

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**Power and precarity in Chinese television production: an
ethnographic study into the working culture of studio-
based entertainment**

Name of Candidate: Tianyu Zhang

Royal Holloway, University of London

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Abstract

With a growing market of international television format trade, more and more television producers are looking for business opportunities in other countries, especially in China. China has become one of the markets with the biggest potential for UK exporters. However, due to China's unique political-economic environment, it remains difficult for foreign scholars to explore the inner workings of the Chinese media industry. Even Chinese academics find it difficult to gain access to television stations and independent production companies. Scholars without access often have to study television production as outsiders, and very few have conducted ethnography in the industry. This ethnographic thesis aims to explore the everyday production practices of Chinese studio-based entertainment shows in order to understand the production culture of Chinese TV. It also analyses the precarious working conditions of television practitioners who are behind the production processes. Ultimately, this thesis argues that many external and internal factors have contributed to the precarious nature of the Chinese television industry, and in turn, the industry has shaped its practitioners into the new precariat of Chinese society.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

What is it like to work in the Chinese media? How do they make entertainment TV? What is it like working in a TV studio? How does it feel working as a creative worker in China? How is the Chinese TV industry different from its international cohorts? To answer these questions, I have explored the daily production practices of Chinese entertainment and the working culture of its TV industry, using ethnographic research and a combination of existing studies. Through observation and interviews, this thesis has analysed several key issues – how China’s media policies, social welfare system, and media institutions’ management systems exacerbate the precarious nature of the TV industry and how creative workers perceive and manage their own working conditions. In addition, with case studies, this thesis demonstrates how issues regarding production ethics affect both the creative workers and studio participants and contribute to precarity within the TV industry. The original contribution of this thesis lies in that it has explored Chinese TV at a micro-level – the researcher worked as an intern and noted a detailed account of daily life in Chinese entertainment. However, working in one’s own culture did not mean the ethnography became anyhow easier. As a researcher, I had to modify my research methods and make compromises to gain access to the fieldwork. The stories behind gaining access and ethics discussions can shed light on future ethnographic work.

Section One: How I started this research

In 2016, I came across a BBC podcast called ‘For All the TV in China’. The podcast was a dialogue between British television producers who have worked with Chinese TV. The producers shared their observations on the Chinese TV production practices, and their discussion entailed key stages from pre-production to post-production. For example, they mentioned the development of Chinese reality TV, the casting process, the involvement of ordinary participants, and health and safety standards. Back then, I had just finished my MA in the International TV industry and recalled that even Chinese scholars have not thoroughly investigated many aspects of the production processes mentioned in the podcast. The podcast has stimulated my curiosity about the production side of Chinese entertainment. What is it like to work in Chinese media? How do people work together? How do they make

a TV programme? I decided to observe Chinese TV's production processes, especially in terms of programme development, the casting process and the decision-making process. What was worth noting was that I could not predict what I would find before starting the fieldwork. I only sensed that something was waiting for me to be discovered.

I specifically decided to study studio-based entertainment due to several reasons. Firstly, the original BBC podcast used examples of studio-based light entertainment, which is the equivalent of *zongyi*¹ in the Chinese context. Secondly, TV studios have a more 'controlled' environment as they are less likely to be affected by external weather conditions. This can give more flexibility to production teams but can equally become a challenge, as the production location can affect the show and the production process, which involves a major division of labour. Thirdly, the director is usually in the main control room during a studio production, coordinating the production via different 'live' cameras. Ellis (2003:286) explains the complexity of studio production:

Studio production brings all the elements of the programme together into one space and time, ensuring a contemporaneous and spontaneous atmosphere to the programme...The television studio is now a familiar feature of the self-reflexivity of the medium, and representations of it tend to emphasise its artificiality and the degree to which physical separation determines control over the finished product. For those who work within it however, studio practice is highly routinised and relatively inflexible, though not without its moments of tension.

How does the director coordinate the production personnel when they are physically separate from the studio floor where the main body of production takes place? How does the rest of the team react to the director's command? Who should be responsible for unexpected events? How do they work together? All these questions further guided me to look into specific areas that have been understudied.

From March to July 2018, I did both participant-observation and passive observation in several entertainment shows in China, and from January to March 2019, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 26 television workers who worked in China and the UK.

¹ Please refer to Section 4 of Chapter 2 for a detailed definition of *zongyi*.

Throughout the fieldwork, the Chinese television practitioners worked very hard, at the cost of almost everything, yet they had limited power to change anything. Most of them must willingly accept the 'production inheritance' from their television predecessors. Condensed production cycles, unscrutinised decisions, limited budgets, poorly protected intellectual property (IP), subjective casting, power struggles, underpaid workers, capricious censorship, and irregular working patterns, are problems that may ultimately stop the Chinese television industry from producing quality shows and providing quality working environment. In sum, the initial aim of this research was to discover co-production opportunities between China and the UK. In order to find out why co-production failed, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in several Chinese *zongyi* programmes, observing their day-to-day operations of television production. However, owing to the fieldwork, I gradually realised that the fundamental differences between Chinese and British television production lie in the management systems, employees' perceptions, and market differences. Eventually, the television practitioners' unique working processes and working conditions overwhelmed my initial business perspective. This is not to say the original BBC podcast did not provide any guidance. After all, my fieldwork observation focused on the specific aspects which were intensively discussed in the podcast.

When working as an intern in several production teams, I developed a strong sense of insecurity and powerlessness, and I constantly felt mentally and physically drained. As a participant-observer, I realised that previous academic works I had read about Chinese TV were inaccurate and under-studied, and more importantly, participant observation enabled me to feel what my colleagues were feeling as creative workers. This was the advantage of participant observation, and I finally figured out what was out there all along – it was precarity. It seemed that studying television from the inside was the best approach to understanding the production culture of Chinese entertainment shows. This ethnography into Chinese entertainment programmes may help shed light upon Chinese TV production studies, which are worth academics' ongoing attention.

Section Two: Definitions and boundaries

The two keywords, power and precarity, need definitions. In this thesis, power means 'the ability to control people and events,' and 'authority that is given or delegated to a person or body.' Both definitions come from Cambridge and Oxford dictionaries. It also resonates with the term leadership, as I will analyse different leadership or management styles. Palmer (1998) argues that power is a factor in leadership, and in organisations, people use power to get things done. To have power is to have the ability to influence people and events. Leadership influence will depend on the type of power that the leader can exercise over other people within an organisation. Ironically, in this thesis, I must admit that power is an invisible reminder that power is everywhere. It is ironic because the whole thesis is about how people work together and deal with workplace problems caused by uneven power relations. But precisely because everything ultimately is caused by power, it becomes invisible in the thesis. Instead, we will constantly see the term precarity and its derivatives, such as precarious and precariousness. This does not mean power is not analysed, but it exists in the discussions of national policies, social welfare system, recruitment and personnel systems, management and self-management, Chinese business culture, and even production ethics. Specifically, its derived term 'power relations' can be used to question the working relations between TV practitioners, the uneven hierarchy within media organisations, and between TV directors and ordinary participants. I would also say the term 'power' here resonates with Bourdieu's symbolic power – the power to establish, reproduce and construct reality. The 'power' here also indicate that the media involves a particular type of power-laden interaction, which John Thompson (1995:82-87) has called a 'mediated quasi-interaction.' Mediated quasi-interaction is oriented not towards specific others but to an indefinite range of potential recipients. Crucially, it invokes a fundamental asymmetry between producers and receivers. It follows that cultural producers are very powerful. They constitute a relatively small number of people who have the capacity to communicate with many others. In some cases, to millions of people.

The term precarity in this thesis is a noun describing a condition of existence without predictability or security, affecting material or psychological welfare. More details about precarity will be explained in Chapter 2. Many academic scholars have studied the concept

of precarity within the TV industry. For example, studies on the UK and US film and television industries have explored television workers' unstable and insecure status. Deuze (2007:173-200) explains that work in television can be characterised as extremely precarious, generally freelance, project-based, involving what Josephine Langham (1997) has called a 'roller-coaster atmosphere' of continual transformation and shifting uncertainties. Such uncertainty includes having unpredictable income levels, negotiating complex networks of industry players, as well as constantly moving in and out of having a job as television seasons end, film projects are completed, or management changes and people get replaced. However, as many more people want to get into the television business than there are jobs available, tension runs high in finding, keeping, and consolidating jobs and, ultimately, a career. Blair concludes that the situation for media workers in film and television can best be described as semi-permanent – always moving between intensive employment and short or long periods of unemployment. Work in the film, television and video sectors of the media thus involves dealing with structural job insecurity and the relative certainty of having new projects to shop around for, and in a best-case scenario, to prepare for. As workers form semi-permanent work groups, informality can destroy friendships in the case of conflict and tensions. The characteristics of the culture of work in the media – long hours, job uncertainty, lack of income stability, high stress levels, intense teamwork – have direct consequences for the work-life balance of the professionals involved. The production process of film and television is complex and chaotic, and at the same time hierarchical and bureaucratic. Blair (2001) also considers the television industry to be a state of 'precarious stability,' and emphasised how many professionals experience some continuity in employment over time because of being hired as part of teams that have worked together successfully before or through an assertive, self-policed work ethics vis-à-vis their superiors.

After exploring creative labour within the independent television production sector in the United Kingdom, Lee (2012) comments that creative occupations are sites of exploitation and intense insecurity fuelled by the desire for self-actualisation. In order to fully understand the subjective responses to creative work, scholars should attempt to understand cultural work as a site for moral work (Banks 2006). The question of how power and precarity affect ethics is not the focus of this thesis, but I have specifically looked at how moral or ethical consideration may inform creative workers' work and thereby affect their perception of work.

Cantillon and Baker (2019) add that although many nations now have policy initiatives directed at generating new jobs in the cultural and creative industries, little consideration has been given to the subjective experiences of those who fill these roles. In this thesis, the spotlight is given to television practitioners, and their subjective viewpoints of the working conditions are valued. Via the case studies, I analyse how power provides exposure to ordinary participants and how it plays amongst everyone involved in the talent shows in the form of stress, anxiety and sometimes poor working relations. I have referenced relevant academic works and concepts throughout the thesis, such as production studies, immaterial labour, affective labour, emotional labour, and different management definitions. Vicki Mayer's focus on 'television producers' and some other Chinese scholars' studies have helped me divert my attention to the people who make television. Fan Xu's ethnographic research on the inner working of Phoenix Satellite TV and Weijia Wang's passive observation of several Chinese news agencies have helped confirm the phenomenon of precarity within Chinese media in general. Other Chinese scholars have studied the management and recruitment systems of Chinese state-owned television, and their perspectives have inspired me to look at the management style at close scrutiny. I have defined the term management for this thesis, and Chapters 4, 9, 10 and 11 all count in the management block. Based on my ethnography, my conclusions are not optimistic but not entirely pessimistic either. While recognising the ambitions and enthusiasm of creative workers, I provide evidence of the real difficulties faced by television practitioners in Chinese entertainment. Ultimately, I agree that creative work is precarious, but I have shown the specific ways in which precarity is immanent in the lives of television practitioners in the Chinese TV industry, including their self-managing countermeasures. It seems that precarity is becoming a global phenomenon. However, I must admit that whereas the interpreted participant observation is the beauty of ethnography, it can equally become a disadvantage. My fieldwork was interpreted with my subjectivity, and it is important to understand that no fieldwork is unbiased. My fieldwork conclusion can become inaccurate or unilateral as time passes. I am open to criticism.

Section Three: Overview of chapters

In the thesis, the Introduction clarifies what I intend to study, how I have studied it and why I want to study it. It has also entailed the relevant background knowledge for readers to understand the thesis better. The background knowledge includes introductions to the television programmes I studied in the fieldwork, technical television terms, different job titles and work divisions specifically exist in Chinese TV, the changing responsibilities of China's media censor, and the Chinese name *zongyi* as the closest equivalent of entertainment TV in English. Chapter 2 is a literature review of relevant studies that strengthen the theoretical basis of this thesis. For example, the perspectives and methodologies of production studies have guided this research to look at how creative workers make television within the context of Chinese entertainment and how the people feel about what they do. Works of Vicki Mayer, Eva Redvall, John Caldwell, Hesmondhalgh and Baker, Fan Xu, Weijia Wang are especially useful for this thesis. The term precarity is introduced in detail as an explanation of the thesis title. Finally, compared to the many works about Chinese news journalists, the production process of the Chinese TV industry and the workers are under-studied. This also gives a good reason for the existence of this research. Chapter 3 is divided into two sections. Section One confirms that this thesis has adopted the interpretivist paradigm when conducting ethnography and Section Two is an in-depth discussion of research ethics for ethnographic research. It also demonstrates how I gained access to Chinese media, what compromises I made and how I felt as an ethnographer in my own culture. Chapters 4 and 5 illustrate the mid and macro-level work environments for creative workers. Chapter 4 explains the history of the recruitment system of China Central Television (CCTV) and the prevalent labour-dispatching phenomena. It also points out that the TV industry relies on informal apprenticeship and lacks systematic employee training. Chapter 5 pushes the discussion to the national level. It argues that China's long-standing *hukou* system and the changing social welfare system affect all Chinese nationals but perhaps indirectly exacerbate the already precarious working conditions of the TV industry, which is relying more and more on contractors. As many television practitioners are migrant workers from different provinces, they face fierce competition within China's media clusters where rules leading to obtaining a local *hukou* are strict and being continuously employed is one of the criteria. Chapters 6 and 7 are case studies of television production processes of reality shows with varied themes and formats. I have recalled the key stages from pre-

production to post-production and explicitly established the parts where creative workers work together. For example, how decisions are made, what interactions are required between television workers and studio participants, how people negotiate teamwork, responsibility and blame. Chapters 6 and 7 are also a mirror of Chapter 4 as they have set examples of how unequal power delegation, hierarchical employment contracts and unequal employee benefits have caused chaos, procrastination and passive improvisation. At the end of Chapter 7, self-censorship is also mentioned as one of creative workers' tricky problems that need to be dealt with. However, the focus is not on censorship but on how creative workers perceive challenges during work and how they affect their idea of a good life. Chapter 8 is an extension of Chapters 6 and 7, but it opens a new discussion about television production ethics, especially the treatment of ordinary participants in reality shows. However, it is not a chapter that can be singled out from the thesis as it ultimately goes back to the discussion of precarity. It starts with the argument that the ways studio participants are treated are caused by a lack of ethics training in television production. It then ends with the notion that creative workers are affected more by the universal neglect of ethics training than the participants because they stay long-term at the programmes and have to overcome guilt and anxiety, tell white lies, and make ethical decisions. The rest of the chapters – Chapter 9, 10 and 11 are the 'management chapters' that analyse how media institutions within the fieldwork are managed and, more importantly, how the different management styles have encouraged television employees to self-management and cope with their working conditions. Chapter 9 outlines the overall management style, and Chapter 10 demonstrates the practitioners' coping strategies. Chapter 11 is a further examination of Chapters 9 and 10 and how management and self-management have created management with Chinese characteristics, which I define as specificities within the Chinese TV industry, although I cannot rule out the possibility of them existing in other countries. I have applied theories from organisational, business and management studies (OBM), such as Ryan's concept of creative management (2004) and Keith Negus and Michael Pickering's creativity-commerce relations (2004). In Chapter 9, I emphasise how creative management is carried out in terms of the division of labour. Chapter 10 demonstrates how the work is experienced and how it shapes practitioners' ideas of a good life. As Chapter 4 analysed the impact of the hierarchical recruitment system of CCTV, it also fits into the dialogue of management and self-management from Chapters 9, 10 and 11. The Conclusion of this thesis has confirmed

the ongoing, understated and universal precarity within the Chinese TV industry. Judging from Western academic works, I think precarity may have become a global phenomenon that especially troubles the creative industry. It seems that Chinese TV is not an exception of precarity. It has its own problems whilst sharing a resemblance to its Western cohorts. The discussion should not just end here because, honestly speaking, who does not know that the creative industry is always precarious? The value of this work, ironically, is that it shouts out loud that the industry is precarious, and its workers deserve better working conditions. Everyone knows it, but how many are bothered to investigate the phenomenon and talk about the elephant in the room? Moreover, why has the news industry received significantly more attention than the television industry? Many questions may not have answers now, but there will never be answers if we keep ignoring them.

Section Four: China's *zongyi* programmes

Since this thesis aims to study the production culture of Chinese entertainment shows, it is essential to understand the boundary of 'entertainment shows' in the Chinese context. A direct translation of 'entertainment shows' from English to Chinese is *yúlè jiémù* (娱乐节目), which is closer to the idea of 'light entertainment' in English. However, in China, a more general term used both in academia and industry, *zōngyì* (综艺), maybe more accurate as it includes all possible genres mentioned by the BBC podcast. The term *zongyi* in the Chinese context has no exact English counterpart. It is literally translated as 'variety shows', includes not only entertainment shows but also other shows with different (e.g., serious) themes, as some *zongyi* programmes may not be as entertaining to the audience as those light entertainment shows. Given the complication, this thesis will consider reality TV, game shows and talk shows as sub-genres of *zongyi* programmes.

There have been different definitions of Chinese *zongyi* (Donghai Sun, 1993; Xin Gao, 1998; Hongsheng Ouyang et al., 2002; Li Chen, 2010; Zhenzhi Guo, 2005; Zhifeng Hu, 2012; Liqun Liu and Ning Fu, 2008; Baoguo Sun, 2009:115-116; Jiaojiao Luo, 2017). This thesis takes the latest definition of *zongyi* by Jiaojiao Luo (2017). In her book, *The History of Chinese Zongyi Shows*, Chinese television *zongyi* started to develop during the 1990s, and the Chinese context has broadened its meaning. The word *zongyi* comes from Japan and has become a

general term that represents all non-fictional shows, non-news and non-drama (ibid., p10). Luo introduced the historical development of China's *zongyi* programmes and classified Chinese *zongyi* into five historical periods – From 1958 to 1989, *zongyi* emerged with the first live *wényi* (文艺, art and performance) show on the 1st May 1958, under the influence of international entertainment shows. During this time, given the ups and downs of the Cultural Revolution, the content of television switched from rigid propaganda to variety shows such as CCTV's New Year Gala. Game shows and dancing shows were popular later in the 1980s and have flourished ever since. The second period was from 1990 to 1996, when studio-based variety shows became a hit. During this time, Chinese television realised the importance of entertainment and consumerism. The third period, or the 'growing period', was from 1997 to 2003. With the rise of Hunan Satellite Television, the production techniques of dating shows, game shows, and reality shows became more advanced. It was also around this time when television commissioning (制播分离) started, with more and more television stations entrusting independent production companies (Sun, 2009:32-41). From 2004 to 2011, Chinese television started to reference international formats, but they soon realised the value of 'production bibles' and started officially trading in television formats. During this time, popular formats such as *American Idol* and *Strictly Come Dancing* were officially imported and purchased. Last but not least, from 2012 to 2016, many Chinese producers made entertainment shows in blocks and formed the habit of signing commissioning contracts, which stimulated a massive growth of independent production companies. The success of *The Voice of China* reflected the importance of signing Valuation Adjustment Mechanism agreements (VAM). With the success of *The Voice of China* (中国好声音) and *If You Are the One* (非诚勿扰), Chinese television actively looked for more format trades with the West. At the same time, the Chinese television industry was more careful with intellectual property (IP) protection. However, it was also a period when 'international formats were consumed until there were none left' (Luo, 2017:118). Meanwhile, the Chinese media censor has been imposing more regulations on international format trades. In 2013, one provincial TV station was only allowed to import one show per year. Later in 2015, the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT), now called the National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA), exerted more demands on the content of reality shows, such as promoting Chinese culture and curbing fees on celebrities. These regulations pushed some Chinese producers to make use of the term 'co-production'

as a disguise. However, in 2016, SAPPRFT modified relevant regulations again and equated 'co-production' to 'international importation'. Such a move encouraged the Chinese side to own the full IP. Additionally, if the show is 'co-produced', the edited version must be censored two months before its broadcast (People.cn, 2016).

Section Five: Introductions to the observed TV programmes

The dating show where I interned needs to be anonymised. It is a weekly programme produced and broadcast by the same state-owned provincial TV station. As it will not appear much in the following chapters, I will not say much about it. I will say more about *Job Hunting*, *Win the Bill*, and *Waiting for Me* because I did participant observation in these programmes. And then, I will briefly talk about *If You Are the One* and *Please Help Me Lawyer*.

Job Hunting is a pseudonym. It is a studio-based reality show produced by an independent production company based in Beijing. It is scheduled after 9 pm. The show is broadcast weekly on a state-owned television station. The show helps jobseekers find their ideal jobs by arranging for them to have face-to-face interviews with interviewers from well-known companies. The interviewee is being interviewed by around ten interviewers at one time. More details about its format cannot be shared as it will reach the point where it is easy to guess the programme's name. I had to anonymise everything about it because a gatekeeper passed on wrong information to the company, and it was too late to correct the mistake by then. In order to be an ethical ethnographer, the only way that I could write about this show in the thesis was to anonymise everything about it. Details of why and how I anonymised *Job Hunting* are in Chapter 3. I interned at this programme for one month.

Win the Bill is a studio-based primetime reality show that gifts ordinary people domestic appliances ranging from washing powder to expensive massage chairs. It is broadcast on CCTV-3, the *zongyi* channel. The programme debuted in 2014 and was originally a co-produced programme with Endemol, a Dutch-based media company. The format entails three segments. It contains three segments: a 60-second talent display, mini-interviews with the hosts, and a mission challenge. Segment 1 is the opening performance of dancing, singing and any other performance displayed by the studio participants. In segment 2, the hosts will interview the participants and ask them what gifts they wish to take away from the

programme. Segment 3 is called 'mission challenge'. It is the most exciting part of the show as participants must survive all the challenges to get the rewards. The challenges are different games designed by the production team. For example, participants need to jump from one side of the pool to the other by getting onto a moving foam without falling into the water. If the participants succeed in passing all missions, they will get the reward. Otherwise, they have to go home empty-handed even if they only fail one mission. I interned at this programme for two months.

The format of *Waiting for Me* originates from a co-production between CCTV and Russian Public Television Channel One in 2010. Since its creation, the programme has undergone several format modifications, but it remains one of the most popular primetime reality show since its debut. The programme is produced and broadcast on CCTV-1. Its latest episode is usually broadcast on Sunday evening whereas the previous episodes are broadcast during weekdays. The studio-based programme aims to find missing people within the country, but occasionally they are found abroad. As each missing person has different stories, each episode is different. The programme is capable of finding people who got lost for decades and, every story is very touching. In some stories, parents are reunited with their children, who were abducted many years ago. In some other stories, people are reconnected with childhood friends who went missing for years. The show's ratings have been the top three in the country due to the difficulty of locating missing persons and its emotional storytelling. I was an intern at this programme for a month. The show has three segments. In segment 1, people come onto the stage and tell the host, the guests, and the studio audience whom they are looking for via this programme. Segment 2 is the climax of the show. The people are invited to walk towards a door and wait until it opens. On the other side of the door, the missing persons may or may not be standing there. Sometimes, the relatives or friends of the missing persons may be there as well. At this stage, tears are expected, whatever the results. Segment 3 is when both parties (sometimes, just one) are calm, they go back to where they sit and carry on with more conversations. The programme is connected with the police and volunteers from around the country. It is linked to websites that contain missing persons' information.

Amongst all the shows I observed, perhaps *If You Are the One* (非诚勿扰) is the most well-known as it is the Chinese version of ITV's *Take Me Out* in the UK. *Take Me Out* also has its variations in Australia, Denmark, Finland, Thailand and other regions. It is a popular studio-based dating show where men and women interview each other in different rounds and decide whether they should go out for a date. Interestingly, *Take Me Out*'s format was purchased by Hunan Satellite TV and was named 我们约会吧, but Jiangsu Broadcasting Corporation's *If You Are the One* became more successful than the purchased format. Hunan Satellite TV appealed to the National Radio and Television Administrator (NRTA), accusing Jiangsu Broadcasting Corporation of copying their format, but the issue remained unsettled (ChinaDaily, 2010). *If You Are the One* has been widely studied by Chinese academics, but the majority focus on its storytelling and social impact. I observed the show's production process for three days.

Please Help Me Lawyer was broadcast by Hebei Satellite TV and produced by an independent production company called Beijing Jiashi Wang Fang Cultural Production Company Ltd. The show was broadcast twice per week on Hebei Television Station. The company is owned by Wang Fang, a well-known television host in China. In this studio-based show, a lawyer sits in front of the host, offering legal advice to guests who come from all walks of life. As the host, Wang Fang usually starts a conversation with the guests. Some guests may wear sunglasses or hats to protect their identities. They will share their problems and wait for help from the lawyers. Some people were scammed, others were involved in money disputes. During the conversations, the studio audience is invited to interact with others in the studio.

The following chart introduces the programmes' basic information:

Year 2018 (Day/Month)	Programme Name	Theme/ Genre	Production Institutions	Viewing Ratings Nationwide
18/03 – 29/03	A Dating Show (Name withheld)	Young People Dating/ Reality Show	Name Withheld (state-owned television station)	Top 20
01/04 – 03/05	A job-hunting show (Name withheld,	Job Interview/ Reality and Game Show	Name Withheld (Independent	Top 15

	pseudonym <i>Job Hunting</i>)		Production Company)	
06/05 – 20/06	幸福账单 Xingfu Zhangdan (<i>Win the Bill</i>)	Win Financial Rewards/Reality, Game Talent Show	China Central Television (CCTV)	Top 10
01/06 – 04/06	非诚勿扰 Feichengwurao (<i>If You Are the One</i>)	Young People Dating/ reality show	Jiangsu Broadcasting Corporation	Top 15
07/06 – 09/06	拜托了律师 Baituole Lvshi (<i>Please Help Me Lawyer</i>)	Legal Disputes/Reality Talk Show	Beijing Jiashi Wangfang Wenhua Chuanbo Youxian Gongsi 北京佳视王芳文化传播有限公司 (Independent Production Company)	Top 15
23/06 – 08/07	等着我 Dengzhewo (<i>Waiting for Me</i>)	Finding Lost-lost Relatives/ Reality Show	China Central Television (CCTV)	Top 2

Section Six: Glossary of TV technical terms

The chart bellows is an outline of TV technical terms that appeared in the thesis, some do not have English equivalents. Please see chart below:

Pinyin ² / words	Chinese Characters (Simplified)	English Translation/explanation	Notes/References
Biān dǎo	编导	<i>Biandao</i> is a foundational role on all entertainment shows. They are responsible for all creative tasks but in most situations, are at the bottom rank of the management pyramid (with interns at the lowest rank).	One Chinese <i>biandao</i> is the equivalent of: one scriptwriter + one (assistant) director + one stage manager (during filming) + one artist coordinator (occasionally) + one editor (frequently) + other jobs (dependent on studio requirements).
Gōng zuò shì	工作室	Studio; project group	A borrowed word, implying that the scale of the company is small, and the work is creative.
Pre-production		Preproduction is the planning phase, which includes budgeting, casting, finding the right location, set and costume design and construction, and scheduling. Pre-production is expressed in two formats: the budget and the schedule. It is also a period of contract negotiation and writing.	Deuze (2007:196); Ellis (2003)
Production		Production is the actual making of the film. This is where the bulk of the workforce is active, which in the case of motion pictures can mean that the project involves hundreds of people.	Deuze (2007:196); Ellis (2003)

² Pinyin, introduced in the 1950s, is widely used in mainland China, as the official romanization system for Standard Chinese. The system includes four diacritics denoting tones. Pinyin without tone marks is used to spell Chinese names and words in languages written with the Latin alphabet, and also in certain computer input methods to enter Chinese characters. In Taiwan, people use Bopomofo/*zhuyin fuhao* as the major transliteration system. In Hong Kong, people use Cangjie input method and Cantonese pinyin input instead of Mandarin pinyin.

		It is the creation and collection of images and sounds.	
Post-production		In post-production, images and sounds are processed into the final programme form. It also involves the creation and addition of material, such as commentaries, music and animation effects.	Ellis (2003)
Coaching		During the making of reality shows that involve participation of ordinary people, television <i>biandao</i> need to train the participants to perform on the stage. This coaching process includes writing lines for the participants, help them memorise what they need to say and do, and prepare them for the upcoming filming.	
Ordinary people/participant		A term used for reality shows to describe participants who are not celebrities. In this thesis, an ordinary participant is someone who does not appear on TV for a living and has little or no prior experience with TV. Having said that, I wrote a section about ordinary participants who are not 'ordinary' – some are professional actors or singers who are not known.	
Creative workers		In this thesis, creative workers are interchangeably used with 'television practitioners', 'television workers', and 'practitioners'. Sometimes, job titles, such as <i>biandao</i> and <i>zhipian</i> are used. They are all creative workers in this thesis.	

Zhì piān	制片	<i>Zhipian</i> varies in different contexts, and the nature of the job depends on the labour contract. A <i>zhipian</i> can either be the producer's assistant, the production assistant, the runner or the security.	

Section Seven: Redistribution of power

This section introduces a recent change in the power structure of the institution that censors China's media content, and since the change only took place in 2018, television practitioners are not sure about its long-term impact and therefore feel unsure about their career prospects. This institution, currently called the National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA, 国家广播电视总局), has changed its name several times throughout history. It was formerly known as the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT, 1998–2013) and the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT, 2013–2018). The NRTA has a broad authority to regulate business involving both traditional media and digital media. Detailed responsibilities of the NRTA can be found in the Appendices, which are directly translated from its official website. Although the website's contents do not state what it does in reality, they outline what the NRTA claims to do.

According to Keane (2015:14), NRTA's responsibilities range from drafting the laws and regulations themselves (ratified by the State Council) to providing 'supervision and management' of radio and television programmes. Keane also states that the SAPPRFT reports to the State Council, the Publicity Department and has overlapping responsibilities with two other Chinese Communist Party departments: The Ministry of Culture (MoC) and the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT). However, after the 2019 institutional reform, SAPPRFT was renamed NRTA, which does not share responsibilities with the MoC and the MIIT. MIIT is no longer for media censorship after the reform, and the previous MoC was merged with the Ministry of Tourism. Together they now form the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People's Republic of China.

Zhu (2012:23) states that all television operators must interact with the CCP and the various departments regulating what goes on air. That is to say, cultural policy in China follows directives issued by the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China (CPCPD, 中共中央宣传部)³, which is embedded at all layers of government, from the national level down to the local. These party publicity departments, along with the party committees

³ Many academics refer to it as the 'Propaganda Department' and use the term 'propaganda' throughout their work. However, the original Chinese word in these institutions literally means 'publicity', not 'propaganda'. On the other hand, although these departments have the responsibility to use 'propaganda', their work is not limited to propaganda. Therefore, this thesis uses the term 'publicity' as a fairer representation of its work.

within media institutions, act as censors and set the policy tone according to the Ministry of Central Publicity directives. Zhu also states that the local Publicity Department 'operates mainly behind the scenes and in broad strokes, except for editorial content (news and information), which it manages very closely via secret weekly instructions to the media'. Although there is no direct evidence to support whether these instructions are 'secret', it is worth knowing that nowadays, self-censorship by media professionals has been the principal mode of control.

The current NRTA directly controls state-owned media institutions at the national level, such as the China Central Television (CCTV), China National Radio (CNR), China Radio International (CRI), as well as other film and television studios and other non-business organisations. For example, the daily supervision of CCTV falls to the NRTA, which coordinates and evaluates the network's key publicity efforts, regulates its signal coverage, controls its senior appointments, and decides on its organisational structure and all of its programming. Meanwhile, the CPCPD manages the broad publicity mission and provides ideological guidance. These bodies exist to 'strengthen the structural management of the media through specialised government agencies' (Zhao, 2008:26). The structure of these two is replicated at the network level: CCTV's internal leadership comprises a party committee and a senior management team. Xiaoxiao Zhang and Anthony Fung (2010) describe the role of NRTA as 'back-seat driving', claiming that the NRTA attempts to micromanage. For instance, the NRTA can forbid the transmission of certain genres in prime time; it can outlaw the names of programmes and prohibit the giving of prizes to participants. It can also issue punishments such as suspending the broadcast of programmes or revoking television licenses. Apart from believing that censorship remains 'the most contentious issue in China' and 'the most serious obstacle to competitiveness' due to a 'historical legacy of social upheaval', Keane (2015:21) argues that television stations and their personnel are co-opted into being good citizens 'through the system of dispensing rewards and honours to workers or organisations for exemplary output or compliance'. In other words, as the industry is primarily state-owned, the industry participants (producers, writers, actors, anchors, investors and journalists) are caught between an official public role and an entrepreneurial calling.

In comparison to some scholars' condescending attitude towards the NRTA, others expressed differing opinions on the unpredictable nature of censorship, using case studies of news journalists. Pan and Lu (2002:29-34) pointed out that Party-State managers have adopted a 'top-down cooperation' via 'routine activities during the news production process' with 'no obvious control and struggle'. Under this logic, the relationship between management and news practitioners is better described as a mutual co-optation rather than direct ordering. After all, the earliest Chinese news journalists were intellectuals with a strong calling to 'serve the people and save the nation' during the chaotic times of China in the 1890s. Inheriting the tradition of 'worrying about the nation and its people', many Chinese news journalists strive to 'serve the public while not bringing troubles to the Party'. Some even risked being fired in order to report controversial breaking news. Pan and Lu (2002) then explained that the censorship institutions are also composed of ambitious practitioners who seek respect from the public. Hence, the power relationship between censors and practitioners is not merely vertical. Through extensive interviews with practitioners working at CCTV, Ying Zhu (2012:118) found that many did not view the censors as the primary obstacle to their careers. Instead, many practitioners mentioned other problems such as lack of corporate culture, employee training, and problematic management of institutions. It turned out that their primary concern was not politics but economics. Despite a more holistic viewpoint on the industry's existing problems, all these scholars agree that Chinese media practitioners must find a way to live peacefully with the censors (Zhang, 2012; Qiao, 2013; Zhou, 2014).

On the 13th March 2018, during the first session of the 13th National People's Congress (全国人民代表大会), the State Council announced that SAPPRFT would become the National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA), which would from then on come directly under the CPCPD. This announcement marked a significant change in China's media censorship. In China, the Government and the Party are two separate systems, although the Party also leads the government, generally by sharing the same leaders. Since the Reform and Open Up Policy in the 1980s, the former president Deng Xiaoping emphasised the idea of 'Separating Party from the Government' (党政分开), urging to learn from the mistakes made during the Cultural Revolution. Under the idea of 'separating Party from the Government', CCTV was only indirectly controlled by the Party, as it was directly under the SAPPRFT, which

was under the direct management of the State Council, i.e., the government. Due to the merge in March 2018, the China Media Group (CCTV, CRI and CNR) has now been promoted to the same level as the NRTA, and it is tasked with the enhancement of China's international broadcasting capacities and promoting the convergence of the three platforms (Gan, 2018). In the past, SAPPRT monitored newspapers and publications, but after the reform, news, publication and film came directly under the CPCPD, whereas the newly established China Media Group was to be directly managed by the State Council. The merger, in essence, tightened the regulation of media in China but also 'upgraded' the governmental hierarchy of CCTV from the deputy level of *bù* (副部级) to the superior level of *bù* (正部级)⁴.

Accordingly, due to CCTV's upgrade within the government, every senior executive from CCTV was promoted in their governmental rank. The Head of China Media Group, Shen Haixiong, is also the deputy leader of the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China. Along with the promotion came the redistribution of power within the media system. Television practitioners admitted in the fieldwork interviews that there had been shifts in the senior leadership of each media institution. Many others believed the change was made to tighten the control of media outlets and contents. As this changed only happened recently, it will take some time before its effects become apparent. Regardless of its actual application, the change marked a significant shift in the power structures of the government and the Party, which will inevitably affect many aspects of the media system in the future.

⁴ China's government is composed of different hierarchical levels. They are ranked from top to bottom – 国级 (*Guó Jí*), 部级 (*Bù Jí*), 司/厅/局级 (*Sī/Tīng/Jú Jí*), 县/处级 (*Xiàn/Chù Jí*), and 乡/镇/科级 (*Xiāng/Zhèn/Kē Jí*). Each *Jí* (rank) has two levels: 正级 (Superior) and 副级 (Deputy). As CCTV was upgraded to the superior level of *Bu*, it is now only one level under the State Council of the People's Republic of China.

Section Eight: Varied divisions of labour

In Chinese TV, two key roles have no precise equivalents in the UK, and even in China, their definitions can change depending on the scale of the production institution. The two key roles are *biāndǎo* (编导) and *zhìpiān* (制片). In CCTV, there are also two roles without precise equivalents in UK which share the same name. They are: *zhìpiānrén*, producer, (制片人), and *zhìpiān zhǔrèn*, (制片主任), a combination of co-producer and production manager. In CCTV, their job responsibilities are different from other production institutions.

Firstly, there is a broader definition of television director, *biandao* (编导) in Chinese, which literally means 'screenwriter and director'. The Chinese word *biandao* derives from 'theatre director' and 'film director'. The word '编' literally means 'write and edit', and '导' literally means 'directing'. The word must be differentiated from 'news reporter' (记者) and 'news editor' (编辑) specifically, as they can be easily mixed up. It is a unique term for directors of television *zongyi* (综艺) shows (Chen, 2012: 13-14). Additionally, *biandao* are the basic foundations of entertainment shows, meaning that they are responsible for all the creative tasks, but in most situations, they are also ranked lower in the management pyramid (interns at the lowest). In terms of job description, each *biandao* is responsible for scriptwriting, training ordinary participants and celebrities, taking turns to be the stage manager during filming, and participating in post-production. The most important part of their job is writing the studio scripts and running orders, and then going through the scripts with the studio participants before they go on stage.

In the West, a stage manager oversees the rehearsal process and coordinates communications among various production teams and personnel. Larger productions may hire a whole team to manage the stage. They are the intermediaries between the director and other production crews. However, this part of the job is assigned to *biandao* in China. As full-time *biandao* are required to become temporary stage managers, full-time stage managers barely exist as an independent job category. In general, during a studio production that would usually last for days, each *biandao* is expected to manage the stage during one part of the filming. Typically, the *biandao* is responsible for the part where their participants appear on stage so that the *biandao* is able to manage his/her own candidates during the

production. When one *biandao*'s participants have finished, the next *biandao* will have their trained participants filmed and become the temporary stage manager at the same time. In smaller productions, *biandao* may temporarily participate in some non-creative jobs due to the lack of staff. In summary, one Chinese *biandao* is the equivalent of one scriptwriter + one (assistant) director + one stage manager (during the filming) + one artist coordinator (occasionally) + one editor (frequently) + other roles (depending on the workplace).

Much like the ambiguity of the *biandao*'s role and responsibilities, the English translation of the term is elusive, and has become the subject of debate in Chinese academia. Some academics have highlighted the chaotic misunderstanding of the definition of *biandao* both theoretically and practically. For instance, some believe a *biandao* is similar to a producer whilst others consider a *biandao* as an editor (Yang, 2010). No academic has called for a more nuanced definition of the role in practice, in terms of clarifying their specific responsibilities. On the contrary, mainstream academic papers insist on maintaining the current television system and improving the professional skills of *biandao* (Li and Zhang, 2011; Yang, 2010; Zhao and Zhang, 2011).

The *biandao* system differentiates the labour division in the Chinese television industry from its Western counterpart. Although a television *biandao* must be equipped with many skills, there are no official licenses or national tests to credit someone's ability in becoming a *biandao*, unlike the news industry that requires editors to have passed the National Journalist Test. Theoretically, anyone can apply for the job with various educational backgrounds. Most *biandao* do not have a media degree, some never went to university, and very few within the field have had postgraduate degrees. Furthermore, there are no distinct work responsibilities for a *biandao*. Even if there are, they are only decided by different production organisations. In the indie that produced *Job Hunting*, there was one chief director and five other assistant directors. The chief director, occasionally, was also the producer. The five other *biandao* were required to do multiple jobs, such as writing the running order and scripts, coaching ordinary participants, temporarily working as the stage manager in the studio, and supervising the post-production editing with their partner company. In *Win the Bill*, there were eight *biandao* who did similar jobs as those in *Job Hunting*, but the decision-making was down to the producer. In *Waiting for Me*, there were six *biandao* with more than 30 unpaid interns, who

were called the 'intern *biandao*'. The six full-time *biandao* and the thirty intern *biandao* were all expected to follow the instructions of the producer, who theoretically should not be involved in the creative task. In *If You Are the One*, there were six *biandao*, one of whom was also the technical director. He was not paid separately for undertaking the additional role of the technical director. In Jiashi Wangfang Media, all *biandao* were required to do post-production editing on their own, without any help from third-party companies. I participated in six productions and each had its own job description of *biandao*. When I asked my colleagues, why a *biandao* was responsible for various tasks that are usually divided between different people in the West, they told me this has always been the case. In recent years, influenced by the South Korean production practices, some Chinese production teams have started to separate the job of scriptwriting and directing, although this is more common for drama productions. A senior director criticised such separation, insisting that such division is 'a blind copy from foreign countries.'

Similarly, the definition of *zhipian* (制片) also depends on different production organisations. *Zhipian* is only one word different from *Zhipianren* (制片人, producer) in Chinese, but it is barely a creative job, nor can it be categorised as either an above-the-line or below-the-line job. *Zhipian* varies in different contexts, and the nature of the job depends on the labour contract. A *zhipian* can either be the producer's assistant, the production assistant, the runner or the security. Although *zhipian* does not take part in the creative tasks, they can sometimes be powerful in the team. In the production company that produced *Job Hunting*, two *zhipian* were assigned to the production team, both of whom liaised with the producer, so they were also the producer's assistants. However, in *Win the Bill*, the *zhipian* was paid much higher than the *biandao*. He was also well-respected in the team because he had been working at CCTV for twenty years under a *taipin* contract. The power this *zhipian* commands is bigger than his job title at face value. In both *Win the Bill* and *Waiting for Me*, the *zhipian* only worked for the *zhipian zhuren* and even shouted at other television practitioners in the studio, especially to the interns. It is not uncommon to find that a *zhipian* is more likely to be on an institution's permanent payroll than a creative *biandao*. Due to the various job descriptions and the nature of employment contracts, Chinese *zhipian* cannot be translated into English directly.

The role of *zhipian zhuren* is more likely to exist in state-owned television or big production companies. In CCTV, very similar to a *zhipian*, a *zhipian zhuren* does not take part in the creative tasks, but they can be more privileged than a producer by being on *taipin* contracts. Theoretically, a *zhipian zhuren* can be seen as a Western production manager, as their main job is to make sure the production stays within the budget. However, unlike Western production managers who report to the producer, the *zhipian zhuren* is at the same career hierarchy as the producer. They are similar to the co-producer of the programme, except that CCTV producers are in charge of the creative decisions while *zhipian zhuren* only deal with the money. In a production team, the *zhipian zhuren* is as important as the producer. A *zhipian zhuren* can be both the co-producer and the production manager. They supervise the entire production, apply for more budgets from CCTV's finance department, manage the budget, recruit people, take part in final censorship process with the producer. The only difference is that they do not have access to the duty of the creative decisions that are ultimately made by the producer. *Zhipian zhuren* is a powerful role in CCTV. Most of them are on *shiye bianzhi* or new *taipin* contracts. They can sometimes recruit interns and other technicians into the team via informal methods. My fieldwork experience gave me the impression that if a *zhipian zhuren* politely informed the producer of informal recruitments, the producer would most likely agree to it.

In recent years, a few Chinese entertainment shows have started to follow the Western work division, especially for those that carry out international co-production. Although some *biandao* disagree with the separation of screenwriting and directing, others support a clearer and more detailed division of responsibilities. During informal chats, some CCTV *biandao* expressed their admiration for their friends who work for *The Voice of China* (Zhejiang Satellite Television, 2012), where one singing contestant was taken care of by three production assistants who focused on specific areas of the contestant's life. They believe that *The Voice* can hire different staff for nuanced jobs because they have sufficient budget and are dedicated to professionalism. In comparison to the sketchy work division at the programme they worked for, these CCTV *biandao* have realised that a specific and accurate work division can improve the efficiency of television production. 'It is not easy for us to change the status-quo', said one senior director, who introduced the term 'production habit and inheritance' during a conversation. He believes that there is a tradition which has been

shaping how they work to this day. 'We have been influenced by television predecessors who taught us to do things in specific ways with specific habits', he said, trying to answer why people were not punctual with timing during studio recording. This statement also represents television practitioners' views on the arbitrary work division.

To summarise, in China, a *biandao* is a combination of a scriptwriter, director, assistant director, and editor. More importantly, television *biandao* are the core of the production team but must refer to the producer to make creative decisions. They simply exercise the creative decisions of the chief director or the producer. A *zhipian* can either be a producer's assistant, a production assistant, or a runner of the production team, and can sometimes even protect the team as a security guard. In large television institutions such as CCTV, a part of a producer's power is also distributed to a *zhipian zhuren*, who manages the budget.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

The literature review demonstrates academic theories and concepts used within the thesis. Production studies, the concept of 'precarity' and studies on Chinese television production have been introduced and compared, including theories that exert more influence on this research than others. In Section One, I introduced production studies as the foundational theory for my research – studying the production processes and observe television practitioners' daily working practices. In Section Two, I introduced studies related to the concept of precarity and how they are incorporated into media studies. In Section Three, I analysed previous studies of Chinese media production and raised examples of work that influenced this research. Section Four is a brief introduction of Chinese *zongyi* programmes, the equivalent of entertainment shows. I believe that works by Vicki Mayer, Weijia Wang, and Fan Xu are among the most important and influential works for this thesis. I will explain why these works are significant and will describe some of the limitations of some of their approaches. For example, Mayer's research focuses on below-the-line workers, and my research, in the following chapters, pays lots of attention to the subjective opinions of below-the-line workers, especially the migrant workers. In both the literature review and the following chapters, I have introduced David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker's research on creative labour, together with more recent work by Mark Deuze and Mirjam Prenger on media production, practices and professions.

Section One: Production studies

Although many scholars are interested in different forms of cultural production and work processes, few have studied the development and work processes of a specific television product (Redvall, 2013; Becker et al. 2006,1; Graham, 2011). Even today, production studies have not yet become a major part of the field of television studies. Previous television studies have contributed to the early development of production studies. Sociologist Leo Rosten and anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker were among the first to conduct production-oriented studies of the American film industry (Rosten 1941; Powdermaker 1950). Later, Gitlin's *Inside Prime Time* became a pioneer of industry-level study. Interested in the decision-making process governing US primetime network television, Gitlin (1985:11) interviewed network executives, producers, writers, agents, actors, among other television professionals

about 'what shaped TV's images of the wider world'. He also observed network operation and production practices in the late 1970s, including primetime shows *Lou Grant*, *American Dream*, *Hill Street Blues* and *The Munsters*. Gitlin's examination of the industry revealed the industry's life-as-it-is-lived. Lotz (2009:32) commented that 'although contemporary researchers might now take for granted that television is a meaningful and important site of analysis, this was not a presumption that Gitlin would have made'. Gitlin's key contribution is the methodology of field-based analysis of the industry itself. Aside from Gitlin's work, John Tulloch and Albert Moran's ethnographic study in 1986 of Australian soap opera *A Country Practice* (JNP Productions/7 Network, 1981-1993) involved close observation of the different stages of production. This was framed within a broadly cultural studies account of the meanings and significance of popular genres, including soap opera. Later in 2004, Robert Kubey interviewed key American television workers and more studies of stardom began to emerge. Meanwhile, television producers themselves have published numerous technical manuals and training volumes, such as Roger Singleton Turner's (1999) book on working with children on television. Following Gitlin's industry-level study, American scholars Vicki Mayer, Miranda Banks and John Caldwell (2009), in their edited book *Production Studies*, outline the focus of and approaches of 'production culture':

We are interested in how media producers make culture, and, in the process, make themselves into particular kinds of workers in modern, mediated societies. We want to look up and down the food chains of production hierarchies, to understand how people work through professional organisations and informal networks to form communities of shared practices, languages, and cultural understandings of the world. We assume that directors and editors, lighting technicians and story writers, contract casting agents and full-time studio caretakers are all cultural actors, too. They shape and refashion their identities in the process of making their careers in industries undergoing political transitions and economic reorganisations. (2009:2)

'Production studies' is also defined by Hesmondhalgh (2013:56) as the 'cultural studies of media industries approach'. Mayer et al. (2009:4) illustrate that production studies 'takes the lived realities of people involved in media production as the subjects for theorising production as culture' and comes with two research questions: Firstly, how do media producers represent themselves given the paradoxical importance of media in society?

Secondly, how do researchers then represent those varied and contested representations? These questions of representation have been a central issue in cultural studies, and the fact that the focus of 'production studies' is on representation is what distinguishes 'production studies' itself from sociological approaches more generally. The scope of 'production studies' is at micro-level and is seen as 'industry-level studies', which is different from macro-level studies which rely on broad statistical data that 'does little to reveal the daily functioning of media or the situation of particular media workers' (Lotz, 2009:26). Studies of working conditions, power and status, are also essential for production studies. Working conditions, as defined by Stahl (2009:54), are not only about the comfort or satisfaction one experiences in film and television work but is more about the 'political and economic aspects of work including remuneration, control of the work process, ownership of the products of labour, the rights and obligations of employers and workers, and workers' access to health and pension benefits.' Stahl classifies these concerns as either subjective or structural. 'Subjective' represents the social-psychological experience of work, while the 'structural' represents the political-economic conditions and organisation.

Many other studies have attempted to analyse the specific production process of individual media production projects. Accordingly, production analysis can take many forms and range from macro to micro levels, from political economy to professional routines (Newcomb and Lotz 2002). Redvall (2013:22) notes that most production analysis operates with several levels of analysis to capture the complexity of the production process. As Newcomb (2007:129) has remarked, the driving question in most production studies is to make sense of the cultural industries with their associated problems related to 'creativity and constraint in industrial settings'. However, as most studies of film and media production are reconstructions of past events based on interviews and document analysis rather than observations or conversations during productions, it is hard to gain a nuanced understanding of the specific nature of the creative collaborations and processes from this approach. Subsequently, behind-the-scenes publications lack academic analysis to critically examine and understand the choices and events that occur throughout the production process. The fundamental challenge then becomes how to design a research framework 'studied to break down the complex processes, when practitioners are choosing special paths and not others for the projects at hand' (Redvall, 2013:22-23).

Many other scholars have asked Redvall's question, and some have proposed different perspectives and methods into studying media production process. In the early 1990s, British academic Georgina Born conducted a two-year's ethnographic study inside the BBC, in conjunction with interviews with independents, non-BBC professionals, and the tracking of industry criticism, awards, and debates. Born's research examines 'how media intellectuals employ complex forms of judgement in their work, in which aesthetic, ethical, technical-industrial and economic discourses are constantly in play' (2000:424). Born argues that 'Television Studies' is 'increasingly entangled in the controversy over what television is to become Television research', and 'along with other far more powerful public discourses, Television Studies has become part of the object to be analysed'. One of the challenges is to move 'inside' television to engage critically and productively with the complexity of that situation. In comparison to Born's approach, Graham Robert (2011) insisted that instead of 'studying up or down', 'studying through' might be a way out of that dilemma in terms of the methodology on media production studies.

John Caldwell's book, *Production Culture* (2008), also adopts a micro-level approach for 'cultural studies of production' as examinations of 'critical industrial practices.' Caldwell paid close attention to artefacts such as technology user manuals, production narratives, industrial events, and institutional and procedural rituals as valuable sites of analysis for understanding how and why certain cultural forms are produced (Havens et al., 2009:245). Caldwell (2008:109) studies television production through the close examination of 'deep industrial texts', especially behind-the-scenes knowledge circulated among professionals, not just generalisations from interviews with them about how film/television works or what it means. He classifies four modes of analysis: the textual analysis of trade and worker artefacts; interviews with film/television workers; ethnographic field observation of production spaces and professional gatherings; and economic/industrial analysis (2008:345-349). Production studies have adopted different research methods, including participant-observation, semi-structured interviews, attending academic and industrial conferences, textual analysis, visiting film festivals, advertising upfronts, industry annual critics meetings and new media summits, filmmaker Q&As, demos, pitch sessions, panels, keynotes, 'boot camps', technical 'bakeoffs', retreats and networking mixers. 'Production studies' also

provides useful perspectives when conducting ethnography. For example, Mann (2009:105) viewed interviews with above-the-line and below-the-line TV talent as cultural artefacts containing evidence of 'an intricate, interlocking system of heavily codified, discursive knowledge'. This means researchers need to critically analyse 'deep industrial texts' gathered from ethnographic fieldwork.

Finally, and crucially, scholars of production culture understand the limitations of production studies. As noted by Mayer et al. (2009:6), current studies of production culture focus almost exclusively on film and television production in the predominantly English-speaking world. There are not enough studies on multi-stakeholder and collaborative projects, which would allow researchers to compare the ways production resonates differently to working communities given divergent contexts and historical conditions. In response to Mayer's appeal, this thesis applies the perspectives and methods of production studies and to the study of Chinese television production.

Section Two: Precarious, precarity and the precariat

Precarity is a multi-stranded concept, associated with a set of terms, including precarious, precariousness, precarisation, and 'the precariat' that make a historical argument about capitalism pronounce a shift in class relations, and predict social movements and political struggles. The original word *précarité* is associated with autonomist Marxism and is translated into the English neologism 'precarity', rather than the existing word 'precariousness' (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011:161). The word 'precarity' appeared in many discussions regarding economic, political and social issues. Stemming from a wave of opposition to economic globalisation, 'precarity' is a noun describing a condition of existence without predictability or security, affecting material or psychological welfare. Precarity is most commonly associated with workers who leave their home country to compete for low-paid retail and service jobs.

Accordingly, 'precarious' is the adjective of 'precarity', which means 'likely to change or become dangerous without warning' (Macmillan Dictionary, n.d.). Precariousness is also understood as a general and pervasive human experience, one that extends beyond the current political-cultural moment and affects people of all socio-economic groups. Precarity emerged as a central concern in academic research and writing in the early twenty-first century. It made its way into academic discourse partly as a response to political mobilisations, particularly those that took place in Europe against unemployment and social exclusion (Kasimir, 2018).

The term 'precariat' dates back to the 1980s when French sociologists used it to define unprotected, temporary workers as a new social class (Bourdieu, 1998; Chauvel, 2010; Standing, 2011). This term was also used by British economist Guy Standing (2011), in the title of his book *Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. Standing (2011:7) defines the precariat as a 'distinctive socio-economic group' and 'a class-in-the-making, if not yet a class-for-itself'. In this spirit, the precariat is described as a neologism that combines an adjective 'precarious' and a related noun 'proletariat'. Standing regards the 'global precariat' as an emergent class, with structural relationships to capital and self-interests that are distinct from and opposed to older workers in stable, long-term, unionised jobs. In Standing's assessment, the precariat

is multi-layered strata of varied part-time workers, the self-employed, and sub-contractors. These people are not members of the working class since, he argues, they do not express work-based identities, collective forms of solidarity, ties to the workplace, or affinities for labour politics.

Enda Brophy and Greig de Peuter (2007:180) refer to precarity as 'a collectively created conceptual tool, the practical purpose of which is to aid in naming, understanding and ultimately transforming the conditions of labour under post-Fordism'. The term is used to refer to many different forms of 'flexible exploitation', including illegal, seasonal and temporary employment; homeworking, subcontracting and freelancing; and so-called self-employment (Nielsen and Rossiter, 2005). In media studies, scholars have borrowed the term 'precarity' together with its variants 'precarious' and the 'precariat'. O'Donnell and Zion (2019) explain that precarity in media work is commonly associated with non-permanent or flexible types of employment, and related practical problems such as fear of job cuts, financial worries or concern about upskilling as technology advances. Morgan (2015:3-4) focuses on the emotional impact of precariousness and adds that precariousness damages younger workers trying to get into the labour market by undermining their capacity to plan for the future or develop a coherent self-identity.

By considering what she called 'invisible' workers – television set assemblers, soft-core videographers, reality casters, and civic cable volunteers – as producers of television, Viki Mayer (2011) evaluated how media work implicitly constructs identities in and through labour. During her ethnographic research into these peripheral workers, Mayer further stated that capitalism profits from invisible labours of 'identifiable Others' and also simultaneously profits from invisible inputs into formal production markets generalised across the many labour sectors organised by precarity. In another essay, *The Production of Extras in a Precarious Economy*, Mayer (2016:67) analysed the labour strategy of the New Orleans-based production of the quality HBO television drama *Treme* (2010-2013) and its ability to create a moral economy for low-paying or unpaid film jobs, based mainly on conversations with workers employed as extras on the series. The strategy was to hire local residents who imagined themselves as helping the local cultural economy in Treme's

locational shooting. They were mostly low-paid workers or even volunteers who are the 'most localised but least visible'.

Similar studies into global media workers are collected into *Precarious Creativity Global Media, Local Labour* (Curtin and Sanson 2016). The edited collection provided perspectives to expand the geographic and intellectual range of screen media studies, moving past 'romanticised assumptions' about creative work in favour of more incisive discussions about power, equity, and collective action. Curtin and Sanson called for more attention to be paid to the escalating stress and strain confronting media workers worldwide before outlining compelling alternatives or transferable solutions, highlighting the common phenomena of exploitation in the television industry globally. For instance, they argue that worker's unions in China are used as an arm of the Communist Party, representing the interests of ruling elites rather than workers. In other countries such as the US, union officials criticised a system of subcontracting that helps producers circumvent union agreements. Moreover, some subcontractors delayed paycheques for months or even refused to pay at all. Union leaders have complained that workers are more vulnerable than ever and that hard-earned gains from the past are being challenged at every turn. Media practitioners suffer from excessively long work shifts and are often scheduled consecutively with little turnaround time. Even so, in the US television industry, television practitioners are pressured to offer free 'spec work', as a norm in the industry to attract potential lucrative long-term business relationships. Sadly, as Caldwell (2016:46) notes, this freely given surplus work 'undercuts peers, taking work (and thus screen time) away from others, further increasing craft-world precarity'. Curtin and Sanson (2016) noted that precarious labour conditions could repeat in many parts of the world. Both private and public media systems around the world are driven by market imperatives that cause intense competition between transnational services and local providers. Meanwhile, pressured by various rising costs, conglomerates seek to contain production expenses by trimming budgets in other areas, especially below-the-line labour. Moreover, producers and executives outsource jobs to independent contractors, resist input from union officials, and undermine the creative authority of skilled artisans. Since many individuals resigned from their jobs in silence, the potential for collective action and institutional reform is undermined. Curtin and Sanson then appealed for more research into

declining labour conditions, especially the impact on creative employees and workplace practices.

In a comparative study on creativity within the gaming industry between several East-Asian countries, Anthony Fung (2016:200-213) characterised creative labour in China as the 'contented bourgeois', who could 'rarely go beyond the ideological boundaries of the workplace and the political or regulatory system of the regime'. Although Fung attempts to criticise China's state censorship that 'diminishes the creative expression in the cultural products' within its online games industry, he has provided a useful perspective: government policies, market dynamics, and cultural specificity all exert a significant impact on working conditions, attitudes, and values among game company employees. Therefore, when cultural workers invest their time in creative industries, they internalise the norms and roles imposed by these corporations.

Keane (2016), in his essay, *Unbundling Precarious Creativity in China* (2016), states that commercialisation of broadcasting industries contributes to precarious creativity in China. Regarding the discussion of commercialisation within the industry, Ying Zhu (2012) has also described CCTV's turn toward the market in *Two Billion Eyes*. The introduction of contract labour with higher pay (as opposed to ongoing employment) signalled a move toward the kinds of outsourcing practices which are standard in most international media industries. Contracted workers became central to CCTV's talent identification and, as Ying Zhu notes, CCTV poached talent from independent production companies, thereby refreshing its workforce. On the other hand, as her study points out, many of the best people at CCTV have left and moved into independent and digital media sectors. Although Zhu considered labour outsourcing in CCTV as a way to poach talent from independent production companies and thereby 'to refresh its workforce', the reality of labour outsourcing may not be beneficial to media practitioners in the long run. This thesis draws a similar conclusion, which is detailed further in Chapter 4.

Although 'precarity' has been widely used in media studies, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) are not convinced that the concept of precarity brings real added value as a conceptual tool rather than as essentially a synonym for the insecurity and exploitation recognised and

analysed in other theoretical and activist traditions (2011:161). They compared the concepts of 'immaterial labour', 'affective labour' (Hardt and Negri, 2000), 'emotional labour' (Hochschild, 1983), and 'precarity', by drawing examples from their participant-observation of a daytime talent show. The concept of immaterial labour was firstly defined as 'the labour that produces the information and cultural content of the commodity' (Lazzarato, 1996:133) and later expanded as 'labour that produces an immaterial good, such as services, a cultural product, knowledge, or communication (Hardt and Negri, 2000:290). 'Affective labour' is part of immaterial labour and involves 'the creation and manipulation of affects', and whose 'products' include 'a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, passion-even a sense of connectedness or community' (Hardt, 1999:96). In comparison to 'affective labour', the term 'emotional labour' appears more in sociological works and it is defined as 'the process by which workers are expected to manage their feelings in accordance with organisationally defined rules and guidelines' (Wharton, 2009:147). Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011:77) finds the concept of emotional labour more compelling and useful than the autonomist concepts of immaterial labour and affective labour. Their focus – is creative labour really barely disguised 'bad work'? Might it even be a particular modern form of bad work, where the subject's desires for autonomy and self-realisation become folded into systems of discipline and accumulation – are also debates that are explored in this thesis. Their view on the debates is that it is only right to listen and observe creative workers reflecting on their work, as these debates rely fundamentally on assumptions about and interpretations of the subjective experiences of workers. More importantly, they call for attention being paid to how work in the cultural industries is managed, coordinated and divided.

Since 'precarity' has its origins and connotations from the West, we need to be aware that understanding 'precarity' in China is a task that requires different theories and approaches. Outside of media studies, Chinese scholars have focused on the overall labour market in China, especially the lives of migrant workers who do not have local household registration (*hùkǒu*, 户口) in the city where they work. Studies on protecting employees' rights at work, worker's unions, and labour dispatch within private companies are also prevalent in Chinese academia. There is also a fairly significant body of work on the working conditions of news journalists. However, there exists a gap in studying other media practitioners' rights as

employees and how their livelihood is affected by factors such as different employment systems, China's social welfare system and household registration system, which are features specific to China regarding employee rights. In other words, existing media studies do not sufficiently examine the nature of the precariat in China. Having said that, this thesis does not intend to examine the generic Western equivalent of 'the precariat' in China in all industries. Instead, this thesis will focus on the appropriation of 'precarity' within the context of television production, and specifically, the precarious television practitioners who produce *zongyi* programmes in China.

Section Three: Previous studies on China's media production

Although many scholars have studied Chinese television in terms of contents, histories, policies and audiences, only a few have paid attention to the production processes. Amongst, even fewer have focused on the production of entertainment shows. Some recent studies involving certain aspects of Chinese television production can be found in PhD theses published over the past decade. For example, Hong Li (2016) examined changes in the production practices of *China's Got Talent* and, Xin Yao (2017) explored the impacts of China's media censorship on the localisation of *The Voice of China*. Clearly, there is still a gap to fill in the studies of the production culture of Chinese television.

Although only a few scholars have studied the media production processes, many have conducted influential work on Chinese news production process since the 1990s (Pan and Lu, 2003; Zhang, 2006; Bian and Zhao, 2011; Wang, 2014; Bai, 2017). For instance, Pan and Lu reviewed how early journalists formed their sense of professionalism; Fan Xu's (2013) ethnographic fieldwork in Phoenix Satellite TV illustrated the inner working of Phoenix TV in detail, and Weijia Wang's (2011) passive observation of three typical Chinese media organisations linked the concept of 'labour' from Marxism to Chinese journalism studies, and analysed institutional changes within Chinese news organisations. Although none of these scholars worked directly in the organisations they studied, they have shifted from mainstream macro perspectives to mid- and micro-level perspectives. Additionally, as the majority of television studies in Chinese academia focus on textual analysis and audience research, practice-based research into the news production process can shed light on future television studies.

When searching 'television production' and 'television studios' on China's biggest academic database, the China Knowledge Resource Integrated Database (CNKI), we can find results from television journals, interviews, archived newspapers, 'how-to' textbooks, and a few academic dissertations, which are often about the latest applications of studio technologies. It is essential to understand the major trends of media studies in Chinese academia. One approach is to consider the collection of television histories. Two typical examples include *History of Chinese Television* written by Zhenzhi Guo (1997), and *A History of Chinese*

Television: 1958-2008, edited by Jiang Chang (2017). Another tendency is to collect behind-the-scenes stories and interviews. However, most of these studies are conducted by the media organisation themselves. For example, in 2013, the Canxing production team published some behind-the-scenes stories of how they localised *The Voice* franchise into *The Voice of China*. The team conceded that, as an independent production company, Canxing negotiated with Zhejiang Satellite TV on how they shared interests and responsibilities based on future viewing ratings. The team also revealed many localisation details, especially the compromises they made while localising international formats. For instance, they could not find studios with the ideal size recommended by the production 'bible'; they could not spare the same amount of time on production as required by the original format; and they could not livestream interactive Q&A sessions due to restrictions imposed by the censorship.

In addition, there are both qualitative and quantitative studies of Chinese news production processes. In *Professional Movement and Social Status of the 'Peripheral Media Practitioners' – A Study based on Newsroom Ethnography*, Huaxin Peng and Jinhua Hao (2018) studied 'peripheral news journalists' in Shenzhen city and how the overall 'self-media' development affected these journalists' livelihoods. Similar studies can be found in Zhi'an Zhang's PhD thesis, *News Production in the Newsroom*, Weijia Wang's PhD thesis, *Study on the Labour Work of Chinese News Journalists*, and Fan Xu's PhD thesis (and later book), *The Role-Making and Programme Production of Phoenix Chinese Satellite TV*. Zhang's thesis is an early study on the daily news production practices of a well-known Chinese tabloid *Southern Metropolis Daily* (南方都市报). Zhang (2006) reviews the tabloid's ten-year development (1995 to 2005) on its news production practices, investigating the interaction between news production and social control. Via passive observation and in-depth interviews, Zhang examines the interaction between media, market and news democracy in the Chinese context. Xu also conducted newsroom observations at Phoenix Satellite TV, a Hong Kong-based Chinese-speaking news agency. As a participant-observer, Xu gained an insider's look into the ambivalent role of Phoenix TV, using Goffman's concepts of 'front stage/backstage' and Foucault's power theory. Xu states that as a non-mainstream media outlet, Phoenix TV must strike a balance between news professionalism and state censorship. For example, Phoenix managed to report exclusive news from Iraq quicker than other mainstream Chinese media, which enabled them to have slightly more freedom in selecting news topics. Although Xu

mentions the culture of multitasking and long working hours, he does not view it as a form of exploitation. Instead, he comes up with the concept of 'professional passion', which has led to less censorship, more public approval and hero-making movements. Undoubtedly, 'professional passion' has encouraged journalists to work without complaints, and it is also served as a replacement for an appropriate remuneration to news journalists of Phoenix TV. Xu's work exerts more influence on my research than others because his findings on the journalists' sense of precariousness and their justification for being low on budget and rewards resonate with my research findings. Although Xu may not have realised that 'professional passion' was an excuse to cover up precarity and an illusion of reward, his effort on understanding the journalists' subjective opinions has shed light on this thesis.

Besides direct newsroom observations conducted by Zhang and Xu, another work that influences my thesis the most is Weijia Wang's research on the working conditions of Chinese news journalists from the perspective of Marxism and political economy. Wang breaks the dichotomy between 'the government' and 'the market' by studying the 'history of people' (Wang, 2011:1). His study focuses on mid- and micro- levels of news production, which highly resembles the perspectives of production studies. In his literature review, Wang has summarised three prevalent perspectives on previous academic work studying Chinese media practitioners, especially on news journalists. The first perspective sees the government and practitioners as separable and antithetic. This perspective sees journalists as being oppressed by state censorship. Using the concept of hegemonic communication, July Polumbaum pointed out that journalists are struggling to maintain a balance between 'authorities from above' and 'social responsibility'.

The second perspective analysed historical changes in the social identities of news journalists and their news production practices. This perspective can be found in *The Conception of Chinese: Ideological Convergence and Contestation* (Chin-Chuan Lee, 2005). Wang thinks that Lee over-simplified journalism as a tool for government propaganda while ignoring the 'societal' and 'historical' context within the development of China's political and cultural leadership. Another example of this perspective appeared in *Localising Professionalism: Discursive Practices in China's Reforms* (Pan and Lu 2003). Borrowing M.de Certeau's concept of 'strategies' and 'tactics', Pan and Lu argue that Chinese news journalists tactically deal

with the government in the form of cooperation, discipline, avoidance, and refusal. This process is seen as 'improvising' news professionalism. Regardless, according to Wang (2011:11), Pan and Lu still held onto the dichotomy of 'government power' and 'professionalism', and failed to acknowledge the invisible influence of cultural imperialism. In *Shifting Journalistic Paradigms: How China's Journalists Assess 'Media Exemplars'* (Pan and Chan, 2003), Chinese journalists were interviewed and asked to rank several news organisations. The result was that all the journalists gave higher scores to those that claimed to seek news professionalism while giving lower scores to state-owned newspapers such as *People's Daily* (人民日报) or *Guangming Daily* (光明日报). The scores reflected how these journalists viewed their own social identities and idealisation in news practices. In another article, *Power and News Production Process*, Lu (2003: 18) scrutinised 'power relations of news production in a transitional China' by examining management, organisational structure and information sources. Several factors affecting the production process were highlighted, including unregulated internal management and capricious power relations.

The third approach comes from a Marxist perspective, which sees government, market and society as interconnected components within a power structure. For example, Yuezhi Zhao (2004;2008) believes that Chinese news journalists in the 1990s conflicted less with the government and instead, gradually became economic elites during economic reforms. In sum, Wang (2011:15) states that previous studies regard 'government' and 'news production' as antithetical and see the realisation of 'news professionalism' as journalism's ultimate goal. Wang argues that this approach obliterates a more historical and holistic analysis of news journalists. It also lacks analysis into the news production process and its control mechanisms. Wang's summary is important to future Chinese production studies as his view is significantly different from the above three perspectives on the relation between state control and professionalism, or creative autonomy. Instead of studying the relations between state censorship and journalists, Wang studies the working conditions and relations between journalists, pointing out other factors that dictate the overall well-being of journalists. In the view of this thesis, the factors Wang mentioned, including internal management and power struggles, exert far more influence on news journalists than state censorship and they deserve future researchers' closer scrutiny. This thesis, undoubtedly, is inspired by Wang's implication and further develops his perspectives on 'the people.'

Apart from qualitative research, some other Chinese academics have adopted quantitative methods, hoping to understand the industry with the help of big data. These scholars often incorporate questionnaires into their research. Yet, the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods appears more commonly in academic dissertations. For example, Zhang Quan (2017) used both ethnography and questionnaires in analysing the professional identity of media practitioners working at Xinjiang Television, Ürümqi Television Station, Ürümqi Radio station, *Xinjiang Economic Daily* (新疆经济), *Xinjiang Daily* (新疆日报), and *iyaxin* online newspaper (亚心网). From April to July 2015, Ding Mai, He Gou He and Guangyu Dong (2016) collected questionnaires from 1,220 news journalists, who worked across 31 provinces in China, in order to compile and publish the *National Report on News Journalists in Radio and Television Stations*. Several aspects of news journalists were examined: their demographic background, working hours, career aspirations, professional training and work ethic. This study showed that most news journalists had university degrees but suffered from high-intensity work and low satisfaction on incomes. Furthermore, the number of journalists who held a professional license was unevenly distributed throughout the country. Ding et al. explain that uneven social distribution and material supremacy are the inevitable results of excessive economic development, and that lack of beliefs had become a common phenomenon in Chinese society. Ultimately, the study showed that nearly 90% of news journalists believed that they should abide by professional ethics in any situation, but younger journalists insisted that professional ethics should be evaluated based on different scenarios.

Another concept, media labourer, is also relevant to this thesis. Since some academics have had work experience in the industry, they had access to interview media practitioners who used to be their colleagues (Yang, 2014; Zhang, 2017). The study of 'media labourers' has become a heated topic since early 2000. Some catchphrases such as 'news labourers' (*xīnwén míngōng*, 新闻民工) and 'media labourers' (*méitǐ láogōng*, 媒体劳工) were invented by media practitioners themselves to indicate a self-deprecating attitude towards the nature of media jobs (Liu, 2008; Lu, 2008; Shang, 2013; Bai, 2014; Dai, 2018). The usage of 'news labourers' and 'media labourers' has clearly emphasised the precarious working conditions of news journalists, as *míngōng* and *láogōng* stereotypically represent farmers and migrants who do heavy-duty work in cities far from their hometowns. It is worth noting that most

academic studies on 'media labourers' are mainly master's dissertations, along with several other PhD theses. Amongst these academic works, one recent trend is to study the changing mentality of news journalists. Hongyi Bai (2011), in his PhD thesis, identifies a dual mentality expressed by contemporary journalists. On one hand, these journalists view themselves as intellectuals who must serve the people; On the other hand, more and more have begun to see themselves as 'media labourers' who think about making ends meet for one's family daily. Similar to Bai, who interviewed news journalists from print media, Haiying Yang (2014) has studied the identity transition of news journalists who work at local news agencies in Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou, with the use of questionnaires. Later in 2017, Li Zhang conducted ethnography in *Qilu Evening Newspaper* and interviewed 15 journalists regarding their understanding of professional identity. Unlike Bai, Yang and Zhang, who only interviewed news journalists from print media, other master's graduates have studied practitioners who worked in radio stations, television stations, and digital media. For example, Hong Hui (2013) has analysed the career plans of television reporters from Changsha Broadcast and Television Group. Hong realises that as Changsha TV lacks enough promotion opportunities, more and more reporters have left the industry, let alone plotting a long-term career plan. Ruohan Liu (2013) arrives at a similar conclusion to Hong, stating that most practitioners struggle with the balance between a heavy workload and family issues, after interviewing news journalists from Shaanxi Broadcasting Corporation (SXTV). Having collected 344 questionnaires from news journalists who worked in major news outlets in Henan province, Li Yuan (2017) has scrutinised how news journalists make sense of their professional identity when confronted with 'huge differences' between their imagination and reality.

Other than studying the mentality and working conditions of news journalists, scholars have looked into historical changes and reforms in organisational structures and human resource management systems of specific media organisations, and, in turn, how these reforms have affected their employees. Xuming Yi's PhD thesis sets out an example of historical analysis on the interconnected relationships among the Chinese government, Chinese TV stations, Chinese audience, and advertisement investors (2011). Other master's dissertations have also contributed to understanding the internal management of media organisation. For instance, two master's dissertations have analysed the phenomenon of 'media labourers' by

using case studies of CCTV and other major media institutions (e.g., Hebei Television, *Hebei Daily*) of Hebei province (Kang, 2007; Ma, 2011).

Kang and Ma believe that the lack of protection provided by employment contracts have not only caused inequality between permanent staff and 'media labourers' (from their view, contractors) but have also demotivated the contractors to work with their full potentials. They both appeal for institutional changes to combat inequality, although they realise the difficulty of a thorough reform for historical reasons⁵. Amongst these studies, CCTV is a popular case study subject. For instance, Wu Jing (2008) explored how the animation department of CCTV transformed into CCTV Animation Limited company; and Jianping Wang (2014) analysed CCTV's two-tier 'channel to programme' management structure and its shortcomings. Just like CCTV, Zhejiang Radio and Television Group also carried out reforms in its HR and personnel systems. Its recent reform ended all previous permanent job contracts (Chunlian Wang, 2011). A more general study can be found in *Study on Radio and Television Media Personnel System*, authored by Hongzi Ding (2007), who has outlined the historical changes of recruitment systems in Chinese TV, with examples of 12 media outlets in different cities of Jiangxi province. He has specifically analysed the pros and cons of recruiting contractors, dispatched labours, and television programmes entrusted to specific producers. Similar to Ding's research, Xinyun Liu (2007) has examined the staff incentive system of Chinese TV, using theories of human resource management. Another similar study is Xiaolin Liu's focus on the labour dispatch system within the Chinese broadcasting and TV system, published in 2011.

Apart from scholarly studies mentioned above, issues concerning workers and their workplaces are stressed the most by media practitioners themselves, who have published in industry reports, internal journals, and newspapers. Many practitioners have examined the reasons behind the precarity within the Chinese media industry (Zhou, 2006; Wang, 2008; Dai and Yang, 2017; Dai, 2018). These practitioners have called for comprehensive reforms

⁵ In the 1980s, with increasing demands for news journalists, more and more television and radio stations had to recruit more employees while following government guidelines on maintaining a fixed number of permanent staff. At that time, radio and television stations were considered government-affiliated institutions, so they implemented the same recruitment system as the government, which only offered limited permanent positions that are directly sponsored by state revenue. As a result, they employed a large number of contractors during this period which created difficulties for reform in the future.

such as a 'more reasonable' internal assessment, a 'fairer' salary structure, and a fully-fledged legal system to 'protect news journalists from being harmed during interviews' (Fan, 2006; Shen, 2008; Liu, 2008; Xie and Lü, 2015). In comparison to scholars who appeal for one-sided institutional reforms, media practitioners insist on building a more constructive mutual relationship between employees (media practitioners) and employers (media organisations). Some even expect more from practitioners, noting that one must keep up professional standards through self-awareness and self-motivation (Zhang, 2005; Fan, 2006; Zhang and Zhao, 2008). Overall, media practitioners themselves have identified the phenomenon of 'media labourers' more than post-graduates or other scholars. We should acknowledge that although there have been attempts to understand the working conditions of media practitioners in all kinds of television genres, most Chinese academic resources have still been directed to studying news journalists. More systematic scholarly studies are needed in the areas of production studies within the Chinese media industry, especially in the livelihood and working conditions of media practitioners outside of news production.

Chapter 3 Methodology of this Thesis: Ethnography

This chapter introduces ethnography as a qualitative research methodology and explains the interpretivist paradigm adopted for this thesis. There are two sections in this chapter. Section One introduced how and why this thesis is situated in the interpretivist paradigm with the researcher as a participant-observer. Section Two is the focus of this chapter. I have addressed key issues surrounding ethnography in non-Western countries, and in my case, issues on conducting fieldwork in Mainland China. Firstly, I introduced the ethical guidelines I intended to follow and how I gained ethics approval from the Research Ethics Committee at the university. Secondly, I explained in detail how access was granted and arrangements made. During the course of gaining access, I had to make compromises and be flexible with ethics guidelines, as some guidelines did not apply in my research context. I specifically quoted Chinese scholar Suiming Pan's research question within the text, asking the same question raised in his book – how to conduct ethnography in non-Western contexts. Thirdly, I pointed out three problems I encountered during interviews – the dilemma between validity and anonymity, the issue of trust, and the using 'deep backstage' information.. Last but not least, I demonstrated how I built relationships with people in the field and my own identity crisis as an ethnographer, hoping that my research experience can shed light on future ethnographic works in non-Western contexts. Additionally, apart from passive and participant observation, I conducted 26 semi-structured interviews with television practitioners whom I met at work and via acquaintances to explore whether some of the phenomena taking place in the internships were universal to the whole TV industry. With limited access to professional networks, I adopted snowballing strategies to select interviewees. A full list of interviewees and relevant information is included in the Appendices.

Section One: Ethnographic research

This section will explain why the thesis is situated in the interpretivist paradigm with the researcher as a participant-observer. What are the specific implications of this in the particular context? Furthermore, how has this influenced the specific research design? At the end of this section, it becomes clear that even if I tried to gather as much data as possible by

gaining exclusive access to the different production teams as a participant-observer, I could not deny that my research is an interpretation of my field data since the interpretative paradigm has become the mainstream consensus amongst ethnographers.

Ethnography and participant-observation

The ethnographic approach to qualitative research comes mainly from the field of anthropology. The word 'ethnography' is used regularly to refer to empirical accounts of particular human populations' culture and social organisation. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1983:2), ethnography can be understood as:

simply one social research method, albeit an unusual one, drawing on a wide range of sources of information. The ethnographer participates in people's lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions ... collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues with which he or she is concerned.

Participant observation enables the researcher to be immersed in a community and to gain in-depth knowledge about the intricacies and inner workings that could not be obtained from second-hand information. The researcher lives within a specific context, maintains relationships with people, participates in community activities, and takes extensive and elaborate notes on the experience. Participant observation is also useful in understanding the difference between what people do and what people say they do. That is why researchers should be critical towards interviews as sometimes even the interviewees may not have clear answers to these questions. Therefore, participant observation enables researchers to uncover the answers on their own. On the other hand, passive observation is less time-consuming compared to participant observation, especially in relation to the amount of data collected. Passive observation also enables the researcher to observe multiple sites within a relatively shorter time. However, passive observation is restricted by minimal access to the field. It can also distract others in the field from performing their daily tasks naturally.

Positivism and the interpretative paradigm: which to adopt?

Anthropology can be defined as studying a specific community through long-term participant observation. No observation can be made unless the observer has a point of view that guides his/her selection and interests. In other words, the fieldworker's theoretical ideas concerning the constitution of the phenomena investigated determine an overall methodological stance.

Participant observation and Positivism

The positivist paradigm of exploring social reality is based on the French philosopher Auguste Comte's philosophical ideas. According to Comte, observation and reason are the best means of understanding human behaviour; true knowledge is based on the experience of the senses and can be obtained by observation and experimentation. At the ontological level, positivists assume that reality is an objective given and measurable using properties independent of the researcher and his/her instruments; in other words, knowledge is objective and quantifiable. Positivistic thinkers adopt scientific methods and systematize the knowledge generation process with the help of quantification to enhance precision in the description of parameters and the relationships between them. Positivism is concerned with uncovering truth and presenting it by empirical means (Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit, 2004: 17). The positivist position maintains that scientific knowledge consists of facts, while its ontology considers reality independent of social construction (Walsham, 1995). If the research study consists of stable and unchanging reality, the researcher can adopt a realist ontology, a belief in an objective, real-world and detached epistemological stance based on a belief that people's perceptions and statements are either true or false, right or wrong. They can employ a methodology that relies on control and manipulation of reality. Accordingly, positivism regards human behaviour as passive, controlled and determined by the external environment.

The positivist paradigm believes that its subject matter had to be real, factual and it had to consist of empirical phenomena which exist somewhere 'out there' in the world. It must also be available to the anthropologist essentially in the same way as the subject matter of natural

science is available to the scientist – through direct observation, which is seen as providing something like sense-data, i.e., information about the social world gathered through the experience of the senses. It aims to give anthropology scientific status, leading to anthropologists' requirements, like scientists, to gather their own data instead of relying on laymen's information without professional training.

From the perspective of positivist anthropology, participation is a highly problematic and rather unnecessary part of fieldwork, especially from the methodological perspective. Far from being methodologically desirable, the anthropologist's participation violates the separation of the observer and the observed and thus goes against the scientific principle of anthropology. In other words, the anthropologist's presence affects the observed situation so that observation of it cannot be assumed to be completely free of distortion, thus rendering problematic the basic aim of reporting 'what is really happening there' (Ellen 1984:26). To deal with this problem, positivist anthropologists make efforts to prolong their stay in the field. It is believed that the longer they stay, the less disturbing the effect of the ethnographers. As a result, under the influence of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, it became an accepted fact in British anthropology that to 'become' an anthropologist, one had to do a period of intensive fieldwork for one or two years (ibid. p55).

Participant observation and the interpretative paradigm

Interpretative social science derives from the realisation that a social scientist is not merely observing things but is interpreting meaning. This concept stems directly from the idea that the social world is not an objective world external to humans in the same sense as any other objectively existing reality (natural world) but is a world constituted by meaning. It does not exist independently of its members' social meanings to account for it and constitute it.

The interpretative paradigm is a distinct move away from the scientific attitude of the positivistic paradigm in terms of its research procedure. The interpretivists believe observation cannot be the only or even the primary process through which data are collected. Instead, participation should be the main data yielding technique. The researcher does not participate in the subjects' lives as a bystander but instead observes while participating fully

and actively in the subjects' lives. In this way, the researcher can more fully understand the meanings of the subjects' actions because they also undertake and share those actions with them.

According to Willis (1995), the interpretivists believe there is no single correct route or particular method to gaining knowledge. Walsham (1993) argues that there are no 'correct' or 'incorrect' theories in the interpretive tradition. Instead, they should be judged based on how 'interesting' they are to the researcher and those involved in the same areas. They attempt to derive their constructs from the field by an in-depth examination of the phenomenon of interest. Gephart (1999) argues that the interpretivists assume that knowledge and meaning are acts of interpretation; hence there is no objective knowledge independent of thinking, reasoning humans. Appropriately, access to reality is only achieved through social constructions, such as language, consciousness and shared meanings (Myers, 2009).

The interpretative paradigm depends on observation and interpretation. Thus, to observe is to collect information about events, while interpreting is to make meaning of that information by drawing assumptions or judging the match between the information and some abstract pattern (Aikenhead, 1997). The interpretative paradigm also attempts to understand phenomena through the meanings people assign to them (Deetz, 1996). Via living with the people being studied and via the necessity of interacting and communicating with them, the researcher will share the same meanings with them in active participation in their social life. In addition, active participation in the social life of the people one studies becomes the primary method of discovering the actors' cultural meaning, their emic rules and their logic. In interpretative social science, the validity of the researcher's account is tested against the everyday experience of the community of people.

As mentioned, anthropology has experienced a gradual transfer from the positivist paradigm to the interpretative paradigm, which has challenged the dominance of the positivistic paradigm due to its lack of subjectivity in interpreting social reality. Based on the differences between the positivist and the interpretative paradigm, it became clear that this study is situated in the interpretivist paradigm because, in my research, my own participation was

the primary means of verifying my account. At the same time, I did not stand above or outside of the Chinese TV but was a participant-observer, in my case, an intern, who engaged in the television production activities and discerned the meanings of actions as expressed within a specific Chinese social context. As an ethnographer, I successfully became a member of the community studied. Hence, my understanding of the working culture is correct. I also believe that the fieldwork data was a collective interpretation of the Chinese television production community. Indeed, I made sense of a specific production culture via understanding its shared meanings within the industry. According to the interpretative paradigm, 'facts' are products of interpretations. Therefore, it should be down to the researcher to draw presumptions about the experiences in the field.

Section Two: Research Ethics

This section explains several crucial elements of this specific ethnographic research. It firstly demonstrated the ethical guidelines I planned to follow and the ethical approval process within Royal Holloway University of London, where I studied for my PhD. It also demonstrated my discursive journey of gaining access to Chinese TV, my utmost efforts in upholding the Western ethical guidelines and the compromises I had to make. I also reflected on my experience of carrying out ethnography in a non-Western context, specifically, ethnography in Mainland China. In the end, I raised an academic debate on how to cope with situations where ethical guidelines may not apply and why certain flexibility should be allowed.

Ethics guidelines in a non-Western context

Before carrying out the fieldwork, I intended to follow ethical guidelines in the UK, such as the *Ethical Guidelines for good research practice*, issued by the Association of Social Anthropologists (ASA) of the UK, and *Statement of Ethical Practice (2017)*, issued by the British Sociological Association (BSA). I also read academic works both in English and Chinese to help me understand ethnography in non-Western contexts.

As ethnographers, we must reconcile various parties' rights and interests during fieldwork, including informants and other research participants, gatekeepers, colleagues, sponsors and funders, their universities or employers, their own and host governments, themselves and the public. Moral and ethical decisions have to be made at all stages of research, from selecting a topic to publication of findings and disposal of data. During fieldwork, especially, ethnographers owe responsibilities to informants, participants, gatekeepers, and colleagues. Ethnographers should recognise citizens' rights to be informed about the methods and aims of the study, its anticipated consequences and potential benefits, risks and disadvantages. Ideally, ethnographers should also give feedback on the results and, where practicable, consult participants over publication (Ellen, 1984:138).

However, such generalised obligations can bring various problems. Some researchers argue that it is not always possible to obtain informed consent and sometimes ethnographers themselves are unable to tell what their actual research interests are until the end of the

ethnography, especially in more exploratory work. In long-term fieldwork, researchers may even forget they are doing research and therefore forget to inform newcomers. More importantly, the need for informed consent may present fieldworkers with acute difficulties concerning cross-cultural contexts, and it may be challenging to obtain knowledgeable and voluntary (let alone written) consent from everyone in the field. Even when informed consent is possible to obtain, the researcher will also encounter these problems: from whom is it to be obtained, in relation to whom, what matters, what events and data? If consent is withdrawn, what implications are there for the field data relating to that person, and can withdrawal take retrospective effect (du Toit 1980:282; Jorgensen 1971; Trend 1980)? Even after the fieldwork, informants could still be harmed by any published data.

In the specific context of my research, I was an ethnographer in my own society. My fieldwork is different from traditional anthropology, where ethnographers worked in unfamiliar environments different from their own. I did not encounter problems with language or culture. Because of my identity as a native Chinese national, I was granted exclusive access to media organisations and potentially gained more trust from media practitioners because of my native identity and a graduate from a renowned Chinese media university. Although conducting ethnography in one's own society has advantages, researchers should not underestimate fieldwork's difficulty or ignore research ethics during the fieldwork.

Since my research was to be carried out in China, I read both English and Chinese academic works regarding research ethics. Pan Suiming (2011)'s *Social Research on Methods: Quantitative and Qualitative Sociological Studies in Chinese Contexts* helped me understand ethnography in China enormously. Having studied China's underground prostitution since 1997, Suiming Pan and his students provided scrutinised fieldwork experience with extreme ethical dilemmas they encountered. Pan discussed whether a researcher should call the police if they find out people interviewed were trafficked, whether a researcher should intervene when seeing research subjects being bullied, and whether a researcher should say hello when bumping into a former sex worker. These situations all took place during Pan's ethnography. Pan believes that conducting ethical research is a test for the researcher's morals and professionalism.

Although my research was not as sensitive as Pan's, some of his insights helped my research. For example, what to do when gatekeepers require the researchers to sign a Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDA). If the researchers signed an NDA, how should they write about their fieldwork experiences without revealing commercial secrets? In what situations should a researcher conduct covert research, which is research not disclosed to the subject, where the researcher does not reveal that research is taking place (Spicker,2011)? Should ethnographers interview informants who lose their jobs? Should ethnographers still use the data if consent is withdrawn?

Pan (2016) asked a critical question: as sociology in China lacks local theories, should Chinese researchers apply Western theories to explain phenomena that have never happened in the West before? Or should they invent new theories based on phenomena that have never occurred in the West? This question, for years, has triggered debates in Chinese academia. We may not have an easy answer to this question. As China's situation is different from that of the West, the feasibility of Western ethical guidelines may not always apply. We must remember that ethnography in non-Western contexts may require different ethics guidelines, and flexibility in one's intended guidelines should be allowed. Appell (1978:3) suggests the best anthropologists might be those who can tolerate the moral ambiguities characterising a discipline that involves 'cross-cultural inquiry...at an interface of ethical systems.' In the next segment, I will explain how I applied Western guidelines and the compromises I made.

Access, responsibilities, and ethics approval

In this section, I have explained how I gained access to Chinese media and the process of gaining ethics approval from Royal Holloway's Research Ethics Committee. More importantly, I have demonstrated why I anonymised key information from my first internship. It also explained how I reconciled the interests of different sides and the flexibilities required.

From March to July 2018, I conducted four months' participant observation and a small amount of passive observation in three state-owned television stations and two independent TV production companies in China. As a participant-observer, I interned at four television

programmes and passively observed two other production teams' television production processes. The research was mainly conducted in Beijing and Shenzhen, but I also visited the *If You Are the One* production team in Nanjing for a few days. From January to March 2019, I interviewed 26 television practitioners back and forth in China and the UK. Whilst working with television practitioners, I observed their daily production practices and tried to understand how they viewed their working conditions from an insider's perspective.

Before I went into the field, I was actively looking for access to the Chinese media. Initially, I sent out my CV from London to many production companies and television stations, hoping to obtain an internship without relying on existing personal contacts. However, there was no reply. I later realised that Chinese media was a miniature version of *renqing*⁶ (human relationships based on favours) society, so informal recommendation remained the quickest way to gain access. The downside of such a method was that some gatekeepers who helped me gain access could not remember my research intentions, let alone retell my identity as an ethnographer to others in the field. Sometimes, I had to translate academic words into plain language, but soon, the original research's meaning was misunderstood or not appropriately comprehended. In one production company, I could not tell others about my real intentions. Therefore, there have been confusion and difficulty during the fieldwork, which I will explain as follows.

In February 2018, I asked one of my relatives who worked in a provincial television station whether I could take on an internship at a studio-based entertainment show. She worked in management, so she rang someone else in a management position at the TV station, who immediately asked why I was interested in the internship. My relative told them I was a researcher from a British university and wanted to study their television production processes as part of my thesis. The person refused immediately and emphasised that all interns must sign an NDA and reminded her that when the Two Sessions were held at a politically sensitive time, every decision at the managerial level must be cautiously made and go through more administrative procedures. This means that an official internship must be approved by every TV station's senior leader, and I should also submit relevant information,

⁶ Please refer to Section 1 of Chapter 10.

including a health certificate. Acknowledging that it would become a complicated process that may not be worth the trouble, my relative then decided not to introduce me as an ethnographer. She rang another executive and said I was a researcher from a British university who had returned to China for a research project held by Communication University of China (CUC), where I graduated with a BA.

The key difference was that the internship request was being made in connection with the Chinese university I graduated from, rather than specifying a foreign university. She also said my research background was in media studies, so I would like to learn from a television production team. Without mentioning the thesis or the connection with a foreign university, I was immediately put in contact with a producer of a local dating show by the executive. My relative sent my CV to the show's producer and the executive she rang, whom I would like to see as the gatekeeper, so they both knew I was a PhD student at a British university. Nobody questioned my intention at this stage. My relative explained there had been many interns coming from different backgrounds, so nobody would be concerned about the intentions behind the internship. With the help of this producer, I started a three-week internship at the dating show. However, I soon realised the show was not an ideal research subject because it did not involve many studio productions. On the contrary, many scenes were shot in different locations. My relative later contacted the Head of Research of this provincial TV station, and this person put me in contact with an independent production company that produced a reality show commissioned by this provincial channel. My relative told the chief executive that I was a PhD student from Royal Holloway but required CUC to study studio production techniques. The chief executive, therefore, relayed this to the production company. He agreed to introduce the company's CEO to me, but I needed to go to Beijing. I immediately agreed and went to Beijing the next day. When I arrived at the company, I did not see the CEO but the show's producer. She told me that the Head of Research told her I wanted to have an internship because it was part of my schoolwork. As my relative had already intentionally told them the wrong information, it was at this point when I realised that I must go along with the wrong story. I knew that if I suddenly revealed my real intention – to critically study their TV production processes, to examine how they treated their employees, and whether they have illegally copied TV formats – I would be refused access.

There were also additional reasons causing difficulties in gaining access. Firstly, concern over intellectual property (IP) protection was growing in China, and most companies would require employees to sign an NDA. Due to the lack of IP protection in execution and the low chance of winning in court, the industry greatly valued its intellectual output. Therefore, they were reluctant to allow anyone to write down anything that could expose their IP. Secondly, as mentioned, the time I looked for media access, i.e., February to March 2018, was a politically sensitive time for China when the Two Sessions were held. After careful consideration, I decided not to reveal my identity as a researcher and stick to my relative's story. In a few days, the CEO spoke to me in her office, asking me to contribute to the company's TV production process since I was a PhD student in media studies. I could not tell her my real intentions, either. Moreover, since many people were involved in the information circulation process, the reason I was there became different from what it was, and even the original was not my real intention. Other people in the company only knew me as a PhD student in media studies, without knowing my real intentions. I realised that I had to conduct the so-called 'covert research', which is research not disclosed to the subject, where the researcher does not reveal that research is taking place (Spicker, 2011).

At this point, I further explained the situation and expressed possible ethical dilemmas to the Research Ethics Committee at Royal Holloway after submitting the Ethics Review Form. The Committee required me to demonstrate how I would protect the research subjects. I emailed them my procedures in detail, and they approved my fieldwork. To comply with the ethical guidelines that I had followed, I anonymised all information regarding the production company and the provincial TV station that put me in contact with the production company throughout this thesis, including all staff members and other organisations involved. Staff members are anonymised with the use of pseudonyms and job titles. Relevant television programmes are anonymised and given pseudonyms. Details of the *job-hunting* reality television format descriptions are also simplified, so the show became unlikely to be identified.

Although I passed the research ethics review from Royal Holloway, I realised my initial decision to maintain anonymity would not benefit the rest of my research. Therefore, despite the first covert research experience, I was open with my identity as a researcher to as many

people as possible during the rest of my fieldwork when I moved on to work with the five other production teams. It was not an easy decision, as I risked being denied access. Although I was denied access several times, I believe it was worth the risk because gaining a production team's consent means I could write more information in the writing-up stage.

At the end of my internship with the independent production company that produced *Job Hunting*, I received a phone call from a friend who worked at a financial news programme of CCTV-2. She knew I wanted to observe studio-based reality shows, and she knew the producer of a CCTV-1 reality show called *Jizhi Guoren* (2017, CCTV), a reality show where people with high IQ compete with artificial intelligence. I was introduced to the show's producer, who later changed her mind after telling her I wanted to do participant observation. When *Jizhi Guoren* refused me, I told my friend what had happened. She asked another friend of hers, who was the prop manager of CCTV-3. The prop manager suggested that he was familiar with a studio-based talent show producer on CCTV-3, *Happy Bill*. My friend then passed my contact to the producer, and the producer told me to directly meet my supervising *biandao*, as this *biandao* would be my line manager throughout my internship. Before my internship, I met the *biandao* in person and informed her of my intentions in simple language, without explaining details such as the fact that I wanted to see whether employees were happy with their jobs.

On the first day of my internship, I went to their shooting studio in Daxing, a remote district of Beijing, where the producer formerly introduced me to the rest of the team. The producer asked to give a self-introduction to the team, and I took the opportunity to explain my research in one sentence. I worked for *Happy Bill* in total for two months and observed one complete filming cycle for one and a half months, from its studio production to its next pre-production meetings. Between two filming cycles, there was usually a week's break. I took this time to travel to Nanjing, the capital of Jiangsu province, to observe the studio filming of *If You Are the One*. I got access to *If You Are the One* via my former MRes supervisor from CUC, who contacted one of her former students working at the programme Development Department Jiangsu Satellite TV. This former student of hers was a close friend of one of the directors of *If You Were the One*. She asked the director whether or not could I passively observe how they filmed in the studio. Her friend, Miss H, took me to the studio set and

introduced me to her colleagues who were already busy working at the studio based in Nanjing's Olympics Stadium. When I got back to Beijing, I carried on with the internship with *Happy Bill* until mid-June of 2018, when my relative put me in contact with the assistant producer of a CCTV-1 reality show, *Waiting for Me*, where people come and find their long-lost relatives and friends. The show's viewing ratings were amongst the top three of the country. I met the assistant producer and told him my intention to be a participant-observer. He was not interested in my research details and immediately agreed to accept me as an intern. However, it had to be an unpaid internship without any internship contract, just like most other interns. I also did not sign an internship contract. Like every other gatekeeper, the assistant producer introduced me to my line manager, a senior *biandao*, who worked at the programme for six years. As usual, I ended my internship after observing a complete production cycle from pre-production to post-production. I finished all my fieldwork in mid-July of 2018 and went back to London afterwards. When I got back to London, I passed my PhD upgrade and went back to Beijing and Shenzhen for follow-up interviews from January to February 2019. I went back to London again in March 2019 and completed all 26 semi-structured face-to-face interviews by April 2019. I started the data analysis and writing afterwards and submitted my thesis at the end of September 2020.

To sum up, my participant observation suggests that conducting media ethnography in China can be complicated due to China's collectivist culture, the overall competitive media environment and the loosely protected intellectual property rights. It may not be difficult to gain initial access to some television production teams. However, it could become challenging to gain further informed consent because television practitioners, especially gatekeepers, did not wish to leak what they saw as proprietary information via any publication, including a PhD thesis that would be published abroad. Because of all these factors, I did not tell the first independent production company of my research, and inevitably, the beginning of my fieldwork became covert research, which I decided to ditch afterwards. I then told my intentions clearly to the rest of the teams I worked with, and despite some refusal, the payback was rewarding. More importantly, my fieldwork in China reminds me to critically reflect on the feasibility of existing ethics guidelines, especially those that may not apply easily in non-Western contexts. In my view, certain flexibility is needed during fieldwork, and in my specific context, I would prioritise whether I can get access

instead of debating how to gain access. I would also worry less about writing as writing is probably the only thing that ethnographers can control. After all, without access and data, ethnographers cannot write anything. My solution and attitude towards ethics may always remain a grey area, but I believe it is down to future ethnographers to make what they consider to be the correct decisions, at a specific time and in particular locations, in certain situations.

Interviews

This segment recalls all the semi-structured and in-depth interviews I had in the field and the lessons I have learnt. When interacting with my informants, I have encountered three problems that I believe are the main lessons I want to share with future ethnographers: the dilemma between validity and anonymity, the issue of trust, and the using 'deep backstage' information.

To begin with, the conduct of ethnography is an intensely personal exercise in which the ethnographer 'pits personality against the odds of incomprehension, rejection, sometimes extreme physical conditions, sometimes outright hostility' (Ellen, 1984:228). During the fieldwork, ethnographers may make friends with the informants, who may later become the most loyal friends. They may also learn a great deal about themselves. In other words, the ethnographer's success is a combination of his/her social interaction competence and help from informants. Help from informants is crucial because anthropologists can easily become perceived as a burden or intruder to the communities they study. Anthropologists must understand that intrusion and seek to represent informants fairly in return. It is the anthropologists' moral responsibility to approach the informants with humility and integrity. More importantly, anthropologists must bear in mind that their use of interviews and informants should be informed by humane values, as anthropology's competence to discover and describe other cultures lies in the proper application of research ethics.

When I was in the field, I had many informal interviews with practitioners from work. The informal interviews enabled me to introduce materials and questions previously unanticipated. Sometimes, group interviews took place when others clustered around and

started to chip in. When there were a few days' breaks between changing internships, I had a few opportunities to sit down and speak with senior practitioners for a longer time. I realised that it became necessary to hold formal but semi-structured interviews with more workers with questions generated during and after the fieldwork. I later conducted another 26 semi-structured interviews in China and the UK, where television practitioners who suited the interview criteria offered an hour or two of their time generously.

The first problem I encountered during interviews was the dilemma between validity and anonymity. Some argue that researchers should not offer confidentiality and anonymity in exchange for access, which will negatively affect the research's validity (Bruun, 2016:131-146). Although Bruun's advice could benefit researchers in the long run, such advice does not apply to those who would be in trouble if their names were revealed. During my fieldwork, offering anonymity was one of the means to uncover hidden rules of the industry. A former classmate of mine shared many hidden tricks of the television industry and the hierarchy of labour within CCTV. She insisted on retaining anonymity. She was not the only one who requested anonymity.

Before carrying out the semi-structured interviews, interview information and consent forms were sent to all media practitioners. The consent form can help practitioners understand the area of question topics and their rights before, during and after the interview (see the Appendices). However, it transpired that many of them did not even read the consent form carefully, let alone sign the sheet. Many participants were happy to take part even without reading or signing the consent form, mainly because they were introduced by our mutual friends who came from management to trust me. Others admitted that they did not have time to read the form. Whether they read the form or not, I always reemphasised the form's contents and their rights before the interviews. Only one interviewed requested anonymity, and the rest were, in fact, happy to have their names published in the thesis. However, their anonymity has been maintained regardless, because as a researcher, I am obliged to protect the informants. Additionally, the informants may disagree with the analysis in the thesis. Even though a PhD thesis is likely to be only circulated within academia, we must be aware that informants may circulate at high frequency in different fields. Rumours about a

researcher's ethos can therefore easily be known beforehand, for better or worse. In this sense, anonymising the informants benefits most parties involved.

The second challenge I encountered during the interview was the issue of trust. The problem with interviews is that researchers may reveal little information and leave much concealed. Therefore, ethnographers must have the ability to judge and manipulate circumstances to maximise both the amount and the quality of information yielded (Whyte, 1960:352). Trust-building, undoubtedly, is a critical element in conducting interviews and must be carefully dealt with throughout the entire ethnography. Building trust in the researcher's project is crucial as interviewees' motives for participating in research interviews will affect the research results (Ortner, 2009; Alasuutari, 1995:85-115). Frandsen (2007:47) highlights that trust can be built or undermined based on the informant's knowledge of the researcher's previous research, media performances, personal merits and communication skills. To improve mutual trust, the researcher should have background knowledge of the subject in question and a professional understanding of the problems in the informant's world (Bruun, 2016).

In my own experience, participant observation offered an advantage to form particular insights into the Chinese television industry's inner workings. Since the questions I asked came from real-life examples, the interviewees found it easier to comment on these. In my specific case, the interviews became meetings between professionals. However, professional talks may sometimes lead to disagreement, which is a common problem many other ethnographers face during interviews, especially when asking critical questions. It has been argued that some critical questions will make the informants defensive and very easily become counterproductive to building trust, especially when the informants are well-known professionals or celebrities. For example, I interviewed a Chinese scholar who worked on international television format trade and training. Out of academic curiosity, she asked about my research, so I shared some of my fieldwork experiences. She perceived my findings as negative and untrue. Instead of answering my questions, she tried to prove me wrong by sharing the opposite experience. Rather than arguing or dismissing her experiences favouring my own findings, I listened to her academic opinions regarding my research questions. The interview became an in-depth discussion and, ultimately, a defence of the

thesis. The scholar then followed this up after the interview by emailing me further information to support her opinions. In this instance, I failed to strike a balance between being an insider and an outsider in the interview context (Bruun, 2016).

Finally, ethnographers may also encounter the problem of using 'deep backstage' information, which may be legally problematic. Caldwell (2008) uses the term 'frontstage-backstage' information to reflect the many types of self-reflexivity that characterise the production culture of television drama production in the USA. Legally problematic information may also characterise a production culture's understanding of itself even if the knowledge obtained cannot be published. In this case, researchers are advised 'to go with the flow' and let the informant 'run with the story' without completely rejecting this kind of information (Ryan and Lewer, 2012:82). Ellen (1984:317) notes that some anthropologists have used false names, but using false names was not recommended because curious readers may keep on asking questions, and when the researcher cannot answer the questions, the credibility of the research will be affected. During the interviews, I was told in-depth backstage information and industry gossip that I later decided not to reveal in the thesis. I did not reveal the information because there could be legal problems involved, but more importantly, some of the 'deep backstage' information was irrelevant to the purpose of the thesis. After all, a researcher should distinguish between interesting and useful data.

Professional ethics and personal morality: ethnographer's inner struggles

This is the last segment of Section Two, concluding how I reconciled professional ethics and personal morality in the field. In the end, I concluded the entire chapter by stating my stance on participant observation and creating certain flexibility on ethics guidelines when conducting ethnography in a non-Western context.

Ethnographic fieldwork is subjective both in the sense that ethnographers selectively report what they are inclined to see, hear and record from events taking place every day in the field; and in the sense that the kind and quality of information which comes their way depends on a large extent on the kind and quality of relationships between ethnographers and their informants. Additionally, the nature of participant observation makes it difficult for

ethnographers to balance his/her multiple identities as a researcher/participant/community member/colleague. Participant observation is an oxymoron, a form of paradox that generates meanings and permits different interpretations. That is to say, most ethnographic research is having to 'live as a human being among other human beings yet also having to act as an objective observer' (Gans, 1968; Middleton, 1970:9). We may eventually realise that, in many cases, ethnographers have to pick sides. When they are in the field, they may realise it is not easy to remain detached as expected. Ethnographers may unconsciously pick a side based on their own beliefs, background and personality. Sometimes, the choice could be made intentionally based on the specific situations they face. Although it is difficult to remain emotionally detached, it is possible to maintain some intellectual detachment (Ellen, 1984:227). On the other hand, ethnographers are always the outside observer. That is not only because they will eventually leave the field, but also because they are neither undifferentially incorporated into the community nor usually seek to be. Their presence is only temporary and for a specific purpose.

My fieldwork experience was not exceptional to the above theories. Firstly, I was expected to pick a side. During the fieldwork, some people were more willing to talk, while some others seemed unapproachable. I have therefore developed different kinds of relationships with the television practitioners I encountered. Some have become good friends with me. I have also developed a different sense of belonging with each production team I worked with. I still keep in touch with my former colleagues, who spent twelve hours with me per day on the same television project. Due to the incredibly long time we worked together, we became allies to fight against other interest groups. As an ethnographer, I knew from the start that I might develop a sense of comradeship with people in the field. As a result, I certainly contributed to the already sophisticated and complex interpersonal relationships within multiple workplaces. Also, as an intern, I complied with the institutional rules and worked like everyone else. As time went by, I gradually understood my colleagues' mindset. After all, I went through the same employee transformation. When I worked for *Waiting for Me*, I was assigned to be an English to Chinese interpreter, and I consciously applied self-censorship when interpreting sensitive political content. At that moment, I not only understood my colleagues better but felt what it was like to comply with institutional rules imposed on its employees.

Secondly, even as a researcher in my own society, bias was still a danger for both insider and outsider researchers. The tension between the need for both empathy and detachment is a problem facing all anthropologists. This is often forgotten by those who argue against the 'insider' working in his/her own society, as opposed to the 'outsider', transplanted to an exotic setting (Aguilar, 1981:22). After all, as anthropologists, we all intend to study people whose values and lifestyles are different, even within our own societies (Ellen, 1984:130). On the one hand, being a researcher in one's own society is advantageous. Throughout this fieldwork, I was told information as intimates, which would not have been given in other circumstances. Television practitioners barely saw me as an outsider and gradually accepted me as one of their own. From their perspective, my identity as a PhD candidate in a foreign university was always a convenient ice-breaking topic. In exchange for information, I shared my overseas life experience and knowledge of British television formats with them. My other identity as a graduate from CUC also helped me gain common interest with alumni who worked in the same production teams. On the other hand, I had my struggles: I struggled to be a researcher as I often challenged my colleagues' opinions and provided alternative viewpoints. In some situations, I even felt guilty of being a researcher as I could not wholly agree with the way things were done and that I knew I would critically analyse how these things were dealt with. I felt that I must not abuse my informants' trust.

Indeed, the balance between bias and objectivity has been a challenge for ethnographers. We should be aware that the goal of anthropological research distance the researcher from his or her informants. To this extent, there is little likelihood of true insider research ever becoming common: the ethnographer will always be somewhere on the continuum between empathy and detachment, home and strangeness, and seeing and not seeing (ibid., p 132). However, as my intention during the fieldwork was not to look for a job, I created a detachment that enabled me to keep a critical distance from the field subjects. Accordingly, the informants did not see me as a competitor, so they were very honest. My job, accordingly, was to interpret their openness and generosity with gratefulness but also honesty. Barnes (1981:2) points out that ethical and intellectual compromise is an intrinsic characteristic of social research and that the competent fieldworker is he or she who learns to live with an uneasy conscience but continues to be worried about it (ibid:21-22). Although, as

ethnographers, we may later find flaws in our fieldwork after self-reflection, we should understand that we can do better fieldwork as long as we learn from the past and follow all the guidelines.

In this chapter, I stated why and how I adopted the interpretative paradigm and participant observation, as I believe my analysis is an interpretation of the yielded fieldwork data. When I was trying to gain access to Chinese media, I prioritised gaining access over how I gained access. Therefore, I made compromises by conducting covert research with the first independent production company I interned at, and accordingly, I had to anonymise key information and gained ethics approval from Royal Holloway's Research Ethics Committee. After realising the disadvantages of not revealing my identity as a participant observer, I decided to be open with identity as a researcher to the other teams I wanted to work with, even though I knew they were more likely to deny my access. Although some producers refused me, I successfully gained access to four other production teams as a participant-observer. The lessons I want to share is simple but might be controversial and contradict many existing Western ethics guidelines. Although it is in every ethnographer's attempt to reveal his/her identity as a researcher, sometimes it is better not to, or, it is better not to discuss the research questions in great detail because not only will the gatekeepers dislike the research, but they may also not understand our level of academic discussions. It is best to explain one's research in a language that the research subjects can understand. I would even argue that some research information does not need to be shared with the gatekeepers because it might become sensitive before and during the fieldwork and irrelevant after the fieldwork. After all, ethnographers may adjust their research after carrying out the fieldwork. It is an art between being ethical and safe, which means that ethnographers reveal the appropriate amount of research information, no less and no more.

Chapter 4 Recruitment and employee training

Before comprehending television practitioners' career and lifestyle choices, it is important to understand the different recruitment systems and employment contracts within the Chinese TV industry. This chapter will introduce the hierarchical recruitment and differences in employment contracts within the two places where I conducted participant observation: CCTV and the independent production company that produced *Job Hunting*. This chapter aims to show that different employment benefits caused inequality within workplaces. Independent production companies are especially precarious as they even have to find legal ways to evade tax. Finally, television practitioners are also affected by the informal employee training system, which did not provide enough support to employees. All these measures taken for recruitment and employee training exacerbate practitioners' anxiety and insecurity. Such an environment clearly does not build practitioners' idea of a good life.

Section One: Recruitment, ownership and contracts

In this section, two case studies are analysed: the hierarchical recruitment process and employment contracts of CCTV, and the ownership of project groups and the tax evasion measures of the production company that produced *Job Hunting*. These two places were where I had my participant observation, so I had a chance to explore their inner workings with scrutiny. This section shows that studio ownership, internal management and employment contracts are interconnected and ostensibly contribute to the precarious mentality of television practitioners.

State-owned television: hierarchical recruitment

The recruitment system of CCTV and other provincial television stations has become more sophisticated since the Chinese Economic Reform in 1978 when commercialisation affected the media industry and brought in different types of temporary labour systems (Kang, 2007). In the case of CCTV, it required a lot more employees but also had to abide by strict rules on the maximum number of official employees permitted for a government-affiliated institution. CCTV, therefore, started to 'borrow' employees from other companies using different methods. As a result, many employees who work for CCTV are not legally CCTV's

contracted staff. These practitioners have either signed contracts with a CCTV-controlled labour dispatching company called Zhōngshì huìcái (中视汇才) before 2017 or have signed contracts with one of the many CCTV-controlled companies that rely on CCTV's sole or primary stock investment. The remaining employees are official employees (*zhèngshì yuángōng*, 正式员工), who were mainly recruited before and during the 1990s, and are entitled to *shìyè biānzhì* (事业编制), a government-recognised permanent job and benefits. Their employment contracts are called *táipin* (台聘) contracts. These official employees are regarded as civil servants whose salaries are directly paid via China's state revenues. However, as the number of civil servants allowed for CCTV reached the government-imposed upper limit of 2,503 in 1998 (Sohu News, 2017), CCTV was forced to use external employees to meet its growing labour requirements. Within the *taipin* system, there are different job hierarchies. By the end of 2007, the total number of *taipin* employees was 2623, and 81% of these were professional technicians (专业技术人员). Amongst the professional technicians, there exist different ranks of professional titles (*zhíchēng*, 职称), which are typical rankings within the government and governmental-affiliated organisation. Generally, one professional title has two ranks – *zhèng* (正) title and *fù* (副) title. *Zheng* can be understood as the rank itself, and *fu* is the associate/deputy position. Within these professional technicians, there were 209 *zheng* superior employees (正高级职称专业技术人员), 689 *fu* superior employees (副高级职称专业技术人员), 915 mid-level (中级职称) and 305 junior level (初级职称) employees (Zhao, 2008:375).

From 1996, CCTV adopted a contracted labour system (聘用制), which was approved by SAPPRT (currently called NRTA) in 2003 by the government paper *CCTV's Temporary Rule on Contract Labour System* (中央电视台聘用制暂行办法) (Zhao, 2008:367). In 2000, CCTV established a labour dispatching company called Zhōngshì huìcái, and was the major shareholder of several other companies. Both Zhongshi huicai and other CCTV-controlled companies started to sign employment contracts with employees and then dispatch them to work on different projects within CCTV. By May 2003, there were 9,642 employees of CCTV and 7,142 of them were contract workers. These contracted labourers were classified under four categories: CCTV-controlled companies' employees (企聘人员), 'borrowed employees' (借用人员), 'retired-but-re-employed employees' (退休返聘人员), and project-based

employees (项目制人员). On the 25th December 2003, the four categories were combined and hence, officially called *qǐpin*, 'hired-by-company' (企聘) labourers. On the 29th December 2004, the last *qǐpin* employees from the Youth Animation Department signed contracts with Zhongshi Huicai (Zhao, 2008:368). By then, the number of *qǐpin* workers in CCTV was 5,684. Since 2007, all *qǐpin* positions are required to go through CCTV's formal recruitment process. At the end of 2007, CCTV gave a pay rise to its *qǐpin* employees.

Before this, in April 2003, CCTV had also reformed its recruitment process for its management roles. It started a campaign called the 'compete to become a producer' (制片人竞争上岗新机制), starting to sign different employment contracts with its producers. This new rule was claimed to have solved the problems originating from the previous management system when producers 'had too much power and were difficult to fire' (Zhao, 2009:369). The new rule gave CCTV's other employees more opportunities to apply for producer roles as long as they met the criteria. In 2004, 16 *qǐpin* employees were recruited as producers, and by the end of 2007, 25% of producers in CCTV were *qǐpin* employees.

This sophisticated labour system saw another significant change on the 19th of February 2016, after Chinese President Xi Jinping visited three major media institutions, including CCTV, and delivered a speech about building competitive media, emphasising that the key to being competitive was to recruit competitive talents. Hence, he proposed reforms to the media labour system. On the 6th of February 2017, in response to Xi's proposal, the 23rd meeting of the Central Comprehensive Reform Leadership Committee (中央全面深化改革领导小组) implemented the *Temporary Reform of Human Resources Management in Major State-owned Media* (关于深化中央主要新闻单位采编播管岗位人事管理制度改革的试行意见), which was aimed at improving media practitioners' benefits (Wemedia, 2017; Wu, 2017). The meeting stated that any reforms of employee recruitment, employment contracts, the salary system and employee evaluation system must 'improve news practitioners' sense of belonging, loyalty and career motivation'. In the same year, under the government's order, CCTV transferred all employment contracts from Zhongshi Huicai to CCTV and categorised these employees as *taipin* employees. However, as the number of civil servant jobs has been strictly controlled, most employees transferred to *the taipin* contract could not obtain *shiye bianzhi*, even though their contracts shared the same name *taipin* with previous employees

who have *shiye bianzhi*. Since the reform, and at the time of writing, only two types of contracts exist – the first is called *taipin*, which includes *taipin* employees from the 1990s and the newly-transferred employees from Zhongshi Huicai. The second is called *wàixié* (外协), which means ‘outer assistance’. *Waixie* employees are those who have signed employment contracts with CCTV-controlled companies. These are companies in which CCTV is the sole or major shareholder. These companies have then established more subsidiaries that work indirectly for CCTV. Most of these companies share the same initials starting with Zhongshi (中视).

Although CCTV has taken part in many investments, it legally only has a few direct subsidiary companies. One of the most important subsidiaries is China International Television Corporation (中国国际电视总公司), CITVC. CITVC owns 70 subsidiaries, one of which is China Television Media (zhongshi chuanmei, 中视传媒). China Television Media owns other sub-companies such as Zhongshi beifang (中视北方) and Zhongshi kehua (中视科华), which both employ many technicians to work for CCTV. After years of monopoly in the market, CITVC became China’s biggest investment media company and ranked among the top 30 in the 9th cultural industry company competition in 2017 (sz.people.com.cn, 2017). Most of its previous and current senior executives, including the CEOs, have close ties with CCTV. They have either worked in the management of CCTV, other media companies or been assigned by other government institutions (such as the NRTA) to their Board. When they leave the Board, they are likely to be promoted within the government system. As many have been promoted, they have helped to strengthen CCTV’s dominance in the media industry.

Although CCTV is legally empowered to found companies, the establishment of Zhongshi Huicai was controversial, and some even called it illegal. News reports from other media agencies have criticised CCTV’s unfair treatment of its employees (People’s Net, 2005; Pengpai News, 2014; Phoenix News, 2017). The controversy lay in the fact that employees of Zhongshi Huicai could legally only work for CCTV, unlike employees of other CCTV-controlled companies who had the freedom to work with other entities. After all, the sole purpose for establishing Zhongshi Huicai was initially to dispatch employees to work for CCTV legally. Although each channel’s chief executives and any programme’s producers can interview employees, their power in assigning employees is limited. Recruited employees are

distributed into different programmes and are encouraged to work in different programmes every three months. The chart below demonstrates the differences between employment contracts chronologically:

Pre-1990s		
Recruitment Methods	Types of Contracts	Explanatory Notes
National exams and employment assigned to students directly by universities	Old <i>Táipìn</i> /Zhèngshì Yuángōng (Contracts are signed with CCTV directly. Employees obtain shiye bianzhi, meaning they are treated as civil servants and receive salaries directly from state revenues. Their job is permanent.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Tai</i> literally means 'TV station'; 2. <i>Pin</i> literally means 'recruit'; 3. <i>Táipìn</i> means 'recruited by the television station'.
From the 1990s to 2017		
Recruitment Methods	Types of Contracts	Explanatory Notes
<i>Xiàoyuán Zhāopin</i> 校园招聘 (Graduate schemes that are held twice a year, only for recent university graduates, including Bachelors, Masters and PhDs)	<i>Qǐpìn</i> 企聘 (Employees sign contracts with the CCTV-controlled labour dispatching company Zhōngshì Huìcái 中视汇才)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The old <i>táipìn</i>/Zhèngshì yuángōng employees are rarely fired and the stability of the job does not encourage people to leave. Therefore, employees on other contracts can only obtain shiye bianzhi when old <i>taipin</i> employees retire. 2. Most employees can only obtain Beijing <i>Hukou</i> (household registration) via graduate schemes.
<i>Shèhuì Zhāopin</i> 社会招聘 (Recruiting non-graduates/experienced workers at any time of the year) including internal recruitment (such as promotions)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Táipìn</i> 台聘 (via internal promotion); 2. <i>Qǐpìn</i> 企聘 (Employees sign contracts with the CCTV-controlled labour dispatching company Zhōngshì huìcái but is unlikely to obtain a Beijing <i>Hukou</i> via their job); 3. <i>Wàixié</i> 外协 (Contracts are signed with CCTV-controlled companies. All company names start 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Anyone who is not recruited via graduate schemes have little opportunity to obtain Beijing <i>hukou</i>, unless they are married to someone with a Beijing <i>hukou</i>. 2. <i>Qi</i> literally means 'company', hence 'qǐpìn' means 'recruited by company'. 3. <i>Wài</i> means 'outside' and <i>xié</i> means 'assist', hence <i>wàixié</i> literally means 'outer assistance'.

	with 'Zhōngshì' and the contract is normally less than one year);	
	4. Interns (unpaid, some have internship contracts, some do not have any contract or legal agreements with their employer).	
Since 2017 onwards		
Recruitment Methods	Types of Contracts	Explanatory Notes
<i>Xiàoyuán Zhāopìn</i> 校园招聘 (Graduate schemes that are held twice a year, only for recent university graduates including Bachelors, Masters and PhDs)	New <i>táipìn</i> , 新台聘, (so as to differentiate from the old <i>táipìn</i> employees who have <i>shìyè biānzhì</i>) including previous <i>qǐpìn</i> employees. This contract can be permanent).	In 2017, CCTV reformed its recruitment system and transferred 7,000 <i>qǐpìn</i> employees onto new <i>táipìn</i> . However, these 7,000 employees did not automatically obtain Beijing <i>Hukou</i> if they did not already hold it at the beginning of their initial employment. Some graduates initially sign employment contracts with CCTV-owned China Central Studio of News Reels Production (中央新闻纪录电影制片厂, short name <i>xīnyǐngchǎng</i>), which produces documentaries. Graduates usually sign the contract with <i>xīnyǐngchǎng</i> for a year, allowing them to obtain Beijing <i>hukou</i> . After they obtain the <i>hukou</i> , their labour contract is transferred to CCTV.
Method formerly known as <i>Shèhuì Zhāopìn</i> (Recruiting non-graduates/experienced workers at any time of the year including internal recruitment (such as promotions)	<i>Wàixié</i> 外协/ <i>qǐyèpìn</i> 企业聘 (Contracts signed with CCTV-controlled companies. Most of these companies' names start with 'Zhōngshì'. The length of employment varies).	1. The term 'Shèhuì Zhāopìn' is no longer used but this type of recruitment still exists 2. <i>Qǐyè</i> literally means 'companies', so <i>qǐyèpìn</i> literally means 'recruited by companies'. <i>Qǐyèpìn</i> is equivalent to <i>wàixié</i> .

Another thing worth noting is that employees can easily see others' work badges, which contain different numbers and letters. These numbers and letters can give away one's employment type. The chart below describes the differences in employees' work badges:

Types of ID in CCTV (as of July 2018)	What does the ID represent?
A series of numbers starting with the letter A	<i>Zhengshi yuangong</i> (Official Employee) of CCTV/ Taipin before 2017
A series of numbers starting with the letter B	<i>Taipin</i> via national Graduate Schemes
A series of numbers starting with the letter C	Previous <i>Qipin</i>
A series of numbers starting with the letter D	<i>Waixie</i>
Guest ID	The holder is a guest invited by a channel and can only be granted access when a CCTV employee waits at the main door and gives the guest ID to the security.
Temporary ID	Employees that have worked for a channel since 1 st July 2018 but have not received a work pass for any reason, must swap their Chinese National ID at the security office in return for a temporary work pass. On leaving the building, they can swap the ID back at the security office. Foreign nationals' entry into the building must be granted by a chief executive of a channel. Anyone with a temporary work ID will obtain a permanent work pass at some point during their employment, but this date varies.

Although practitioners can see colleagues' work badges easily, most of them care less about the lack of privacy and more about the legal disclaimer from CCTV on their employment contracts. Employees understand that CCTV has the upper hand in the employer-employee relationship. By legally dividing responsibilities, CCTV has minimised its risks and maximised its interests in multiple ways. Firstly, it successfully circumvented the government's restriction on the maximum number of employees. Secondly, CCTV did not need to be responsible for dispatched employees in terms of salaries, Beijing *hukou*, healthcare, pensions, bonuses, and other benefits, which saved CCTV a significant amount of money. Thirdly, as CCTV-controlled companies hire *waixie* and previous *qipin* employees, CCTV is not financially or legally responsible for them, but still manages them. Fourthly, CCTV-controlled companies are treated as state assets, despite technically being private companies. This means CCTV-controlled companies are more financially stable than their private counterparts, whom government-affiliated institutions do not back up. The paradoxical relationship between CCTV and its subsidiaries has complicated the definition of 'television commissioning'. Arguably, this should not be regarded as real commissioning because none

of these companies is entirely external and independent to CCTV and its interests, except on paper. However, some academics see it as a special type of commissioning that exists specifically in China (Sun, 2009:32-41). Similar models have been implemented by many other government organisations and provincial television stations since 1978. On one hand, labour dispatching has temporarily helped Chinese state-owned television to recruit more employees. On the other, such a recruitment system has most likely benefited state television's senior employees by ensuring their stable employment while crushing career opportunities for newcomers. Many new employees find it challenging to obtain the type of employment contracts they deserve whilst still having to devote themselves to the fierce competition within the system. The reality is that even though some quit, many more will strive to participate willingly, knowing how unfair it has been.

Production companies: Labour dispatch and multiple management

Like state-owned television stations, private independent production companies also practice labour dispatch and sign varied employment contracts with different individuals, project groups and other companies. A studio-based programme usually requires different work locales: offices for pre-production and post-production, a television studio for filming, canteens, storage rooms, accommodation, and other places depending on the programme's requirements. Having studied Hollywood studios, Steven Phelan and Peter Lewin (1999) claim that the emergence and rapid growth of independent film and television companies is a strategic outsourcing response by large conglomerates to the market and other uncertainties. In doing so, some of the risks of mediamaking is taken away, and conglomerates can still retain their bargaining power by controlling the marketing, distribution, and exhibition of movies or television shows (Deuze, 2007:177-178). On the other hand, Robert DeFillippi and Michael Arthur (1998) have argued that the emergence and rise of independents were (and are) started by successful actors or producers in order to have more creative freedom and ownership rights. Allen Scott (2000:99) notes that outsourcing and subcontracting the production of television shows contributes to the ongoing vertical and horizontal disintegration of corporate entities. All agree that the complex pattern of production in film and television gets facilitated by the flexible model of temporary project-based enterprises. The scholarly analysis above regarding Hollywood

studios and other conglomerates also fit the situation in China, where state-owned television, such as CCTV, accelerates the emergence of independent production companies and collaborate with different external media parks for studio production in order to maximise interests while minimising potential loss.

Several popular media 'parks' are available for television stations and production companies to use as temporary production bases. Firstly, many television stations do not have enough space or budget to build television studios of different sizes, especially when the building of studios involve many administrative processes and decision-making from the executives. Secondly, most television studios are prioritised for news production and are likely too small for entertainment shows. More importantly, due to competition, there is no guarantee that one programme will be successful. Hence making a studio specifically for one show is not economical.

In Beijing, CCTV's long-term partner is Xingguang Media Park (星光影视园), located in Daxing (大兴), a remote but spacious district that can accommodate multiple studio productions simultaneously. Unlike CCTV-controlled companies beholden to CCTV, Xingguang is in an equal position in its dealings with CCTV, and it similarly collaborates on an equal footing with other television stations and production companies. Accordingly, Xingguang's employees have no employment relationship with CCTV. Generally speaking, during a studio production in Xingguang Studio, there are three major groups of practitioners: the first group are production teams from CCTV, who are on different employment contracts as explained previously; the second are studio technicians, such as audio technicians and prop designers. These people all come from different CCTV-controlled companies that specialise in certain aspects of television production, such as equipment and customer services. The third group are employees of Xingguang Media Park, including studio managers, studio construction workers, and on-site security staff. These three groups come from significantly different companies with different employment contracts. Although it could be more challenging to manage employees with different employment contracts, CCTV was willing to take the risk as such cooperation allowed work flexibility and mobility and saved CCTV a substantial amount of money compared to directly hiring the relevant employees. They only needed to temporarily deploy employees from third-party companies

and provide them with meals on the production set. Once the studio production was finished, CCTV could leave without worrying about the aftercare, such as clearing the stage, withdrawing the production equipment, and cleaning the set. Instead, these would be taken care of by the CCTV-controlled companies and the media park, working together. When the studio was set back to its 'default' status, the rest of the employees would wait for their next customers – production teams from another television station or other production companies.

Private production companies, just like state-owned television stations, commonly practice labour dispatch and hire smaller companies for temporary work. They also make full use of shell companies and legal subsidiaries for legal tax avoidance or even illegal tax evasion. The consequence of labour dispatch, temporary contracts and unclear management often make employees feel insecure and pressured from multiple sides. From April to May 2018, I interned at the *Job Hunting* production team that belonged to an independent production company in Beijing. *Job Hunting* was a reality show that was broadcast on a provincial television station. Similar to CCTV's employment structure, the indie's core production team were all on temporary employment contracts. Furthermore, the core production team did not sign employment contracts directly with the indie. Instead, they were legally employees of one of the indie's subsidiaries also registered under the CEO's name. The interns, however, signed their employment contracts with a shell company owned by one of the CEOs⁷.

An additional complication was that the core production team also signed another employment contract with the chief *biandao*, who owned his own production *gōngzuòshì* (工作室)⁸. This means that the creative practitioners signed two contracts – one with the long-term project group, their permanent business group, and the other temporary employment contract with the indie, specifically for the *Job Hunting* project. The *gōngzuòshì* was made up of several junior *biandao* who relied on the chief *biandao* to source television production projects. Once they received the commission, the chief *biandao* would decide how to distribute the income internally between the team. On the surface, the practitioners of the

⁷ The indie legally had two CEOs, but one was more dominant and had more say on investments and decisions.

⁸ A business term in the Chinese context, with translations varying from 'project groups' to 'tiny company'.

gongzuoshi were legally the employees of one of the subsidiaries of the indie, based in Khorgas (霍尔果斯), a town in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. In reality, it was only a contract to avoid higher taxes as media companies were given tax breaks if they registered media companies in Khorgas⁹. According to the employment contract, if *Job Hunting* reached a specific rating, the *gongzuoshi* would gain a bonus. If the show did not reach the 'bottom-line rating', the *gongzuoshi* could be fired. Once the show was produced, the indie would then try to sell the programme to television stations. If the show were successfully sold, the indie would receive a commission fee from the station.

When I interned at this indie, the production deal between the television station, the indie and the core production team was coming to an end. The indie appointed a producer to *Job Hunting* as the representative of the indie. This producer was directly assigned by the CEO to keep an eye on the overall production process. The producer had several assistants who signed employment contracts with the indie. These assistants were called *zhipiān* (制片), production assistants. However, they were, in fact, the producer's assistants. Therefore, except for the core creative practitioners, everyone else worked directly for the indie. The creative personnel, as usual, preferred the flexibility in working with other companies once they finished the projects at hand. Undoubtedly, for production companies, the content of employment contracts was determined by the commissioning and the show's production process.

Although this kind of employment structure was commonly adopted in the industry, it primarily benefited the management while exploiting the *biandao* who directly contributed to the show's creative content. Some practitioners expressed their fear of being alienated by the leader of *gongzuoshi*, claiming that the team leader would distribute more money to those who got along well with him. A former *biandao* who worked in the *gongzuoshi* expressed her concerns about the chief leader's leadership style. She recalled that she eventually resigned as the whole team had to be obedient all the time. Another critical factor was that she and other team members sometimes had to report to different managers,

⁹ From 2010 to 2018, companies registered in Khorgas were granted a 50% tax break. However, the benefit was cancelled in mid-2018 after a series of tax evasion scandals were discovered within the industry, i.e., 'yin-yang' contracts (阴阳合同) (Chen, 2018; Song, 2018; BBC News, 2018; Reuters, 2018).

although they legally did not sign an employment contract with those managers. Facing such a complicated working relationship, she could not deal with the power struggles and decided to leave the *gongzuoshi* for good. Just like this *biandao* who had to respond to different managers, other practitioners working in similar employment systems recalled having to take the blame 'from all sides.' This was the phrase used by SWY (interviewee 6), a former production assistant alienated by the chief director when she accidentally came across some payroll information for the company she was not supposed to access. She was also reprimanded by her manager, the programme's producer who worked directly for the production company. From her perspective, even though it was her job to double-check the payroll data, management from all interest groups did not want anyone to know what they considered to be insider's proprietary information.

It is clear that hierarchical employment contracts bring about inequality between practitioners who do the same job, and this is where discrimination and unhealthy competition are formed. Private production companies, just like state-owned television stations, commonly practice labour dispatch and hire smaller entities, such as smaller companies and project groups, for temporary work. They have taken all measures to maximise the company's interest, including tax evasion and claiming tax benefits in a remote inland city, whereas not trying to benefit the employees. The consequences of exploitations of all kinds, such as labour dispatch, temporary contracts and reporting to more than one manager, often make employees feel insecure and pressured from multiple sides. Under this system, employees can be easily blamed and wronged if they fail to satisfy any interest group involved within the whole management.

Section Two: Informal apprenticeship – employee training

This section introduces the phenomenon of informal apprenticeship within the industry and how this particular employee training system affects television practitioners' impression of their career prospects and life choices. The presence of informal apprenticeship, or employee training with limited or no legal responsibilities, gives employers and employees the flexibility to end employment at any point but discouraged newcomers from learning production skills systematically. In the long run, the employers may make more efforts, whereas the employees feel more insecure about their career development.

Arne Baumann (2002) shows that in Germany and the UK the most common route for newcomers into the media production industry is through a learning-by-doing process where skills are picked up informally and without certification. This practice of learning-by-doing is also adopted in the Chinese TV industry. During this fieldwork, each production team used multiple methods to train new employees based on the scale and nature of their organisation. Amongst these, the first and foremost employee training started from an informal apprenticeship held within the workplace. Most newcomers (formal full-time employees) started as interns or were selected from existing interns, though direct recruitment of formal employees can be done via other channels. In general, the informal apprenticeship varies from individual to group apprenticeships, which both focus on training newcomers with on-the-job rather than via theoretical knowledge, but occasional seminars and guest lectures are also available to employees. The bigger an organisation is, the more complicated the training can become. The training is usually informal because neither the organisation nor the apprentices are sure how long they will commit to each other as not every intern is on a formal internship contract. Many are recruited via informal channels and do not even have any contracts at all. On the other hand, some interns do not wish to tie themselves to any contract at the beginning of apprenticeships.

Strange as it seems, it is usually smaller independent production companies that tend to contract and pay their interns. Compared to independent production companies, state-owned television stations are more cautious with the internship contracts they offer. A state-owned television station will either recruit interns on an informal basis without signing any

legal contracts or require interns to sign legal agreements, usually disclaimers, which favour the employer. In its 2017 internship contract, CCTV imposed a strict NDA on its interns, holding them individually responsible for any breach in that agreement. The contract also stated clearly that any internship would be unpaid, and interns must be willingly responsible for their own health and safety. If any accidents happened, CCTV would not be responsible for any work-related injuries. CCTV was not the only place that imposed such unequal rules. Most other state-owned television stations and production companies encountered during fieldwork either did not offer legal employment contracts to interns or imposed unequal contracts in the company's favour. In its 2018 internship contract, the company that produced *Job Hunting* stated clearly that all interns must withhold all information obtained via the internship for two years after leaving the company.

Although it has become the norm to use these contracts, this employee training method has proven cost-effective from the employers' perspective and suits the dynamic nature of the television industry. Undesirable work is usually assigned to interns so full-time *biandao* can focus on other work. In CCTV, new employees (especially interns) will be usually assigned to a senior *biandao* who leads a small *biandao* team. The interns are expected to learn quickly by observing and practising the tasks assigned. Most work is assigned by the senior *biandao*, who acts as the intern's supervisor. A qualified intern, undoubtedly, should be able to carry out most assigned work. Typically, interns will start by sharing the workload of their supervisor, who will help them do complicated work. Supervisors will only interfere if anything goes wrong. Otherwise, interns are trusted to complete the work independently. Sometimes, this trust can cause problems, and it remains a disadvantage of informal apprenticeships – the interns lack a systematic learning experience and legal protection from their workplaces. When senior *biandao*, the supervisors, are in charge, they can be impatient with the interns and sometimes even leave them to work entirely without support. Many interns are asked to work immediately without much training, and it is their responsibility to be quick learners. Although they rarely face severe consequences for not catching up (since they are, after all, the responsibility of senior *biandao*), they still need to deal with unspeakable guilt for somehow letting people down. This mentality mainly exists amongst university students or graduates who are new to the industry.

As many interns do not feel supported and protected, some leave their internships before long. In the long run, this high staff turnover increases the overall training cost, as senior *biandao* always need to train newcomers. Many senior *biandao* complained about their wasted effort in coaching newcomers who left too soon. Other television practitioners realised their time had been wasted fixing problems caused by interns, and they blamed the management for the chaos. YD (interviewee 5) expressed her opinions on the informal apprenticeships operated by CCTV:

YD: Management tends to think they are taking advantage of the interns by not paying them, but they ignored our (senior *biandao*) effort in training the interns. Some interns only came for one day and left without giving any notice. I then have to train another person the next day. I'm not paid for training the newcomers, and I already have too much work. As a senior *biandao*, part of my job is to willingly sacrifice some of my interests, including annual bonuses, to give new people more opportunities. I don't think such a system is fair for either the *biandao* or the interns in the long run. CCTV is already paying for it.

SZ: How so?

YD: Think about the time and effort CCTV needs to give in the long term, and HR must invest in recruiting, training and protecting the interns.

SZ: Is CCTV still winning even though it needs to make an effort in recruiting interns?

YD: I'd say for CCTV as an institution, yes, but for senior *biandao* like us, no. We gain nothing, and we don't benefit much from training anyone.

Just as YD predicted, the unsupportive training culture has discouraged both senior and junior *biandao*, who were initially passionate about television work. It seems to be not only difficult to get in the industry but also difficult to stay. Newcomers struggle to get enough support, let alone a fair promotion. Young people face low income, high pressure, a strict *hukou* system, and nepotism within a *renqing* society. Additionally, with the tradition of hierarchy, experienced practitioners often demonstrate a sense of superiority over young graduates who 'know nothing about the society', as one senior producer, ML (interviewee 33), commented. She had worked in the industry for ten years and is also running a media company. She believes recent newcomers have no spirit of endurance and should 'be willing to be exploited'. She insisted that it is 'fair' to multi-task while having one salary: 'If you cannot multi-task and work long hours with the boss, why should I hire you?'

In one of the small production teams for *Waiting for Me*, one intern worked unpaid for an entire year and was sometimes shouted at by her supervising *biandao*. On her 13th month working on the show, she got promoted and was officially hired as a *waixie* employee by CCTV. Others were not lucky enough to get a full-time contract. In the production company that produced *Job Hunting*, one intern was fired after she asked for a few days' leave for her university graduation. The *biandao* told her privately that she 'did not need to come back soon'. There were three other interns in the group, including me, and we were all astonished after hearing this at her farewell party. I later asked the *biandao* in private why this intern was fired. The *biandao* said the team did not have enough budget to hire as many interns, and this intern did not perform as well as the others, adding that 'she did not provide as many ideas during our brainstorm meetings'. According to full-time television practitioners, most interns came for work experience and left in the end, and those who could stay were considered 'lucky'. However, this is not entirely true, based on my fieldwork observations. Many interns who eventually obtained a full-time contract raised the dilemma they faced. JA (interviewee 13), a junior *biandao* who successfully went full-time after one year's internship, expressed her concerns over her current job and the overall apprenticeship.

JA: I wanted to quit as soon as I finished producing the previous episode but I was offered a full-time contract a month ago. I was unhappy for not being paid and underappreciated for one year. I was sending out my CV to independent production companies and was ready to go for interviews. Suddenly, CCTV told me I can now work full-time. I was quickly offered comprehensive job insurance and a stable salary, but I wasn't happy. I didn't want to overwork every day.

SZ: But you accepted the job, and you are working even harder.

JA: I know, and I find it ironic. CCTV is the best I could get within my ability. I grew up in a small and poor village in Sichuan province. I am working here because I want to live in Beijing, not because I like CCTV. We as formal *biandao* must train the newcomers, even if we know some of them will leave very soon. On the other hand, CCTV isn't treating the interns fairly anyway, so I'm not surprised if someone wants to leave.

Just like JA, whose ultimate goal was to settle down in Beijing, many other practitioners were willing to endure the workplace environment they strongly disliked. JA and other *biandao* of

CCTV all agreed that the informal apprenticeship is a product of exploitation and *guanxi*¹⁰ – those who do not have *guanxi* will accept the exploitation and unpaid work. As soon as they realise the work intensity, most of them choose to leave. Those who come with special *guanxi* may initially believe they have privileges but will soon realise that the only way to survive is to work harder and accept the exploitation, as they will not be treated more favourably. Most interns work without being paid on the most unwanted tasks left by full-time employees, and only a few will be offered a full-time job at the end of the internship.

On the other hand, some interns do not necessarily apply for an internship to obtain a full-time job. They view the apprenticeship as a platform for the intern to decide whether the industry is the right fit for them and vice versa. During this fieldwork, most interns gained access to television companies via informal channels such as acquaintances, relatives and friends. Fewer gained access via formal recruitment such as university internship schemes. Unless stated clearly in the internship contract, many know in advance that they will not get a full-time job. Those who wish to get a full-time job usually figure out whether to go down this career path or not within six months of working in a production company. Other interns have stayed and worked with multiple production teams, hoping to gain more opportunities. If someone has successfully stayed in an internship position for more than six months, they are more likely to get a full-time contract at the end of the internship, but some quit as little as two days after starting the internship. They quit primarily because the internship was 'too different from the initial expectations', according to Larry Z, who gave up a television internship after he realised he was only appointed to do administrative work.

In sum, this chapter analysed the institutional factors that contribute to the phenomenon of precarity. Television practitioners who do the same jobs are managed under unequal employment contracts with different incomes and different levels of job security. As outlined in Chapter 4, one's employment contract is linked to one's *hukou* and *shebao* status. Such a recruitment system exacerbates anxiety and disappointment within the industry, especially among newcomers and migrants. Additionally, the employee training system, i.e., the informal apprenticeship, has discouraged junior and senior practitioners – Interns are not

¹⁰ Connections. Please refer to Section 1 of Chapter 10 for details.

supported and protected enough, whilst senior *biandao* have to coach interns who may leave the industry quickly. With multiple responsibilities on hand, senior *biandao* are underappreciated for contributing their time and effort in coaching the newcomers. From the management's perspective, it seems that senior *biandao*'s effort does not count towards the company's total cost or the institution. Therefore, high staff turnover becomes a norm in the industry as practitioners fail to live up to their versions of the good life. Clearly, this cycle is strengthened in the name of informal apprenticeship with limited or no legal obligations. However, in the long run, employers may end up losing talents, time, and money for conniving the system that ultimately creates a precarious industry.

Chapter 5 *Hukou* and *shebao* as defining factors in the labour market

This chapter introduces how the two defining factors – household registration system (*hukou*) and social welfare insurance (*shebao*) – affect China’s television industry. It analysed how these factors affect television practitioners’ life regarding the concept of ‘good work’ – how typical are they posed as a problem? How many people are affected? Do they affect everyone to the same degree? More importantly, how have the two elements exacerbated the phenomenon of precarity within China’s television industry, and how have they contributed to the complex power relations within the industry. Section One introduced the *hukou* system and why it is important for television practitioners to legally settle down within the cities where they work and, when necessary, obtain a local *hukou* for a better life – buying properties and cars, sending children to public schools, and decent pension and healthcare. Section Two supplements the idea of a better life by analysing how the relationships between regional social welfare systems and local *hukou* holders affect television practitioners’ sense of belonging and security. The chapter conclusion emphasised that obtaining a local *hukou* and enjoying fair social welfare is an important goal for many immigrant practitioners. Moreover, China’s current *hukou* and social welfare system contribute to the phenomenon of precarity within the industry.

Section One: *Hukou* – A Crucial Criterion Linked to Employment Contracts

To explore the labour system and its influence on migrants, we need to understand China’s long-standing *hùkǒu* (户口) system that has exerted tremendous influence on the lives of Chinese people at all times. It remains one of the most critical factors in making life decisions for many people and has divided the Chinese society into different stratifications (Zhou, 2016; Li, 2016; Wang et al., 2020). The early concept of household registration dates back to the Spring and Autumn Period (770 BC). In each dynasty of ancient China, the household registration system went through different reforms and was eventually officially implemented by the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1958 (Wang and Cai, 2008; Chen and

Dong, 2016; Li and Wang, 2020)¹¹. This section aims to understand how the *hukou* system affects the Chinese TV industry, and in turn, how employers have taken advantage of the system to recruit, manage and discipline its employees. This section also considers the attitudes and perspectives of television practitioners who live under the rules of China's *hukou* system.

In China, cities are classified into different tiers. China's city tier system is a hierarchical classification of Chinese cities. It is the most common system of ranking Chinese cities, which are often categorised into four respective tiers. Traditionally, tier-1 cities are the largest and wealthiest – often considered the megapolises of China. As the tiers progress, the cities decrease in size, affluence, and move further away from prime locations. However, the growing regional disparity in China has created a greater need for city-by-city distinction, leading to the emergence of lower-tier categories. At the time of writing, there exist six, eight, 14, or even 18 city-tier categories in China. Even half-rankings (such as 'tier 1.5 or 2.5') have become increasingly common, particularly in the real estate market. Most commonly, cities referred to as 'tier-1.5' or 'emerging first tier' cities represent those that do not equal the traditional first-tier cities (such as Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen) but stand out beyond other traditional tier-2 cities. It is worth noting that the tier system typically includes cities in Mainland China^{12 13} only.

During fieldwork for this thesis, four out of six production teams were based in Beijing, including many in-depth interviews with television practitioners who aim to settle down in Beijing. As the capital of China, Beijing is clustered with the biggest number of media

¹¹ From 1949 to 1958, the early period of PRC affected by the civil war between Kuomintang (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (1945-1949), CCP established household registration only in major cities to implement political control over suspected remaining KMT sympathisers. The *hukou* system during this time did not restrict citizens' freedom of movement to other cities.

¹² Mainland China is the geopolitical and geographical area under the direct jurisdiction of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Politically, it does not include the special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macau, even though both are partially on the geographic mainland. There are two terms in Chinese for 'mainland'; one is *dàlù* (大陆), literally 'the continent'; the other is *nèidì* (内地), literally 'inland'. In Cross-Strait relations, the term 大陆 must be used in official contexts concerning Taiwan, with the PRC referring to itself as 'the mainland side' (as opposed to 'the Taiwan side'). However, in its relations with Hong Kong and Macau, the PRC government refers to itself as 'the Central People's Government', and mainland China excluding Hong Kong and Macau is referred to as *nèidì*. 'Mainland area' is the opposing term to 'free area of the Republic of China' used in the Republic of China (ROC) Constitution. In Taiwan, the *hukou* system operates mostly as a census tool, providing demographic information about residents in each region (Juneja, 2017).

¹³ This thesis agrees with the one-China policy.

organisations. Undoubtedly, Beijing is the most difficult city in China in which to obtain a *hukou*. Studying the mentality of migrant television practitioners who wish to settle in Beijing is both representative of the sample for the thesis, and of the wider population of television practitioners as a whole, which is one of the major discoveries of this research. The following sections will explain the importance of obtaining a local *hukou*, especially for those who strive to settle down in tier-1 cities. It analyses how a *hukou* can affect one's sense of security and indicates that the current *hukou* system has caused a sense of precarity, although the system has been going through more positive reforms. If the quality of one's work affects one's happiness, then one's *hukou* status can affect one's quality of life. Under current policies, it is possible to earn a 'better' *hukou* with a 'fairer' pension. However, the price can be high, and the pressure is always there to either gain or improve one's *hukou*, especially when one's *hukou* can decide the *hukou* status of the next generation.

What is *Hukou* (户口)?

Four countries in the world have *hùkǒu* systems: North Korea, China, Japan and Benin.¹⁴ A *hukou* record officially identifies a person as a resident of an area which is usually issued per family and includes the births, deaths, marriages, divorces, and movements, of all family members. China's residential registration system, *hùjī zhìdù* (户籍制度) is a crucial socio-political and economic institution in China. It is essential to know that one cannot acquire a legal permanent residency or numerous community-based rights, opportunities, benefits, and privileges in places other than the locality of one's *hukou*. Only through proper government authorisation can one permanently change *hukou* location and categorisation. (Wang, 2018).

Hukou acts like an inter-city 'citizenship'. Without this 'citizenship', one cannot enjoy the same benefits as the residents (terms and conditions applied). The *hukou* system has long been a significant source of inequality as people from different cities or provinces enjoy different social benefits. By law, only a person with a local *hukou* may join in the local army, have local healthcare, buy local properties, and enjoy other benefits. If they have children, they may be able to send them to local schools and have *gaokao* (national university entrance exam) with entrance criteria specifically designed for the local area. With stability and security as essential factors in deciding one's success in Chinese culture, people have strived to obtain *hukou* in tier-1 cities¹⁵.

Since *Hukou* type and locale have long been tied to economic and political fortunes in contemporary China¹⁶ (Chan, 2009), some argue that the police use *hukou* for investigation,

¹⁴ However, Japan's household registration system is different from China's. In Japan, one's household registration can be freely relocated with the movement of the owner.

¹⁵ Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and Tianjin.

¹⁶ Chinese academia has not reached an agreement on the earliest implementation of household registration. Some believe it appeared in Western Zhou dynasty (1045 to 771 BC), some argue it appeared earlier in the Shang dynasty (16th century BC to 1046 BC) (Xin, 2007). Regardless of the debate over its origin, it is agreed that a similar system already appeared in the Spring and Autumn Period (770 BC). Later in Qin dynasty (221 to 206 BC), the emperor invented a more sophisticated household registration system called *míngjí* (名籍), literally the name registration. Throughout ancient history, there are several functions of the household registration system, which centred around citizens' benefits and responsibilities. Firstly, it provides the government with access to information about a household. Secondly, each household has the responsibility to pay tax, which funds state-owned labour. Thirdly, from the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220 AD) to the Qing dynasty (1644 to 1911), governmental officials were not allowed to serve in areas close to their original household (Wang, 2015).

social control, and crimefighting purposes. Others think that the *hukou* system restricts freedom of movement, the allocation of labour resources in the economy, the equality of urban and rural residents' status, and the urbanisation of cities. Regardless of the ongoing debates and reforms, the government hopes this system could help stabilise the Chinese political system and shape the Chinese political economy, while fundamentally affecting individuals' life chances and social status (Fu et al., 2018).

The *hukou* system went through several stages of changes. Before 2014, people with agricultural *hukou* (农业户口) or non-agricultural *hukou* (城镇户口)¹⁷ had drastically different opportunities, obligations, and socioeconomic statuses (Yu, 2002). The distinction between rural and urban *hukou* was repealed in July 2014, when the State Council decided to accelerate reform of the *hukou* system. The reform announced that megacities with more than five million residents should control the influx of new citizens and adopt a points system. Similar systems are already in place in Shanghai, Guangzhou and Tianjin. Beijing's permanent population exceeds 20 million, about two and half times that of London and New York (ChinaDaily, 2019). In 2019, China relaxed *hukou* residency curbs in many of its small and medium-sized cities to push urbanization, according to the 2019 Urbanization Plan published by the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) on the 8th of April 2019. Nevertheless, local authorities continue to make and implement their own *hukou* policies. The policies have a long-lasting impact on migrants' and their children's residential patterns, school opportunities, job prospects, and access to wealth. In general, scholars argue that *hukou* imposes a de facto 'birth-ascribed stratification' on the Chinese population (Potter, 1983).

Since most Chinese citizens were born with a *hukou*¹⁸ and they can only have *hukou* locales changed under strict policies such as parent or spouse sponsorship, employment and investment, the movement of *hukou* is often a difficult decision for many people. In fact, changing one's *hukou* locale has become a strategic decision that can potentially improve one's quality of life, if dealt with properly. On the other hand, as it can be difficult to fulfil all

¹⁷ Also referred to as the city and town *hukou*.

¹⁸ During the One-Child Policy period (1982 - 2015), some infants were born without *hukou* as their parents did not apply for birth certificates on their behalf, fearing they would be fined for violating the policy.

the criteria within a short time, changing *hukou* can even be a once-in-a-lifetime action. Therefore, it is not surprising that people have diverse viewpoints on *hukou*. Some vow to gain a 'better' *hukou*; others view *hukou* as a historical remnant and decide to move around anyway. Regardless of different individual decisions, one simple fact about *hukou* is that one's *hukou* can have an impact on one's life, depending on one's employment contract, total years of residence and other personal circumstances.

Impact on television practitioners

What is more relevant to this study is some TV practitioners' desire to obtain a Beijing *hukou* as this contributes to their idea of a better life. A Beijing *hukou* holder is considered a legal permanent resident of Beijing, who has priority access to all relevant benefits over non-*hukou* holders. A Beijing *hukou* entails over 80 benefits including buying properties, education (especially university admission advantages), job-hunting, transportation, social security, marriage, maternity benefits, medical insurance, healthcare, pension, finance, etc. It is estimated that a Beijing *hukou* potentially saves the holder a significant amount of money in comparison to non-*hukou* holders in several aspects: firstly, it saves around £47,000 in buying a property; secondly, it saves at least £9,000 in education; thirdly, it increases the chances of being admitted to Peking University up to 41 times in comparison to students from other provinces (CNTV, n.d.).

It is more and more challenging to obtain a Beijing *hukou*, although China has relaxed *hukou* restrictions in other medium-sized cities (ChinaDaily, 2019b). Since 2015, the method for obtaining a Beijing *hukou* is a points system called *jīfēn luòhù* (积分落户)¹⁹. Migrants can change their *hukou* status after reaching a specified number of points. Apart from the point-based system, there are seven other ways²⁰ to obtain Beijing *hukou*. Depending on the type of residence permit one holds, one's civil rights in Beijing vary. If a migrant has a Beijing

¹⁹ The points system means employment, accommodation, educational background, skill level, tax payments, and credit records, among other things, are converted into points.

²⁰ 1. Via marriage; 2. Via family members (children or parents); 3. Governmental-affiliated institutions civil servant job sponsorship; 4. Job sponsorship from licensed companies; 5. University graduates who serve in rural villages or communities; 5. Awarded as a 'socialist role model'; 6. Special talents (including 'thousand scholars plan', overseas entrepreneurship, commercial investment sponsorship, other special talents defined by Beijing government); 7. Outstanding entrepreneurs. Each route contains detailed eligibilities, and only candidates who meet all the requirements are eligible.

working and residency certificate (北京市工作居住证), essentially a Beijing 'green card', they are almost treated as equal to Beijing *hukou*-holders, aside from the fact that their children are not allowed to take part in the National College Entrance Examination (*gāokǎo*, 高考)²¹ in Beijing. It is known in China that Beijing *hukou* holders have a significantly better chance of being admitted to the best universities, as most top universities are in Beijing²². Hence, migrants not only need to consider their own future but also their children's future in Beijing. Moreover, without a Beijing *hukou*, one can only purchase commercial housing (商品房), which is more expensive than indemnificatory apartments (经济适用房)²³ that can only be purchased by Beijing *hukou*-holders. Each year, the Beijing government distributes different numbers of *hukou* sponsorship to different workplaces, depending on the industry sector, the job level, and other factors. In theory, all employees in Beijing have opportunities to gain Beijing *hukou* so long as they meet all the criteria. Larger-scale workplaces, such as state-owned television stations, may be given more numbers of sponsorship each year. Hence, there is a greater chance to obtain a Beijing *hukou* if one works at a state-owned institution. Otherwise, employees need to find other ways to obtain a Beijing *hukou* if their jobs do not meet the sponsorship criteria.

As owning a Beijing *hukou* is crucial to obtaining key social benefits, it also becomes a bonus (if not key) factor in determining the value of an employment contract in all industry sectors, including the television and media industries. This means employers can get an upper hand by providing *hukou* sponsorship without raising other aspects of a job role. However, when it comes to individuals, its impact varies depending on the person's background (financial,

²¹ The *gaokao* is an examination that is taken by Chinese students in their third and final year of high school in early June each year. It is also the lone criterion for admission into Chinese universities. *Gaokao* is considered the most important examination in China for most high-school attenders.

²² Given that each university offers different and even discriminating admission criteria for students from different provinces, students who hold *hukou* from the same province where the universities are located have a significantly better chance of being admitted by the universities. This is because Chinese universities normally offer lower admission criteria to students from the same area. For example, the top universities in China, Peking University and Tsinghua University, only require around 500 final marks in *gaokao* for Beijing students, whereas a student from Shandong province needs at least 700 marks. It is extremely difficult to get 700 marks in *gaokao* – only the top students in the entire Shandong province could reach those criteria. In addition, each province has unequal education resources, and the difficulty of *gaokao* varies in different provinces (sohu.com).

²³ Indemnificatory housing includes low-rent and affordable housing, public rental housing and relocation projects for residents who have been moved to make way for commercial developments. They are saved for those who meet specific criteria, including having a local *hukou* (Global Times, 2012). In Beijing, the applicant's eligibility includes: 1. Older than 25 years old; 2. Does not own any property within the family (including either of the married couple or children under 18); 3. Must hold a Beijing *hukou*.

education, and original *hukou* locale) and mentality towards the *hukou* system. It is safe to say that the wealthier an individual is, the less of an impact the individual receives directly from *the hukou* system. For example, although people cannot change their *hukou* locale easily, they can throw money at the problems, such as sending their children to private schools, buying commercial housing, registering their legal workplace to companies that sponsor local *hukou*, and even immigrating to other countries. Undoubtedly, it is more of a class issue, and in return, the unequal *hukou* system also exacerbate inequality within the country by giving more invisible benefits to those who own *hukou* from prosperous cities. Although no specific statistics can tell how many people within the media industries are migrants, China Economic Journal indicates that in 2017, around 36% of Beijing's long-term residents do not hold Beijing *hukou*, and the numbers of Beijing *hukou* holders and long-term migrants both decreased by the end of 2017. During this fieldwork, I have the impression that around half of the television employees do not hold Beijing *hukou* and there were more migrants working at private production companies than state-own television stations. The desire to obtain Beijing *hukou* has affected some practitioners' views on their job security and overall living conditions. For example, SAW (interviewee 4), who came from Heilongjiang Province, was struggling to obtain a Beijing *hukou* to buy a car and a flat in Beijing with her husband, who was also an immigrant. She was anxious when changing to her second job from a private production company as she did not want to leave employment gaps for more than three months that would jeopardise her points towards obtaining Beijing *hukou* and her rights in receiving social welfare benefits that could only be sustained by continuous employment. Out of her expectation, she found out that the first production company she worked for did not pay for her national insurance, resulting in an unaccounted one year that could not be added to her points towards *hukou* application.

Another important but understated factor is that many media workers come from media studies background where university tuition fees are slightly higher than others. This means they are more likely to come from a middle-class background and may financially and mentally afford to work without a local *hukou* (Yang, 2014; Guo et al., 2020; Yang and Sun, 2020). They can either find ways around the *hukou* restrictions or, more realistically, they are not overly affected by inequalities caused by *hukou* differences. For example, JSS (interviewee 18), who was transferred from CCTV's documentary channel another

entertainment show, came from a wealthy background. He drove to work in different cars during a week and often quarrel with his line manager. After a few month's unpaid internship, JSS left the programme because he did not want to work with the manager anymore. He entrusted a third-party company that provided Beijing *hukou* sponsorship with another employment contract apart from the one he signed with CCTV-affiliated company. In comparison to JSS, JA (interviewee 14) was in a much worse situation due to her relatively poorer background. JA came from a small village in Sichuan province and aspired to settle down in Beijing once she gained an internship at CCTV. She was willing to work unpaid for a year and put up with her demanding manager, who did not get along with JSS. Unlike JSS who left for good, she did not have much choice but to stay so as to hold the potential opportunity to stay in Beijing. JSS was in a better position than JA as he could afford the investment to go around the *hukou* restriction, which not only required money but also specialised network. There are many more similar stories.

Nevertheless, a job position becomes competitive if it can provide the employee with a local *hukou*, since many still hold the belief that *hukou*, in some way, represents one's original social status. Indeed, one's *hukou* status does have an impact on one's rights and benefits residing in any city.

In general, based on the current *hukou* regulations, television practitioners who work in state-owned television stations may be more likely to gain Beijing *hukou*. For example, CCTV, as a licensed government-affiliated institution, has multiple channels to sponsor its employees with Beijing *hukou*. It can recruit university graduates via graduate schemes, or it can change an employee's labour contract to one of its licensed companies which have job positions that sponsor Beijing *hukou*. It can also sponsor employees from the management by giving them *shiye bianzhi*²⁴ via internal promotions. Each year, the Beijing Municipal Human Resources and Social Security Bureau (北京市人力资源和社会保障局) grants a certain number of *hukou* to CCTV, and only specific roles can sponsor employees with Beijing *hukou*. If a CCTV employee does not have a Beijing *hukou*, s/he should either obtain a work

²⁴ See Glossaries in the Appendices: *Shiye bianzhi* are permanent job(s) in Chinese government-affiliated institutions that are on the permanent payroll of that institution's human resource department. The person is directly paid by China's state revenue, and it is almost impossible to be fired from these roles.

permit without hukou or to find other ways to obtain a Beijing *hukou*. In a study on the relationship between mental health and one's *hukou*'s status, Fu et al. (2018) that *hukou* is a fundamental cause of disease in China, and its effects on depression are mediated by various social, economic, and medical factors, based on medical data from 2016. It is not difficult to understand why many immigrant employees try every available option to obtain a *hukou*, as an employment contract largely dictates not only an employee's financial status but their other rights within Beijing. For those who work for private companies, unless it is stated clearly in the employment contract that the job can sponsor a *hukou*, they will need to gain Beijing *hukou* by collecting enough points to meet the requirements of the current point-based system.

As many migrants see little hope in obtaining *hukou* from tier-1 cities, many have moved to smaller tier-2 cities where there exist relatively looser *hukou* restrictions. There was a trendy phrase in the 2010s: 'to run away from Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou' (逃离北上广), as tier-1 cities in China, Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and nowadays Shenzhen, are considered more developed within the country. Statistics show that since 2015, 'running away from Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou' has become a new trend amongst young people. In 2015, Shanghai's permanent residents decreased by 104,000 and by another 13,700 in 2017. In 2017, Beijing's permanent residents decreased by 2,2000 and again by 165,000 in 2018 (Sina.com, 2019). Since it is increasingly challenging to settle down in a tier-1 city, many migrants find it easier to live and work in tier-2 cities such as Hangzhou, Tianjin and Xi'an, where local governments have initiated many settlement benefits to attract skilled workers. In other words, many tier-2 cities have taken advantage of their relaxed *hukou* system to attract skilled talents ²⁵.

²⁵ For example, in 2018, Tianjin, one of the four municipalities, relaxed its *hukou* criteria and welcomed all migrants under the age of 40 with a bachelor's degrees to obtain Tianjin *hukou*. Chengdu gives free accommodation to young migrants who successfully obtain Chengdu *hukou*; Zhengzhou provides housing reimbursement and discounts to migrants with a master's or PhD degree and rewards £11,000 to first-time house buyers with a PhD degree; Xi'an offers cash to university graduates who obtained Xi'an *hukou* via signing employment contracts in Xi'an. Just like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, Shenzhen as a tier-1 city used to attract more migrants due to its relatively relaxed *hukou* system, mainly accepting migrants from Guangzhou. However, due to its high living expenses and rising housing prices, some migrants have started to leave Shenzhen for Changsha or Wuhan, where there are relatively better *hukou* and housing benefits, according to a 2018 report on Sina.com.

Although moving to tier-2 cities has become a common measure for migrants from less developed cities, television practitioners have found it challenging to follow the trend, mainly because the core of the television industry remains within just a few cities, along with the majority of television job vacancies. The scarcity of quality media jobs in other tier-2 cities has left practitioners little alternative but to remain in cities with strict *hukou* policies. However, their opinions vary in terms of *hukou*'s impact on their overall well-being. Some insist they still earn more in a tier-1 city than their hometowns so they will strive to obtain a new *hukou* even if the criteria for obtaining a *hukou* are competitive. Others weigh up other aspects of their lives and decide to move out when they are ready, as children's education would become a challenge in the long run. Although there are many limiting factors, most migrant practitioners still choose to work in tier-1 cities, even if they cannot obtain a *hukou*. This mentality of staying in tier-1 cities gives employers the advantage of recruiting talent from all over the country, without making much effort to improve the other benefits of a vacancy. Additionally, recruiters can exploit the *hukou* system by attracting talent with a special offer of *hukou* sponsorship but compromised benefits in other aspects, such as a lower salary. No matter how unfair the employment contract can be, there are always applicants who are willing to accept it, which has, in turn, minimised the lowest offer in the industry.

Section Two: Social Welfare System (社保) and Continuously Employed

Although migrant workers can move to tier-2 cities for a less restricted *hukou* system and potentially a less stressful lifestyle, they still need to face the consequence of frequent relocation – their social welfare insurance record and hence the benefits they will receive when they retire. As this fieldwork was mainly conducted in Beijing and partially in Nanjing and Shenzhen, the majority of television practitioners who work in these cities are migrant workers with *hukou* from other provinces. In fact, as clusters of television production companies are grouped within particular districts of tier-1 cities (e.g., Chaoyang District of Beijing), most television practitioners' choices are confined within these specific areas, even though they may not like particular places. As many have not obtained a local *hukou* in which they currently work, they are most likely living in these cities with a long-term residence permit. Hence, their social welfare records play a significant role in safeguarding their social benefits in the place other than his/her original *hukou* locale. It is important to clarify here that one's social welfare records are related but not limited by one's original *hukou* locale. In other words, one can enjoy reimbursed medical care and receive a pension in another province that is not his/her *hukou* locale, with certain conditions applied. One of the most important conditions is one's employment activity. A migrant worker's overall rights in another province not only depends on whether s/he has a job in this province but also on the quality of the employment. The following section will introduce China's social welfare system, *shèhuì bǎozhàng zhìdù* (社会保障制度) (often shortened to *shèbǎo* (社保), and why it is crucial for employees working in tier-1 cities, such as Beijing, to stay continuously employed, wherever possible.

'Five-insurances-and-one-fund' (五險一金)

In China, one's *shebao* is closely tied to his/her *hukou* type and locale. By law, all employees (full-time, part-time, contracted, permanent) must be provided with essential work-related insurance. The types of insurances an employee can have depends on the workplace, some of which may provide more than others. In state-owned institutions, most employees have comprehensive insurance called *wǔ xiǎn yī jīn* (五險一金), literally translated as 'five-insurances-and-one-fund'. These include: *yǎnglǎo bǎoxiǎn* (养老保险), pension endowment

insurance, *shīyè bǎoxiǎn* (失业保险), unemployment insurance, *yīliáo bǎoxiǎn* (医疗保险), medical insurance, *gōngshāng bǎoxiǎn* (工伤保险), work-related injury insurance, and *shēngyù bǎoxiǎn* (生育保险), maternity insurance. These five benefits are called *wǔxiǎn* (五险). Apart from *wǔxiǎn*, there is also *yījīn*, (一金), housing provident fund (see Appendices for details). In some large-scale private companies, most employees have fully comprehensive insurances. However, in smaller private companies, employees may not enjoy housing accumulation funds and maternity insurance. They will, however, have essential insurances covered – worked-related injury insurance, medical insurance and pension endowment insurance. The fact that state-owned institutions are likely to offer more social welfare benefits explains why they are popular: even if the jobs offered are not well-paid, many people would choose more comprehensive insurance and *hukou* sponsorship over a large salary.

It is worth noting that each city or province exerts different regulations on the contribution rates of social insurance. Roughly speaking, *wuxian* comprises of 11%-12% of one's income before tax, and *yijin* comprises of 5%-12% of one's income before tax. That is to say, one not only needs to pay tax from the salary but also pay roughly another 20% on one's social welfare. Such a significant investment aims to add security to an employee's overall quality of life but in tier-1 cities where an immigrant's social welfare benefits are tied up to being continuously employed, this desire for a quality life is not always fulfilled and have left many television practitioners with little choice but to stay in an unsatisfactory employment.

The importance of staying continuously employed

Regardless of one's workplace being state-owned or private, each insurance requires an employee to pay into the scheme for a minimum amount of time. This means an employee must stay employed consecutively for a minimum period of time to enjoy the benefits. Each scheme has different minimum payment periods. The state pension scheme requires at least 15 years of accumulative payments in order to access the funds when retired. To receive medical insurance when retired, one must pay at least 20 to 30 years accumulatively, depending on each province. For unemployment and maternity insurance, the minimum payment time is one year, but there is no requirement for work-related injury insurance. It is

worth noting that an individual will only receive a pension and free medical care when reaching the legal retirement age. If they have not reached retirement age, they can only withdraw pension funds under special conditions such as an early retirement²⁶. As social welfare insurance includes medical insurance and a pension with different minimum payment periods, theoretically a male employee can only have access to free medical care and a lifelong pension after 25 years of accumulative payment, and a female employee can enjoy medical insurance and lifelong pension after 20 years of accumulative payment.

A non-*hukou* holder needs to stay continuously employed in the city where s/he aims to stay in the long run and ultimately needs to obtain a local *hukou* if possible. Continuity and accumulated time of *shebao* payment affect different aspects of one's rights within a city. In some cities, the continuity is linked to one's eligibility for *hukou*, buying properties and cars. If a non-*hukou* holder fails to stay continuously employed, their social welfare benefits will be compromised when they are unemployed for more than a month, although rules are different in different provinces. In Beijing, paying *shebao* or individual income tax continuously for at least five years is the prerequisite for buying properties and cars. This cap varies in different cities, but it is vital to pay continuously to enjoy all the benefits when needed. This means no matter how many jobs one has had, there is a maximum time one can be unemployed before losing some social insurance benefits. For example, in Beijing, the time limit is for three months. If one wishes to receive medical fee discounts in public hospitals, one must pay for medical insurance continuously for more than two months. Otherwise, this person still needs to pay the full price for the treatment. When this person is employed again, s/he will continue enjoying the discount, but any money paid for medical care during the unemployed two months will not be reimbursed unless the employee entrusted a third-party agency to pay for his/her insurance, although finding a third-party agency is both illegal and risky. The reality is that for many employees, it is almost inevitable

²⁶ An early retirement will result in a lower-than-average lifelong pension and free medical care after retirement. According to the *Temporary Regulation on Early Retirement or Early Resignation* issued by China's State Council, a few types of civil servants can apply for early retirement if they have: 1. worked at least 30 years; 2. Less than five years until legal retirement's age and served at least 20 years; 3. Other special conditions. Employees from other sectors can take early retirement if their job is labelled as 'dangerous and can cause hazards'. The early retirement age for male employees is 55 years old and 45 years old for female employees. They must have worked at least ten years in the 'dangerous' sector. For disabled employees who cannot work at all, the early retirement age is 50 years old for male and 45 years old for female, who must have worked at least ten years. For those who are disabled in their line of work and therefore, cannot work at all, they can take early retirement with the doctor's confirmation.

to experience some periods of discontinuous payment, especially when changing jobs, going abroad, and freelancing. In comparison to *hukou* holders, migrant workers need to be more careful when leaving a *shebao* payment gap between jobs, because many benefits, such as car and property purchases within tier-1 cities, are closely related to one's social welfare insurance status.

Although each city has different social welfare policies, none allow for a social insurance debt to be paid off by individuals – it can only be paid off via employers. This means one can only pay off their social insurance debts by finding another job. If the gap between two jobs is more than one month, the new employer is not liable for any debt generated by the unemployment gap. Therefore, if a non-*hukou* holder intends to buy properties or cars in the city where s/he works, one should aim to start the next employment within three-months. It is important to understand the terms and conditions of relevant policies, primarily what counts as 'continuous payment' in different cities.

Last but not least, since the calculation of welfare benefits varies in different provinces, non-*hukou* holders may end up paying different amount of money in different provinces but receive less than what they deserve when it comes to retirement, due to uneven work time and benefit calculation rules in different provinces.

To sum up, it is crucial for non-*hukou* holders to pay the social insurances continuously if they do not wish to leave tier-1 cities. Despite that social welfare insurance can and has protected the fundamental rights of employees, it also, in a way, refrains employees, especially migrant workers, from leaving long gaps between jobs. This means many employees may need to stay continuously employed even if they do not enjoy the jobs, in order to sustain their current social welfare benefits. The rules of inter-city *shebao* calculation and more details on social welfare rules are introduced in the Appendices.

Section Three: Impact of national policies

The above two sections indicate that since television practitioners without a local *hukou* are under extra pressure to cope with the hectic working environment and competitive lifestyle within a tier-1 city. During this fieldwork, I have categorised non-*hukou* holders into two groups: One group choose to live in tier-1 cities because they genuinely love working in the television industry and it is the tier-1 cities that can provide excellent opportunities. The other group choose to work in the television industry because they aim to settle down in a 'better' city one day. The first group may not consider obtaining a local *hukou* as an essential life goal, but as their other aspects of life become more involved with the city, they realise they might as well become local to buy cars, properties, send children to local schools and ultimately, to be treated the same by the national policies, according to interviews during this fieldwork. In an in-depth interview, a senior *biandao*, SAW (interviewee 4), admitted that her first job did not pay for her national insurance, meaning that if she was ever injured during work, she would not be protected by any insurance. She only discovered the truth after she quit the job.

SAW: I was too young and inexperienced, even my mum reminded me of job insurance, but I never checked my national insurance record and assumed the company took care of it. When I resigned from my previous workplace, the company was reluctant to give me the record, and that made me suspicious. I told them I must transfer it to my next job, and then they had to tell me the truth. I think I'm only lucky that nothing happened to me. I still feel horrible when I recall it until this day.

SZ: What was the consequence of not paying for *shebao*?

SAW: Apparently, I wouldn't be insured and compensated if I got injured during work. Secondly, for those who don't have a Beijing *hukou* but work in Beijing, they need the record of social welfare to buy properties and cars. I really need a car, but I've been so out of luck. I need to wait till 2021 to take part in the license plate lottery system. I hope by then I will be lucky enough to buy a car.

The other group of practitioners are in a more complicated situation. Although they do not necessarily view their current job as the only career option, they must rely on it to sustain their life in the city such as paying bills, rent, and if possible, meeting the eligibility to become

a local *hukou* holder. On the other hand, since they have invested many years working in the television industry, they may eventually lose many other career options due to limited expertise in other areas. They may gradually find themselves stuck in the television industry as they have come so far and have invested so much, even though it was not their initial plan.

No matter how different their personal circumstances are, television practitioners will realise that as time goes by, it only becomes more difficult to leave the industry or the city where they work. Such a realisation is not always easily handled by practitioners, especially for those who are mentally vulnerable. Some practitioners have expressed their disappointment when trying to maintain a continuous social welfare record and to make ends meet. As more and more employees are stuck in this limbo, employers have learned to take advantage of the rules of *hukou* and *shebao*, recruiting talent with an average salary but all-inclusive insurance. Some other employees do not even need to make such efforts. After all, employers know many young migrants will aspire to work in the seemingly glamorous television industry, without knowing what is waiting for them.

In summary, this chapter provides an overview of China's prevalent *hukou* system and the social welfare system as defining factors of in the Chinese labour market. It demonstrates how China's national policies affect the overall labour market, especially the television industry which is already known for being precarious. The two sections explained how *hukou* and *shebao* affected TV practitioners' life in regard to the concept of the good life – their career choices are confined within tier-1 cities where top-notch media production organisations cluster and therefore, they need to ensure their rights as employees and (migrant) residents are protected, which has been difficult due to China's strict and unequal residence rules. This chapter also partially answers the main research questions of power and precarity in that employers from tier-1 cities have an upper hand in recruitment, resulting in a more precarious environment for the television industry that is already known for being precarious, long hours, project-based, job uncertainty, lack of income stability, high stress levels and intense teamwork (Deuze, 2007:199). These elements have shaped the boundaries of the Chinese television industry and have indicated the political-economic environment of the industry. It also explained how national policies might have contributed to the concept of precarity within the Chinese television industry. Without a continuous employment record

and a long-term residence permit, migrant workers will find it challenging to have the same rights and benefits as the locals unless they only intend to stay short-term. Television stations and production companies, on the other hand, have taken advantage of the national policies by offering various employment packages that are more attractive in terms of benefits but may involve reduced salaries.

Chapter 6 Pre-production panning: complicated, effortful, under-developed?

As Deuze (2007:196) explains, preproduction is the planning phase, which includes budgeting, casting, finding the right location, set and costume design and construction, and scheduling. Chapter 6 introduces the pre-production stages of the television programmes observed during fieldwork from March to July 2018 and follow-up interviews in 2019. Pre-production usually involves developing studio scripts, budgeting, hiring creative talents, designing the stage sets, and if possible, rehearsing before filming. The fieldwork data indicates that all efforts made during pre-production are key to a successful (or, at least a safe) production and may predict future viewing ratings. These efforts include but are not limited to production meetings, script redrafting, studio rehearsals, and practitioners' quick reactions to unexpected events.

The fieldwork indicates that while a successful programme requires close attention to detail and long-term preparation, nobody can guarantee its long-lasting success in a competitive market. One can never underestimate the complex nature of studio production. Even experienced practitioners cannot guarantee a 'perfect' production that always goes the way they planned. On the other hand, some teams failed due to uncoordinated teamwork and chaotic management. *Biandao*, the foundation of a *zongyi* programme's production team, significantly determine a programme's production quality. Sometimes, *biandao*'s jobs are undermined and undervalued due to unreasonable management. Undoubtedly, the precarious mentality of underpaid *biandao* is not beneficial for the industry in the long run. This also means that if a production team does not prepare sufficiently, filming and post-production can be even more difficult than expected. As time goes by, an under-developed programme with unhappy staff will not last in the competitive market.

Section One: Meetings – to plan, to review, to foresee

Since the first television station in 1957, Chinese television has gone through tough times and experienced a variety of different limitations. It still became a pillar industry during the 1980s and continues to be a crucial part of the creative industries in China (Chang, 2018:378).

However, unlike in Western television industries with the traditions and mechanisms to invest research, time, effort, and money in refining production bibles, Chinese television producers do not usually have the same resources to invest heavily in pre-production due to policy, IP protection and management restrictions. Regardless of the many limitations, creative workers tend not to impose any restrictions on creativity and prefer to carry out production meetings in casual manners, with creative brainstorming sections in between as a way of relaxation.

Production meetings entail all the planning from pre-production to post-production. They are usually held by the head of the production team to ensure that every aspect of the production will run smoothly. Depending on the purpose of the meeting, television practitioners discuss everything they can think of, such as the filming plan, themes of upcoming episodes and performance reviews. During the process, they may also pitch format modification, disagree and reflect on previous working methods. Sometimes, a new programme is created during casual conversations and gradually becomes full-fledged. Often, it takes creative workers a long time to make work schedules and divide workloads. Meetings can be held at any time, anywhere, based on the specific needs of the teams and the management styles. Regardless of the different purposes of production meetings, they are the soul of a programme and represent the entire team's collective intelligence.

Due to the changeable nature of television productions, television practitioners hold different opinions on the amount of time and effort that should be invested in a programme's development. Although these practitioners felt that vertical power relations could cause hasty decisions, they ultimately saw them as products of an under-developed research and development process. However, not all practitioners agreed with this perspective, and several interviewees took an opposite view of programme development. HJ (interviewee 25), a *zongyi* producer from CCTV, did not believe in long-term programme development, especially study exchanges with foreign media institutions. He was pessimistic about the idea of sending creative workers abroad to study television production.

HJ: My colleagues who attended TV production crash courses in England returned and said their study experience was not very useful for China. Since it would be impossible to copy the

British TV system, there was little point studying it. We still have to produce TV in our own way. Even if CCTV established a television format-development department, nobody could guarantee that our employees can produce the best-selling programme.

I relayed this to YF (interviewee 26), the former Head of Research of Hunan Satellite TV, who disagreed with such a statement:

YF: I believe he made a fundamental mistake. A good idea is not only generated by a few talents. Hunan TV has issued regulations, provided generous budgets, and hosted regular format pitch competitions to ensure that creative ideas can be fully supported and developed. When we come across good ideas, we develop them via teamwork. We hold monthly competitions to find the best pitch. Creativity requires a series of supportive mechanisms that ensure an idea can turn into a mature programme.

HJ and YF's statements represent two mainstream opinions towards programme development in the Chinese television industry. Hunan Satellite TV was the first to buy international formats and learn from international (mainly British) programmes. On the other hand, CCTV has a lot more concerns when it comes to international collaboration. They seem to be more confident with their own way of producing TV. Several other CCTV practitioners agree with HJ's view on television programme development. They also believe that the key to creativity relies on talented people.

Section Two: Tailor-made television scripts and other paperwork

Although non-scripted entertainment shows do exist, most *zongyi* programmes are scripted to various degrees, and all the shows observed within the fieldwork were scripted. This section does not aim to debate the differences between scripted and non-scripted shows or to explore why these shows are scripted. Nor is it a handbook on 'how to write for television'. Instead, this section recounts the process of how television *biandao* write television scripts as part of their duties. It is an honest account of how these Chinese *biandao* wrote television scripts for specific episodes they were responsible for. It explores how *biandao* tailor scripts for each participant and episode and other paperwork they come across throughout the production. As explained, the term *biandao* is composed of two parts: *biān* (scriptwriting) and

dǎo (directing). The order of the two characters states that writing comes before directing. Hence, a good *biandao* should be able to turn television scripts into good programmes.

Before explaining how *zongyi biandao* write television scripts, it is essential to understand the meaning of a television script in the context of Chinese *zongyi* production. The 'television script' here is different from scriptwriting for dramas, soap or sitcoms. It is difficult to define a script for reality shows due to their 'realness' and unpredictable outcomes. To begin with, the term 'television script' is called *tái běn* (台本) in Chinese. In most cases, it is a combination of the lines of all characters (the hosts, the studio participants, and the guests) and the studio running order. Some production teams may also print out the studio running order and the call sheet²⁷ separately, but *taiben* remains the most important guide for everyone involved in the production, especially for the hosts during the filming, because they need to know the running order and their lines in the show.

In order to write a satisfactory *zongyi taiben*, a *biandao* must consider several factors: the theme of the episode, the selling point of studio participants' stories, the total time limit and some other supplementary material, such as pre-recorded videos. The first factor is the most crucial element. *Zongyi biandao* must decide on the theme of the episode. For example, although *Waiting for Me* is about finding missing persons, its stories can be classified into different categories, and they each require different writing styles and filming time slots. For instance, a *biandao* may need to: find studio participants' long-lost families who live abroad, track down old soldiers' previous comrades who fought during a war, source someone's birth parents, identify strangers who saved lives, or search for people who appeared in specific photos. Each category involves different emotions, and some contents may be too upsetting to be broadcast. As most production teams offer script templates, a *biandao* does not need to worry about the font, the time limit, and the overall format. It is the stories that matter. A commonly acknowledged technique for writing a good television script is to communicate with the participants as much as possible until the *biandao* creates a good story.

²⁷ Most Chinese production teams do not have the equivalent of a call sheet, and if they do, these do not contain as much detailed information. Sometimes, the information needed on a call sheet is divided into separate documents that are assigned to different television practitioners.

Whilst writing *taiben* is the priority during pre-production, television *biandao* also need to fill out other paperwork as part of the job. Standard paperwork includes studio participants' basic information, application forms, expenses forms, invitation letters to participants and their companies, non-disclosure agreements and disclaimers from studio participants, the studio running order, and the television studio plan. Regardless of an episode's theme, a *biandao* must write a script that reaches management's expectations, and their careers can be adversely affected if scripts are not approved. For practitioners working at government-affiliated institutions, such as CCTV, some paperwork is as important as a *taiben*. While creativity is the key to a successful story, being politically correct is the prerequisite for a television script to be approved by the management. In Section 3 of Chapter 9, the producer of *Waiting for Me* had to delete specific upsetting details of the studio participant's personal experience to avoid potential social instability. This is why script pitch meetings (选题会) have become the most important meetings during pre-production. Each *biandao* will be asked to pitch several stories related to a potential participant, and the producer will decide whether the story can be developed further. In May 2018, the *Win the Bill* production team held three script pitch meetings before a four-day studio production. Each meeting lasted five hours, with ongoing debates over the pitches. The procedure was as follows: Each *biandao* pitched eight stories of the eight different participants. The producer then discussed each story with the *biandao*. As each *biandao* was tasked with eight stories, all of them were asked to pitch one story in turn at a time, so everyone had an equal chance to discuss the scripts within an equal amount of time. Other *biandao* also discussed the scripts with the *biandao* who was pitching so that every person expressed their opinions. It was also a good opportunity for the interns to learn from experienced *biandao*, and they might even have their pitches granted by the producer.

Section Three: Casting and its criteria

Regardless of the show's theme, *zongyi biandao* are likely to look for ideal studio participants at any stage of the programme's production. They tend to find as many participants as possible and prepare some of them for upcoming episodes. *Biandao* is constantly building up a talent pool where plenty of suitable candidates can make time for their production schedules. If a *biandao* is given enough power within the show's rules to decide the specific theme of an episode, they can first look for their participants and then decide its content. On

the other hand, if the show's theme is already fixed, the *biandao* will be under more pressure to look for ideal candidates. For example, *biandao* working on *Win the Bill* could cast studio participants first and then group similar participants to form a complete episode, whereas the *Waiting for Me* production team cast studio participants completely differently. The channel's senior management gave them direct orders to produce specific themes for different episodes. One way or the other, television *biandao* must cast the right participants for their programmes.

During the fieldwork, three universal casting rules were prevalent: 1. Participants must speak fluently without noticeable accents; 2. Participants should ideally look presentable on TV; 3. Participants must have particular life experience that suits the programmes' requirements and is suitable for television broadcasting. These three rules are basic requirements for any *zongyi*. The rules seem simple, but many candidates do not meet these standards. Many *biandao* were disappointed when they met the 'ideal' candidates in person and realised they were not what they seemed to be on the application forms. For instance, during a casting interview for *Job Hunting*, some participants lied about their work experience. Others had excellent CVs but spoke with strong dialects that were difficult for the target audience to understand. Some did not pass the initial telephone interview because they failed to carry on with basic conversations. Moreover, some candidates sent their CVs to production teams without knowing much about the shows. A few candidates even appeared at the casting interview without knowing why they were there.

On the other hand, some of the participants' life experiences might have piqued audience's curiosity, but their stories would not pass TV censorship. During one of *Win the Bill's* team meetings, a *biandao* proposed to interview forensic scientists. The proposal was immediately turned down, and the producer explained that the work details of forensic scientists are protected by law and should not be exposed to the public. As it can be difficult to find talents who meet the casting standards, some *biandao* have deliberately lowered their casting standards to meet with production deadlines. Their carelessness inevitably compromised the shows' quality. However, for production teams that lack resources and time, they had to get on with whatever they had. Other production teams did not have any specific casting standards. They simply trusted the *biandao's* subjective judgements. One senior *biandao*, ZF

(interviewee 27), as a member of a casting committee, admitted she has been casting for ten years but still could not offer a standardised or generalised method to find the 'right' candidates.

SZ: How do you cast the right candidates?

ZF: Casting is not rocket science, and it can be highly subjective. I've worked for ten years and met so many talents. They are all very different people. It's impossible to generalise the criteria. I'd say, follow your instinct.

SZ: Is this too arbitrary?

ZF: Depends on how you see it. As *biandao* become more and more experienced, they somehow just know whom to cast. They know what they are looking for in a candidate, but it's hard to put it into accurate language. Sometimes it's just a hunch. Obviously, *biandao* are responsible for their choices as TV is a business. We are all responsible for the viewing ratings of our candidates. No *biandao* wants their episode to end up at the bottom of the ratings chart.

ZF's theory came from ten years of experience working on one programme. Other *biandao* from this programme once had a two-hour meeting with ZF regarding the overall theme of the programme. It turned out that they were all confused as to what the show was essentially about. Some insisted that even the producer could not specifically decide the programme's future direction. Others believed they were capable enough to come up with creative sub-themes in the future. Despite the confusion, they all agreed that creativity should not be confined within a narrow scope. More specific guidance from management would help the team find the most suitable candidates, so they did not need to rely on a vague sixth sense.

In contrast to ZF and her confused team, *biandao* at *Job Hunting* had a clearer view of casting. One *biandao* said he must prioritise the first rule – so long as the candidate communicated fluently and happened to have some fun life stories, he would cast them, as it was not difficult for him to job-match the candidates. In the case of *Waiting for Me*, the initial casting standard is essential – participants must speak fluent Chinese mandarin, as well as having an unfortunate life experience. However, although *biandao* of *Waiting for Me* were often able to find people who had lost touch with their families, they struggled to eventually bring their stories to TV, due to the show's censorship and the producer's changing mind. Similarly, the studio participants of *If You Are the One* (Jiangsu Satellite TV, 2010) are known for making

harsh comments and being good-looking. When I asked one of the show's senior *biandao* whether the female participants needed to be good-looking, she told me 'not really' and insisted that speaking fluently was the priority. She commented: 'We have great makeup artists, so I wouldn't worry too much about being naturally good-looking. However, it would help if the candidate has some talent to display on stage.'

Since casting ordinary participants can be risky, most *biandao* have learnt to be results-oriented. Finding suitable participants with relevant life experience has more to do with the programmes' potential success in the market and less to do with how it might affect the participants. In other words, *biandao* must learn to care less about whether the studio participants gain what they want from the shows. Other production teams have learnt to shift the programmes' focus to celebrities instead of ordinary participants. This explains why some seemingly promising candidates received no job offers at the end of *Job Hunting*. The *Job Hunting* production team believed the focus of the programme was the HR persons brought in to conduct the interviews with the participants, who were all high-profile business celebrities from well-known companies. According to *Job Hunting* programme's internal audience research, the peaks in viewing ratings all appeared at points when the HR interviewers spoke or quarrelled.

Although some *zongyi* programmes are advertised as reality shows with the participation of 'ordinary' people, some participants turn out to be not so 'ordinary'. Some are professional actors, dancers, singers, but are simply not well-known performers. It is common to see unknown actors bringing their agents and personal assistants to the studio, looking at the show as an opportunity to gain exposure and publicity. During the studio rehearsal of an entertainment show, one intern told me they were convinced that some studio participants with interesting stories were professional actors who had already been in different reality shows. They may not have lied about their stories but had modified some of the details to cater for specific shows. It is also common to see unknown professional dancers and singers performing at professional levels in talent shows. As they do not wish to be called out for cheating, they are often vague about their professional backgrounds as performers.

When casting professional actors, television *biandao* have expressed divided opinions on their casting standards. Some argue it is easier to train experienced candidates; others believe it was more difficult to shape experienced candidates. A *biandao* from *Win the Bill* said she often had to spend time figuring out whether candidates were lying to her or not. She found that experienced participants were sometimes less enthusiastic about being on stage and less likely to cooperate with the production crews, as they viewed themselves as celebrities. Junior *biandao* TB (interviewee 16), who had just started coaching participants, revealed how difficult it was to deal with experienced participants.

TB: During my second month within this production team, I was assigned to coach three studio participants and write studio scripts for them. Two of them were difficult.

SZ: How difficult?

TB: The first participant told me an impressive story. Initially, I only wanted to understand their stories from another perspective, so I rang up their family members and they denied the existence of the story. I was embarrassed and confronted the participant.

SZ: What did he say?

TB: He admitted that he had lied because he wanted to make the story sound more interesting.

SZ: How about the other participant?

TB: She was just a difficult person. She kept on bargaining with me about the total time she could sing on the filming day and refused to edit her demo shorter. I had to consult my supervising director. My supervisor immediately told her to either leave or obey the rules. She started to cooperate with me afterwards.

TB added that experienced participants could be 'too confident' at times, and it was important not to bend any rules for them. She especially warned other *biandao* not to act like the participants' assistants. Experienced participants also sometimes included children with pushy parents. Some parents refused pre-paid train tickets reimbursed by the production team, and instead bought first-class flights for the family, ensuring their children's best performance in the Beijing studio. One seven-year-old dancer could not help crying when she was asked whether it was painful to practice doing a split movement. The host then asked the girl whether she liked dancing. The girl held back her tears and said, 'yes, I like it.' It was a suspicious answer as the girl's parents were watching her from backstage. As eager parents were watching alongside their children, the child participants were under

tremendous pressure to perform well. One girl and her parents were invited to be on a show displaying Indian dance. The girl's mother was Chinese, and her father was Indian. During the rehearsal, the *biandao* asked me to help with interpretation in English as her father could not speak Chinese. The theme of the upcoming episode was about family disputes around education. It turned out that the girl's mother was extremely eager to train her daughter as a dancer while her father was firmly against it. The family spent around \$4,000 per month to send the girl to the best dancing school near where they lived. The girl secretly told me that she was not interested in dancing, but her mother insisted. The *biandao*, who pitched this topic, was aware of the girl's real intention. However, he could not do anything but to present the issue in the programme. Later, the *biandao* said he had been looking for controversial topics, and 'problematic families' became his casting priority. He said: 'I only look for candidates with special life stories, but I know that other *biandao* cast candidates with performing arts backgrounds.'

Section Four: Coaching the participants

When television *biandao* finish writing the first draft of their scripts after interacting with the studio participants, their next priority is to coach the participants and modify the scripts. This is the most important work during the pre-production process. If the coaching goes well, the following studio production will be much easier and even full of fun, depending on the themes of the shows. However, if the studio participants know little about how to perform on the stage, the production process can become disastrous, and the relevant *biandao* may face difficult and sometimes upsetting consequences. Coaching is tricky because there are no universal rules to define success. Each participant is different. If the casting is not right from the start, it will automatically be more difficult for the *biandao* to train participants, simply because they are not the ideal candidates.

The key to coaching is to build rapport with the participants. In this sense, the coaching experience is similar to a bespoke talking therapy. An experienced *biandao* will start with a small talk via WeChat and then meet participants in person to gain more trust. The *biandao* will firstly introduce the show in detail, especially the parts that need the participants' involvement. Secondly, the *biandao* will answer questions from participants about the television scripts. Finally, they will both work on helping participants to memorise their lines

on stage. This is a work-in-progress as learning the lines is not just a matter of recitation. During this step, the *biandao* and the participants will revisit old memories, which involves complicated and often intense emotions, such as sadness, happiness and anger. The *biandao* needs to calm participants when necessary, much like a therapist. Only when the participants are completely honest with the *biandao* can they tailor the television scripts further to make them more natural and touching. Coaching is not an easy task as most participants have only watched the show from an audience's perspective. Generally, they are not aware of the behind-the-scene efforts until they are involved in the pre-production process. Initially, most of them only expect to repeat what they have seen on TV from other participants. They would never expect to spend a lot of time with *biandao* or be very honest with them, given that they are strangers. A CCTV *biandao*, YD (interviewee 5), expressed her views on the coaching process and commented particularly on her work relationships with the participants:

YD: I've worked for five years in the industry. I can read people's minds easily via small talks. Nothing can escape from my eyes, from little emotions to whether or not someone is telling the truth. This ability is very important because I must be able to understand the participants thoroughly in order to discover what they don't even know about themselves.

SZ: Is this necessary?

YD: This is the key to a successful reality show. You must present something real. What is 'real'? It's participants' trivial emotions they don't even notice. When they repeat all the lines and memories multiple times, they will form a specific emotion about the subject matter. It's like a conditioned response. They will react the same automatically on stage. If I train them well enough, they will even perform much better during formal filming than during rehearsals.

SZ: How does it feel being able to read someone's mind?

YD: I feel tired. Sometimes my participants may tell me something they would never tell their partners, families and friends. They have only talked to me about certain things. On one hand, I'm happy that they can open up, but on the other hand, I feel I must console them because I'm the only other person in this world who knows what happened. It's stressful.

Mike (interviewee 28), a senior executive at a provincial television station, expressed a similar view to YD. He used to be a *biandao* for several dating shows and has had many private conversations with the participants he coached.

Mike: It's all about the human psyche. The secret to this job is having the ability to make the participants tell the truth. It's the ability to make them trust you completely. It's to become a psychologist eventually.

SZ: What happens when participants trust you completely?

Mike: They will cooperate. They will do what I say. They will immerse themselves into the subject matter and practice hard for the final performance. More importantly, I get to understand who this person is, what the story is about, and how I can better modify the television scripts. We want accuracy and realness.

Both YD and Mike have formed close relationships with their participants. Therefore, they both have written touching television scripts that accurately represent the participants. They have reached their so-called 'real' stage effect. On the other hand, the way they described the *biandao*-participant relationship implies that they were in control, or at least they preferred to be in control. In contrast to YD and Mike, some *biandao* rely on their participants to do most of the work. Accordingly, their relationships were not as intense as those of YD. ZF (interviewee 27) said she gave more space to the participants to tell their stories and prepare talent show demos based on participants' preferences. Instead of writing up 'perfect' television scripts, she gave participants more autonomy and allowed them to perform freely on stage. Most of the time, she listened to the participants and modified the scripts whenever she spoke with participants. She only rehearsed intensely with participants once they travelled to Beijing from other provinces.

Regardless of different coaching styles, one thing is certain – a *biandao* must be able to build rapport with studio participants to bring out the best of them on stage. In order to build rapport, *biandao* not only need to communicate with them as much as possible, but also need to chat with them in various locations, and via several different social media platforms. SH (interviewee 29), a senior *biandao* of *Job Hunting*, shared his experience of coaching ordinary participants.

SH: Everyone is busy, and we can't always meet face to face. However, I try to speak with my participants via WeChat all the time, just like friends. I deliberately do that because people can be different when they type via a mobile screen. When you are in the interview room, you have

an initial impression of them. However, when you speak via WeChat, you seem to be chatting with different people. I get to see their different sides. This helps me know them better.

SZ: What if they disguise their true selves online?

SH: We all do, don't we? It's the messages they deliver that matter. If they post pretty photos of themselves, they most likely desire attention. This may mean that they are insecure.

Apart from constant catchups via social media, SH also rang participants frequently when they could not meet up in person. He also made full use of the different locations where he coached the participants. During a studio rehearsal in 2018, instead of going to the office, SH asked the participants to go to his hotel room for rehearsals, with other *biandao* and interns watching from the side. Everybody sat in the hotel room, listening to their conversations whilst eating snacks. The participants gradually got tired and laid down on the second bed. Everyone became relaxed, and the participants felt less nervous before the filming day. Other *biandao* invited participants to different restaurants or cafés to talk over the television scripts. In a suitable location, for example, over the dinner table, people often become more relaxed and are willing to talk more openly. In these cases, the *biandao* usually heard what they wanted, and the participants got a free meal. When a suitable environment for conversations is created, *biandao* and participants find it easier to go through the coaching process. However, if a *biandao* does not make enough effort to communicate with participants, the resulting scripts can become superficial. Participants may also be nervous on the filming day, which leads to less-than-ideal results. When this happens, *biandao* will likely be reprimanded by their managers for not doing good jobs.

Last but not least, a *biandao* must satisfy management to get final approval to film participants during the studio rehearsal. Even if *biandao* and participants have invested a great deal of effort during the coaching period, their planned performance may still be cancelled if the management do not agree like their studio rehearsals. This happened multiple times during the studio rehearsal of *Waiting for Me*. As there were not enough time slots for all the *biandao* and the participants, the producer needed to make the final decisions on whether all participants would be included in the filming. The *biandao* needed to win the producer's approval the day before the scheduled filming, otherwise, the entire pitch would be delayed for another two months, or even cancelled for good.

As Ellis (2003) has summarised, pre-production is expressed in the format of budgeting and scheduling via planning and anticipation. Undoubtedly, planning would require sufficient time and budgets invested in the pre-production stage. However, during the fieldwork, the planning of some production teams was rushed primarily due to unorganised leadership and shrinking budgets. For example, in CCTV, the Finance Department had the power to cut down *zongyi* programmes' production budgets, claiming that the teams did not need as much money, even though they had little knowledge about television production. Some CCTV *biandao* had doubted the whereabouts of production budgets, but nobody questioned where this extra money was diverted to.

Surprisingly, scriptwriting and participant coaching were not given specific standards or guidelines as two essential elements of *zongyi* programmes. Accordingly, television *biandao* had to work with their subjective experience and went through the producers' equally subjective assessments. These subjective standards made challenging relationships between television *biandao* and studio participants, who performed best with mutual trust. It seems that the only way to become a good *biandao* is to learn from practice. However, without clear professional guidance, the definition of a good *biandao* remains highly ambiguous. More discussions on production ethics and ethical concerns during television production will be covered in Chapter 8.

In summary, this chapter used fieldwork examples to outline the key stages during the pre-production process – holding various meetings, writing television scripts, filling out essential paperwork, signing disclaimers and contracts, and casting and coaching studio participants. Section One indicates that television practitioners hold divided opinions on how many resources should be invested in programme development. The divided opinions have resulted in the efforts made during the planning and anticipation of different *zongyi* programmes. Section Two specifies that a good television script is the foundation of a good show and a fair indicator of the amount of effort made by *biandao* and studio participants. Section Three and Four have described how *zongyi* programmes cast and coach potential studio participants. Unspecific casting criteria are partially caused by a programme's varied sub-themes, but more because neither the producer nor the *biandao* could make one-size-

fits-all casting standards for the highly subjective and creative coaching process. Even if the coaching and everything else goes well, they cannot guarantee satisfactory viewing ratings. The coaching process involves a lot of emotional labour from both the *biandao* and the studio participants. From the *biandao's* perspective, coaching can take as much time as possible depending on how the participants can offer much trust and effort. From participants' perspective, they can be reluctant to be completely honest with *biandao* and invest a lot of time and emotional labour in the coaching process. In the end, the coaching process becomes teamwork. To win the game, both the *biandao* and the participant need to make efforts.

Chapter 7 Production and post-production: teamwork and improvisation

As Deuze (2007:196) describes, production is the actual making of the film. This is where the bulk of the workforce is active, which in the case of motion pictures can mean that the project involves hundreds of people. Post-production activities take place in editing rooms and recording studios, where the product is shaped into its final form. Although each production team is different, most production teams certainly try to schedule everything as clearly as possible, even to the extent of overplanning. Even a seemingly simple story arc can turn into a time-consuming filming order, mostly when team members do not stick to cooperative teamwork. Poor schedules often lead to improvisation. Television teams need to deal with many uncertainties during the scheduling and filming, which also heavily affect the post-production process. During this fieldwork, many production teams preferred not to arrange their editing in advance during pre-production. Instead, they believed editing should depend on the results of studio production. This belief comes mainly from the fact that competitive game shows often end with surprising results during filming, which often contradicts the initial predictions. Hence, television *biandao* usually wait until the very end of studio shooting before reorganising the overall editing logic. For example, editors of *Job Hunting* had to edit several participants into the same episode based on whether or not they passed their job interviews. This chapter continues to introduce the television production processes of *zongyi* programmes during the fieldwork after Chapter 6. This chapter explains how media censorship, internal competition, and production improvisation have caused precarity with concrete examples.

Section One: Getting in the mood for production

Working in the studio is often more stressful than in the office due to pressurised shooting schedules, complex work relationships and a sudden change of work environment. As it is more stressful to work in the studio than in the office, television practitioners must adjust to the 'studio-production mentality' as quickly as possible. Preparation usually lasts a few days, depending on the upcoming filming schedules. As television practitioners usually spend most of their time working in the office, it is often easier for them to switch back to 'office mode' after filming in studios.

For many production teams, a common strategy to cope with the shift is to take breaks before the studio filming periods. Practitioners are used to working intensely for a few days before the breaks and are often more motivated to work when they confirm their holidays after finishing the filming. To adjust to the right mentality, they often finish the following tasks before filming begins: 1. Filming plans must be approved by producers. 2. Studio participants are confirmed to show up on time. 3. Scripts are finished or are at least in the final draft; 4. There is enough budget to deal with unexpected events. 5. All materials, such as short videos to be used in the studios, are prepared. 6. Third-party colleagues, such as prop managers, sound technicians, and technical directors, are prepared. All these tasks are critical for the upcoming filming, but the priority is to ensure that studio participants will show up and are looked after. This is because studio participants may cancel their participation at the last minute for various reasons, such as family emergencies. Television *biandao* must consider the possibility in advance to avoid a 'no-show' situation. After all, as studio participants are not paid to participate in the show, they are not legally obliged to show up. This is why most television programmes reimburse participants' travel expenses and accommodation, so they are more likely to reschedule the filming than to cancel for good. Television *biandao* will also invite backup participants or broadcast backup episodes shot and edited beforehand in case of a 'no-show' situation.

Apart from looking after the studio participants, television *biandao* know that they should also look after their own mental and physical health. Some take their time to pack their suitcases, ensuring they have packed everything they need during the filming days. Others will need to make family arrangements, e.g., childcare, for their time absent from home. Television *biandao* with long-term health conditions will also bring along their medications in case of emergencies. JA and YD explained their opinions on self-care:

SZ: How do you look after yourself during studio production?

YD: As a team leader, I have many responsibilities, so I can barely prioritise my own needs. If I do my job well, I will feel relaxed and calm. Does that count as looking after myself?

SZ: I suppose so. What else will make you feel good?

YD: There are certain things I do to make myself happier. I always take two large suitcases to the hotel. I need to pack my all-inclusive beauty products such as make-up, dresses, stylish sandals, fragrant shampoo, hair conditioner, hand cream, facial masks and vitamin

supplements. When I work from the hotel, I use facial masks and apply a generous amount of scented body lotion.

JA: And for me, apart from what YD mentioned, I always carry a cuddle pillow and my toy teddy bear. They are my 'secret weapons' for a good night's sleep.

SZ: So, being a pretty lady makes you feel good?

YD: Yes. No matter how busy I am, I must put on make-up first thing in the morning. Make-up is a real mood booster.

JA: I can't agree more. I try to convince myself that the studio production is like a holiday when I can live in a remote hotel and dine in a crowded restaurant. I can change into three outfits per day with different kitten-heel shoes.

SZ: Why kitten heels?

JA: Sometimes, I need to run from one studio to another. It won't be convenient if I wear high heels.

JA and YD are both single *biandao* who are experienced with frequent travelling. They do not have any other concerns except for work. On the other hand, it can be a challenge to balance family and work for those who have children. JNZ (interviewee 20), a senior *biandao* at an independent production company, struggled with her job.

JNZ: My son is two years old, and he cries when I'm not home for a few days. I'm afraid there's nothing else I can do because I'm the main breadwinner in the family. What makes me sad is that my mother-in-law never supports me. She keeps telling others that I disappear once in a while and leave my family behind. She always tells others that it is my husband who's been looking after my son. I want to argue with her sometimes, but I feel guilty about being away from my son. This society is harsh on women.

SZ: How do you deal with these feelings?

JNZ: Sometimes, I think of giving up this job, but then I think that I've come this far. I shouldn't give up. I always say nice things to my mother-in-law when she's angry, so at least I don't escalate the tension. Also, during work, I make video calls with my son whenever I can. Aside from the family issues, I'm tough. I love my job, so I don't need time to adjust to office time, studio time and editing time. You know, they are all parts of my job.

When television practitioners are mentally ready and packed for their production 'holiday', they travel to a designated hotel near the television studios. Depending on the location of

the studios, production teams have different ways to help their staff commute. Most independent production companies and television stations in Beijing usually rent studios from their third-party business partners. Therefore, many production teams arrange group travel to the studios, which the artist coordinator usually organises. All crew members and most studio participants board the same coach from a convenient location. When practitioners arrive at the television studio, they first check into the designated hotel and then meet up to start work. Although the hotels are also long-term business partners with the production teams, things may occasionally go wrong. In May 2018, the hotel that accommodated the *Job Hunting* production team was suddenly suspended by the police due to a breach of health and safety rules. The production assistant later recalled that everyone who had checked in had to evacuate immediately. Since it happened suddenly, the production crew could not find another hotel on such short notice. The chief director spent half the day looking for local hotels that could accommodate 30 people at once, whereas the rest of the team continued working at the studio, locking their luggage in a small office. At around 11:30 pm, when they finished the rehearsal, the production team and studio participants walked together for 30 minutes to a nearby three-star hotel and finally checked in. They had to walk because no taxis operated during the night, as it was a very remote area. The *biandao* helped the participants check in first and then checked in after them. One *biandao* drove some of her colleagues to the studio in her car the following morning while the rest took taxis. Compared to most other programmes, which had hassle-free check-in procedures, what happened to *Job Hunting* was out of the ordinary and rare. However, even seemingly trivial logistics like hotel check-ins can cause the team a lot of stress and hassle if they do go wrong.

As production teams check in at least one day before working in the studio, they usually have free time to familiarise themselves with the local environment and the studio layout. Interns and junior *biandao* are often excited to be in a new environment and will explore the surroundings in small groups. In contrast, senior *biandao* are used to the environment, and start working straight away. The following section will demonstrate how television practitioners work during studio production.

Section Two: Studio rehearsal

When all employees are settled in and ready for studio production, they need to ensure the upcoming filming will go as planned. Production teams will usually rehearse at least one day before the official filming begins to achieve this goal. These rehearsals can give them more time to re-evaluate the original filming plans and help studio participants familiarise themselves with the studio. Depending on the programme's format, some teams may start formal recording during the rehearsal period, although the filming may not take place in the main television studio. For example, *Waiting for Me* requires a special interview section called the pre-interview (*qiáncǎi*, 前采), that is scheduled to take place in a smaller studio for official interviews between the host and participants. *Biandao* will need to finish the pre-interview during the rehearsal period while helping studio participants familiarise themselves with the formal running order. Similar to *Waiting for Me*, the format of *If You Are the One* also contains several sections that play short videos. These videos can be shot in different locations, and they all need to be ready before the studio filming begins. Based on different television formats, some rehearsals can be more complicated than others.

The chart below demonstrates the generic production procedure of *Waiting for Me* and shows the importance and complication of its studio rehearsal period:

Steps	Process	Location
Step 1	Different <i>biandao</i> , with their teams, search missing people information online and find heart-touching stories.	CCTV new building
Step 2	The team leader (usually a senior <i>biandao</i>) assigns interns to fill out the pitch application forms and inform the producer in the online group chat, getting the initial permission to carry out story development. This also prevents others from unknowingly pitching the same topic. As a rule, if the same topic is chosen by different teams, whichever team mentions the producer first in the group chat will be granted the topic.	CCTV new building
Step 3	If the story is permitted, the <i>biandao</i> team contacts the police and other volunteers to help find the missing persons.	CCTV new building
Step 4	When the missing persons are found (or not), different <i>biandao</i> teams contact the potential studio participants and meet up with them for more details. The team will not inform the participants of any results as they must keep the secret until the end of filming.	CCTV new building

Step 5	The entire production team and the studio participants will check in the hotel within the studio site. Each <i>biandao</i> team will coach the participants for the pre-interview. The producer discusses the television scripts with <i>biandao</i> during this stage. During the pre-interview, the host, the producer, and the <i>biandao</i> team will watch the interviews and discuss how to refine the stories.	Xingguang Media Park studio
Step 6	Filming starts in the main studio. If participants finally meet the missing people they have been looking for, they will reunite and then be taken to another studio for a follow-up interview.	Xingguang Media Park studio
Step 7	The <i>biandao</i> works alongside the post-production editors to produce the first edition of the show.	CCTV new building
Step 8	After the show is edited, it is checked by the producers first and then the CCTV-1's chief executive. Once the management is happy with the editing, the programme will be scheduled for broadcast.	CCTV new building
Step 9	The <i>biandao</i> teams share behind-the-scenes stories with listeners on live radio. Meanwhile, interns publicise the programme on social media platforms.	CCTV new building

For *Waiting for Me*, to record around 20 stories within a four-day filming period, multiple production teams planned to spend over a half-day filming their stories. As the total time for filming is limited, the producer may need to cancel some stories during the studio rehearsal period. Hence, each senior *biandao* and their team must pitch the best story to the producer to get the final approval. Even if the pitch was initially approved, it might still be cancelled before the scheduled filming day. This means participants may come to the studio in vain, and the *biandao* responsible for the story will not receive any payment for the pitch even though they have spent a significant amount of time developing it up until this point. Final approval lies in step 5 in the chart, i.e., the hotel meetings at the filming site. The hotel meetings of *Waiting for Me* took place in a comfortable suite, where the producer sat on the sofa, giving out copious amounts of barbecue food from the table to different teams while listening to all the refined stories. At around 2 am, when the meeting ended, some teams continued to hold internal meetings elsewhere. In contrast to the informal barbecue atmosphere, these meetings were incredibly important to the *biandao*, as the producer could change his mind at the last minute and cancel some pre-arranged filming schedules. Due to the capriciousness of the producer, the *Waiting for Me* production team had to hold late-night meetings one day before the studio filming. This had almost become a ritual for the programme team. The *biandao* expressed conflicting love/hate feelings about these meetings. On one hand, they looked forward to discussing their ideas with the producer. On the other, they had to stay awake until midnight nearly every day in the studio hotel, waiting

for the producer's final confirmation of the meeting time via the production team's WeChat group. Sometimes, the producer rescheduled the meeting on short notice, as each day's production progress was unpredictable. *Biandao* of *Waiting for Me* had to learn to cope with surprises. A senior *biandao* commented on the timing and the unaccountable change in the producer's mood. She said: 'we don't have enough time slots to fit all the stories. The producer has to pick the best stories to ensure the quality of our show.' Although she did not explain why the producer changed his mind frequently, she implied that the producer did not wholly trust the *biandao* to meet his expectations. This was her way to defend the producer by implying there was nothing wrong with his leadership and judgement, but rather, there was something wrong with other *biandao*'s work abilities.

Unlike the internal competition of *Waiting for Me* that could lead to pre-approved filming plans being cancelled, other *zongyi* programmes were more reluctant to make last-minute changes. They usually ran rehearsals to find potential problems as early as possible. During the studio rehearsals for *Job Hunting*, every *biandao* was ready in their position and willing to help others immediately, even though their co-worker technicians from third-party companies were much less enthusiastic. *Job Hunting*'s rehearsals aimed at helping the candidates familiarise themselves with the interview procedures without giving each interviewee too much time to recite their lines. On the first evening of studio rehearsal, a senior *biandao* patiently demonstrated the filming procedures in detail to the candidates and answered all their questions. She explained all possible outcomes of the job interview by playing the role of a candidate. All candidates had opportunities to rehearse and feel the tension when the chief director pretended to be an interviewer. In comparison to *Job Hunting*, *Win the Bill*'s rehearsal was more prolonged. It required all studio participants to know the filming order, the 'mission challenge' and their lines. As *Win the Bill* was usually given four days to film, it was not uncommon for the crew to rehearse until after 2 am. The time limit put a lot of pressure on all personnel involved, especially on the *biandao*, who were expected to start working the next day at 10 am. Despite the suffering of staying up all night, *biandao* of *Win the Bill* carried on with their work as planned in most cases.

Although production teams rehearse before their studio filming, nobody can guarantee that it will run as predicted. The unpredictable nature of television production pushes *biandao* to

improvise during the studio production. The improvisation will be analysed in the next section.

Section Three: When filming starts

Finally, after arduous rehearsals and regular filming in other locations, the main event begins. This section analyses the behind-the-scenes stories of *zongyi* productions. It describes how *zongyi biandao* stick to initial filming plans, how they fulfilled their assigned roles during the studio production, and how they dealt with obstacles during the studio production.

Teamwork, procrastination and improvisation

Senior *biandao* agree that the more time a production team has spent on rehearsal, the easier it gets during the official studio filming. In their view, studio production is the final push of a production team's work performance. Studio production tests how well a team has prepared and is also the beginning of the post-production process. As mentioned, during this fieldwork, some production teams admitted that not enough time and effort was invested in the programmes' development for whatever reasons. As a result, some television practitioners panicked before production deadlines, and some became even more unorganised. These often led to improvisation during studio production, mainly to compensate for neglected details or problems that occurred during pre-production planning.

Even those who are fully prepared cannot expect to see an easy production process. Therefore, improvisation or reacting quickly to unexpected situations is an essential skill. To some degree, improvisation gives *biandao* opportunities to improve their professional skills. For instance, a team leader on *Waiting for Me* could not decide on an appropriate prop for her desired stage design, despite starting the selection process early. To produce a specific episode, she spent two days selecting a good-looking box that could hold photos. The box and the photos were designed to be brought onto the stage together. She wanted the audience to believe that the studio participant carefully kept both the box and the photos for years. After two days of careful selection, she ordered a white box but found it was too small when it arrived. Realising she was running out of time, she assigned another *biandao* to carry the rest of the photos onto the stage during the formal filming. She came up with this

solution only five minutes before the filming started. The studio audience applauded loudly. After the filming, she admitted she was scared that the audience would not believe they were the participant's treasured items. Luckily, nobody could tell this was a last-minute idea. As the production went exceptionally well, she was glad her improvisation worked.

On the other hand, improvisation can be the by-product of poor planning and failure to handle unexpected events, especially for those who have problems with work performance and attitudes. In May 2018, on *Win the Bill*, a lack of teamwork and an unrealistic filming plan caused a delayed and difficult studio production. Each *biandao* was responsible for one episode during the four-day studio production, each with a different theme. As the studio was only rented for four days, all the work – studio rehearsal, filming and final coaching of participants – was condensed into a short amount of time. To finish the task, all *biandao* worked from 10 am on the first day and finished at 4 am the next day, almost every day. Xingguang Media Park was reluctant to rent out a studio to one production team for too long since the studio was in high demand. Moreover, the producer said it would cost 'too much' if she extended the rent for another day. Each day's budget, including studio rent, cost ¥450,000 (around £50,000 in 2018). Subsequently, the production team had to work to an unrealistic schedule across those four days.

As mentioned in the Introduction, *Win the Bill* contains three parts: a 60-second talent display, mini-interviews with the hosts, and a mission challenge. These three parts were usually filmed separately, and the team experienced unpredictable events during studio production, such as the sudden disappearance of some candidates, a lack of production equipment, and disagreements on directing styles. Below is a comparison of the ideal, planned schedule and the actual filming schedule for one of the days of studio production in May 2018 (table 1):

Planned filming order	Content	Props	Lighting	Microphone	Actual Filming order	Reason for change
0	[Opening] <i>Mingrige</i> Song + Dance	NA	NA	NA	4	The host took too long to change outfits
Round One – Chinese Opera						
1-1	[Content] Beijing Opera <i>Lihuasong</i>	7 Fake trees; 4 Silk; Dry Ice	Cold; On and Off a few times	3 headsets	2	The host needed to change outfit
1-2	[Interaction] Quiz Competition	Responder	NA	2 headsets	5	Same candidates
1-3	[Content] Beijing Opera <i>Mulan</i>	NA	Yellow; Red	1 headset	6	NA
1-4	[Interaction] Quiz Competition 2	Responder	NA	2 headsets	7	Same candidates
Round Two – Chinese Literature						
2-1	[Content] Comedy skit: Dream of the Red Chamber	All necessary props	NA	4 headsets	1	Hosts needed more time for makeup
2-2	[Interaction] Quiz Competition 3	NA	NA	2 headsets	8	NA
Round Three – Chinese Kungfu						
3-1	[Content] Chinese Kungfu: Young People	NA	NA	NA	3	Not enough headsets supplied by audio company
3-2	[Interaction] Quiz Competition 4	Responder	NA	2 headsets	9	NA
3-3	[Content] Recitation of Chinese Poem <i>Qiang jin jiu</i>	NA	Plain	NA	15	Malfunction of the big screen
Round Four – Chinese Singing						
4-1	[Content] Singing of <i>Wish You Long Live</i>	Tree; Dry Ice	NA	2 headsets	10	NA
4-2	[Interaction] Quiz Competition 5	Responder	NA	NA	11	NA
Round 5 – Chinese Calligraphy						

5-1	Live Calligraphy: Guess the Writer	Calligraphy props		handheld microphone for each person	12	NA
5-2	Calligraphy Interaction: Live Show	Same		handheld microphone for each person	13	NA
5-3	[Interaction] Calligraphy quiz show	Same		handheld microphone for each person	14	NA

The chart demonstrated a disruption of the planned filming order on the day. There were various reasons behind it: lack of production equipment, poor timing, and unexpected events. These incidents caused the *biandao* to improvise the filming order. On the filming days, the sudden disappearance of staff happened from time to time. Some *biandao* left the production site without telling anyone their whereabouts. It was later found out that they went for a cigarette break. This should have been prevented as jobs were divided before the filming. Each *biandao* was responsible for one aspect of the production: lighting, props, customs, audio equipment, the big screen, external communication, and camera positions.

As outlined in the Introduction, there are no full-time stage managers in many production teams, and *Win the Bill* was no exception. Each *biandao* was, in turn, tasked with the job of stage manager. The *biandao* responsible for the day's filming came up with a new schedule in response to the incidents. However, his other colleagues did not fully support him as they did not stick to the initial plan. During the filming, no other *biandao* strictly followed the original plan except the *biandao*, who worked with the technical director in a separate room. The interns were pressured to stick to the plan – they needed to lead the studio participants to the backstage area and to ensure they were standing by, as participants may be absent for various reasons. Later, some interns explained they were not given the participants' contact details, so they had to ask the participants directly. This caused inconvenience on both sides. In the UK, call sheets containing all contact details are usually given to everybody in the team. However, the equivalent of the call sheet does not exist in China due to competition and confidentiality. The norm is that each *biandao* is only responsible for a few candidates, so a full list of contact details will not be shared openly with the rest of the team. In the case of *Win the Bill*, there was not a full list of contact details. On the filming day, the

biandao who did not need to film any episodes only helped the others when the producer asked them to. In the end, filming progressed slowly and finished at 3 am. When filming was finished, some *biandao* still had to carry out rehearsals for the next day. Most *biandao* went to bed at 5 am and came back to the studio at 11 am. As most of them did not sleep enough, their performance was affected on the second day – the team kept procrastinating and was slow with teamwork, just like the day before. No one broke this vicious cycle until the last filming day. The *Win the Bill* teamwork was unorganised because of the unclear division of job roles. The missing role of a full-time stage manager also restricted the overall performance of the *biandao*, who could barely focus on one job, let alone multitask. When the team returned to the office, they were reprimanded by the producer in the performance review meeting. One *biandao* was deprived of their annual bonus, and others did not receive their full month's salary because they exceeded the filming time limit.

Nonetheless, even if a production team plans carefully, accidents can still happen. In April 2018, during the filming of *Job Hunting*, one candidate had a family emergency one day before the filming and had to cancel his participation. Another participant was asked to work by his manager, so the team rescheduled his participation to the following month. Meanwhile, the production team contacted the backup candidates, who were told to stand by for that month's filming.

Despite the unclear division of work and the unexpected events, all production teams observed within this fieldwork survived the studio production period, although it was almost impossible to stick to the initial production schedules. Some teams compromised their production quality without realising it. From television practitioners' perspective, improvisation is a crucial skill for studio production, which requires years of experience and the ability to work under pressure. WN (interviewee 9) commented:

WN: I've worked with many programmes, and I'm confident enough to say my current team is the most efficient I've ever seen. I thank my boss very much. She is assertive and supportive. She does not like staying up and always encourages us to be more efficient with work, rather than staying up, pretending to be hardworking. A while ago, when we worked on a project with Zhejiang Satellite TV, the prop manager from another company liked us because we were the

only team he had ever met that could finish all work before 9 pm. He told us that other teams would always finish after midnight. Procrastination is quite common in this industry.

SZ: From your perspective, what are the reasons behind procrastination?

WN: Leadership. If the leaders, often the director or producer, are very clear about what they do, they won't hesitate to tell others what to do. Often, if a production team is organised, you won't see procrastination and poor time management.

SZ: How about emergencies?

WN: There may be things we can't foresee, but so long as we stick together and maintain good habits, it shouldn't be a problem. And if it's not our fault, then we just need to chill.

To support WN's comments on procrastination and leadership, WN's boss, JY (interviewee 8), expressed her views:

SZ: In your opinion, what are the reasons behind procrastination during filming?

JY: Procrastination is common in the industry. Throughout my entire career, I've seen a lot of procrastination – you agreed to start recording at 10 am, but because someone was late, you waited till midday, and people had to go for lunch. After lunch, people came back at 2 pm. Someone started adjusting the equipment, and it was 3 pm. You then realised the celebrities were still putting on makeup, and the artist coordinators had to ask the studio audience to wait one more hour. Ok, finally it was 4 pm. You then started recording till 7 pm. People still need to have dinner! Guess what? You gave them another hour to eat but still needed to allow the celebrities to put on more makeup. How could you finish recording before midnight? You'd expect to finish at 2 or 3 am and continue this routine for the next day as technicians wouldn't be able to wake up early after staying up all night.

As various factors (especially management) can affect an ongoing production, some practitioners have learnt to view improvisation as a positive challenge during their careers.

SAW: You don't need to worry too much about not following the plan. I mean, we can make plans, so can we change them.

SZ: Under what circumstances?

SAW: Sometimes, we improvise because the rehearsal or the filming goes too well. Once our producer was impressed with a beautiful stage background, he asked us to film a lot more of his ideas right after the first filming. He said he was truly inspired, so we tried his ideas. It turned

out even better. I'd say that although we finished quite late on that day, we accomplished more than we had planned, and everyone was excited about the improvisation. So, I'd say improvisation isn't always a bad thing.

It seems that a successful production team must strike a balance between following plans and improvisation. So long as they are confident with their work, they do not necessarily view procrastination negatively. However, those who did not plan well enough soon realise the importance of careful planning.

Working with colleagues from third-party companies

As mentioned in Section 1 of Chapter 4, as well as directly hiring contractors, many production teams work with third-party companies that provide contractors. Working with people from different companies has allowed television practitioners to meet talents with different skills and formed a flexible working environment. However, it requires television practitioners to adapt to new colleagues and diverse working practices quickly. It can be a challenge to those who wish to build rapport, as they do not have much time to establish long-term work relationships. Additionally, television practitioners find it difficult to build their own teams due to high staff turnover in the industry. Without enough trust and understanding, it remains difficult for people to work well together, especially for the first time. The status quo pushes them not to develop strong relationships with temporary colleagues, and it soon becomes forgivable to forget colleagues' names after a project is over. When practitioners are gathered for another project, they will see many new faces. To avoid embarrassment, they have borrowed a fancy word that addresses people with skills and experience – they now address each other by their job titles followed by the respectful suffix *lǎo shī* (老师), which literally means 'teacher' in Chinese. For instance, if *biandao* do not know the name of a new cameraperson, they will call them '*camera laoshi*'. The camera *laoshi* will show politeness in return and call the *biandao* '*daoyan laoshi*'²⁸ (director teacher). When they know each other's names, they address each other by names but add *laoshi* at the end as a title.

²⁸ *Dǎoyǎn* (导演) is a formal term for 'director', usually used in film production, and is a senior title. However, to show respect to others, television practitioners raise *biandao*'s (and sometimes others') titles by calling them *daoyan* instead of *biandao*. As explained, *biandao* is a combination of many different jobs and is at the foundational level at a production team, unlike the director, who is usually the head of all the *biandao* and is as important as the producer.

Although television practitioners are expected to get along with temporary colleagues from different companies, many problems have occurred. One such problem comes from unmatched professional skills and job attitudes. If the two parties are equally passionate and competent, the collaboration will be much easier than having an incompetent colleague. As the two parties come under different management, it is difficult to give advice or complain to the other. During one of the studio productions of *Win the Bill* in 2018, a senior *biandao* reminded her interns five times consecutively to confirm the number of props prepared by the prop designer. She told them to 'watch the prop designer carefully' and make sure three cups were ready to be delivered to the candidates on stage. The senior *biandao* had been fined money from her salary due to the carelessness of the prop designer. As a result, she did not trust the prop designer. She was fined because the producer only blamed those directly responsible for the filming, and more realistically, those who were directly under her management. The senior *biandao* explained that although their production team rented the equipment from the company that hired the prop designer, it was not the company's job to ensure proper equipment usage. The senior *biandao* commented: 'These third-party people will only do work when you push them hard. They barely take any initiative. They just don't care as much as we do. That's why it's difficult to work with them.'

Similarly, to *Win the Bill*, the production team on *Job Hunting* also encountered unenthusiastic third-party colleagues. In April 2018, during one of its studio productions, the chief *biandao* politely asked one of the technicians, who came from another company, to adjust the size of some photos. He was responsible for the studio screen. The technician immediately refused, saying that it was impossible to adjust the size in such a short time. The chief *biandao* knew he was lying but did not argue with him. He then asked an intern to adjust the photos instead. On the same day, some camera operators accidentally shook the cameras during the filming. Their carelessness resulted in the deletion of important images during editing. These camera operators came from a company in partnership with the production company that produced *Job Hunting*. The producer, CC (interviewee 30), was angry with them but could only politely ask them to be careful with the cameras when she saw them the next time in the studio. When asked whether she could make an official complaint to the manager of the third-party company, the producer admitted that even if

she did, the manager would not do anything about it because the company was a family business.

CC: You don't believe the manager will fire his relatives, do you?

SZ: Who chose to collaborate with this company?

CC: Put it this way. There are hidden interests behind finding third-party business partners. We got this studio cheap via our *guanxi*. Only the CEO knows what's going on.

SZ: So, there's nothing we can do to change the passive attitudes of these workers?

CC: I'm afraid we can't do anything about it. I don't have a say. After all, we have to rely on them for studio production.

In an interview with senior *biandao* YD from CCTV, she could not hide how much she disliked the technicians from CCTV-controlled production companies.

SZ: How would you describe your experience in working with third-party companies?

YD: Oh, my God! Even the thought of it makes me feel uneasy. I don't want to be rude, but most of them didn't even go to university, as far as I'm concerned. They got their jobs via relatives who work there.

SZ: How does someone's educational background affect their work attitude and performance?

YD: Good question. I must admit that some of the technicians are talented. The best lighting technicians I've met in Beijing only have a primary school education, but they have a great taste for lighting and have many apprentices. I agree that you may not need a degree to work in television. However, sometimes, people with higher degrees comprehend things better. I can't reason with people who aren't educated because sometimes they just don't get me. Also, I don't want to come across as rude, but if you failed schools and had to find a job as a low-paid contractor in some areas that aren't skilled, what does it say about you?

SZ: Are you suggesting they don't cooperate with you nicely?

YD: Not only that, but they also don't listen. They can't be bothered to be on time. They won't do anything more than what they are asked of. They just don't give a damn.

Although YD judged people by their educational status, her negative attitude towards technicians from CCTV-controlled companies derived from long-term unhappy work experiences with employees from other companies. She was certainly not the only interviewee who complained about third-company contractors. Although practitioners may

have different personal attitudes, one thing is certain: it is not easy to work with people who come under different management, let alone get along well with each other. Ultimately, this is an issue caused by management and perhaps could be fixed with better leadership.

Live supervision, or live censorship?

In Section 3 of Chapter 9, an example of *Job Hunting's* live censorship is used to analyse the micro-management between the television station that commissioned the show and the production company. It is a classic example of how the management supervised a programme's production from the beginning. Firstly, the television station gives general requirements issued by NRTA and speculate what should be avoided during the production. Secondly, the station sends its representatives to the studio to watch the filming process. The representatives will advise the producer later. Thirdly, the television station requests to watch the edited show and advises on the final modifications. Finally, when both sides agree on the final edited version, the television station will schedule the show for broadcast.

The censorship procedure of *Job Hunting* was more complicated than others as many parties were involved during the production. In situations where one team can make all the decisions, the producers usually censor the show while it is being filmed. Although they are present on the production site, producers rarely intervene with the filming even if they are not satisfied with certain areas. They will, however, intervene or pause the filming when they believe changes must be made immediately. For instance, on one filming day of *Win the Bill* in May 2018, both the producer and the *zhipian zhuren* were monitoring the production via the screen with the technical director. The beginning of the show was a dance performed by actresses dressed as army soldiers. The producer spotted their shiny earrings and immediately asked the *biandao* in charge to pause the filming. She told the actors to take their earrings off, saying: 'This is not a realistic reflection of the army soldiers. What soldier wears bling-bling earrings with their uniform?' The scene was then re-shot without the earrings. Another example is described in Section 3 of Chapter 11 when the former host of *Waiting for Me* threw the portable mic on the floor with anger. The producer instantly rushed downstairs from the main control room and negotiated with the host. Although producers may not intervene immediately, they note the issues and express their concerns afterwards during performance review meetings. Sometimes, these concerns turn into specific

disciplinary matters based on the *biandao*'s performances on the filming day. In late May 2018, after a procrastinated four-day studio filming, the producer of *Win the Bill* held a team meeting and severely criticised the entire team for procrastination and negligence. One song played in the show had been banned by NRTA a while before, but no one on the team was aware of it, and they carried on filming. Some girls under the age of ten were asked to dance in inappropriately adult outfits. The producer questioned the team: 'you made these kids dress like hookers. Do you expect me to play it on TV? Does this represent CCTV's overall taste?' In the end, the producer deleted all the content she was not satisfied with. She then blamed the relevant *biandao* for wasting the programme's money and time.

Although management keeps an eye on the ongoing studio production, they barely intervene on the spot unless something goes severely wrong. In these cases, the potential changes the production team need to make afterwards make them feel pressured. Although live supervision is still an essential component of studio production, no one wants to rely on it because theoretically, a production team should have planned well during the pre-production stage, so the producer should not be worried during the studio production.

The Inevitable technical problems

Even if everything has been carefully planned during pre-production, various unexpected events may still occur during the filming – technical errors, accidents, operational mistakes, and lack of props. Amongst all these unexpected events, technical problems are the most unpredictable and can be challenging to fix as they can happen at any stage of the production. Some can be fixed easily, while others can be detrimental to the programme. After all, machines can break down through no one's fault without warning. Due to the unpredictable nature of filming equipment, a production team hopes to spot problems before filming rather than during the production. Apart from having technicians checking the machines before filming, another effective solution is to rehearse several times to ensure the equipment works properly. Sometimes, production teams may also use one of the best rehearsals as a backup recording if things go wrong during the formal filming.

One example that best illustrates this unexpectedness was the first night's filming of *Waiting for Me* in July 2018. One of the show's selling points is the family reunion scene – when the

colossal ship-shaped audience seats are split in half, moving slowly towards each side, giving way to a long pavement leading to the closed door. The studio participant walks towards the door and waits until it opens. Once the door is open, everyone will see whether the long-lost person is found or not. To create the most suspenseful reveal, technicians test the audience seats, the music, and the lighting before the show starts.

In most cases, everything goes as expected. In July 2018, on the first studio filming day, official filming started at around 4 pm. The cameras had been on for five seconds, and the seats were in the process of moving towards each side when the big screen hanging from the ceiling suddenly moved and became tilted. It was later explained that the movement of the audience seats resulted in the instability of the hexahedron-screen connected to the seats. Production technicians shouted 'stop' and immediately pressed the 'stop' button at that critical moment. Everyone in the studio became anxious, and the audience were panicked. Technicians shouted at each other loudly, and the assistant producer ran towards the seats and asked the technicians to fix the seats immediately. One *zhipian* ran to a technician and started swearing at him, saying something along the lines of 'I told you to modify it yesterday, but you procrastinated.' Filming was instantly paused, and it was thirty minutes before everything was fixed. In total, filming was set back for forty minutes. As a result, the entire schedule for the day was delayed, and everyone only finished work at midnight. Later, I asked some of the *biandao* about the accident. They referred to it as a purely technical problem. The assistant producer explained that the big screen was not supposed to move, but the seats had caused it to move, resulting in the accident. He felt relieved that no one was hurt and reiterated that it was no one's fault. He said: 'Sometimes there can be unexpected technical problems and our priority is to fix them as soon as possible.' This accident was severe and resulted in a long pause in filming.

Production teams can reduce the impact of technical problems during the filming via team coordination. For example, it is common to have shaky cameras during studio filming. When cameras are shaken, the technical director can see the problem immediately and cut to another camera while reminding the cameraperson to fix the camera position simultaneously. On rare occasions, such a problem may not be spotted during production, meaning some images cannot be used for editing. Editors will then abandon the images and

replace them with other scenes, such as the audience's reactions. When this happens, the producer may intervene, and the people responsible may be disciplined, depending on the importance of the deleted images.

The most unlikely yet devastating technical problem during post-production is the damage or disappearance of the original footage. It can happen in many forms. For example, the SD card may be stolen or lost, the editing computers may break, or a fire breaks out. Although these are unlikely to happen, they have happened in the past. Since they are so unlikely, disciplinary actions depend on what led to the incidents. On the 9th of February 2009, the then newly built CCTV Television Centre in Beijing's Chaoyang District was partially burned down due to a dangerous firework display authorised by some CCTV's senior management. Around 70 people, including the management, were disciplined, and the leading person responsible was sentenced to 20 years in prison (BBC China, 2010). The damage cost 160 million yuan, which at the time was around £16 million.

No matter how serious the technical problems are, it is the attitude towards the incidents that determines the quality of the upcoming studio production. A harmonious team will react to the problems with calm and patience. An efficient team will solve the problems with speed and accuracy. An unorganised team, however, may use technical problems as an excuse to be more unorganised. A team with a blame culture will look for someone to blame instead of solving problems. Overall, it is the team's attitude and approach that makes the difference.

Section Four: Production outside the studio – Location shooting and archived videos

Location shooting is the shooting of a film or television production in a real-world setting rather than a sound stage or backlot. The location may be interior or exterior (Millerson and Owens, 2009). Although this research studies studio-based programmes, some programmes have combined studio production with location shooting, depending on the theme and format of specific episodes. Combining studio production and location shooting can improve the programmes' quality. Aside from location shooting, some programmes also incorporate archived footage during the production.

If You Are the One, *Please Help Me Lawyer*, and *Waiting for Me* incorporated scenes shot from locations outside the main studios in almost every episode during this fieldwork. Displaying locations is required by the television formats. Each location serves different functions. To perfectly combine studio production and location shooting, television *biandao* prefer to let the locations 'speak' rather than voiceovers or captions. Therefore, it is important to find the most appropriate location, especially when shooting time for each is limited. Even so, television *biandao* may still spend considerable time on location shooting, though relevant footage may only appear on TV for a few seconds after editing.

Production teams may also play archive videos while filming in the studios. These 'bits' are either produced directly by the production team or borrowed from archives from the database. For example, in the making of one episode of *Waiting for Me*, *biandao* came across a studio participant that had been interviewed by the Chinese International Channel of CCTV. The *biandao* directly contacted the programme for the archived interviews. As they were both parts of CCTV, the footage was easy to obtain. The *biandao* was later inspired by the original interviews and took the participant back to the same locations where the original interviews were filmed.

It is more difficult to carry out location shooting than using archived footage. During the pre-production of *If You Are the One*, the *biandao* travelled to different cities to interview potential candidates and made self-introduction videos for the candidates. When casting was over, the *biandao* needed to produce videos about the candidates, including their views

on marriage, relationship histories, and personalities. Not having any templates for references, the *biandao* needed to make full use of their creativity. Sometimes, it took them days to find a suitable location for what could have been a 20-second video. As an essential supplement to studio production, location shooting plays a vital role in the overall work schedules of television *biandao*. A *biandao* needs to divide workloads into different sections and allocate reasonable time to each task to keep up with the overall production plan.

Section Five: Editing

It is not always the case for the editing to take place after the show is filmed. In the UK, some reality shows already have scripted editing orders based on predictions of the game results. In China, *zongyi biandao* insist on editing after finishing all the filming. They can then arrange different candidates into the same episodes and decide whether some shows will pass censorship. There is no pre-arranged editing order, and no predictions of the candidates' performances, especially given the unpredictability of the censorship decisions. Sometimes, the editing cannot be prearranged simply because the show's results are unpredictable. For example, the *biandao* of *Job Hunting* can only decide which candidates to put into one group within one edited episode for the following scheduled broadcast time once they know who obtained job offers during the interviews. In comparison to *Job Hunting*, the *Waiting for Me* production team has more control over the editing as they already know the results beforehand, i.e., whether or not they found the missing persons. In their case, editing is used to make the story-telling more logical for the audience to comprehend. However, *Waiting for Me* still cannot prearrange its editing, not because it cannot predict the participants' reactions and the missing persons, but because of its changing management and staff turnover within the production team, such as the change of the host. Chinese *zongyi* shows finalise the editing after the studio production, even for imported foreign formats like *The Voice of China* (Zhejiang Television, 2012). In the behind-the-scenes stories, published by *The Voice of China* production team, the team admitted that the editing and the broadcast order were arranged after finishing all the studio filming (*The Voice of China* production team, 2013).

Although prediction is hard to make, many production teams have learnt to make reasonable estimations. For example, *biandao* of *Job Hunting* arranged the filming order of different

candidates based on the team's expectations on the candidates' overall competitiveness in the job market. During *Job Hunting's* studio production, the interview order of the most promising candidates is arranged in the middle of all the interviews, ensuring the best performances of both the interviewers and the interviewees. Accordingly, the footage of promising candidates is prioritised during post-production. These candidates are also likely to appear at the beginning of the edited shows, ensuring maximum exposure to the media.

Section Six: Perfect imperfection – *Shenpian* (审片) and three-tier censorship

Zongyi biandao from state-owned television confirm that there is a three-tier censorship system (三级审片制度), which originated from the news industry. The procedure requires at least three gatekeepers from three different ranks (usually the *biandao*, the producer and the channel's chief executive) to review the edited shows and give further advice on modifications. It is worth noting that the term *shěnpīān* (审片)²⁹ is broader than the term 'censorship'. Censorship is 'the process of removing parts of books, films, letters etc. that are considered unsuitable for moral, religious, or political reasons' or 'the suppression or prohibition of any parts of books, films, news, etc. that are considered obscene, politically unacceptable, or a threat to security' (Macmillan Dictionary, Google dictionary). In the Chinese context, prohibiting content is only a small part of the *shenpian* process. The primary task of *shenpian* is to check and review the edited show to improve narratives, story arcs, image aesthetics, and audio effects. These aspects are usually the *biandao's* responsibility during the production. The management often trusts *biandao's* creativity, but they can sometimes require *biandao* to make major changes. There are multiple reasons for the *shenpian* process. Ultimately, it is to ensure the edited programme adequately represents the institution's capability and what it stands for. Television programmes produced by independent production companies may go through more steps since more parties are involved. The editing must represent the interests of all sides, e.g., edited episodes of *Job Hunting* must be checked and reviewed by both the independent production company and its broadcasting platform, a television station.

²⁹ Please see the glossary.

In the company that produced *Job Hunting*, the *shenpian* procedure was more complicated than the usual three-tier system in television stations. Firstly, the *biandao* needed to coach the studio participants on what to say and perform on stage. After the studio production, the *biandao* were responsible for the editing of the participants they coached. However, in *Job Hunting's* company, the editing was assigned to a smaller independent production company. The *biandao* of *Job Hunting* only needed to send notes to the editors and wait till the initial editing was finished. Then the *biandao* could alter the first cut with the editors. When the *biandao* was satisfied with the refined editing, the shows would be sent to the producer. The producer was usually too busy to review all the shows at once, so she asked her assistants to review the details and watch the shows later, guided by her assistants' opinions. The producer's assistants would check the story's logic, images, subtitles, and other aspects. Only when the producer was happy with the show would she send it to the representatives of the broadcasting platform. The station would have someone in senior management review the edited episodes, and in the case of *Job Hunting*, this was the Head of Television Format Development. When the representatives (including their assistants) were happy with the refined editing, they would send the show to the chief executive of the broadcasting channel for final approval. If anyone during this process was not satisfied with the editing, the editors had to make changes until the show passed the *shenpian* procedure. As introduced, the *biandao* of *Job Hunting* belonged to an independent *gongzuoshi*, while the producer was an employee of the independent production company. This meant an edited episode of *Job Hunting* would be reviewed and censored by at least sixteen people, including five *biandao*, five editors, one producer, two producer's assistants, sometimes interns, one station representative, the representative's assistant, the chief executive of the channel from four different parties which include the *gongzuoshi*, the independent production company, the smaller production company they hired, and the television station. After the show appeared on television, it would be subject to the censorship of NRTA. If NRTA expected any changes from the show, the television station would be notified, and then the independent production company, creating another chain reaction.

As it is impossible to predict the outcome of *shenpian*, independent production companies usually schedule their work carefully to leave enough time for any changes. MW (interviewee

31), the chief director of *Please Help me Lawyer*, said that she constantly reminded other *biandao* to finish the editing at least one week before *shenpian* to prevent deadline anxiety.

WM: You must have heard the term *bōchū shìgù* (播出事故)³⁰? If we fail to deliver edited shows to our partnered television stations, that will become a severe *bochu shigu*. As a manager, what I don't want to see is procrastination, but sometimes it happens. There are too many people involved, and if one person is late for any reason, the rest will be affected.

SZ: What precautions have you made?

WM: Make plans and give deadlines. The programmes we make are commissioned by four different satellite TV channels, and each of them has different standards. We must make changes quickly. If necessary, I will do some of the editing myself with the *biandao*.

Common problems that have been spotted during *shenpian* include frame skipping, unsynchronised subtitles, illogical image orders, shaken images, and uneven lighting effects. These technical mistakes are easy to detect but must be checked by multiple editors in case one person overlooks something. In the Chinese TV industry, if a programme cannot be broadcast on time, it is called *kāi tiān chuāng* (开天窗), which means 'opening the skylight window'. *Kaitianchuang* is very serious and should be avoided at all times. In March 2018, one episode of a dating show produced by a state-owned television station almost caused *bochu shigu*. The show's *biandao* left the editing tasks to two inexperienced interns, who were unfamiliar with the broadcasting standard. On the day of *shenpian*, the producer came with the chief executive, expecting the show to be perfect. However, the chief executive became concerned after watching the show for only two minutes. He paused the video every ten seconds and asked the production team, 'what happened?'. As a former senior editor, the chief executive demanded that the team modify the video as soon as possible. Only three days were left before the show's premiere. Facing such a serious problem, the producer, LJG (interviewee 32), immediately asked all the senior *biandao* to redo the editing. The senior *biandao* realised they had just enough time to make all the changes. Everyone in the team offered to help with one part of the editing. In the end, the team worked with the interns until 4 am and successfully sent the tape to the Programme Management Department at 10

³⁰ Broadcasting accidents – a set term widely used in the news and television industry. It refers to situations where scheduled programmes cannot be broadcast on time due to various reasons. Not being able to meet the broadcasting standard is a serious incident. When *bochu shigu* happens, people involved may face severe consequences.

am the following morning, the day of the show's premiere. Before this incident, the interns had been given all the editing tasks without any instructions for two weeks. All senior *biandao* realised it was their irresponsible attitude towards the interns that resulted in this incident. The programme was successfully broadcast on television in the evening, but the producer reprimanded all the senior *biandao* and ordered them to supervise the interns from then on. The producer later recalled the experience and described it as a 'tremendous disaster' in his career:

LJG: If we had not passed the *shenpian*, our programme might have been cancelled by the station straight away, and all of us would have faced disciplinary actions.

SZ: What caused the incident?

LJG: It was my mistake as I did not supervise the *biandao* very well. I did not realise that they left the work to the interns. They should've been responsible for the work.

SZ: So usually, what is the Channel's *shenpian* process?

LJG: When one episode is edited, I need to watch it first, then again with the chief executive. But this time I was on a business trip, so I missed it. It was my mistake, and I feel sorry about the mess.

SZ: Fortunately, it was solved. Has anyone been punished for *bochu shigu*?

LJG: Not on this show, but when I was an editor, a colleague of mine caused a *bochu shigu*. Although it wasn't my mistake, everyone else in the team, including me, was fined half a month's salary for three consecutive months. My colleague then had to temporarily send his wife back to his hometown to save on living expenses. She was pregnant and needed to be looked after, but he could not provide for her.

It is clear that the *shenpian* procedure involves collaboration from many sides, and any adverse outcome could severely affect a television practitioner's career. After all, what is being broadcast represents the values and professional skills of its production crews, producers, sponsors, and broadcasting platform. Hence, everyone must be responsible.

When being asked how they feel about the *shenpian* procedure and censorship, television workers from different hierarchies and institutions expressed various views. Those who worked at independent production companies viewed *shenpian* and censorship negatively, but those in state-owned television took the opposite view. Some practitioners supported

such a system as it made them feel their efforts had been taken seriously. Some insisted that the reviewing must be conducted under scrutiny as no one wanted to face negative consequences. Others disagreed with the complicated procedure as they believe *shenpian* takes too much time and can encourage the authorities to impose more administrative orders on creative products. JNZ (interviewee 20) expressed her concerns over the increasing censorship:

JNZ: I'm a liberal person. That's why I don't want to work for any television station where bureaucracy is prevalent. I'd prefer to work for a small *gongzuoshi* where my talent can be fully appreciated and used. Last week, the producer imposed a new rule which states a programme should not emphasise the phenomenon of celebrity fandom. I'm a huge fan of celebrities and gossip. It's clearly painful to me as I wished to write a lot about the celebrities I like.

SZ: What do you feel about the producer's advice?

JNZ: This is the status quo, and I don't think she has any say in this, either. I listen to the management, but I honestly think some rules are ridiculous. I wish I could make my own show one day, so at least I can have more creative freedom.

SZ: Do you feel your creative freedom is suppressed?

JNZ: I'd say, as an adult, we must understand that all employees should listen to the boss. Also, when we work for a company, it is clear on the contract that the company retains the IP of the shows we make. In this sense, I don't think my creativity is suppressed as the shows are collections of creativity. I must adjust to changes, which may not be bad for me in the long run. However, I get frustrated when I am told to make changes that I don't think are necessary.

JNZ's producer, CC (interviewee 30), also shared her opinion as a senior employee working for an independent production company partnered with many television stations.

CC: I am the producer, but I don't have more say than the sponsors. If our partners, such as the broadcast platform, ask us to make changes, we must comply. I can't argue the censorship. I've worked in independent companies for many years, and I know it's hard for small companies to survive in the market without working with television stations. In a sense, we are their employees. They tell us what to do, and they are experts when it comes to changes in censorship. We can't predict the taste of NRTA, but we must learn to 'smell the wind'. If one show is disliked, then it's likely that similar shows will be banished. I've worked long enough to take immediate action before suffering from losses.

SJ (interviewee 2), a senior producer who has worked in CCTV for twenty-five years, shared his critical views on *shenpian* and its by-product, censorship.

SJ: All these years, I can tell the management are having more concerns when making decisions than before. Young employees dream of promotions, but they don't realise that their mentalities will drastically change once they become leaders, as they will be facing a lot more responsibilities. Leaders must be able to deal with negative voices from society, especially from netizens. Society is also changing. Things are more transparent, and nothing can escape the new media and netizens. For CCTV, the pressure will only increase, and we must be extra careful about what we show on the screen. That's why *shenpian* is very important. However, as CCTV is promoted to the same level as NRTA, we don't listen to them anymore. Our chief executives can make final decisions and have our shows broadcasted directly. I'm glad that the procedure is now less complicated. On the other hand, there will be more self-censorship because CCTV is taking full responsibility for all the shows we produce.

While television practitioners share different opinions on the *shenpian* procedures that they face almost every day, many aim to perfect the editing as much as possible. A senior *biandao* from an independent production company said she would almost certainly regret the editing after watching it on television. She said: 'Producing television is an art of imperfection. When you see your previous work, you regret not making it perfect, but no matter how perfect you think it is, it becomes imperfect the next time you watch it.' Many others shared the same view.

This chapter has outlined the entire television production process, from studio rehearsal to final censorship. One of the challenges for a production team during studio production is to work temporarily with colleagues from different companies. Divisions of labour within the studio can be chaotic without pre-agreements. Moreover, directors may find it difficult to assign tasks to workers from other companies as they do not necessarily need to obey the directors. Typically, a television director may need to cope with passive-aggressiveness from these workers, who are not responsible for the show's quality. Sometimes, situations can become even worse when directors fail to motivate their employees within the teams. For example, the *Win the Bill* production team could have anticipated better to perfect its

division of labour and handle unexpected events. Instead, they procrastinated and eventually had to improvise during the studio production. In comparison to the embarrassing improvisation of *Win the Bill*, *Waiting for Me* spent a significant amount of time on coaching studio participants, especially during the pre-interview stage. Although technical problems remain unpredictable, the more rehearsals are done, the more satisfactory studio production can become. When talking about post-production, most television practitioners understand the downside of informal apprenticeships, and they try not to leave interns on their own. They are also aware that the needs of all parties involved must be catered for as well as their own, including sponsors, broadcasters, and censors. It is clear that temporary work relations give television workers fewer opportunities to establish long-term collaboration and discourage them from building rapport that requires time. Television workers have felt insecure and anxious over short-term projects and constant change of teammates. Additionally, they need to improvise during unexpected events, such as delayed filming schedules and technical problems. On top of that, the unpredictable *shenpian* results also require television workers to leave as much time as possible before the show's broadcast time. This even puts more pressure on the *biandao*, who are already working under a condensed production schedule due to limited budgets. Indeed, television production is an art of perfect imperfection. Perhaps, it should also be an art of letting go, as television practitioners are already overwhelmed by the precarious work conditions.

Chapter 8: Production Ethics

This chapter explores the ethical concerns and issues regarding production ethics that happened during the Chinese *zongyi* programmes within the fieldwork. It specifically looks at several aspects: What ethical concerns occurred during the production process? Did the television practitioners follow any ethical guidelines? How did *zongyi biandao* interact with ordinary participants? What was the power relation between television *biandao* and the studio participants? Finally, and most importantly, did issues regarding production ethics exacerbate precarity?

One of the theoretical bases for this chapter, the concept of emotional labour, was already introduced in the literature review. I will also reference Jelle Mast's discussion on professional ethics and the treatment of reality show participants, Hesmondhalgh and Baker's studies on the anxieties of star-making, and how media workers feel about making 'good' and 'bad' cultural products. After outlining relevant theories and previous studies on production ethics, I will point out ethical concerns that occurred during my fieldwork in each section and how these problems contribute to the precarity within the Chinese TV industry.

Section One: Literature regarding production ethics

Ethical issues should not be downplayed because they extend to, or wholly emerge from, what lies behind and what comes with or after distribution, promotion, and transmission. To reiterate, I contend that ethical issues exhibit textual, extra-textual and intertextual dimensions (Mast, 2016:2181). Furthermore, television production apparatus typically remains invisible to its viewers, and occasional self-conscious references are more likely part of a promotional strategy. This secrecy, commented by Calvert (2004), feeds moral critique because it sustains the power differential and enables programme-makers to circumvent accountability. This is why ethical dilemmas emerge from the calculation of professional, commercial, moral values and responsibilities (Gross, Katz, and Ruby, 1988; Potter in Christians, Fackler, Rotzoll, and McKee, 1998). Scholars have agreed that the threefold interaction between the television institution, the filmed subjects, and the audience should be studied (Aufderheide, Jaszi and Chandra, 2009; Nichols, 2001, 2008). They also suggest

that a meaningful ethical analysis is to consider the multiple roles and associated status or power subjects may adopt, ranging from 'ordinary people' to (crime) offender, victim, or witness, to celebrity, public figure, or expert, to a third party (Bonner, 2003; Hibberd et al., 2000).

In discussions on media ethics scholarship and privacy law, notions of intrusion, embarrassment, false light³¹, and appropriation are identified as key topics relating to the treatment of participants. Mast (2016:2183-2194) has summarised key ethical issues from pre-production to post-transmission stages. Ethical issues include negative casting, one-sided contracts, and mis- and disinformed consent during the pre-production stage. During the production, surreptitious recording, surveillance and omnipresence, filming in bad times, demonstrating others' weakness through shaming, deprivation, punishment, and social exclusion are the key ethical issues. During the post-production process, concerns include exploiting emotional distress or shame and disinforming through selective editing. Finally, at the post-transmission stage, magnified public exposure and prolonged consent are the concerns. Mast explains that reality TV's lack of institutional framework comparable to journalism complicates ethical judgment. More significantly, the power differential between programme-makers and participants restricted by the contract 'produces a context for issues of intrusion, humiliation, misrepresentation, and appropriation to emerge' (2016:2194). Although Mast's research samples come from British, Dutch and Northern Belgian reality shows, his summary on the lack of institutional framework for reality TV and uneven power dynamics also fit the scenario in Chinese entertainment.

Since this thesis focuses on the media workers, conflicts between individual *biandao* and their workplaces will be evaluated. A useful reference regarding workers and their workplaces is from Sandeen and Compesi (1990), who have realised that 'individual moral values constantly interact, and possibly conflict, with the exigencies and regulations of television industry and market, measures of organisational standardisation and aesthetic conventionalisation, options provided by technological developments, and perceptions of the public opinion.'

³¹ an invasion of privacy tort based on injury to the victim's reputation by such a portrayal (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

Other helpful examples relevant to production ethics come from Hesmondhalgh and Baker's fieldwork at a daytime talent show. Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011:170-180) have analysed the relationships between 'emotional labour' and the anxieties on star-making, 'affective labour' and immanent cooperation. As the talent show they studied had the potential to make ordinary participants into 'stars', its production team had to manage emotional responses from rejected participants, and sometimes, their parents. Additionally, dealing with the participants who had been cast to appear on talent shows was another emotional challenge. It was hard for the show's junior workers not to care too much about the participants. When coaching participants, junior workers found themselves performing emotional labour while simultaneously struggling to distance themselves from the show's emotional effects, as many hours were invested in auditions, the casting process, and cheering for them during their performance on stage. In another situation, when a child participant's mother requested high demands, the production team stopped caring about the participant as they did not want to make this participant a 'star' anymore. The above examples indicate that emotional labour became another aspect of the production team's job. Hardt and Negri claim that cooperation is immanent to immaterial labour, especially its affective labour variant. To disapprove a link between 'affective labour' and immanent cooperation, Hesmondhalgh and Baker have found that some workers were favoured by the manager of IPC TV because they had worked on another project beforehand. Other team members realised the unfairness and struggled to manage emotions when dealing with specific production team members. In the end, they still had to invest emotional labour in maintaining their work relationships because working well together on short-term projects can help develop contacts and reputations that will lead to further contracts. Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011:179) then comment that 'the cooperation which Hardt and Negri see as "immanent" to immaterial – especially affective labour – is something which is extremely challenging to achieve in the contemporary television environment.' Examples of enduring unfairness whilst maintaining good work relationships have also happened in Chinese entertainment, which will be discussed at the end of this chapter and the following chapters. In this thesis, unfairness is portrayed as an ethical issue that has affected practitioners' work relationships and how studio participants are treated.

More examples on production ethics also come from Hesmondhalgh and Baker's (2011) study on media workers' reactions to 'good' and 'bad' cultural products and how they manage creativity, autonomy, and commerce. Tensions between creativity and commerce are especially studied as examples that have triggered ethical concerns. For example, magazine supplements are written to attract more advertising in the magazine industry, but they have restricted the journalist's creativity. Additionally, copy checking, where representatives of companies will see a draft of features before publishing, are conducted in return for access to elusive interviewees and other information (2011:89-90). In the hip-hop music industry, a tendency to pursue commercial success without creativity is also rising (2011:193-194). Finally, within the documentary industry, Hesmondhalgh and Baker have raised an ethical question: how to know filmmakers' intervention to the contents of documentaries are overstepped (2011:198). Hesmondhalgh and Baker have claimed that many of the workers they spoke to care about the quality of the goods they produce and their ethical implications (2011:190-199). They also believe that whilst producing good texts can bring about pleasure, satisfaction, a sense of purpose and self-realisation, playing a part in producing bad texts can mean frustration, disappointment and a sense of purposelessness, 'as a result of careless, meaningless ideas, and the distortion of perceived hijacking of good ones (2011:199).'

With Mast's comprehensive classification on production ethics and Hesmondhalgh and Baker's concept of emotional labour, concrete examples of workplace unfairness, creativity-commerce tensions, and negative feelings derived from producing bad products, the following sections will refer back to Section One and outline key ethical issues during my observation on *Waiting for Me*, *Job Hunting*, and *Win the Bill*.

Section Two: Lack of ethics training

Chinese news and television industry have been imposed with guidelines by the media regulator NRTA, which has prioritised news production and often enforces regulations that supervise news and television together. NRTA has enforced *Provisional Disciplinary Regulations on Radio and Television Broadcasting Institutions' Personnel* (广播电视播出机构工作人员违反宣传纪律处分处理暂行规定) since May 2002. In the regulations, radio and

television broadcasting institutions are defined as 'radio stations, television stations, radio and television stations, etc., of the nationwide radio and television broadcasting system, approved for establishment by the State Council administrative entity for radio, film and television'. This means the regulations are applied to all television practitioners in state-owned television stations but not directly to those who work at independent production companies. Although the regulations do not restrict media practitioners of private companies, some programmes they have produced need to comply with relevant regulations if any state-owned television station is the broadcasting platform. Without a clear guideline on how to conduct ethical production or even a clear definition of 'production ethics', *zongyi biandao* can only work with gut instinct, universal common sense and learn from other colleagues. Instinct and common sense are not enough to protect the workers and other parties involved during a television production process. Indeed, problems have occurred in the programmes observed during this fieldwork, with ethical concerns involving both the practitioners and the studio participants.

Although the NRTA has exerted comprehensive regulations and guidelines on 'professional ethics' for media practitioners, the rules are closer to mandatory political guidelines than to a professional code of ethics. Since the NRTA has not issued a comprehensive day-to-day professional guideline, this gap has to be filled by the media practitioners themselves. However, at least during my observation, not every practitioner was able to carry out ethical production. During in-depth interviews with CCTV's management, they expressed concern for not having enough national guidelines for making non-news programmes. The lack of professional guidelines has also challenged newcomers to learn a standardised production process, let alone ethics training, particularly under the prevalent tradition of informal apprenticeship. The major disadvantage of the informal apprenticeship is that the senior *biandao*, intern's teachers, are too busy to offer systematic training to the interns, let alone theoretical training on ethics. After all, it is likely that the senior *biandao* did not receive ethics training from their predecessors either. Of all 26 practitioners interviewed, nobody has recalled having ethics training, some did not even hear of such a phrase. ML (interviewee 33), a senior television producer who now owns an independent production company in London, recalled her work experience in CCTV.

ML: I worked in CCTV for seven years. I can talk confidently about how to make television, but I've never attended any ethics training. I did not know of such a thing. Maybe there were training sessions of some kind, but I couldn't be bothered to attend any of those. You can't only count on me for this answer. I suggest you ask other people.

Other *biandao* in CCTV also certified that they have never attended any ethics training since they started work. Some argued that even if there was so-called training, it was most likely about traditional Chinese culture. On the other hand, CCTV has provided as many opportunities to its employees to attend professional workshops with guest lecturers from other media institutions. CCTV also encourages its employees to submit television format pitches to its Innovation and Development Department. Notices about seminars often appear in bigger WeChat groups where practitioners of the entire Channel are present. However, many practitioners recalled that they did not go to many training sessions, nor were they interested in doing so. As there was no ethics training, practitioners interviewed had vague ideas about relevant issues such as privacy protection, anonymity, ethical interview methods, and IP protection. Additionally, some practitioners showed little interest in developing new television formats due to a heavy workload and unsupportive media environment. Having insufficient guidelines and training on ethical production, practitioners lack knowledge in data protection and protecting others involved in the production. For instance, during my fieldwork, television practitioners were careless with the studio participants' personal data. Many practitioners did not even hear of 'ethics training' when interviewed. Their negligence of ethics may have exposed an institutional deficiency of the television industry.

Section Three: The 'ordinary' participants and bribery

As described in Section 3 of Chapter 6, television *biandao* hold divided opinions on casting experienced participants as some may cause more problems than amateurs. Casting unknown actors involve two ethical issues: does it breach the 'realness' of a reality show? Secondly, as these unknown actors are already professional, who can decide which actor is better, and more importantly, how to keep the casting process fair without the possibility of corruption and bribery? The first concern depends on how we define 'real' and understand the differences between the 'real' and the 'performed self'. Scholarly discussions of reality

TV have tended to turn on issues of ethics of representation and the responsibilities associated with truth-telling and mediation (Murray and Ouellette, 2009). In this thesis, the question would be whether or not it is deceitful to allow the same persons or actors to talk about processed versions of their life events on different reality shows? This question can be answered by exploring the relationship between reality programmes and their audience but can also be diverted to studying the relationship between television practitioners and ordinary participants. The second concern is more pressing in the industry. Since every programme holds subjective casting standards, to what degree does subjectivity affect the fairness in casting? For instance, does it potentially exacerbate corruption and bribery in the industry whether or not in disguise, especially when unknown candidates, including children and their parents, are looking for every opportunity to become famous? The root of corruption and bribery may lie in the uneven power dynamics between production teams and the participants. Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011: 170-173) have explained that reality TV especially has the power to turn ordinary people into stars. Meanwhile, Murray and Ouellette (2009:4) have argued that reality programming distances itself from the deliberation of veracity and ethical concerns over human subjects. Even programmes that claim to improve their participants' lives do not carefully consider the ethics and responsibility that come with the representation of 'real' people and, as a result, are commonly charged with the exploitation of their subjects.

During my fieldwork, the abuse of power led to corrupted behaviours to the extent of receiving bribery. In one production team, a *biandao* with more power in the casting process intended to grant access to those who did not reach the production standard. This behaviour would have led to decreased viewing ratings due to compromised production quality. Luckily, at an employee review meeting, the show's producer discovered the unusual performance and prevented it from being on TV. She angrily exposed to the team that one specific director accepted bribes from participants in return for their exposure on the show. The *biandao* was suspended until further notice. This meant that the *biandao* would only receive a basic salary, about 4,000 yuan/month (£450/month). The producer then changed the casting procedure and announced that from then on, all candidates must be selected by the Special Candidate Committee, not by individual *biandao* anymore. It may be easier to catch someone in the act, but it can be difficult to find out about hidden deals from the past.

Compared to monetary bribery, the return of favour in Chinese culture, or *renqing*, plays a bigger role in the *biandao*-participant relationship. As many studio participants are likely to be on TV again, they can gain television experience and make professional contacts with television practitioners who may offer them opportunities to become celebrities of any kind. From *biandao*'s perspective, they can find the most suitable participants via professional acquaintances in the industry. Since word-of-mouth and reputation are effective in the industry, studio participants who wish to become professional actors often build relationships with as many *biandao* as possible. This has made the exchange of gifts and favours common in the industry. In comparison to direct monetary bribery, moderate gift-giving is more prevalent between *biandao* and their participants as China has an inexpensive gift-giving culture. Since most ordinary participants wish to be on TV, they are more than willing to build good relations with the *biandao* who offer to coach. The gift-giving culture is usually under control, but it can also become bribery. The same logic is applied to relationship building with colleagues and managers.

While some candidates look for fame, others participate in the programme for other things. For instance, participants who signed up for *Job Hunting* regard television as the best platform to land dream jobs or advertise entrepreneurship. However, they do not always get what they expect. An interviewer criticised one candidate for seeking revenge on her previous workplace. In the end, she did not get any job offer. On the same afternoon, after this candidate failed, a middle-aged female candidate successfully got three job offers by sharing her tough experience in entrepreneurship. She was the only person who received an offer during that day's filming. For *If You Are the One*, most participants are eager to find dating partners and are willing to be on TV, according to one of the programme's *biandao*, HH (interviewee 34), who emphasised that the 'outside world' has been misunderstanding their show as a platform to create celebrities. 'Our guests come from all walks of life, and our *biandao* travel to different cities during weekends to meet our participants. We are serious with what we do', added the *biandao*. Whether the participants are experienced or new to the show, the directors will coach them to reach the programme's standard. If they are not careful with the casting criteria, the viewing ratings will be affected, and their career can be jeopardised. Even so, rumours about bribery in *If You Are the One* have been widespread

online. I relayed some rumours, and HH chose to see them as a selling point for the programme. 'After all, I'm not surprised to hear about bribery in this industry,' added HH.

Section Four: Manipulation and white lies – are they inevitable?

In Section 2 of Chapter 6, details were shared on how *zongyi biandao* write television scripts. The secret of writing a good script lies in extensive communication with the studio participants and repeated rehearsals. During those complex rehearsals, television *biandao* endeavours to build rapport with the participants to find potential selling points for the television script. As it is often the case that the *biandao* takes control of the coaching process, the *biandao* often has more power and say than the studio participant. As an overlap of pre-production and production, the coaching process can easily generate feelings of humiliation and entail disinformation and misinformation. Feelings of humiliation refer to negative emotions, distress, or pain that one experiences when 'being, or perceiving oneself as being, unjustly degraded, ridiculed, or put down – in particular one's identity has demeaned or devalued' (Hartling and Luchetta, in Reysles, 2007:409). Further, humiliation does not necessarily involve public exposure. It could also be seen as an act of disempowerment, enforced by a more powerful inflictor who effectively (ab)uses and/or demonstrates the power differential by depriving or denying others certain privileges or options or exposing their weakness (Reysles, 2007; Schick,1997). As defined by Mast (2016:2184), misrepresentation is any communicative act that deceives or (re)presents a particular state of affairs unfaithfully or misleadingly. It may also relate to not fully informing candidates about the format and production process. Spence (2012) argues that it is useful to distinguish between disinformation and misinformation, as both forms may be considered unethical in the (a priori) sense of being untruthful or by having potentially harmful consequences. Based on the above literatures and my fieldwork findings, I have detected similar phenomena during the coaching process that I observed: Firstly, the participants are advised to impress the audience by sharing tailored stories instead of the truth; Secondly, the coaching process may contain emotional manipulation; Thirdly, the coaching process may harm the participants if not carried out properly. Fourthly, it is challenging to define what is considered as an 'appropriate' director-participant relationship. Finally, a television programme can certainly misrepresent its studio participants either deliberately or unintentionally.

Typical examples can be found in *Waiting for Me*. Given the show's theme, the studio participants most likely have experienced tragic events because of their missing relatives and friends. The reasons for most tragic separations are often due to kidnap, human trafficking, natural disasters, and war. Firstly, although the *biandao* know the whereabouts of the long-lost people, they have to lie to the participants, claiming that they are not allowed to know whether their relatives were found or not. In fact, they know everything beforehand, including stories that the participants do not even know. In most cases, the programme's format requires the production team to locate the whereabouts of the missing people before inviting participants, although exceptions can be made if the episode's topic is in the public's interest. From the production team's perspective, if they tell the truth to the participants, the participants will be likely to have an emotional breakdown before they go on stage, which could jeopardise the filming process. The question is whether or not this intentional deception, or disinformation, should be considered unethical, as the decision is made more in the production team's interest. Telling white lies in that situation can be seen as a form of emotional manipulation because the missing people are not found in some cases. *Biandao* knew beforehand that some participants' dreams of family reunion would never come true, but they must pretend to know nothing and encourage them to stay positive. However, on the other hand, if the production team reveals the results to the participants before the filming, the team will not be able to capture the participants' real reactions on camera. The irony here is that the production team will not ask the participants to fake reactions because the participants are not actors, and that would also be lying to the audience. It seems that the programme has to sacrifice the participants' right to know temporarily in order to benefit most parties in the long run. Despite the dilemma, *biandao* of *Waiting for Me* choose to ignore their inner conflicts for a potentially better production process. YD (interviewee 5), a senior *biandao* of *Waiting for Me*, shared how to balance her inner conflict and conscience for 'the greater good.'

YD: I am aware of the dilemma here. Imagine if you were in their (the studio participants) situation, how would you react when you knew what happened to your missing family? Would you remain calm during the next filming? You would want to cry and go home with your family.

That's why we can't tell them beforehand. Otherwise, all our efforts would be in vain and we may lose our jobs.

SZ: Would you say not telling them beforehand is a form of emotional manipulation?

YD: It depends on how you see it. We have done tremendous work beforehand to help find their relatives, and all we ever want is to make a complete production out of the people we have helped because we are television *biandao*, not police volunteers. However, out of the people we have helped, only those with unique stories will be invited, and only a portion of these filmed stories will be broadcast on TV. Think about the total number of people we have helped and the total number of people we have lied to. I'd say most of the time, we have done way more than we are required to. We are only television *biandao*, after all.

SZ: Forgive me for asking in this way... how do you persuade yourself to lie?

YD: For the greater good. We, as *biandao*, want to show their stories on TV to get more help from society. Meanwhile, we also get to finish our job. If we told them beforehand, all these expectations might just go away. Also, not telling them is only temporary. They will know eventually. Why rush? When I weigh between the two, I'd say the choice is easy to make. However, that doesn't mean I don't feel sorry. I felt terrible when I started the job, but I feel much better now. I believe all is for the job and the greater good. I can cope with suffering for a little while.

Although *biandao* such as YD can handle their emotions and the unavoidable ethical concerns the job brings, others do not easily find the balance. Some interns left the programme on the same day once they sensed the emotional challenge. Even some *biandao* left the programme for not overcoming their psychological struggles. JSS (interviewee 17), a junior *biandao* who left the programme, described his experience with *Waiting for Me* as 'painful'.

SZ: Did you leave because you couldn't get along with your team leader or because you couldn't handle the job?

JSS: I'd say I couldn't handle the job. I couldn't do it well enough. That's why my team leader wasn't happy with me. I couldn't do it because I couldn't coach the participants. I just couldn't handle my own emotions when hearing heart-breaking stories.

Before joining *Waiting for Me*, JSS worked as a documentary cameraperson for two years. He was not the only person who quit when realising the job's difficulty. According to the

assistant producer of *Waiting for Me*, television programmes with serious themes such as *Waiting for Me* often require its employees to 'toughen up.' JSS raised another ethical issue – the potential trauma a *biandao* may bring to a participant. During the coaching process, a *biandao* needs to encourage the participants to recall and retell their traumatic memories multiple times until the stories reach the *biandao's* expectation. This potentially involves intrusion, an infringement of someone's sense of self-determination, as it pertains to a subject's inner world of ideas, feelings, and personal life in general, and 'emotional loss' (Shufeldt Esch, 2012:47 in Mast, 2016:2183). During the coaching period, the senior managers will watch the pre-interviews of the studio participants and advise *biandao* on improving the television scripts, especially when they are not satisfied with the participant's reaction. The presence of senior managers may be a form of omnipresent surveillance. It is worth asking at which point the participants should have some space. One studio pre-interview was about a participant who lost contact with her father when she was six years old and was later abducted and abused by her abductor. She was crying out loudly in front of the camera. However, the show's host and the producer did not buy her sorrow and believed the participant did not show her real emotions in front of the camera. The host secretly asked the *biandao* whether the studio participant had an abortion or a child. She wanted the *biandao* to dig out more personal events of the studio participants to bring out more complex emotions. The responsible *biandao* hesitated for a while and refused the host's request, insisting that whether she had a child had nothing to do with the episode's theme. I asked the *biandao* why she refused to ask the question.

Biandao: We are both females. I understand if she went through things like that, it would be painful. I do not want to bring more pain to her as I don't think it has anything to do with the theme of finding her biological father. This job can easily make people suffer. Why bringing out more irrelevant pain?

Reality TV has been described as a 'spectacle of shame' (Palmer, 2006), which thrives on the shamelessness of what is described as 'willing victims' who 'knowingly' take shame upon themselves (Palmer, 2006). The request to ask whether the participant had an abortion is an example of shaming and humiliation. Even if the participant knew she would have to answer some difficult questions, she could not have expected this level of privacy intrusion and

shaming, especially from another woman (the host). In comparison to this *biandao*, many others, including the managers, have to care less about the participants, and more about the show's ratings. Because of this, some *biandao* may even encourage the participants to downplay, lie about, or exaggerate their life events, especially when a *biandao* does not think a candidate's story is dramatic enough for the show.

Some *biandao* have admitted to coaching participants to making up things for a 'better story,' according to a *biandao* who wished to remain anonymous. During one coaching process of *Win the Bill*, a senior *biandao* specifically warned one participant not to reveal his identity as a media company's CEO, as this relatively privileged social status would not gain the audience's empathy. Instead, the *biandao* told the participant to describe himself as a freelance singer who went through hardship while pursuing his music dream. The *biandao* especially told the participant to emphasise the difficulties he encountered when persuading his wife's parents to agree with their marriage. On the filming day, the participant went on stage with his wife and shed tears about the obstacles they encountered before marriage. His wife said her brother beat her up because her family did not want her to date this man. The show's ratings reached their six-month peak because of the story. The senior *biandao* later explained with triumph that withholding information was not telling lies. 'It's a matter of providing the most relevant information to reach your desired results,' she added. There was no doubt that the male participant's identity as a CEO was deliberately withheld because only a 'sad enough' story can gain the audience's empathy.

Another ethical issue that happened to *Waiting for Me* lies in its pre-production process when the production team needs to look for missing person information for potential television scripts. On a typical office day, different teams of *biandao* and interns will receive phone calls from people looking for missing persons and actively look for information online via all CCTV resources. On average, the production team receives hundreds of phone calls from its special hotline every day but can only help a small number of people, especially the potential studio participants. Although *biandao* reiterate that they try as best to advise those in need by giving them contacts from volunteers and local police stations, they are, in a way, picking the most miserable and representative stories out of many unfortunate real-life events. This selection process is a challenge to the *biandao*'s conscience and has raised the question of

whether it is ethical to neglect someone's pain. Many *biandao* interviewed admitted that they could only help potential participants since a successful search involves tremendous efforts and cooperation between different parties – CCTV's legal team, missing people websites, volunteers and the police. The search is often carried out by volunteers and the police in every province based on provided evidence. Therefore, the production team needs to confirm the potential participants before looking for the missing persons. Many *biandao* expressed their helplessness and frustration towards the selection process as they found it difficult to refuse those who are sobbing on the other side of the line. The only rational thing they can do is give as much advice and other useful contacts to those in need, such as telling them to give DNA samples to the local police. The upsetting nature of this job has also caused the high staff turnover at *Waiting for Me*.

Last but not least, since it is usually the *biandao* that has dominant power in the *biandao*-participant relationship, they have more power to define the boundaries of their professional relationship. As *biandao* and participants spend a lot of time together, they will likely form friendships beyond the initial professional relation. This type of friendship has become a double-edged sword as its impact on the production process can be unpredictable, sometimes even harmful. In an interview with senior *biandao* YD (interviewee 5), deep concern was expressed over one of her interns, who enjoys befriending the studio participants and even looking for romance with some of them.

YD: Don't get me wrong. JA (the intern) is a smart girl and a quick learner. I can trust her on the work but not on her outgoing personality and ambiguous professional ethics attitudes.

SZ: Why is that?

YD: You know *Waiting for Me* isn't for entertainment. This programme requires the *biandao* to read the participants' minds. If you (a *biandao*) want that to happen, you must create some sort of authority in front of the participants so that they take your words seriously. JA is too friendly and outgoing. She sometimes has hotpot with the participants and goes to corner shops with them. I don't think being friendly is wrong, but these behaviours only diminish her authority. Distance creates authority and mystery. We, as *biandao*, need to maintain an appropriate distance from the participants so that they take us seriously and cooperate with us. JA will soon find herself in an awkward quasi-friendship with the participants when they stop listening to

her. What's worrying me more is that she once fell in love with one of my participants. In the end, I had to stop her from interviewing him.

SZ: Have you spoken to her about it?

YD: I have, multiple times. She seems to think I worry too much. Indeed, she has made quite a few episodes on her own, but they are not enough to help her get a full-time here.

SZ: What happened between JA and the male participant?

YD: Nothing serious. After he left the programme, they kept in touch for a short while and then stopped talking to each other.

YD's concern reflects a typical friendship development tendency between television *biandao* and their participants. Many find it difficult to strictly maintain professional relationships after spending a tremendous amount of time together. It is not to say that friendship between *biandao* and participants should be banned. It is the potential impact on the production quality that needs attention. If a *biandao* cares too much or too little about the participant, s/he may exert too much or too little pressure on the participants. Accordingly, a studio participant could face a lot of pressure or be misrepresented by the programme due to the *biandao*'s carelessness. Moreover, these potential negative consequences will harm the ordinary studio participants more than the *biandao*. MT, a studio participant of *Win the Bill*, admitted that she faced pressure from the *biandao* and thought about quitting.

MT: My *biandao* is nice to me, but she is very demanding. She put on an attitude when we get closer. As we get closer, I thought I could get away with some stupid rules, but I was wrong. She cared about my image and insisted on a lot of practice. I appreciate her hard-working attitude but it's too much pressure on me. On the other hand, I'd feel guilty if I let her down.

SZ: How would you describe your relationship with her?

MT: We've spent a lot of time together. I've told her many things that I won't even say to my family. I see her as a good friend.

SZ: Did she ask you to tell her secrets?

MT: Some are required as part of the coaching, but I told her a lot more voluntarily. You see, conversation flows. It's hard not to.

SZ: Do you think she deliberately made you feel guilty or nervous?

MT: Absolutely not. She sees me as a friend.

MT realised the pressure exerted by her *biandao*, but she did not see it as a form of emotional control. Her *biandao*'s unintentional guilt trick worked as MT ended up following her instructions. Just like MT's *biandao*, who may not intentionally make participants feel guilty, many other *biandao* do not even know anything about production ethics. Like YD, many *biandao* only gradually realise that they should think for the participants as they encounter more and more extreme cases. Although ethical issues have occurred, most *biandao* and participants during this fieldwork formed healthy professional relationships. Some became good friends. SAW (interviewee 4), proudly shared her theory of production ethics and her relationships with the studio participants she has coached.

SAW: Although no one taught me production ethics, I learnt from observing successful *biandao*. In this industry, you don't usually get systematic training of any kind. That's why you need to observe and learn wholeheartedly via practice. In my view, ethics is a combination of professional manner and empathy for others. If you don't like doing something, you probably shouldn't make others do it. I know it's easier said than done, but I barely mess up any relationship or bend the rules throughout my career. I've learnt to keep a distance from the participants. More importantly, be honest and kind. I guess I'm like that as a person. I've helped many people land their dream jobs, and many of my previous participants still contact me to this day. A few days ago, I helped a former participant contact a modelling agency. It's been a year since we worked together, and he still came to me for help.

SZ: How do you keep a comfortable distance from your participants?

SAW: I think this has more to do with one's emotional intelligence. I always keep in mind that when I meet someone via work, I am responsible for keeping my professional image even after we end the cooperation. That's why my previous participants may still ask me for potential job opportunities after they left the programme. I believe I've established a trustworthy image in front of them. I think it's important to keep in mind that whatever our relationship becomes in the future, it originates from our professional encounters.

SAW has been one of the most well-respected *biandao* I have encountered in the field – she is good at maintaining appropriate distance from the studio participants, which can be challenging to other practitioners.

This section has emphasised that the ordinary participants' behaviours and performance are most likely affected by the *biandao* who coach them. That is to say, a television programme can correctly represent its participants but may also misrepresent them. This is clearly a matter of production ethics, as false representation can harm the participants, especially during post-transmission, which adds the dimensions of publicity and prolonged consent. Mast (2016:2193) argues that the longevity of a reality show in the form of repeats may pose problems of misrepresentation because the transfer of a participant's publicity rights to the broadcasting corporation is 'irrevocable' and 'infinite'. Key moral questions to be resolved, as Mast (2016:2194) suggests, are 'how far in time a prior permission should extend and what qualifications might apply, regardless of legal commitments.' Ultimately, television *biandao* should be aware of the potential harm they may cause to the participants during the entire television production process. This can be a challenge to those who are not aware of production ethics. What is worse, as systematic professional guidelines are missing, the line between white lies and manipulation is blurred.

Section Five: Working up to disappointing news – was it enough?

In Section One, I mentioned passive aggressiveness from a television production team observed by Hesmondhalgh and Baker. Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011:173) have argued that in most cases, a compromise could be made between production team and studio participants but when the demand becomes unacceptable, the production team is unlikely to cooperate and may stop caring about the participants. This section emphasises that due to lack of ethics training and, sometimes, being inexperienced, television *biandao* may not offer enough mental health support to their candidates. Even worse, when some *biandao* do not get along with their participants, they give up on them by underperforming during the coaching process.

For programmes such as *Job Hunting* and *Win the Bill*, the studio participants may encounter critical comments from the interviewers. They may not get any job offers. They may fail the challenges and go home with no financial reward. They need to accept the possibility of being kicked out of the show for nothing in return. In April 2018, on one day's filming of *Job Hunting*, the HR interviewers brutally criticised a female participant for 'being an idiot'. She

was criticised because she gave up the opportunity to further her education but started up from the bottom of the industry she dreamed of. Instead of getting into her dream industry, she was deceived by a fake modelling agency and did not get any salary. Having no money by the end of the 'work' experience, she had to share a rented room with 11 other girls in a basement in Beijing. After hearing her stories, the interviewers gave no empathy but called her 'stupid'. Nobody gave her any job offer. She left the stage in tears. The casting *biandao* who coached her was surprised with the result because other casting *biandao* who interviewed this participant agreed with her choice and sympathised with the participant. They did not foresee the possible failure of the participant. Neither did they prepare the participant for possible failure during the coaching process. Like the *biandao* of *Job Hunting*, some others did not offer mental wellbeing support to their candidates, most likely because they were inexperienced, or too confident. Some others simply gave up on their candidates or even deliberately watched them fail. On another day's studio production of *Job Hunting*, a male participant received no job offers and was criticised by the HR interviewers for 'being too cocky'. He was extremely distraught after the filming and checked out on the same day, although his expense would have been covered if he stayed another day. The *biandao* who coached this participant, SH (interviewee 29), gloated over the participant's failure.

SH: During the coaching process, I reminded him repeatedly not to behave aggressively in front of the interviewers. He didn't listen. I couldn't do anything but see him being told off on the stage.

SZ: How do you feel?

SH: I knew he would fail. I did warn him. What else could I do? He's old enough to face the consequences of his own behaviour.

SZ: Do you think this feeling you are having is a bit personal?

SH: I can't deny it. He did piss me off. I tried to be as professional as possible. If someone says something stupid, I often tell myself it's about him, not about me, so I don't take things personally. However, he was too difficult, and I wasn't happy with him.

SH did not feel sorry the failed participant. He did what he could, although perhaps he could have done more. SH was not the first *biandao* who gloated over studio participants' failure. Some *biandao* who have had a negative experience with participants have chosen to be passive-aggressive. From their perspective, the least risky thing to do is to underperform

during the coaching process and stop caring about the participants. On some other occasions, some other *biandao* did not support their participants enough because they were too confident. Out of people's expectations, one promising candidate who performed excellently during the casting interview of *Job Hunting* failed on the filming day. She did not receive any job offer as the HR interviewers doubted her intention for being on TV. The candidate lost all votes from the interviewers. This upset the entire production team as they firmly believed in this candidate who had exciting job experience and excellent communication skills. The candidate was especially hurt by the interviewers' comments and cried when she stepped off the stage. Her *biandao* JNZ (interviewee 20) expressed disappointment and regret over such a result.

JNZ: I feel bad when seeing my candidates fail, but I feel worse for not foreseeing any bad results. I should've coached her better. I should've helped her face different scenarios so she wouldn't be that upset. Now that she's upset, I'm more upset.

SZ: Do you think she lied to you about her real intention to be on TV?

JNZ: I didn't think so. Neither did my colleagues. I can't be sure about it now, but I still think the HR interviewers were too harsh with her. Maybe they misunderstood her. No one expected this. We all thought she would become the selling point of this upcoming episode.

As JNZ made a mistake, the participant she coached suffered from her negligence, though JNZ did not intentionally make her candidates feel agitated, so did many other inexperienced *biandao*. It is fair to say that though some *biandao* may have stopped caring about their candidates, most others have helped the candidates with professionalism, putting personal opinions aside.

During my fieldwork, no other show except *Waiting for Me*, could bring more potential trauma to the studio participants. The consequences of 'failing' on *Waiting for Me* can be devastating – some studio participants have to accept that their long-lost relatives are not found, will never be found, or are already dead. Such news is heart-breaking. Participants who have faced these results so far unexceptionally burst into tears with a severe mental breakdown, regardless of their gender or age. It is precisely at this stage that these participants will need proper grieving counselling or therapy. Such help has not been provided at any stage of the production process. Although *biandao* understand the psyche

of the participants, little effort has been made to ease their pain when they experience a mental breakdown. Perhaps it is unfair to blame the *biandao* as they are not professional therapists, and the production process is full of stress and competition. Moreover, the managers especially expect the *biandao* to make participants express their pain and sorrow in front of the camera to get higher ratings for being 'real'. As discussed in Section One of this chapter, the managers' requests were full of manipulation and humiliation, resulting in misrepresentation if the participants cooperated. Primarily, these participants only come to the programme to look for missing relatives. They would not have expected anything intense like the coaching process, with inevitable manipulations and white lies. During the coaching of *Waiting for Me*, a common way to ease the participants' pain is to pause the conversation and console them with encouraging words. The coaching usually takes place in private places, for example, in *biandao*'s hotel rooms. When a participant starts crying, the *biandao* will offer tissues, saying gentle words to cheer the person up. They would say almost anything to calm the participant except 'I already know what happened to your missing relative(s)'. Senior *biandao* YD described the dilemma she and her colleagues had been facing: on the one hand, they have to keep the secret and give participants hope; on the other hand, they must carefully prepare the participants with possible bad results without leaking the truth.

YD: I admit I could've done better, and I should've. I implied that they needed to get ready for the worst, and most of them said that coming to CCTV was their last resort. I then asked them to 'toughen up' to accept possible disappointing news. Whilst some claimed they were ready for the worst result; others just weren't strong enough. Even those who claimed they were ready were not ready the moment they heard the bad news. They all cried and experienced extreme mental breakdowns. I feel bad for being occupied with other things such as internal competition, persuading the producer, writing up television scripts, and looking for suitable props. I never have enough time to care for the participants' mental health. Sometimes I dislike myself for not being able to help. I wonder, am I just using them? Or is the whole production team earning salaries via someone's painful experience? Whenever this thought crosses my mind, I tell myself I don't have any other choice, so I shouldn't blame myself. If I don't think this way, I will have a mental breakdown before the participants.

YD's concern is common and typical in the industry. The programme she works for is of serious and sad nature. It would be natural for anyone who works on serious topics to come

across challenging ethical issues. *Biandao* from *Please Help Me Lawyer* (Hebei Satellite TV, 2018) also have the same ethical concerns. *Please Help Me Lawyer* aims to help those involved in complicated lawsuits with professional advice and mental support. MW (interviewee 31), a senior *biandao* who worked three years for the programme, commented that the biggest challenge for the production team was to not judge the studio participants, as some could be 'extremely silly and selfish'.

MW: I once helped a middle-aged man to sue his daughter. He abandoned his family when he was young but expected his successful daughter to give him £1 million when she became a celebrity. He complained that his daughter was selfish. What the heck? Isn't he the selfish one?

SZ: What happened in the end?

MW: Our studio guests are well-known lawyers and psychologists. Although everyone did not agree with this man, they provided legal advice to him. Later, this episode became controversial as netizens were guessing who the female celebrity was. Fortunately, most netizens criticised the father. I keep thinking about what we did and what we offered to the man. We were risking a celebrity's reputation even though we did not reveal any names.

SZ: Do you deal with a lot of similar cases?

MW: Yes, I do. I've seen many family tragedies and the dark side of human nature, yet it is my job to help them seek legal advice. My colleagues and I must treat all our studio participants with respect, even if sometimes we don't want to respect them for what they did. For me, I know the difference between my professional and personal morals. It can be a hard choice.

MW has set an example in front of the newcomers to the company. The programme has enjoyed stable viewer ratings. On the other hand, as television *biandao* gain more job experience, it is down to the individual to decide whether to stick to certain production ethics. Because of the lack of supervision on production ethics, studio participants are usually vulnerable in the *biandao*-participant relationship. Additionally, faced with pressure from the management, television *biandao*, as the basis of television production, are required to care more about their work and the upcoming viewer ratings. Therefore, they may have intentionally or unintentionally neglected the emotions of studio participants, leaving them disappointed or unsatisfied. A thorough guideline of production ethics should be established to protect both the *biandao* and the studio participants.

This chapter has discussed ethical issues during interactions with studio participants, mentioned in Chapters 6 and 7. As one of the key elements of *zongyi* television, the involvement of studio participants, especially the ordinary participants, should be treated carefully. Since most ordinary participants have limited experience on TV, they naturally rely on the *biandao* who coach them. This gives more power to the *biandao* in their interactions, which requires a high level of mutual trust and professionalism. Even though television *biandao* lack ethics training, most are well aware of the sensitive nature of *biandao*-participant relationships. Some *biandao* get frustrated when having to withhold key information from participants. Others intentionally underperform as a way of passive-aggressiveness to get rid of certain participants with whom they do not get along. Apart from *biandao* who directly coach participants, senior managers can also manipulate studio participants by eagerly trying to extract sensitive and personal information from the participants hoping that this would help the programme's viewing ratings. This happened during the coaching process of *Waiting for Me* when the host and producer demanded one *biandao* to ask the participant whether she had had an abortion, which had nothing to do with finding missing persons. Although the host and the producer wholeheartedly wanted to help the participant, they were clumsy with their interview techniques and were not aware of the potential mental damage to the participant. The amount of manipulation, humiliation and misrepresentation by intentionally misinforming the participants must be seen as severe ethical issues that can harm the programmes in the long run. Sensing the subtle relationship between *biandao* and participants, some experienced participants use the relationship for their own benefits. Some have indeed bribed *biandao* to appear on TV. It seems that *biandao*-participant relationships should be regulated, and a code of ethics should be imposed on all production personnel. At the beginning of this chapter, several research questions were raised, and the last one is the most important: did issues regarding production ethics exacerbate precarity? Since television practitioners do not have systematic ethics training and have to perform emotional labour on top of their jobs, it is not entirely fair to blame them for being unethical. The negative impact of lacking ethics training can be worse for *biandao* than for participants. Many *biandao* suffer from guilt and anxiety for not providing enough support and telling temporary white lies to the participants. They have to stay on their jobs whereas the participants can leave for good. Who is there to look after the mental wellbeing of television *biandao*? Clearly, all these factors do not fulfil creative workers' idea of the good

life. The absence of production ethics is more likely institutional delinquency than individual negligence. Such management oversight has led to an absence of care for creative workers and has inevitably exacerbated precarity. The upcoming chapters will further explore the management styles and how they shape the precarious working culture.

Chapter 9 Management from above

As described in the Introduction, Chapters 9, 10 and 11 can be viewed together as chapters that analyse the management styles of Chinese entertainment TV, its impact on television practitioners and how the different styles shape the industry's overall production culture. This chapter illustrates the various management styles of the studio-based television programmes based on my ethnographic fieldwork from March to July 2018 and a series of follow-up interviews from January to March 2019. The term management is redefined to cater to this thesis's context: a process coordinated by media managers who lead, plan, coordinate and mediate power. During this process, managers and employees share responsibilities and try to create 'good' work. Undoubtedly, their decisions are also affected by national policies, industry regulations and employment contracts, as described in Chapters 4 and 5.

This chapter is called 'management from above' as it describes explicitly how media managers forecast and carry out media policies, make decisions, organise television programmes and manage employees. All decision-makers must consider as many aspects as possible, and this process may inevitably cause certain groups to be more unsatisfied than others. Sometimes, media managers expect cooperation from employees when orders are inexplicit and lack consultation. Furthermore, although managers are often careful with their decisions, they may still fail to balance the interests of different parties. It is often the most vulnerable, invisible, below-the-line practitioners that are affected by the changing policies. Affected by the volatile policy-making environment and growing nationalism, managers have learned to compromise and expect their staff's understanding. Furthermore, no matter how harsh the working conditions are, plenty of creative workers are willing to stay. Media managers have taken advantage of this situation by turning a blind eye to managing essential aspects of workers' working environment, although some decisions are beyond their payrolls. It remains unknown how long this buyer's market will exist and whether the negligence of health, safety, and other forms of exploitation have negatively affected the industry.

Section One: Defining management in the context of thesis

The word 'management' in the following chapters needs a definition specific to the context of this thesis. I have thereby referenced theories and definitions from management studies and media studies. The term 'management' has been defined by many thinkers and scholars. For example, in 1911, the 'father of scientific management', Frederick W. Taylor, stated that 'management is the art of knowing what you want to do and then seeing that they do it in the best and the cheapest manner.' Henri Fayol (1916) argued that 'to manage is to forecast and plan, to organise, to command, to coordinate, and to control.' Mary Parker Follett, the 'mother of modern management,' believed that management was 'the art of getting things done through people.' In 1998, Chinese management scholar Guohua Xu (徐国华) defined management as 'a process coordinated by managers who wish to effectively achieve organisation goals, realise individual development and fulfil social responsibilities.'³² Harold Koontz and Cyril O'Donnell (1976) believed that management entails five basic functions: planning, organising, staffing, leading, controlling, and motivating. Gershon (2009) suggests that media managers must be able to cultivate tone and setting, promoting a positive and creative environment where content makers feel free to produce the best work within resource limitations. He then puts that a successful media manager needs six fundamental competencies: planning, organisation, leadership, staff management, control and communication. Another scholar, Dennis F. Herrick (2003:57) argues that cash flow management through accounting and marketing, people management through interpersonal skills, and time management of executives and staff are the three most critical skills for running a media company. Faustino (2009) adds that the need for training is intensely felt by media companies and linked to the levels of required practical knowledge and adaptation to the use of new technologies and converging industries.

Other useful references come from Weijia Wang's ethnographic research on Chinese journalists' working conditions in the early 2000s. Wang agrees with Gordon, Edwards and Reich (2009), stating that capital's control on labours starts as early as in the labour market and before workers enter their workplaces. By the same logic, Wang believes that the Chinese news industry's multi-layered recruitment system, internal power handovers, and

³² 管理是管理者为了有效地实现组织目标、个人发展和社会责任，运用管理职能进行协调的过程。

the state's intervention have affected the working process, social status, and work aspirations. Wang also thinks that after years' reform on the relations of production, China's cultural production 'with Chinese socialist characteristics' has, in fact, become a part of the global capitalistic system, especially after many Chinese news journalists lost their jobs during the 2008 financial crisis (2011:96). Adopting Marx's labour theory of value, Wang has emphasised how the news industry's multi-layered employee recruitment system, including labour dispatch, contracting, freelancing and internships, and the industry's internal management have commercialised the labour of news journalists and made maximum use of their labour value (Wang, 2011:104). Additionally, geographical locations, forms of media, advertisement investment, target audience market and media institutions' scales all determine the varied internal management and divisions of work between news institutions (ibid., 2011:196). Additionally, although *Labour Contract Law of the People's Republic of China* (中华人民共和国劳动合同法) was taken into effect in 2008, and has largely curbed employment exploitation, Wang is worried that relevant laws cannot fundamentally change the abiding commercialised relations of production (ibid., 2011:124).

On the other hand, Wang (2011:125-127) has reiterated the vital role of the Chinese state in adjusting and mitigating the relations of production within the news industry. Firstly, looking specifically at the reforms of production relations in the Chinese news industry, the interactions between the state and the market (capital) are pronounced. In the 30 years of China's economic reform, adjustments to the production relations across various industries and fields have been accomplished by interactions between the state and society. Particularly in the early years of economic reform, before the central government had reached mutual agreements on how to make the country rich and strong, each solution in the reform process was repeatedly tested by different industries among the society and was eventually confirmed by the state, later becoming relevant regulations. The state's impact is exerted at the macro and micro levels in the fields of news, publication, television, and film. At the macro level, the state plays a role in the direction of industrial development, market regulations and adjustments to the media system. At the micro-level, the state provided vital support, confirmation and regulations to help adjust the attributes and functions of the press and media and the identity and social status of news workers. The Chinese government especially helps renovate the media industry's internal wage system, personnel system and

business management of press outlets. Government policies have, in fact, coherently and mutually complemented the formation of the market commercialisation regime and the reform of internal labour relations. Therefore, Wang points out that unlike the analysis of the information commercialisation process from a mature capitalist system, to understand the Chinese media reform, researchers should not only pay attention to the role of the state and policy issues but also analyse how the state participates in forming this new type of production relations.

Secondly, when viewing the whole transformation of China's labour relations within the communication industry, the state's impact on market mechanisms and capital accumulation methods has not been a one-way system of confirmation, promotion and fulfilment. Two factors deserve particular attention. First is the importance of the 'socialist legacy' in the reform process, under China's particular historical context, such as the materialised institutional legacy of the 'Party-media', ideological legacies of the 'people's democratic dictatorship' and the radical cultural-critical tradition. These historical and social elements have always fought against 'market fundamentalism' in the process of labour commodification, and it is not uncommon for these counterattacks to be led or supported by the state. Second, the state indeed took on partial responsibility in protecting the society when the market and capital forces had hindered and damaged social development. From the 1990s to the early 2000s, following a rapid development in media marketisation, problems of capital accumulation such as labour abuse and media rent-seeking corruption quickly became evident. Outside the communications industry, conflicts between media workers and capital forces were also prevalent and led to great social backlash. Against this backdrop, the state issued a series of regulations regarding the use of labour and media production guidelines. This has vastly alleviated the tension and protected society. Overall, as Wang indicates, the process of news labour commercialisation cannot be analysed without considering the role of the state. Likewise, the role and function of the state cannot be analysed without an explicit historical context or the mutual interaction between the state, the society, the market, and their mutual constraints. In this sense, the current and future reforms on news labour and production relations are not one-way or linear. Under various social forces at play, such a reform process is neither predictable nor irreversible.

It is clear that when analysing the working conditions of Chinese news journalists, Weijia Wang focuses on the employment structure and government's policies and sees these factors as parts of 'management'. This tendency to analyse employment structure is in accord with Mark Banks (2007:6)'s comment on the various sociological traditions, including Marxist, Foucauldian and liberal ones, that 'artistic desires for creative autonomy and independence exist in uneasy tension with capitalistic imperatives of profit-generation and controlled accumulations.' Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011:81) have commented that the same can be said of journalistic and other professional desires for autonomy and independence. Wang's research on Chinese news journalists has surely shed light on the Chinese television industry. These sociological traditions, including Marxist adopted by Weijia Wang, have explored tensions generated by struggles over aesthetic and professional autonomy. Different authors have labelled these tensions differently. They are usually expressed as between contrastive pairing, for instance, between art and capital (Ryan, 1992), art and commerce (Banks, 2007), culture and commerce (Slater and Tonkiss, 2001), culture and commodity (Frow, 1995), creativity and commerce (Negus and Pickering, 2004), and culture and economy (Ray and Sayer, 1999).

After discussing the management of autonomy, creativity, and commerce, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011:111) agree that the creative management role is split in television, and commercial imperatives are emphasised over artistic and professional ones. During the discussion, they have outlined popular creative management theories. For instance, Davis and Scase (2000:52) envisaged creative organisations as a place of 'negotiation, mutual adjustment and compromise' between commerce and creativity. Lampel et al. (2000) saw the management of creativity as an attempt to seek a balance between creative freedom and commercial imperative. For Davis and Scase, and Lampel et al., management in the cultural industries is an act of navigation, a tentative 'balancing act', an attempt, from the perspective of managers, to find that 'point' up to which creative individuals are willing to be controlled (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011:82-83). Davis and Scase (2000:52) also mentioned the paradox of control and creativity, stating that it is challenging to reconcile openness, intuition, personal networks and individual autonomy with instrumental criteria and rational business methods. In response to Davis and Scase, Hesmondhalgh and Baker contend that the question is 'how we might understand the historical and structural factors

behind such paradoxes, and how we might evaluate issues of the conflicts and unequal power relations lurking behind metaphors of negotiation and navigation (2011:83).’ They agree that Bill Ryan has provided a satisfying answer to their questions.

Ryan (1992:114-23) recognises that many capitalists make a very nice profit out of cultural goods by rationalising cultural production both at the creative stage and the circulation stage. The creative stage is achieved through what Ryan calls formatting, especially the use of genre-based and star-based series of production, whereas, at the circulation or distribution stage, it is achieved through the institutionalisation of marketing within corporate production. It is the task of creative management to direct the work of rationalisation (Hesmondhalgh 2007:24, 66-7). According to Ryan (1992:121), creative management is less directive and has ‘a muted and accommodating style’, and this rationalising creative management is always struggling against the relative autonomy given to creative workers. Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011:85) argue that in reality, artistic-cultural production is based on a complex division of labour, and Ryan’s account might be more feasible if it were rephrased as resting on how the value of artistic-cultural production is very widely perceived. Ultimately, Ryan’s point emphasises the importance of understanding how the specificity of creative labour leads to certain organisational dynamics in the context of power relations. Compared to Ryan’s account, Negus and Pickering (2004) prefer to see creativity and commerce as distinct dynamics that are nevertheless intertwined, producing a series of tensions – including organisational ones.

Apart from the discussions on the relations between creativity, commerce and organisations, Hesmondhalgh and Baker’s definitions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ work also helps define ‘management’ for this thesis. ‘Good’ work involves autonomy, interest and involvement, sociality, self-esteem, self-realisation, work-life balance and security, while ‘bad’ work includes being controlled by or dependent on others, boredom, isolation, low self-esteem or shame, frustrated self-realisation, overwork and risk (2011:36). They have particularly focused on the quality of working life in the cultural industries and how creative work is perceived and experienced by creative workers in terms of pay, hours, security, involvement, esteem and freedom.

The above theoretical discussions on creativity, autonomy and commerce, Weijia Wang's Marxist analysis of media organisations, the proposed components of media management, and the differences between 'good' and 'bad' work within the creative industries help this thesis define its own version of management – a process coordinated by media managers who lead, plan, coordinate and mediate power. During this process, managers and employees share responsibilities and try to create 'good' work, including autonomy, interest and involvement, sociality, self-esteem, self-realisation, work-life balance and security. Undoubtedly, their decisions are also affected by national policies, industry regulations and employment contracts. Since Chapters 4 and 5 have covered China's *hukou* and social welfare system, media institutions' hierarchical recruitment systems and employee training system, the remaining issues – how managers lead, plan and coordinate work, and how employees perceive and experience creative work, will be examined in the following chapters.

Section Two: Decision-making meetings

Gershon (2009:269) states that a natural convergence of industries and information technologies blurs the distinctions between broadcasting, cable and telephony. Thus, today's media managers face new industry players and more diverse issues compared with years past. According to Faustino and Noam (2019:147), the media industry is going through an accelerated transformation due to media convergence, which deeply affects management strategies and practices within and across media companies and industries. Therefore, as suggested by Albarran (2002), media management requires a combination of competencies specific to particular media industries, requiring particular individual and unique talents. This section explains that the media managers, usually the head *biandao* and the producer, combine authoritarian and consultative leadership styles during the decision-making process. Their management styles are obvious during various decision-making meetings. During my fieldwork, I have witnessed a combination of consultative and authoritarian leadership styles. Some managers are aware that communication with employees can affect their work enthusiasm, while the majority focus more on perceived end results. Additionally, too much commute time, high rents and complicated work relations also cause the current high staff turnover.

In April 2018, the indie that produced *Job Hunting* had a two-days meeting over the weekend to pitch a new television format to the CEO on the upcoming Monday. Inevitably, the team had to sacrifice their rest days. It was not the first time for the team to work over weekends. They worked almost every weekend, according to two interns from the team. The meeting started at 11 am with a routine briefing and soon began the format creation discussion. The chief director encouraged all team members to brainstorm how to modify the current talent show format. Each member had opportunities to propose new ideas, and the rest of the team would further develop the proposals. The chief director sat in the middle of the team, listening to the pitches while smoking an e-cigarette. He only spoke up when decisions needed to be made. When he came across an idea, he encouraged the team to develop it further. With regards to a few interns that remained quiet during the meeting, the chief director had to ask their opinions one by one to encourage them to speak up. By the end, everyone had contributed to the modification proposal, but no decision was reached because the chief director told the team to postpone the discussion until the following week. After a four-hour heated discussion on format modification, the chief director suddenly required the team to create a new dating show format upon the request of one of his clients. Initially, he did not mention that he had a new client who was a popular relationship counselling blogger on social media. The team was disappointed when they realised that they could not go home after the format modification, as they would usually be dismissed at 5 pm. At around 3 pm, interns secretly complained amongst themselves about the meeting schedule when the rest of the team went out for a cigarette break.

Intern (interviewee 1): I can't even remember the last time I had a free weekend. This month I have been working 21 days non-stop, and this is only the third month of my internship.

SZ³³: But as far as I know, you still get paid, right?

Intern: Yes, but I am paid monthly, and I don't get paid for working during the weekends.

SZ: Is this common for other team members?

Intern: Of course. Do you think they can complain? Their money is distributed by the chief director who would mark their work performance.

³³ Tianyu Zhang (Sophia), the thesis writer.

After the short break, the team went back to the crowded meeting room for another round of discussion. As the client was known for relationship counselling, the team was asked to create a 'simple' dating show format to promote the client's reputation. Each team member was asked of opinions nicely from the chief director as usual. However, just when everyone assumed that the new show would be drafted based on the group discussion, the chief director suddenly said he would strongly recommend the team reference one American dating show produced in 2002. He then showed the team video clips of the dating show via a hard drive and required one of the senior *biandao* to write a proposal based on the clips they watched. The team reacted to the American show with varied opinions – some insisted that the games played in the show were 'too daring' and would not pass the censorship. Others found the show to be of great plot and quality. In the end, none of the team's ideas was adopted. It was also clear that the team lacked resources to watch foreign shows without the use of a valid VPN as the junior *biandao* came to me for VPN recommendations to bypass the Chinese firewall because his previous one had expired. He was then able to find more video clips of the American show on YouTube. On the following Monday, the format modification proposal was rejected by the CEO because he did not see the financial value of the modified format, according to the CEO's assistant. Despite the refusal, the chief director did not give up on the failed plan and insisted that the team modify it further. However, no further proposal was agreed by the CEO, and the whole team left the company in February 2019. Anonymous sources informed that the chief director did not get along well with the CEO in the end. In September 2018, the show's host was replaced. In March 2019, when I revisited the team during an informal dinner, the chief director told me that he left the company 'for friends.' He did not explain further, but after I interviewed the company's previous production assistant, who resigned around the same time, it became clear that the company fired the chief director's *gongzuoshi* due to the decreasing viewing ratings. The company also obtained the show's IP and hired another *gongzuoshi* to continue with the production. The show's format has been modified several times and is still available on certain Chinese online streaming websites. It was not the first time for the chief director to make decisions for everyone in the team, but it is clear that the vertical decision-making style of this *gongzuoshi* did not go well.

Compared to this small-scale *gongzuoshi* with a relatively authoritarian decision-making style, bigger institutions, such as CCTV, adopt a more systematic but complex decision-making process. SJ (interviewee 2), a producer from CCTV-1, explained:

SJ: No one gets to decide on everything. Managers consider too many aspects when making decisions. It is never one person's decision as relevant departments must support every decision. For example, a while ago, we wanted to hire JD, a news presenter from a current affairs programme. We wanted her to host an entertainment show as her image and hosting style suit this programme perfectly. However, the channel's chief executives gave up the idea in the end as they'd fear the audience may overthink the reasons why we had the previous host replaced. To be honest, we had to replace her because she obtained a US green card. The Chief feared this information might be leaked to the public and cause unnecessary troubles. JD and the former host shared too much in common, including their age. The audience may think the previous host was replaced due to unspeakable reasons if we find someone similar. That's why we hired our current host, even if she isn't better than JD, our initial and ideal choice.

Apart from politics, CCTV's complex decision-making process is also affected by the human resources and finance department. TW (interviewee 3), a senior cameraperson from CCTV-3, explained:

TW: If the finance department doesn't give us the money we need, we can't make any show. However, people who work there know little about television, so they always underestimate the amount of money we need for programme development. Whenever we are granted some money, they would cut off 30% first, insisting that we won't need that much money. We have to go with what we get.

SZ: Have you appealed or tried to reason with them?

TW: Yes, we have, but it never worked. They just won't give us the money, and we can't do anything about it. They would bring up some rules and legislation that support their decisions. We can't win. Sadly, our money is controlled by people who don't know anything about television production. How can we expect them to support us?

SZ: Is this a common phenomenon in CCTV?

TW: It is quite common to see decision-makers who don't know anything about television make critical decisions about television. Such a shame.

During this fieldwork, most decision-making processes were not consultative enough. This is because, on some occasions, managers had to make decisions in a hurried and pressured situation. Last-minute decisions inevitably resulted in under-developed television programmes. For example, some production teams were still confused about their programmes' themes even after the editing or after the programmes' broadcast on TV. The internal meetings of *Job Hunting*, *Win the Bill*, and *Waiting for Me* have represented varied workplace cultures within the television industry. During the meetings, most *biandao* remained silent, except for the producer/chief directors who hosted the meeting. People kept quiet because they knew decisions were likely to have been pre-made, and some were not up for debate. They also know that they are not the decision-makers even if they have been asked for their opinions. One senior *biandao* said that they got used to bureaucracy and decided to 'play it safe'. A British producer, David, who has been working with Chinese television for ten years, commented:

David: Sometimes, you need maniacs to challenge the big leader. I've seen Chinese practitioners obeying their boss. Sometimes I even asked whether I could help them challenge the big boss because I know the big leader isn't that creative without teamwork. Still, unfortunately, in China, it's all about listening to the leader.

The playing-it-safe attitude has soon partially turned into passive-aggressiveness, resulting in decision-making processes not being taken seriously. Passive obedience can lead to rushed decisions and under-developed programme formats. Whenever a format meeting was arranged, television practitioners' first reaction was to check upon similar programmes from home and abroad. The foreign programmes were usually produced years ago, but decision-makers may still require the team to reference the old formats. Unlike in the UK, where format factories can spend years developing a new format, Chinese television endeavours to create television formats within a much shorter timeframe and to keep modifying the formats during their actual production. Some have succeeded and gained high viewing ratings, such as *Win the Bill*, but not all are lucky. However, this does not mean that television practitioners do not adjust to changes. Many television practitioners are good at self-reflection and have learnt from the past to improve their shows' quality despite vertical power relations.

Although television practitioners have acknowledged different employment contracts and uneven work benefits, they find that the employment hierarchy might have hindered their creativity and professional growth. The fieldwork data suggests that junior *biandao* are willing to create new television formats and venture individualised directing styles. Most of them have been hard-working and sacrificing their time for work, not only for the decision-makers but also for their career growth. For those who live far from work, attending a half-day meeting is equivalent to a full day's work when travel time is calculated. Those unwilling to commute must live somewhere closer to the workplace in the central business district in Beijing, where rents are incredibly high. Moreover, the *biandao* from the indie work almost unpaid during weekends as they are annually contracted. The decision-makers, from the producer to the senior management, are aware of the situation but cannot do much about it. Since a *biandao's* work can be changed freely by the host and the producer, they usually decide to play it safe by not arguing or fighting back and tactically remain silent most of the time. Correspondingly, the staff turnover rate of the industry is high. Within the duration of the fieldwork, over one month in April 2018, more than eight employees left the independent production company that produced *Job Hunting*. In the following month, four other people left the company. Later in September 2018, the entire production team of *Job Hunting* left the company and was replaced by a newly appointed chief director. High staff turnover rate also occurred in CCTV but more at a below-the-line level. In *Waiting for Me*, some interns only came for one day and left immediately. Several other *biandao* also applied for job transfers due to complicated work relationships.

Section Three: Nationalism, censorship and self-censorship

Another aspect that has a far-reaching influence on media management is China's growing nationalism, with persistent media censorship. Driven by a competitive market, Chinese television practitioners are expected to produce new shows within a limited time and to regularly modify a programme's format to cater to the audience's changing tastes. This mentality of 'the quicker, the better' has pushed many practitioners to reference or copy foreign television formats. It is not uncommon to find similar television formats appearing on different provincial channels within the same year. Some shows were under-developed and disappeared in no time. Despite several modification failures, some television practitioners believe they can do as well as Western television without legally buying television formats. This belief is based on professional self-esteem and nationalism, especially when the Chinese government has encouraged the media to carry out self-dependent innovation. The NRTA has imposed limitations on importing foreign television formats. For example, in 2013, each provincial TV station was allowed to import one show per year, and in 2015, it encouraged reality shows to promote Chinese culture and curb fees on celebrities. All these measures have pushed TV stations to turn to co-production for a while, but in 2016, SARPPFT stated that co-production was equivalent to 'importing foreign formats' if the Chinese production team did not retain the full IP rights.

An example of nationalism comes from one of the *Win the Bill* format modification meetings during my fieldwork. The programme has been through several format changes since its debut in 2014. Each format modification process usually lasted a few days, according to one of the senior *biandao*. *Win the Bill* was originally a co-produced programme with Endemol, a Dutch-based media company. Since 2015, instead of asking Endemol for further help, the team decided to modify one section of the show, the 'mission challenge', on their own. This section was originally designed by Endemol. Subsequently, the co-production ceased, and according to one of the senior *biandao*, the viewing ratings became higher after they stopped paying Endemol for game design copyright. 'The audience doesn't care about how bespoke the missions are. They are more interested in knowing whether or not the candidates can pass the challenge,' said one senior *biandao*, who believed that the Endemol-designed game missions were too complicated for the audience to comprehend.

In another team meeting in June 2018, *Win the Bill* management considered importing the 'mixed reality' technology for one of their newly created television programmes. 'Mixed reality' is most often understood as a blending of the physical world with the digital world (Etherington, 2018), which is considered as an advanced television production technique. The world's first interactive mixed reality TV show is the Norwegian programme *Lost in Time*. Although CCTV agreed to hire the original technology team, they were reluctant to pay the Norwegian production team, which could directly help them create their desired content. This was because the *Win the Bill* production team believed that they were able to apply the technology without any help, as they were 'professional enough', according to the show's producer. After the meeting, the producer expressed her opinions on international co-production between China and other countries. She believed that co-production is still possible, especially for CCTV, even with policy restrictions. However, she emphasised that all co-production must ensure CCTV retains the IP, as required by NRTA.

The producer's comment contradicted the rest of the team, who insisted that CCTV would no longer have any co-production with international production companies. They argued that CCTV must comply with NRTA's rules since NRTA has encouraged Chinese media to create original television formats. As the only state-level media, CCTV is more advantaged to make television than other provincial TV, especially when buying international television formats. However, since NRTA has imposed restrictions on international co-production, even CCTV had to find a way around the changing legislation. In 2018, CCTV commissioned *Challenge Impossible* (挑战不可能) and *Smarter AI* (机智过人). Both programmes hired Western consultants during the pre-production. This was CCTV's attempt to redefine the term co-production. A producer from CCTV commented: 'As long as CCTV owns the show's copyright, we will not get in any trouble by hiring international teams to help us.'

The ceased co-production with Endemol, the attempted purchase of 'mixed reality', and the conversation with *Win the Bill* producer have indicated CCTV's inclination to cut programme budgets and show a stronger nationalism and self-confidence from Chinese TV. One senior *biandao* of CCTV proudly reiterated that Chinese television formats are becoming popular globally, with the export of *National Treasure* (国家宝藏) (CCTV, 2017). Many *biandao* have emphasised that co-production may no longer be necessary as they believe they can do as

well as others. One manager from CCTV believed that experienced television practitioners should be able to decipher a programme's production process by merely watching the show. Hence, it may not be necessary to buy 'production bibles' from other countries.

Apart from the growing nationalism, increased censorship has reinforced self-censorship within the television industry. Traditional political-economic media studies often emphasise the institution that imposes censorship, i.e., the NRTA in China. However, fewer studies have explored how the media industry implements censorship. During this fieldwork, I closely examined the implementation of the censorship process and the people who carried out the process. The live censorship of the *Job Hunting* production is a typical example of how an independent production company complies with state censorship under the supervision of the show's broadcasting platform, a state-owned television station. In May 2018, apart from the production team and their colleagues from other production companies, representatives from the television station who commissioned the show arrived at the production site. In a filming studio office, the representatives watched the entire studio production via a television screen synced with the technical director's screen. From the perspective of the independent production company and the television station, having representatives to supervise the production could potentially boost production efficiency and ensure that the show does not derail from the platform's expectations. Since the show was broadcasted via satellite TV, the TV station would be fully responsible if any of the content went wrong. Therefore, the TV station assigned its Head of Format Development, with his assistant, a senior *biandao*, to the studio to oversee the recording. The Head of Format Development and his assistant were entirely responsible for the prior censorship until the show was sent to the chief executive of the channel for further approval. The Head of Format Development was a middle-aged man with a full sense of humour. His job was not only to censor anything that may be politically sensitive but also to give advice on the overall story arc, the camera positions, the image quality, and other creative parts of the production.

Whenever there was a break, the producer would come to the guest room and take notes of their advice. On one filming day in May 2018, an interviewer from a big international company made controversial comments on the classification of Chinese universities, and this comment had embarrassed a studio participant who did not graduate from a well-known

university. The other interviewers immediately held a debate on the comments. The Head of Format Development quickly realised that this debate was inappropriate for TV broadcasts. He immediately asked the producer to delete the debate during editing as the content would potentially offend those who did not graduate from top universities. When the final editing was finished, the Head of Format Development repeatedly watched the show and advised further modification. When watching the edited episode for the second time, the Head of Format Development and his assistant were unsure of one opening subtitle. It said: how this *běipiāo* person makes a living? *Beipiao* (北漂) is a term describing outsiders coming to Beijing to make a living. The character *piao* literally means 'floating' and indicates a strong sense of insecurity. The Head of Format Development immediately asked his assistant to inform the production company to change the subtitle. He believed the phrase would potentially affect social instability. Sometimes, the Head of Format Development and his assistant disagreed with each other. For example, when they censored one episode about experimental music, the assistant did not think the background music was suitable for TV broadcasting. However, the Head of Format Development argued that the music went with the idea of 'experimental'. He then suggested that the assistant contact the studio participant to pick a different song. If, by then, the assistant still disliked the music, she could make her own decision.

Finally, most Chinese television stations are particularly cautious when selecting studio participants from Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. During the production of *Job Hunting*, the assistant from the TV station explained that if any of the non-Mainland candidates expressed ambiguous or opposite political views on TV, the entire show would be banned by NRTA, and the station would be disciplined. Therefore, she insisted that the production company and the broadcasting platform should be responsible for background checks, ensuring these candidates are never involved in any activities that could separate the country. In this specific TV station, they usually ask the candidates to sign a written confirmation.

To be on the safe side, the producer of *Job Hunting* exerted more self-censorship on herself, even on apolitical things. Once in a group chat, the producer reminded the *biandao* to write less about celebrity fandom in a television script. The story was about a studio participant who wanted to become a celebrity's assistant. The producer said that the Head of Research of the TV station reminded her that it is best not to emphasise celebrity fandom. Instead, the

programme should aim to divert the topic to 'appropriate' career values and to spread positive energy to young people. Some of the *biandao* disagreed with the demand and commented in a group chat '左到家了……' (this cannot be more politically left). As *biandao* of independent production companies do not work for state-owned television and hence are less involved in politics, they can be more reluctant to accept censorship, although they do not have much say in the situation.

Unlike *Job Hunting's* passive self-censorship, CCTV's television practitioners are often more active to comply with censorship due to CCTV's role as the state media. Sometimes, they can be too cautious. For instance, one episode of *Waiting for Me* had to be modified because the full version was 'too dark' and would potentially harm the image of certain Chinese authorities from a detention centre in the early 1980s, according to the producer. During an internal meeting designed to modify production scripts, the producer was astonished to hear all the details of the specific story. While the *biandao* retold the story to the team, the producer listened carefully, with his hand covering his face. The heroine in this story had suffered since the 1980s, partially caused by a corrupted person at a detention centre. The producer knew for sure that if the programme revealed too many details about potential bribery and the dark sides of human nature, they would be asked to modify the story by the channel's senior executive, who would review the show. The censors would not expect the audience to hear dark stories in case that they affect social stability. Everyone in the room went silent after hearing the details, and eventually, the producer shouted out loudly: 'Bastard! How could people be so cruel and selfish?' He went silent again and told the team: 'We can't tell her the truth. She won't be able to take it. Also, the truth would be too miserable for TV broadcasting. We need to tell her a white lie, but we must promise to help her until we find her relative.' One month later, when the programme had axed many other episodes due to the change of a host, this story remained the only episode to be broadcasted on TV. In September 2018, one *biandao* of this story said that many people have been in touch to provide possible clues after watching the show. However, the woman's relative remained missing until the submission of this thesis. Although it was tempting to reveal the details on TV, the production team had to spare the details to help the studio participant effectively. Despite the self-censorship and giving up exposing details of specific sensitive

social issues, the producer of *Waiting for Me* still endeavours to encourage the production team to pursue as much professionalism as possible.

As the thesis's Introduction explains, the more frequent international cooperation, China's pivotal role as a business partner, as well as television practitioners' self-esteem must have spurred the growing nationalism. Chinese television practitioners have learnt from their international cohorts and created influential original formats. Additionally, their desire to create television programmes with Chinese characteristics shows their pursuit of professionalism and even perfectionism. From this perspective, nationalism is understandable. However, it is uncertain when such emotion becomes unreasonable and hinders the development and quality of future TV shows. For example, the decision-makers of *Win the Bill* back then would not have been able to predict whether the show's viewing ratings would drop or increase after they ceased co-production with Endemol. It was more like a gamble. They also could have paid the Norwegian team the full price to avoid the hassle of creating content that matched the latest technology. There might be more reasons behind the seemingly obvious nationalism. However, the ability to find out the specific reasons behind CCTV's decision-making process is out of my reach as an intern/researcher. It may remain a mystery and needs more exploration from future researchers. Furthermore, it is apparent that any issues that could potentially stir up social stability and highlight class contradictions are avoided by television practitioners. This can be seen from examples of deleting controversial debates on university classification, removing sensitive subtitles, and sparing details of corruption. Stricter censorship undoubtedly results in more self-censorship, and to what degree will self-censorship suppress creative freedom remains unknown. However, it also remains unknown whether suppressed creative freedom can affect a show's quality. Sometimes, suppressed creative freedom can be used as an excuse to cover up other reasons behind a failed programme. So far, the television programmes I observed are still thriving. Perhaps the point of this question is to study creative workers' experience of work, as to whether their work is perceived as 'good' work.

Section Four: Health and safety

During my fieldwork, health and safety training and precautions were not accessible to every television practitioner, although the management did attempt to ensure everyone's safety. Only a proportion of staff received health and safety training, and only a few were licensed to give first aid to others. Additionally, temporary workers, such as most interns and studio participants, were not fully protected. They were not trained with relevant knowledge, and most were not insured during studio production. On the other hand, the management ensured everything within their reach looked decent, at least on the surface. For instance, all office buildings were clean, spacious and organised. Some office buildings are located in the city's central business district, and one can enjoy a good bird's view of the city. In stark contrast, things that were beyond the management's control could be chaotic. For example, certain third-party television studios were dusty, unorganised, and lacked health and safety precautions. In such an unorganised environment, television practitioners were fine to endure the inconvenience for up to one week's studio production. It was the longer projects that challenged television practitioners' perseverance to deal with the unpleasant living experience. During the studio production of *Waiting for Me*, all *biandao* lived in Xingguang Media Park for two weeks. They needed to adapt to irregular working patterns and long working hours for many days. Such circumstance was common to other projects that required longer stay in television studios.

The reasons behind long-working hours were mainly due to limited budgets and the managements' decisions. Even for state-owned television, such as CCTV that generally has more money than private production companies, production managers still try to save as much money as possible. On the other hand, even when there is enough budget to cover all expenses of a production team during the studio production period, television studios, especially third-party studios, are too popular to be booked for as many days as one team wishes. Due to the popularity of television studios and compact scheduling, television practitioners are expected to live near the studio during the filming period. Some hotels near the production bases are of a minimum standard, and workers also have to endure food they dislike. During the fieldwork, it was clear that hardly anyone enjoyed the food from the studio canteen – taken out from big buckets by vans, roughly cooked and options were limited. Since unexpected events during studio production could happen anytime, television

practitioners barely had time to go to restaurants, nor could they always eat at a regular time even if they paid for food delivery. They either endured unpleasant food for several weeks depending on the filming schedule (generally up to two weeks) or dined in the same small restaurant inside the Media Park, ordering every dish in turn from a limited range of options. In general, when television practitioners are in the filming base, they cannot freely manage their time either due to the tight filming schedule or the management. For instance, they can be summoned at 1 am for a meeting or rehearsal and still be expected to start work again at 10 am on the same morning. Sometimes the most exciting thing for a team during studio production is to go for a coffee break perceived as a luxurious experience.

During the fieldwork, two CCTV productions were filmed in Xingguang Media Park, where there was no health and safety guide, nor were there any warnings about dim lighting and uneven roads. An intern who worked there for three months laughed at me when I was scared about dust falling on my hair. She said that dust was common in studios and could help contrast the lighting effects. When asked about health insurance, she admitted that interns were not insured and must be responsible for their own safety, let alone receive any relevant training. In distinct contrast, official *biandao* and other staff with labour contracts were insured, as were some studio participants. Nearly all production teams signed contracts with their studio participants about their health and safety. However, some agreements were, in fact, disclaimers. The disclaimer (保证书) says: 'I declare that I am healthy during the studio production and I am fully responsible for my health and safety if accidents happen. CCTV is not liable for my health and safety during studio production. If I cause any damages, I am liable for any costs.' Indeed, for many CCTV production, all participants were asked to sign the disclaimer before the filming. Apart from signing the disclaimer, studio participants also needed to sign a confirmation of IP transfer (确认书), which allowed CCTV to use participants' images in the future (see Appendices). Although disclaimers were signed, the producers were still concerned about the health and safety of studio participants. On the day before the filming of *Win the Bill* in May 2018, the production team arrived at the studio and supervised the final prop installation, which was a swimming pool. The producer started to quarrel with the prop designer about the water depth. She insisted that the water would be too deep for studio participants, but initially, the prop designer did not take her seriously. She then questioned whether the designer could be held responsible for accidents. The prop

designer finally asked his team to adjust the water depth. When the props were modified, the producer assigned two *biandao* who had insurance to test the equipment. They both tried all the props and confirmed that they were safe. On days of filming, medical teams and divers were present by the swimming pool in case any candidates fell into the water. By the end of the filming, all candidates were safe. For CCTV, the only group exempt from signing disclaimers is children aged under 18, who must be protected by health insurance. In May 2018, *Win the Bill* worked with around 40 children for a scheduled special summer programme in July. The child participants were covered by insurance, and the producer was particularly cautious when working with them.

Even though many creative workers from this fieldwork did not enjoy their accommodations near television studios, the *biandao* of *If You Are the One* at Jiangsu Satellite TV enjoyed their stay near the filming base, which is the well-known Nanjing Olympic Sports Stadium. The stadium has been rented by the production team monthly and has provided many work sectors for the production team. The television studio is in the centre of the stadium with a temporarily built makeup room, two guest rooms, a small interview room, and other facilities exclusively built for *If You Are the One*. The production team schedules its filming once a month and aims to film four episodes within two days. More importantly, the team has formed the habit of finishing work early. They can then start early in the morning and continue this pattern. One senior *biandao* of *If You Are the One* confirmed that all studio participants and staff were insured. Their 'secret' lies in not hiring interns. 'We make sure every employee is on a labour contract, and due to production confidentiality, we do not hire any interns,' said a *biandao* who has been working there since 2010.

Except for the *If You Are the One* production team, other production teams observed during this fieldwork were expected to work long and irregular hours with little financial rewards. The irregular working pattern has caused some practitioners health problems and even affected their personal lives. A senior *biandao* from CCTV said: 'As a *biandao*, you don't usually have weekends and don't sleep regular hours.' She had to take special medication to relieve herself regularly, and she claimed that her colleagues had this 'universal problem'. On another occasion, an intern mentioned the same health problem and confirmed that her colleagues had stomach disease due to irregular working hours. She said: 'Most media jobs

are replaceable. If you are not willing to cooperate, you will be easily replaced. This industry never lacks young and energetic people who are willing to do tiring work.’ This intern had been working for the production for three months without being paid a penny. Apart from having health problems, television practitioners also have to balance between professional and personal life. There was no such thing as ‘personal’ life in most cases, as they were fully occupied with work. A senior TV presenter who worked at Zhejiang Satellite TV commented: ‘Everything I do, including socialise, is for my career. Why would I deliberately go clubbing with colleagues if it’s not for team building? Even if I’m not in the office, I am technically working.’ The work and life dilemma can be especially tricky for married creative workers who struggle to care for their families. A senior *biandao* at an independent production company had been having tensions with her family. She had a two-year-old son, but she struggled to care for him. Her mother-in-law always quarrelled with her and claimed that her husband was the primary earner. Her income was higher than her husband’s, but her mother-in-law did not see her effort. This was due to her absence from the childcare. Sometimes, she could only have a video chat with her son when she worked in the studio. In worse cases, practitioners were not even aware of the potential danger caused by their workplace until they had left. The interview conversation with SAW (interviewee 4) shown in Chapter 5 indicates that some private production companies may not even pay for employees’ social welfare, as required by law.

Although many creative workers have endured poor health and safety guidelines at work, some still hold an optimistic view of the industry. Many have developed a sense of accomplishment from their jobs. One senior *biandao* said his job enables him to ‘meet various people’, and this ‘great opportunity’ outweighs the overnight filming and dusty studio environment. It seems that no matter how harsh the working conditions are, plenty of creative workers are willing to stay, and many more youngsters endeavour to pursue a television career. Media managers have undoubtedly taken advantage of this situation and turned a blind eye to managing essential aspects of workers’ working environment, although some decisions are beyond certain manager’s payrolls. A further question is for how long this buyer’s market will exist and whether the negligence of health, safety, and other forms of exploitation have negatively affected the industry.

Section Five: Security and confidentiality

As the industry is becoming increasingly careful with proprietary rights, television practitioners pay more attention to issues regarding security and confidentiality since any possible leak of information may cause unprecedented damage to a television programme. Although rules are expected to be followed, not all employees can comply. Failure to comply with relevant rules will be likely to cause negative consequences.

As the content of *Waiting for Me* involves many ethical issues, it is taken as a case study in this section. Given the special requirement to keep secrets until the end of studio production, every team member was sent rules via WeChat (China's version of WhatsApp) about confidentiality during studio production. New employees were sent specific rules on their first day at work: 1. No public discussion of work details; 2. When in the studio, do not leave the wireless microphone on the speaker at any time; 3. In front of participants, use coded language to replace 'those who look for missing persons' and 'missing persons found'; 4. No immediate posts on social media about the show's result, unless it has been on TV; 5. Securely dispose of all printed material (including the studio running order and television scripts) relevant to the production; and 6. Nothing relevant to the programme should be left in the studio once the filming is finished. Although *Waiting for Me* has exerted clear rules, a breach of confidentiality may still happen. On an average office day, theoretically, anyone who was present in the office could have access to the show's information, either from computer or printed paper randomly scattered on *biandao's* desks. During the studio production period, where the entire team was accommodated in Xingguang Media Park, risks of a potential breach of confidentiality became higher.

In July 2018, during the pre-interview period, the hotel guest arrangement almost leaked the production plan to some participants. Since many families checked into the same hotel, the production team occasionally had to put different participants, arranged for different episodes, into the same room, especially when the hotel was fully booked. It was natural for participants to hear each other's stories and how they had tried to find the missing persons. The filming took place one by one, and the participants who finished earlier could inform the latter where the long-lost families were located – in a hotel. The latter participants, who were not supposed to know anything, may assume that their long-lost relatives were hiding in that

hotel, and they may go to that hotel. If they did, they would reveal the team's location plan, and other new participants could know their relatives' whereabouts. It almost happened when some participants tried to find out more about the production. Luckily for the production team, the producer immediately relocated the participants before they could know more. This accident shows that although a production team can think of many precautions, they are still likely to have made mistakes before starting the studio production.

Similar issues, such as potential breach of confidentiality also occurred in other production teams. During the production of *Job Hunting*, studio participants' CVs were randomly scattered in the studio office. They were unintendedly made accessible to anyone who could walk in. The doors were wide open, and there were plenty of irrelevant bypassers. When the recording was finished, the production crew were too busy packing their own bags to dispose of the relevant printed documents securely. The cleaners had to pick up the documents and chuck them into large rubbish bins, without using shredders. Some studio participants also may also be impatiently post exclusive photos on social media even if they were reminded not to do so multiple times by the production team. It was difficult to guarantee no spoilers given the massive number of studio participants and the audience who were relatives and friends of the participants. During my fieldwork, although no member of staff found anyone revealing competition results on social media before the scheduled broadcasting date, they still saw many participants posting photos that contained less important information about the programme, such as the location of the studio and the stage settings.

Compared to precautions against protecting proprietary information, the security work was much better. Nearly all offices and production sites visited during this fieldwork were secured, with the protection by security guards and password controls. There was no easy access without a work pass or authorised visiting permit. As a state-owned institution, the CCTV office building is equipped with a complicated security system. There were at least two guards at each entrance. Anyone who wished to enter the building must present a valid ID with an invitation letter or a work pass. No food or drink could be brought into the building as X-ray machines were checking every handbag. CCTV employees could only buy food or drink at the shops within the office building, with their work pass or via WeChat pay. Even within the third-party production sites, security guards were everywhere, ensuring everyone

entering the studio were relevant to the production on site. In many independent production companies, security guards and password-protected doors were present to ensure people's safety.

We can see that some media managers changed their decisions quickly and caused confusions and disappointment from employees. Middle managers were especially caught up between policies and expectations from their subordinates. Other managers got around media censorship and endeavoured to ensure most people's safety on site, even though they failed to provide legal insurance to interns. On the other hand, since interns were offered free food and accommodations during weeks of studio production, they felt that they should not ask for more, especially when they signed internship disclaimers before the internship started. Access to free food and accommodation was used as an exchange for free labour and sacrifice of rest days of the interns. Since many employees were contracted yearly, they could not argue about taking rest days as they were aware that the nature of media jobs excludes national holidays defined by laws.

Overall, from Chapter 4 and Section 1 of this chapter, we understand that managers of different levels are responsible for various aspects of the decision-making process within a hierarchical organisation. By the same token, employees with different employment contracts have different responsibilities and unequal work benefits. The term management is also redefined to fit the context of this thesis: a process coordinated by media managers who lead, plan, coordinate and mediate power. During this process, managers and employees share responsibilities and try to create 'good' work, including autonomy, interest and involvement, sociality, self-esteem, self-realisation, work-life balance and security. It seems that the television management, from above, expected cooperation from employees when orders are inexplicit and lack consultation. The fieldwork has shown that most unsatisfactory events were caused by poor management rather than television practitioners' own wrongdoing. Regardless of the nature of a TV organisation, all decision-makers have one thing in common: they must consider as many aspects as possible, and this process may inevitably cause certain groups to be more unsatisfied than others. Furthermore, although decision-makers are often careful with their decisions, they may still fail to balance the interests of different parties. It is often the most vulnerable, invisible, below-the-line

practitioners that are affected by the changing policies. Due to the volatile policy-making environment, managers of different television institutions have learnt to make compromises and expected their staff to cooperate. These management styles have undoubtedly had a far-reaching influence on television employees, not only on how they should work together but also on how they decide to work together. The following chapter will demonstrate how television practitioners implemented self-management as a coping mechanism to the management styles.

Chapter 10 Self-management

Chapters 4 and 9 have introduced the multi-layered recruitment system and analysed why such an employment and management system have caused inequality and precarity. This chapter discusses how employees cope with the overall working environment, and the process of coping strategies is called self-management in this chapter. This chapter argues that certain management styles have led to employees' self-management and encouraged an informal work culture that compliments the formal working conditions. During my fieldwork, I have realised that most unsatisfactory events were caused by poor management rather than incompetent employees. In both state-owned TV stations and independent production companies, media managers have one thing in common: they must consider as many aspects as possible, but the decisions can still cause one group to be more unsatisfied than others. In other words, they can still fail to balance the interests of different parties. It is often the most vulnerable, invisible, below-the-line television practitioners who are affected by the changing decisions. Due to the volatile policy-making environment, managers of different television institutions constantly make compromises and expect their staff members to adapt to changes. The following sections will explain why creative workers form informal working cultures and how they do it.

Section One: TV as a reciprocal business: *guanxi* (关系), *renmai* (人脉) and *renqing* (人情)

Weijia Wang (2011:169) states that the multi-layered recruitment system, including labour dispatch, has made it almost impossible for news journalists to organise activities spontaneously. This is because the current employment system segregates employees with different employment contracts and hierarchies. Some employees are not even qualified to join the worker's union within their workplace because they are legally dispatched from another company to the media institution where they actually work. Also, since employees of different employment contracts receive different work benefits, they are more likely to compete than unite and fight for their rights. This is a common strategy used by global media conglomerates that creates job market competition and tension to avoid being targeted at by workers. As discussed, the Chinese television industry is not far from the news industry as they share similar management and recruitment systems. Under such an environment,

television workers have to self-manage and find ways around unequal treatment whilst improving their working conditions by other means, since resorting to the worker's union may not be the best option.

In a study among freelancers in the UK media industry, Kerry Platman (2005:581) finds a paradox: on the one hand, freelancers tend to be seen as equipped with the latest 'cutting edge' skills and technologies, providing immediate and ready-made solutions to the labour and product needs of media client-employers. Yet, at the same time, employers expected freelancers to 'fit in' and to share their 'vision'. They were cautious of entrusting work to individuals who might find their methods questionable, as budgets had dwindled, technology had advanced, and customers had become more demanding. The pressures of modern media management were such that employers could not risk intransigence or rigidity from their freelancers (Deuze, 2007:184). Platman's conclusion of the UK media industry resembles the Chinese media industry, where managers have tried to invest the least to recruit the best talents. Ironically, due to fierce competition, they can always find talented people. The problem later becomes how to manage the creative workers and build rapport with them. In China, a popular proverb can demonstrate the relationship between the managers and the subordinates – 'higher authorities have policies whereas local authorities have their countermeasures.'³⁴ This proverb accurately reflects the relationship between media managers and creative workers. Firstly, the TV industry is a miniature of the Chinese *renqing* society, where work can be done, and trust can be gained based on the return of favours. Secondly, creative workers have adapted to the nepotism of various kinds, and they make full use of it themselves. Subsequently, an informal working culture aimed at building interpersonal relationships is needed due to employee self-management.

Sometimes, the return of favours can go wrong and jeopardise fairness. A CCTV *biandao*, YD (interviewee 5), revealed that the management breached the code of production by assigning television script proposals to another *biandao* without giving equal opportunities to others. The rest of the team found out about this during a team meeting when the *biandao*, who was given the scripts, could not explain where he obtained the story first-hand.

³⁴ 上有政策下有对策。

Everyone, including the producer, knew that this was unfair to other *biandao*, as the number of proposals granted is calculated into a *biandao*'s annual bonus and would affect their annual reviews. Despite that, nobody said anything. It was not the first time since unfair competition (in this case, gifted authorship) has happened.

SZ: Have you thought about appealing to the producer?

YD: I know it was unfair, but I didn't know whether that *biandao* and CCTV's senior management had a close relationship or not. I didn't want to be a gossiper. After all, it was not like my proposals were not granted.

SZ: Is gifted authorship a common thing here?

YD: I'm not sure, but I can say that almost everyone in CCTV has some *guanxi* (special connections) with the senior management or some important people. However, people still need to prove their worth once they are employed. Last month a *biandao* was fired. She definitely had *guanxi* and worked with us for a few months. But guess what? She was still fired.

This conversation about *guanxi* is a typical reflection of the Chinese television industry, where employees are keen on discovering newcomers' work connections. *Guanxi* (关系), or return of a favour, as an important component of Chinese society, has played a significant role in making an informal working culture that mutually affects the television production culture. Although the web of *guanxi* is important within the industry, it is not the key to a successful career. YD has been thought highly of by her managers because of her excellent directing skills. She is amongst the highest-paid list of the production personnel, although on a *waixie* contract. It may not seem too important for state-owned television stations to have *guanxi* with the management, as decisions are made across different departments. However, *guanxi* and *renmai* are essential resources for independent production companies.

Guanxi literally means 'relation' or 'relationship' and can be loosely translated as 'connections'. It is an essential cultural concept in Chinese society and refers more narrowly to 'particularistic ties' (Jacobs 1979, 1980; cited in Gold et al., 2002:6). These ties are based on ascribed or primordial traits such as kinship and ethnicity, and achieved characteristics or having shared experiences, such as doing business together. Although the bases of *guanxi* can be naturally created, *guanxi* itself must be intentionally produced, nurtured, and maintained over time. *Guanxi* has both positive and negative connotations, but in many

cases, it implies 'going through the back door' to get something done, especially when it is more difficult to go through the 'front door' (ibid. p6). *Guanxi* defines the rudimentary dynamic in personalised social networks of power and is a crucial system of beliefs in Chinese culture. It plays a fundamental role within the Confucian doctrine, which sees the individual as part of a community and a set of family, hierarchical and friendly relationships.

Rén qíng (人情)³⁵, described as the exchange of favours, sympathy and help, comprises two basic properties: reciprocity as a recipient of *renqing*; and empathy as a benefactor (Luo, 1997; Pearce and Robinson, 2000; Yi and Ellis, 2000; Fan, 2002; Ramstrom, 2008; Wang et al., 2008; Shi et al., 2011; cited in Khan et al.; 2016:184). According to Khan et al. (2016), *renqing* is the activity that is conducted within a *guanxi* relationship and represents the behavioural aspect of the relationship. Without *renqing*, a *guanxi* relationship would be inactive and effectively dormant. However, *renqing* could blur boundaries between business and interpersonal relationships and, inevitably, it would be difficult to distinguish between personal and organisational actions. On the other hand, *renqing* has the potential to strengthen interpersonal ties within a business relationship. If someone *qian renqing*, (owes a favour), they need to return the favour next time. The parties that are involved in *renqing* actions automatically have formed some *guanxi*, and they are *ren mai* (人脉)³⁶ to each other. *Renmai*, or human contacts, is another term related to *guanxi*, also a niche Chinese concept that can be loosely defined as potential or official business partners who are willing to divide interests in a win-win situation. In summary, the exchange of favours is essential within Chinese society, and hence, China is seen as a *renqing* society. As television is ultimately a business, *renqing*, *guanxi*, and *renmai* all contribute to the reciprocal nature of the Chinese television industry. Such a notion can be backed up by the in-depth interviews conducted during this fieldwork. The terms *renmai*, *renqing*, and *guanxi* have appeared multiple times during the interviews. Although some creative workers admitted to knowing or having 'under-the-table-relationships' during their career, the Chinese television industry is like other businesses that rely on *guanxi* and *renmai* (Park and Luo, 2001; cited in Luo et al.: 2011:140).

³⁵ From here all will be written as *renqing*.

³⁶ From here all will be written as *renmai*.

A former production assistant, SWY (interviewee 6), explained in her interview how and why her previous company made investment decisions prior to its official formal bidding.

SWY: In my previous workplace, an indie, the CEO already commissioned a production team to work on a project that he invested in. However, he made it seem like a fair competition by demanding every other team in the company to write proposals. He claimed that whichever team wins would work on the project and gain the first sum of the commission fee.

SZ: Why did he do that if he already sorted it out?

SWY: He wanted the company to believe he was a fair boss, even if he had already found a suitable team via his *renmai*. Apparently, he owed someone a favour, and he also trusted the team that was recommended. Without *renmai*, he could have ended up paying double the fee.

SZ: Wouldn't an investor be willing to pay a team that is competent even if it means he has to pay more?

SWY: True, but if he only needed to pay a little bit more, we wouldn't need *renmai* anymore. Investors could save a significant amount of money if they found the right person(s). Let me give you some examples. My previous company only paid ¥10,000 (around £1,145) to rent a television studio, but its advertised market price was ¥100,000 (around £11,459). It's a ten times difference. Another example, I was assigned to hire a hip-hop band to perform at our company's annual dinner party. The band's market price is around ¥100,000 (around £11,459), but I managed to pay them only ¥40,000 (around £4,583) because my boss happened to know one of their friends. The band owed the friend a favour, and they also wanted to have a long-term business relationship with us. They wouldn't give any other the same low price.

SZ: What else makes *renqing* and *renmai* important other than money?

SWY: Trust and reputation. CEOs aren't stupid. They really care about whom they work with, whom they pay for and why. They wouldn't pay for any team that doesn't have a good reputation. It's a small world. We do care about our business partners' reputation and ours. Bosses will only trust those whom the market has tested. If they failed to find reliable partners, they'd risk losing millions. It's a serious business.

The above shows that the power of networking can never be underestimated in the television industry. Even this research itself relied on it. Television gatekeepers granted my fieldwork via *guanxi* and *renmai*. Without the help from friends and former classmates who work in the industry, it would have been impossible to carry out this fieldwork. On the other hand, the reciprocal nature of the television industry has its adverse effects. Practitioners expressed

various concerns about *renqing* and *renmai*. Many agreed that the return of a favour lies in the word 'return', which means they end up doing something unwillingly. In some cases, they described themselves as 'bent' and did not decide their own lives. For example, a *biandao*, EJ (interviewee 7), who graduated with a degree in English as a Second Language, and now works at CGTN, the English Channel of CCTV, commented:

EJ: When I started the job, I asked a colleague to lend me some recording equipment as he oversaw the recording room. It was for my personal project, and I could only do it during my lunch break. He opened the door for me and went for lunch. I recorded a soundtrack which took 30 minutes. A few days later, he asked me to translate his daughter's CV into English. It took me two hours. I mean, I didn't even make him sacrifice any time, and the equipment did not belong to him. How could he expect me to do the translation? They were not equal favours. It was unfair, and I wasn't happy, but I still helped him because I was new and did not want to offend anyone. I never asked him of anything ever since. One thing I dislike about *guanxi* is the effort in building it. When the chief director asks the team to attend dinner parties and drink alcohol with clients, I can't say no. I don't get paid for participating in these events. You can argue that it's for work, but they were just drinking alcohol. When I get home, it's usually 10 pm, and I stay up till midnight to compensate for the time I lost. I understand staying up is not good for my health, but I can't accept that I will need to face my work again once I go to bed and wake up. Where has my day gone? Where is my own time?

Since the industry is small and competitive, it is difficult for new people to get into it. A CEO of a small independent production company, YJ (interviewee 8), explained:

YJ: The reciprocal nature of the industry encourages oligopoly. Big production companies enjoy advertising how well-known and experienced their directors are, but they have ignored whether these directors and producers are good at making the specific genres they need. It also pushes away young teams like us. I hear too many stories about experienced directors 'labour-dispatching' their work to be done by unknown production teams. Obviously, those teams ask for little money, and their IP was relentlessly exploited. The experienced directors didn't do anything but obtained hefty commission fees from ignorant television stations – such a shame.

Section Two: Chinese food culture – building relationships on the dining table

The main argument made in this section is that the Chinese food culture is deeply embedded in television practitioners' daily working practices, and the time they take off for having food should be considered as part of an informal working culture, which is as, if not more important, as other aspects of television production.

Chinese cuisine is widely seen as representing one of the world's richest and most diverse culinary heritages. Accordingly, dining cultures evolved around the dining table are as complicated as the making of Chinese food. In Chinese society, people usually treat others with meals to make new friends or enhance established relationships. Even if people are not familiar with each other, they may still choose to go out for a meal to know each other better. Apart from daily socialisation, Chinese people also regard group dining as an effective way to do business. For example, in Cantonese culture, the breakfast is known as *zǎochá* (早茶), morning tea. This can usually last from morning to afternoon and acts as an important prop for people to talk business and exchange information in a seemingly informal environment (Ma, 2015). In other areas of China, people may not have morning tea but instead have formal dinners together. As dining together has been an important aspect of business etiquette in China, customs around the dining table are inevitably associated with hierarchy and power.

For television practitioners, who generally live a hectic life, having meals together means that they can potentially take a break from work and develop interpersonal relationships with colleagues. Newcomers always use meal breaks as an icebreaker and to socialise with others. As time goes by, creative workers can gradually create their social groups and choose to dine together. More importantly, they are likely to discuss work at the dining table via meal-sharing and may spontaneously divide workloads. Sometimes, their behaviours outside of usual working locales are even more important than their daily practices as they may be promoted or fired over the dining table. In this case, the restaurant becomes an extension of the workplace, where hierarchy exists in a more subtle and uncontrolled form. In a formal dinner, the seating order is strict, based on seniority and organisational hierarchy.

In general, the seat of honour is usually the one in the centre, facing east or facing the entrance. This seat is usually reserved for the guest with the highest status or a foreign guest of honour. Others with higher status should sit closer to the seat of honour, and those with lower positions sit further away. Meanwhile, a host may take the least prominent seat, usually the one nearest the kitchen entrance or service door. Only after the senior or the guest of honour sits down can other people be seated. Another essential aspect of the food culture is toasting alcohol. As it is a tradition for Chinese people to drink alcohol during a formal meal, the etiquette of toasting alcohol can become a burden on subordinates as the rules are complicated. For example, when toasting to older people or senior managers, it is expected to touch their glass from a lower angle and ensure the glass is not higher than the other person's. This behaviour is to indicate respect and humbleness. Anyone late to the meal may be expected to drink a glass of alcohol as an apology. Finishing a full glass of alcohol when toasting to someone represents full respect to the other person. Therefore, Chinese businesspersons may end up drinking multiple glasses of alcohol when they speak separately with a business partner. It is also considered a breach of politeness if someone turns down a drink. Although the alcohol culture is criticised by many people nowadays, it remains popular amongst Chinese businesspersons. Because of this, an employee's ability to drink alcohol may decide their future in the workplace as managers would expect to bring a subordinate can drink a lot during business meals so they can *dǎngjiǔ* (挡酒, drink alcohol on behalf of someone, so the person does not need to drink) for the managers, which is part of the Chinese alcohol culture. Due to the complex food and alcohol culture, creative workers are expected to learn these out-of-office skills to keep their jobs. These skills are especially important for employees from independent production companies, where clients mean everything.

In April 2018, the independent production company that produced *Job Hunting* had a formal dinner after one day's group activity. The company's CEO sat in the centre of the restaurant with their secretaries sitting on one side and senior managers sitting on the other side. The secretary was responsible for pouring alcohol into the managers' glasses. The managers, in turn, stood up and toasted to the CEO. When they finished flattering the CEO, they drank all the alcohol in the glass and showed the empty glasses to the CEO. As the highest in the hierarchy, the CEO had the privilege not to finish the whole glass. Instead, he only took a sip

from the glass, showing off his superiority. When the business clients are the highest in the hierarchy, they will do almost the same to differentiate from the rest. At the same time, newly recruited colleagues were required to toast to the managers and say, 'thanks for hiring me.' The rest of the employees sat quietly, waiting for the CEO to take the first bite of the food.

Apart from having meal breaks together, television practitioners also go for cigarette breaks together. One senior *biandao* of an independent production company always took breaks with her colleagues, although she did not smoke. As a new mother, she struggled to have free time, but she claimed she could feel freedom outside of the office building, so she happily took the cigarette break as an opportunity to chat. Having been through similar situations, managers usually turn a blind eye to employees' occasional breaks. They even encourage employees to dine together to enhance group cohesion. While most employees do not dislike activities scheduled by the management, they prefer to stick to their spontaneous circle of friends. When workers need to dine with someone they dislike, they have to deal with the awkwardness by sitting close to the person. Sometimes, team members may even speak behind each other's back when the colleague they disliked went to the toilet. This was indeed embarrassing for other colleagues who were not involved, but everyone had to cope with it until they went back to the office. They even had no other opportunity to complain about each other. WN (interviewee 9), a senior *biandao* from an independent production company, shared her opinion on her company's formal dinner.

WN: Having a formal dinner is a waste of my personal time. It still counts as work. I don't feel relaxed. I still need to face my boss, and I cannot hang out with my friends. How tiring.

In response to WN's opinion on sacrificing personal time, YJ (interviewee 8) expressed her view on group dining from management's perspective.

YJ: To be honest, as a leader, I don't enjoy making people work overtime. However, having meals together as part of the team-building activities is important when the whole team meets up with our clients. That's why I'd prefer to hire male employees because they can drink more alcohol on the table. I also don't want to risk having my female employees being sexually

harassed during alcohol drinking. Also, I believe having a male employee pitching in front of our clients is better than having a female.

SZ: Why?

YJ: I think that male employees have deeper and more authoritative voices than female employees in front of clients. They can show the confidence of my company. I don't think I'm a sexist. I'm just telling the truth. Companies prefer to hire men than women precisely because they make less of a fuss when asked to drink alcohol during business dinner.

Although YJ's comments on male employees are based on gender stereotypes, there is no denying that she was merely describing the sexist status quo of the television industry. More importantly, her concerns about drinking alcohol with business partners have reflected that creative workers can develop health issues due to the drinking culture. Despite all the negative impacts of the food culture imposed on the industry, most employees choose to play along. After all, quitting may be more costly than staying.

Section Three: God-worshipping – Religion? Superstition? Or Self-consolation?

This section explores the aims, the means, and the effects of god-worshipping rituals taking place during studio-based television productions in China, with several case studies signifying the ambivalent nature of god-worshipping rituals. Additionally, divided opinions from television practitioners who perform the rituals are analysed, whether the workers are superstitious, agnostic or need self-consolation. This research contends that god-worshipping rituals have exerted a diversified influence on television practitioners' views on solidarity, security, and professionalism but ultimately reflected the precarious nature of the Chinese television industry.

In the course of Chinese television production, it is common to see god-worshipping rituals held by television practitioners, despite China's secularism. God-worshipping is especially prevalent within private independent production companies. Even some state-owned television stations indirectly perform worshipping ceremonies, to which the authorities turn a blind eye. The scale and procedure of worshipping depend primarily on the organisation that carries out the ceremony. There is no specific god that must be worshipped. Creative workers are often allowed to choose from their religious idols such as Lord Guan (关羽), Lord of the Soil and the Ground (土地公), Mazu (妈祖) and Wong Tai Sin (黄大仙), and many others they prefer. It is essential to carry out a ritual, regardless of the number of worshippers, the worshipping scale and the locations. China has a long history of god-worshipping, but rituals specifically conducted for business protection became popular since the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), with the rise of commercialism. However, worshipping rituals within the television industry came directly from Hong Kong and Taiwan filmmaking customs in the 1980s, when cross-Strait co-production was popular. As time passed, the current rituals and other production taboos, have become a control mechanism, which is often formal, compulsory and institutionalised. In less superstitious organisations, the presentation of worshipping is greater than the content itself. Nothing indicates that the worshipping ritual will perish any time soon. On the contrary, it has been passionately passed onto the newcomers.

The company that produced *Job Hunting* had a habit of holding god-worshipping rituals, which I would argue, are of both religious and superstitious nature. Ceremonies often took place two hours before any studio recording. Throughout the four days of studio production in May 2018, the production team worshipped various unknown gods believed to bring safety and fortune. The ritual required each person to bow four times in different directions while carrying a burning stick. Television practitioners prayed with their eyes closed and bowed in front of an altar. Although some of the workers were atheists or agnostics, they followed the rules for good luck. Firm believers believed they needed to finish the ritual while supervising others to do so. Before each filming, the chief *biandao* shouted at his team 'time to pray,' and the team would stop whatever they were doing and stand outside the studio to pray in front of the altar. At the same time, the chief *biandao* went inside the studio to check upon each worker, including those from other companies, ensuring that everyone was ready to pray.

To learn more about this god-worshipping event, I interviewed 26 television practitioners, including the chief *biandao* who initiated the ritual and other employees who work in different organisations, both from state-owned media and private production companies. Practitioners' opinions revealed a tradition – it is common and popular for Chinese television production teams to worship gods before filming. If the production is studio-based, the worshipping is called *bài péng* (拜棚, worshipping television studio). Every worker is expected to attend the ceremony. Christians and other religious believers who do not worship other gods could be exempt from the ceremony, although nobody has claimed to see any Christian colleague refusing to participate. Even if the employee is atheist or agnostic, they still need to pray for whatever they believe. That said, the god-worshipping ceremony is almost compulsory, with the flexibility of group-worshipping or single-worshipping. If it is impossible for all practitioners to be present at the ceremony, the production team will send at least one representative to worship.

Practitioners have confirmed that the worshipping practice originates from Hong Kong and Taiwan in the 1980s. When a Hong Kong production team is ready to make a horror film, they will certainly invite a psychic to the filming locations to conduct religious site (*zuò fǎ shì*, 做法事), ensuring the location does not offend any real ghosts. On other occasions, they may invite a psychic for the opposite reason. They wish the ritual could borrow supernatural

power from ghosts, making the film more realistic than before. Also, the Hong Kong production team still retains the practice of sacrifice, i.e., putting a roast pig or pig head onto the table and 'donates' it to gods (Douban, 2015; Zhihu, 2015). Even though there is no specific god that must be worshipped, there are several Chinese gods that people usually worship, such as Guangong (关公) and Wong Tai Sin (黄大仙).

The chief *biandao* of *Job Hunting* commented: 'The custom of god-worshipping is mainly for practitioners' self-assurance. We want to feel safe during the television production. I was told that this custom originates from Taiwan province. You may notice that actors from Taiwan would worship gods originating from the Fujian province when they come to the Mainland.' With more and more collaborations between Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, this custom has spread to most areas of China and has derived into multiple variations. It is also common for Chinese production teams to worship gods before making major decisions such as investments. For example, In Beijing, a large-scale independent production company is known to be a frequent visitor to Yonghegong Lama Temple (雍和宫), a temple and monastery of Tibetan Buddhism.

Another superstition is that women are not allowed to sit on top of equipment boxes. It is because, in Chinese culture, women carry dark or *yīn* energy (opposite to *yáng*, sunlight, which represents men). If a *yīn* person sits on the filming equipment, bad luck will arrive. This taboo originates from the early production rules of Peking opera, where equipment boxes contained the clothing of the King for the show. It was believed that *yīn* energy would be bad luck for King's clothing (*wáng yī*, 王衣). This belief has been somehow inherited by Chinese film and television workers. Therefore, nowadays, women are still not expected to sit on top of wooden boxes containing filming equipment.

Creative workers' opinions represent their anxious attitude towards television production. One dominant opinion is that they do not necessarily believe in any god, but they feel they should. In that sense, the ceremony itself is not superstition but more of a custom. Practitioners would instead perform the worship without overthinking its credibility. They may not be religious, but they do so to feel safe.

WN: You cannot guarantee the programme will make money if you do it. However, if you don't, you can't rule out the possibility of filming accidents. We are afraid of the possible accidents, expecting the film to make money is only our second concern. I can tell you I heard many stories of karma, when people did not worship before filming, and bad things happened. I saw it with my own eyes. There was this time when my team cooperated with another production team in a studio. One of their technicians fell from the stage and broke his legs. The company's CEO had to pay him off. Do you know what's scary? They did not worship! After that accident, worshipping became compulsory in that company.

While some other practitioners expressed their agnostic viewpoint towards god-worshipping practice, others firmly believe in supernatural power and even told 'real' stories about the devil's curse. Television presenter LL (interviewee 10) expressed his opinion on the worshipping practice.

LL: You must understand that Chinese culture is of an opportunist nature. For example, students may worship Confucius the night before exams. Business people will have a *jiǎncǎi* (剪彩)³⁷ ceremony before opening a shop. It's a culturally embedded phenomenon. You must know that most Chinese people don't believe in any god, but they tend to do so in situations where they feel they have no control over it. On the other hand, they may well believe god-worshipping will benefit them. It's more about how it makes you feel. Who cares if there exists a god? You shouldn't overthink it.

Sabrina, a former Phoenix TV *biandao* who owns her own media company in London, enjoyed revealing the names of some famous Chinese actors who are known to possess supernatural dolls in the industry. She also believed that some actors are 'cursed' by supernatural forces, as she has friends who work with celebrities. Apart from fearing unknown consequences for not worshipping, other practitioners pointed out clearly that worshipping is nothing but a cover-up of media mogul's guilt and fear. TV producer XW (interviewee 11) insisted that god-worshipping is a sign of guilt.

³⁷ *Jiancai* is the action of cutting a red ribbon on an opening ceremony, usually conducted by the person in charge or a special guest. The *jiancai* action represents the start of a project on the ceremony.

XW: Do you know why rich people are superstitious? Many of these wealthy figures, especially actors and celebrities, are generally not that well-educated. They gained a lot of fortune via illegal activities. Since they earn so much, they often need money laundering. They feel guilty and scared afterwards. They feel they must do something to ease their guilt whilst craving for more fortune. The higher you are in the industry, the more you believe in luck, and therefore, the more superstitious you become.

XW's explanation correlates with the celebrities' tax fraud scandal in late 2018³⁸. Indeed, media companies have tried everything they can to pay less tax. When I interned at the indie, I was partially paid via bank transfer and the rest in cash because the company wanted to avoid unnecessary taxes. Although many television workers expressed their doubts about the effect of god-worshipping, none of them, including Christians, have refused to perform the ceremony. They confessed they feel pressure from the top and their peers. SJ (interviewee 2) has been the only interviewee who does not believe in the ceremonies. However, he still participated in the ceremonies for face and formality.

SJ: I have worked in CCTV for over 20 years. We don't have the tradition of god-worshipping. We would not be allowed to do so due to CCTV's governmental nature. However, when I worked with an independent production company, our business partner, I took part in the ceremony.

SZ: Why?

SJ: You see, they were helping us with the filming. I was the only one from senior management in there. If I did not worship, my subordinates from CCTV would not. There's no need to make the company embarrassed.

SQ (interviewee 12), a production manager and actor from Taiwan currently working in Beijing, has confirmed SJ's statement. He even pointed out that such worshipping has more to do with power than its actual effect.

³⁸ Over 500 Chinese actors and other film industry professionals are in the crosshairs of communist authorities as the State Administration of Taxation pursues an ambitious campaign against tax evasion. From: Hao, N. (2018). Chinese Regime Lists 500 Actors in Tax Evasion Crackdown. [online] www.theepochtimes.com. Available at: https://www.theepochtimes.com/chinese-regime-lists-500-actors-in-tax-evasion-crackdown_2732469.html [Accessed 13 Jun. 2019]

SQ: In Taiwan, people worship many gods. I was not surprised to see the same when I came to Mainland China. Practitioners were often told to worship any god(s) their investors or bosses asked them to. Whichever god our boss worships, the rest of us will worship the same god. Sometimes the god is Guangong (关公); some other times it's Mazu (妈祖). This is common for Chinese diasporas as well. I lived in the US for a while, and worship was popular with Chinese Americans.

Indeed, SQ's statement about power struggle resonates with C.K. Yang (1961)'s study into Chinese religions. Yang (1961:181) argues that traditional Chinese monarchs made sure to demonstrate their superiority and mastery over supernatural forces by either granting honorific titles to the gods or trashing their gods if no result came of persistent prayers. The current worshipping ritual seems to be a successor of this tradition. Above all, decision-makers decide who should pray, which gods to pray to, where to pray and even how to pray, even though these pre-set arrangements are told to be informal and liberal.

As worshipping has been part of the production practice, no workers explicitly expressed negative thoughts about it. On the contrary, the fact that practitioners are given time to worship manifests that they are allowed peaceful and personal time to think, meditate, reflect and stop for a while. This short pause is in stark contrast to their hectic work schedules. On the other hand, this religious practice has a distinct significance in fostering group cohesion. By gathering every worker from all departments, hierarchies, and third-party companies together to focus on one thing, the worshipping ritual serves as a symbol of common devotion in bringing people out of their divergent routines and orienting them toward community activities. The practice not only serves as an icebreaker but also diminishes the hierarchy. The time for worship is equally given to every practitioner, regardless of their hierarchies. Although the initiators could suggest an idol to worship, they have no real control over the prayers on employees' minds. In other words, the worship is initiated by power and hierarchy, but the practice itself diminishes the hierarchy by enabling everyone to focus on superior divine power superior to the team's leaders.

Section Four: Accommodating differences – hotel sharing

As part of the informal work culture, accommodation arrangement is one of the essential factors that affect television practitioners' work efficiency. Due to the nature of studio production, in most cases, production teams accommodate their employees nearby the television studios during the filming period. This section explores the relationship between the living conditions of temporary accommodation and production workers' working practices. For example, how has hotel-sharing affected television practitioners' interpersonal relationships, and how does it affect the production practices? To answer the questions, I looked into some simple facts: was the accommodation safe and comfortable? Was the hotel close enough to the TV studio? How many days, in general, did a team stay in the accommodation? How were the rooms allocated? What happened when people did not get along during hotel-sharing? What happened when they did not get along?

This research has found that the temporary accommodation arrangement plays a vital role in forming the informal work culture as important as the formal work culture. It has created a formal/informal, public/private, and relaxing/nervous dichotomy. As most production personnel are accommodated near the television studio where they work, it is natural for them to work directly from the hotel room as one of the temporary offices. Also, during the fieldwork, most programmes did not provide fixed offices for their employees. Since hotel rooms are usually designed for temporary overnight stays for business or leisure, they are not the ideal location to work from for some people. However, television workers must learn to work with colleagues inside the hotel rooms. Some were even arranged to share the same room with their managers, which has caused tensions between colleagues. JA (interviewee 13), a junior *biandao* who worked on an entertainment show at CCTV, expressed the pressure she faced when sharing a room with her team leader.

JA: Can you imagine what it's like sharing the same room with your team leader? I don't even care about privacy anymore, but the pressure of being watched all the time makes me uncomfortable. She knows what I'm doing, so she can tell me what to do. I don't have any time to myself, within my own bedroom. I never get enough rest due to the team's working habits. Everyone stays up, and I must get used to taking a nap in front of everyone before having late-night meetings with the producer. We would typically stay in the room, sitting or lying on the

bed, and wait to be called on social media. Once the producer asks us to go to his room, everyone needs to get up and work. I don't feel comfortable having to deal with the extra stress.

SZ: Does your team leader have her own work to do?

JA: Yes, of course. It's not like she sits there watching me. We usually divide the workload and do our own things separately. The problem is that she will know exactly when I finish, and I have no time to relax.

SZ: Are you ok with room-sharing for work?

JA: To be honest, I would prefer a room of my own, but I know the team needs to save money. I'm an easy-going person, and I don't have any special requirements if it's for work.

SZ: In what circumstance would it be possible to get a room solely for yourself?

JA: If you are in management, you can have your own room. The producer, the *zhipian zhuren*, and the hosts have their own rooms.

JA's team leader was a senior *biandao* who was one rank higher than her but not in management. They were sharing a twin room. Apart from lacking privacy, it can also be embarrassing for employees of mixed genders to work together from a hotel room, especially when it comes to using the bathroom. YD (interviewee 5), a senior *biandao* of CCTV, expressed her embarrassment about one of her male colleagues.

YD: I don't mind using a hotel room as my temporary office, but I don't like sharing the same toilet with male colleagues. I don't feel comfortable with it. This colleague always uses the toilet right before we need to leave the hotel. He said he did so because he had some uncomfortable experiences. I understand his OCD about using the toilet, but I don't want to be dragged into his problems and wait for him to finish each time. My room isn't a public toilet!

Other television practitioners claimed that sharing a hotel room with someone they dislike have caused them embarrassment and anxiety. In some production teams, practitioners are usually arranged to stay with their colleagues by the producer. They can discuss with the producer with whom they would like to share the room, and usually, the producer will fulfil their requirements. However, this is not always the case, especially when many interns need to be looked after by experienced *biandao*. Although it is improbable to share a room with someone they dislike, it has happened. YQ (interviewee 14), who once shared a room with a colleague, ended up paying for a new room for herself.

YQ: She (the colleague) snored so much and used the toilet multiple times throughout the night. I didn't sleep well at all. I couldn't see myself sharing a room with someone like this for the many days to come.

SZ: What did you do?

YQ: I spoke with my producer. She was reluctant to help me as there were not many empty rooms. She told me to swap rooms with someone else as there was no single room. I then spoke to many people, and luckily, I found someone who was about to check out. I got the empty room, but I ended up paying because the producer did not have enough budget to cover another room.

SZ: Do you think you can prevent this from happening again?

YQ: I don't think so. I can't possibly know who snores unless we are put in the same room. You can work with someone and know them for a long time, but sharing a room is another level. My job is already hectic, so I must ensure I get a good night's sleep.

Despite the hassles, some television workers are willing to put all the negatives aside and enjoy the experience. They believe room-sharing can be part of team building, and it may enhance their relationships in the long run. LP (interviewee 15), a production assistant of an independent production company, shared her views on strengthening friendships.

LP: I take every activity outside the office as an opportunity to know my colleagues better. Room-sharing is a good opportunity. I made friends with my colleagues when we started having late-night conversations about life. It's weird, but sometimes when you are stressed and not sleeping at home, you are more likely to talk about something you wouldn't usually. Some of my colleagues started talking about their childhood and family when we turned the light off. You know, the ten-minute random conversation before sleep can either put you relaxed or intrigued. I also realised some of them aren't as happy as they seem to be during the day. When we remove our makeup and all other fancy disguises, we are just human.

SZ: What if the conversation goes too deep, and you discover each other's secrets?

LP: I guess that depends on the person. Even if they didn't tell me, they might tell someone else, and eventually, some people will know. If someone asked me to keep their secrets, I would.

SZ: Do you think it's risky to make friends with your colleagues?

LP: It depends. Sometimes you meet someone, and you know you will get along. I still hang out with some previous colleagues, and we are getting even closer. You know people can get

lonely if they spend most of their time at work. Sadly, this is the situation for most television workers I know. Our job dictates our life.

In response to LP's view, some television practitioners added that working from a hotel room as a team makes them feel more relaxed and comfortable. This has enabled workers to discuss work in an informal manner, which has been more effective than having formal meetings for some production teams. TB (interviewee 16), a former intern of CCTV, shared her opinions on the hotel-sharing culture.

TB: When I worked there, I witnessed quite a few office politics and how people conspired to make competitors look bad. Our team leader told us a lot of office gossip and gradually guided us to have different opinions on some colleagues. She also coached us on what to say to the producer to have our story filmed in the first place. Hotel-sharing provided us with a safe space to talk about everything we wouldn't talk about in the office. A different location somehow can change our perception of the work we do.

SZ: Do you think your team leader took advantage of the working location?

TB: I don't think so. I don't believe my team leader intentionally manipulated us into thinking who is the bad guy. I guess she was just trying to protect us by saying whom she thinks are difficult to deal with. To be honest, it didn't take me a long time to figure that out myself. I'm making the point that she wouldn't tell us so much about her personal experience if she wasn't staying up with us together in a cosy hotel room. An office is too formal to allow any gossip, but I genuinely believe it's the exposure of personality that finally bound us together. We got to know who we really are by working together in a tiny hotel room. When we were tired, we slept on the bed in turns, and we ordered takeaways together.

SZ: So, it's about doing everything together in the same space?

TB: Essentially, yes. Initially, we were only colleagues, but then we became roommates, and eventually, we became friends. That's how hotel-sharing has affected our relationships.

JSS (interviewee 17), a junior *biandao* who has worked on three television programmes at CCTV, agreed with TB's analysis on the building of relationships, although he is more sceptical towards the hotel-sharing culture.

JSS: It's about trust. If you see someone daily and work with them in different locations, situations, and times of the day, especially when you get to see how they organise their

bedrooms, you will know them quickly and may build incredibly close relationships with them.

SZ: Has anything ever gone wrong?

JSS: It has, and sometimes it will. Not everyone gets along well, especially when they are too different. However, work is work. We can't really choose our colleagues. I guess hotel-sharing allows us to explore the possibility of comradeship, and sometimes, unfortunately, we find incompatibility. I'd say it's equally important to maintain distance. We are better off away from some people than being close to them.

JSS referred to his unpleasant experience with a colleague who criticised his way of speaking. They worked in the same team and often quarrelled, especially when they were asked to work closely from a hotel room during the studio production. When they had more time working together within a narrower space, this colleague started to criticise more and more of JSS's way of working. The team leader had private conversations with each of them, but neither seemed to change. In the end, the team leader had to intervene and deploy the other colleague to another team.

SZ: Why did the team leader deploy that person to another team but not you?

JSS: She could've transferred me to another team, but she's more worried about my professional skills. Honestly speaking, that colleague is more skilled and experienced than me, so the management thought it would be easier for her to adapt to a new team, whereas it would be difficult for me to learn multiple things within a short time.

SZ: Are you happy with this result?

JSS: We both knew we couldn't get along, especially when we had to be put working closely from 10 am to midnight every day from a tiny hotel room. We didn't fight too much in the office as we only needed to see each other for six hours per day, and we had more people to associate with. When we were put in the media park, it was just a few of us working endlessly. It was like we almost lived together. The fight escalated and became worse.

SZ: Would you do anything differently if you had another chance?

JSS: I hope I would. It's not a good feeling to see the managers intervening in our conflicts, and I bet they must have hated me for bringing this much trouble. I'd say maybe have more mutual understanding and respect each other's opinions and behaviours. However, I still blame the fact that we have to work from a small room, sitting on someone else's bed without a desk, ordering takeaway and eating in front of people we don't get along with. Things add up.

The example of JSS and his colleague exhibits that some conflicts cannot be easily mediated simply by mutual understanding. As the culture of hotel-sharing ultimately requires a partial sacrifice of one's privacy, it is difficult to accommodate people who are too different to get along. It may be worth creating a safe space for television practitioners who would prefer more privacy, but only the managers are privileged to have their own rooms until this day. More importantly, during studio production, the busy work pattern does not allow practitioners to have much time to themselves. The culture of hotel-sharing and working from temporary offices will still exist. On the other hand, the hotel-sharing culture has strengthened friendship for some television workers, who hold more positive perspectives towards teamwork. Most of them are also younger and less experienced than those who hold a more sceptical opinion towards hotel-sharing.

Section Five: Holidays – building relationships outside the work

Sharing the same hotel room may be mandatory, but taking holidays together is voluntary. Creative workers who work on entertainment shows are less likely to take all national holidays due to the scheduling of studio production. More often than not, they are likely to take time off during the low season. This means that when they are free, their friends who work in other industries are likely to be still working. As a result, they often end up going on trips with colleagues from the same production team or department. This unique lifestyle of *zongyi biandao* is alienating them from the outside world. On the other hand, as they have few choices on when to take holidays, they have learnt to make friends with their colleagues. It is also common to see the whole production team going on trips together. Sometimes even when practitioners can take holidays in turns, they may swap shifts with others to take the same time off with whom they are close.

In several in-depth interviews, many have emphasised the importance of forming relationships outside of work locales and expressed specific concerns over the holiday system. Some believe their social life is limited by the unpopular days of the year they can take time off; others see it as a positive thing to avoid traffic and enhance relationships with colleagues. ZD (interviewee 18), a former *biandao* of Hunan Satellite TV, claimed that she always took holidays with her colleagues and enjoyed the comradeship.

ZD: I have worked on multiple *zongyi* programmes, and each had a strange holiday system. We were project-based and usually worked during the weekend and national holidays. We could not predict when we would take time off until we saw real progress. Therefore, my job made it impossible for me to make friends outside of work. When we worked, people in other sectors took holidays; when they went back to work, we finally had our time off. I could not find time to meet my high school or university friends. The only people I could hang out with were my colleagues. We often travelled to other cities when we finished a project. As time went by, we became family. We ate together, shared the same hotel rooms, took holidays, and travelled together. It's a complicated relationship. I didn't have many friends outside of my work.

LA (interviewee 19), a senior *biandao* of an independent production company, expressed a similar opinion to ZD.

LA: In our company, colleagues often go out together after work, especially going for karaoke and sometimes short trips to the suburban areas of Beijing. We have a very similar lifestyle, and we can take the same time off when a project is finished. Why not take holidays together?

In contrast to ZD and LA's positive experience in forming friendships outside the office, YD shared the opposite opinion after having experienced negative moments with her colleagues.

YD: You know this job can be isolating. *Zongyi biandao* don't get opportunities to socialise with people from other industries. We almost certainly need to make friends with our colleagues as it's easier and more convenient. Initially, I treated my team as my family, especially the interns assigned to me. Later, I realised it was stupid. I hate to admit that I couldn't possibly like any incompetent colleague as I need to cover up and fix their poor performance. Remember Josh? In the beginning, we were very close. We went for dinner; we went on weekend trips together; we shared gossip, but gradually I realised he was incompetent with work. I often had to clear up his mess. I spoke with him multiple times about his work attitude, but I saw minor changes from his side. We quarrelled many times and finally only spoke to each other during work. Look at him! What has he been doing? He's been here for one year and has never made one episode entirely on his own. My other interns who were promoted to full-time are coaching new interns, but Josh is still there. Last week he even turned up to the office at 4 pm. On that day, I had been looking for him, but he never replied to me. I regret befriending him.

SZ: What have you learnt from this experience?

YD: Don't get too close with your colleagues until you are sure you can get along.

Although having had bad experiences with colleagues, YD has not given up hope on forming potential friendships with some colleagues due to her busy lifestyle and the holiday allowance she is given. On the other hand, all interviewed practitioners have admitted that work-induced friendships can be affected by each other's long-term workplace performance. This indicates that although creative workers have made efforts such as taking holidays together, they can still be disappointed when realising the fragility of their relationships.

In summary, this chapter demonstrates how Chinese television practitioners have cleverly handled workplace relationships under a *renqing* society and how they have turned things around under unfavourable working conditions, just like how they gained tranquillity and

inner peace from compulsory god-worshipping ceremonies. Exactly because sometimes it is difficult to go through the 'front door', creative workers have to go through the 'back door' by forming good relations with as many colleagues as possible. During this process, they have learned to build trust with colleagues via hotel-sharing and after-work socialising to form workplace allies. The problem is that these solutions only remain useful under the condition that they keep making efforts at and outside of work, but ironically this means that they are always on duty, even if they are physically off work. As long as they still take holidays and share hotels with people from work, they are creating invisible workplaces outside of offices. Although creative workers perceive these activities as simultaneous, natural, or even willing, they are in this situation because of unorganised management, explicitly speaking, awkward holiday systems, project-based work, unequal competition and the overall precarious working culture. The next chapter will focus on the outcomes of management and self-management in the long term.

Chapter 11 Production cultures with Chinese characteristics

Chapter 8 has confirmed that the absence of production ethics has caused confusion, disappointment, guilt and anxiety to creative workers, and these clearly do not fulfil creative workers' idea of the good life. Such management oversight has led to an absence of care for creative workers and has inevitably exacerbated precarity. Chapters 9 and 10 introduced the management styles of the Chinese TV industry and their impact on creative workers. Chapter 9 has referred back to Chapter 4 and confirmed that the recruitment and employee training systems are parts of the overall management system, but Chapter 9 stresses the interactions between media managers and employees. Chapter 10 demonstrates that television practitioners have created countermeasures to deal with stress from the higher-ups. Chapter 11 continues the discussion of Chapters 9 and 10 by exploring the consequences of unorganised management and informal self-management.

Section One: *Jianghu* (江湖) and *Menpai* (门派) – interest groups

Simon Cottle (2003:170) uses the notion of a 'production ecology' in the organisation of work in television, which can be characterised by 'a set of competitive institutional relationships and cooperative dependencies'. Deuze (2007:190) comments that project work in the media is ecological in that it combines elements of severe competition between investors, studios, service companies, and individuals with aspects of cooperation and dependencies through formal and informal production networks, reputation mechanisms, and access restriction policies. The phenomenon that groups of workers collectively move from one project or season to the next and stay together for a couple of years is defined by Blair (2003) as semi-permanent work groups (SPWG). The fact that film and television workers need to secure membership of multiple teams, networks and work groups has emphasised the crucial role of (informal) networks in the industry as not every worker is guaranteed employment every year (Deuze, 2007:198).

The concept of 'production ecology', 'project work' and SPWG also exists in the Chinese TV industry and is named 'interest groups' in this section. The informal work culture has not only affected television practitioners' social behaviours, but it has also exerted some invisible

rules to those who wish to work in the industry. The number one rule is to fit in as soon as possible. This explains why many newcomers have conformed to the rule of *renmai* at the very beginning. Many workers entered the industry via acquaintances, family members and friends, instead of formal job applications. Their initial choices have determined who would be their future alliances. The more allies they make, the easier it will be to move on to the next job. On the other hand, failure to maintain contacts will cause isolation and difficulty climbing the career ladder.

Most creative workers interviewed during this fieldwork believe that the current television industry is divided into multiple *jiānghú ménpài* (江湖门派), interest groups from different schools and backgrounds. Practitioners from different *menpai* (schools) are likely to have connections with powerful television figures, and the division has created an oligopoly in the industry. Some senior *biandao* view the industry as a *jianghu*, and within the *jianghu*, senior directors act as the head of a *menpai*. A senior *biandao* with seven years' experience took Yi Hua as an example: 'Her company is known for introducing foreign formats into China. Once you are familiar with other well-known production teams within the industry, you will notice that each one is good at making a specific genre.' SWY (interviewee 6), who has worked for five years in the industry, commented:

Where there are interest groups, there is competition. So, if you want to be in the game, you must have enough *renmai*. Younger people lack *renmai* but are willing to work extra whilst senior people have *renmai* but lack energy. People then form different project groups to maximise their resources.

Without any doubt, these comments on *renmai* reflect on the prevalent nepotism in the industry. It is worth noting that an interest group is not necessarily just a team of *biandao* who are passively assigned to work together by their managers. It is also slightly different from a project group, which is usually temporary. Instead, an interest group is a group of professionals bound together by certain long-term interests such as money, shared hobbies, blood ties, or friendship. They also tend to work directly or indirectly for a long time, although some may work temporarily elsewhere. In this sense, a small team within a company or a temporary project team can form a long-term interest group so long as they continue to

benefit and protect each other at work. Amongst the 26 practitioners interviewed, 20 admitted to having entered the industry via *renmai* (e.g., friends, acquaintances, and internships). Only six successfully found media jobs via recruitment websites or by taking national exams. Eighteen became full-time employees after having internships in multiple places, and 15 of them were unpaid during the internships. On the other hand, although having *renmai* is an advantage to get into the industry, television practitioners never deny the importance of fair competition, experience, and hard work. YQ (interviewee 14), a senior *biandao* promoted to assistant producer within two years of working in the industry, recalled her career path. She graduated from Leicester University with a master's degree in Global Media and Communication. She now works as an assistant producer for a reality show in a state-owned television station.

YQ: When I came back to China, I was proud of my educational background, but soon I realised that nobody cared about my *haigui*³⁹ identity or that I have a master's degree. I started at the bottom, just like any other university graduate who'd never studied abroad.

SZ: But you soon moved up the career ladder, didn't you?

YQ: Indeed, but I also moved from the private to the public sector. When I had my first job in Beijing, I worked so hard until I couldn't take it anymore. To be honest, my current workload is nothing in comparison to my first job in Beijing. My first job made me throw up at the end of every day because I was always overworked. You may think supervising a show until 11 pm is hard work, but it is nothing compared with what I did. I'm very grateful for doing it now. At least working for a state-owned television is less stressful than working for indies.

SZ: What's your next career plan?

YQ: I still want to go back to an independent production company, but as a producer, or maybe start my own company. I decided to work in state-owned TV because of my health status. I need a break from the previous heavy workload.

According to YQ, she believes that working at a state-owned television station is less stressful than at independent production companies, despite her average workload being ten hours per day. Other *biandao* who work for independent production companies also agreed that it is relatively less stressful for state-owned television.

³⁹ Chinese students who studied abroad and returned to China afterwards.

SAW (interviewee 4): I entered the industry via my first internship in a *gongzuoshi* of five people. I don't have a media degree and knew nothing about television, but I was willing to learn. I started as a runner and tried all jobs in the team. When I wasn't sure about something, I asked my colleagues. Luckily, they were all supportive. If a job is designed for a human, it can't be too difficult to handle, right? That's how I encouraged myself. Two years later, I was invited to a dinner with my husband and accidentally got a job via his friend, who knew the manager of my previous company. I was introduced to my previous company and soon started working within its Format Development team. In that company, I often worked until 2 or 3 am and my mum was so against it. Back then, I lived with her in west Beijing and had to move out because I had caused her too much inconvenience. My previous company was based in east Beijing, and there were no easy ways to travel after midnight. I then moved in with my colleagues so we could work at any time. The team leader really enjoyed having late-night meetings whenever he felt inspired.

However, not all hard work has brought back satisfactory results. SWY, who currently works at an automobile company, shared her story on how she failed to maintain *renmai* and build *guanxi* in her previous job. Not only has she stopped trying to become a different character, but she has also stopped making entertainment shows.

SWY: I worked as a production assistant in my previous workplace. It was a well-known independent production company, but some of the work was dodgy. There were too many interest groups, and it was extremely difficult to gain their trust to become one of them. Accepting a new person to the core group equates to dividing money and other benefits with the new person. Imagine if there were only three people, they would split the money in three, but adding another one means splitting the money in four. The elder team members wouldn't make it easy for the new person.

SZ: Did you try, and how?

SWY: Yes, multiple times. I tried to spend as much time with director X. I've been to restaurants, bars and other events with them. I helped them as much as I could via work or personal relationships, but it turned out that I wasn't accepted. I only got a taste of it but then immediately pushed away.

SZ: Do you know why? Would you try again?

SWY: Mainly because of money. They don't want new people to get their money easily. Experienced team members always want a pay rise. They don't want anyone new to touch their shares. I had to give up on director X. They had already formed a well-functioning team with specific work divisions. I also realised that I couldn't live a life like theirs – having dinner with clients, drinking alcohol, smoking every day, staying up, sacrificing family time, and so many more. Ironically, I often needed to stay up for work, but I wasn't earning as much as they were. By then, I realised deep in my heart I didn't want their life. That's why I quit and chose to work in public relations instead. Luckily, my current job is simpler, and I don't need to care too much about *renqing*.

SWY was not the only television practitioner to experience isolation and disappointment when joining a new interest group. As the nature of interest groups are close-knit and often intertwined with work-related benefits, anyone outside the group will find it challenging to gain long-term profit via the group without being admitted into the team. On the other hand, once they are admitted, they would be tasked with specific missions to fulfil their obligations as a useful member. The head of the group, often a senior producer or director, would then distribute a fair share to the newcomer based on their performance. In other words, an interest group is a product of the informal work culture that encourages workers to build relationships for their long-term benefits. Unavoidably, television practitioners must survive fierce competition by making full use of everything they have.

Deuze (2007:195) notes that the informality of the labour market in television is not only a prerequisite to succeed. It is, in fact, privileged and favoured by people in the industry as a necessary component of the creative process. This deliberate blurring of the personal and professional as a benchmark for the production of culture in television further fragments the formal relationships and hierarchies of employees and employers and thus contribute to a need for other, more informal forms of cohesiveness and consistency. For example, in this section, building interest groups is one way to achieve an informal form of cohesiveness. However, it comes with a cost. Creative workers can experience alienation, refusal, frustration, disappointment and even unemployment during this process. Also, activities outside of the office is an indefinite extension of one's working hours. Such unpleasant mental and physical experience definitely does coincide with workers' idea of the good life and has exacerbated the precarity of the industry.

Section Two: Spontaneous work division

One of the most distinctive consequences of the informal work culture is that television practitioners eventually divided their workload into smaller teams based on their abilities, interests, and working relations. In return, practitioners were given plenty of opportunities to discuss and distribute workload within their teams as they began to know each other better. The god-worshipping custom, the food culture, the hotel-sharing, holiday spending and swapping, all contribute to the enhancement of interpersonal relationships. If someone owes a favour, they may voluntarily undertake the boring tasks and leave the creative part to their colleagues. Power undoubtedly plays a role in the distribution process, but ultimately, it is the combination of all the aspects of this informal culture that decides the current workload distribution.

Theoretically, the managers distribute the workload to workers of different hierarchies, positions and experiences. A breach of the management's arrangement could result in disciplinary consequences or even dismissal. However, some flexibility is expected during the actual work distribution as a rule of the Chinese *renqing* culture. It is not uncommon to see workers with one job title undertaking or sharing another job. This also partially explains why it is difficult to understand who has the most power in a production team until their real responsibilities are revealed. YJ (interviewee 8), CEO of an independent production company, once manifested the spontaneity of workload division within her company.

YJ: The people I've hired all have worked with me for years, and we are like a close-knit family. We work, we dine, we play, and we cry together. We never force each other to do anything we dislike, especially in terms of work. My employees are highly skilled, and all have worked different media jobs. I just let them pick what they like. For example, one of my *biandao* owns an editing company. We naturally distribute all the editing tasks to him, and he's always happy to do the work.

SZ: Has anyone ever been unhappy with the distribution?

YJ: Yes. In those cases, we would discuss the job nature and democratically vote within the team. To be honest, we've worked together for a long time and the job division is usually done within seconds. We barely get any disagreements within the team. If we do, we must take it seriously as we are comrades and we must look after each other. However, ideally for

newcomers, we'd expect them to try all the jobs in turn, and they will discover their strength soon.

The work division in YJ's company works well as she has encouraged a consultative atmosphere within the team. For other small-scale production companies, there are often disputes over workload and division. In government-affiliated institutions that have more hierarchies, decision-making is more complicated. The work division not only depends on one's job title but also seemingly irrelevant factors such as one's relationship with the management. *Biandao* with better relationships with the producer may be assigned easier or exciting tasks. Even within interns, nepotism plays a significant role. TB, an intern directly recruited by the assistant producer of a programme in CCTV, was always assigned easy tasks. The other interns within the same group were required to undertake all the hard work and responsibilities. However, as prior relationships are an advantage in terms of work distribution, all the relationship-building activities that happen during one's work performance will gradually be weighed more by one's managers and colleagues. JA, a former intern of *Waiting for Me*, now a full-time *biandao*, has been thought highly of by her teammates. JA became an intern in July 2017 and worked unpaid for an entire year. She wanted to quit multiple times during the internship but eventually got promoted. Her direct manager, YD (interviewee 5), is particularly proud of her due to her excellent performance and patience during the long waiting period.

YD: I've always wanted to help her. She's been here for more than a year and saw other disappointed interns come and go. She has this trait in her. She just doesn't give up easily, although she does not realise this herself. As her manager, sometimes I feel guilty because I wasn't able to promote her earlier enough.

SZ: Who gets to promote the interns, and what are you looking for in a candidate?

YD: It's the producer, but he highly values the team leaders' opinions. I've praised JA in front of the producer on many occasions, which has helped. I understand CCTV has this unfair recruitment system for interns. I was there once. JA stuck until the end, and she was chosen. It's not about luck. She's earned this. She's able to direct and edit. She has learnt almost everything I taught her in the past year. I've got other interns who are less capable than JA, but they are chosen as well. I dare say some of them are chosen because their families have connections to the management.

Apart from being hardworking, JA also gets along well with the rest of the team. During hotel-sharing, she has never caused any problem to the team leader, although she initially felt uncomfortable about sharing a room with the higher-ups. When working with colleagues from hotel rooms, she would make jokes to ease occasional awkwardness. She is willing to help others and has agreed to swap holidays with colleagues. People owe her favours. Her most attractive traits were her sincerity and openness to others, especially in such a complicated working environment.

Unlike JA, who works at the CCTV, SAW (interviewee 4), a senior *biandao* who has worked for several independent production companies, also climbed up the career ladder quickly. She shares one trait with JA in common – she is a quick learner. She respects the reasons why her managers perform god-worshipping, although she is not a firm believer. She has been paid the most in her team for being a good communicator and a talented *biandao*. More importantly, she is a team player and is well-liked by her colleagues. Both JA and SAW went through periods when they were only assigned the tedious and basic tasks by the managers. As time passed, they gained a good reputation by playing along with the rules of the informal work culture. They became noticed by the managers and are given important tasks nowadays.

SZ: As you become more and more experienced, will you become picky with the jobs assigned to you? How can you ensure you get to do what you like?

SAW: First of, I shouldn't be picky as I'm paid to do what's out there. Secondly, the longer I stay in a team, the more people will know me and my strengths. I think work division is essentially a mutual selection. On one hand, as a senior *biandao*, I get more respect within a team and suggest what I'd like to do; on the other hand, it is also about what others can do. For example, I wouldn't rely on the interns entirely, even on tedious admin jobs, which are simple but requires some understanding of the industry. In this case, I'd demonstrate all the tasks in front of the interns whilst doing everything else that's left to do. With other experienced colleagues, I think it's best to try different tasks in turn so that nobody gets bored and this is also fair. Moreover, as people know each other well, they can trust the rest of the team to do what they are comfortable with.

JA and SAW are experienced *biandao* who have built many connections throughout their years in the industry. This means they have more opportunities to change jobs by joining different interest groups. In comparison to experienced *biandao*, newcomers may struggle for lack of useful contacts. What is worse, they can risk joining the 'wrong' group, resulting in being isolated by others. Undoubtedly, it is a challenge to find the interest group that suits. However, since interest groups can bring about so much more rewards, television practitioners are still eager to find the most suitable interest group, which allows them to divide different workloads within the group, if not fairly, at least willingly.

Section Three: Working relations– enhanced or alienated?

This fieldwork also indicates that creative workers have to deal with complicated working relations, especially when the media managers do not offer enough support for fair competition. One typical example of complicated working relations comes from *Waiting for Me*, a programme with ambivalent work divisions and unhealthy competitions between *biandao*. As the first few steps of the pre-production require good stories and topics for the show, it is important for *biandao* and their interns from different smaller teams to find useful stories by any means and pitch the idea to the producer via group chats using China's most commonly used social media, WeChat. Since there is a chance for different teams to come across the same topic by coincidence, *biandao* from different smaller teams are cautious with their IP until they successfully pitch it in the group. The *biandao* push this competitiveness to the extreme – most of the time they speak via WeChat and avoid speaking in person, fearing that other teams may overhear their ideas in the office. As a result, interns from different teams gradually stopped speaking to each other and become cautious towards people from other teams. It is not even surprising to see *biandao* sending interns to spy on other teams during the production.

In order to compete against other groups, *biandao* would make full use of their intelligence to benefit their own groups. The key to perfect the everyday perform is to gain the sympathy from the producer. A *biandao* had once pretended she was unable to speak loudly during a general meeting due to a 'severe' illness. She claimed that she must go to the hospital after discussing the studio script with the producer so their group should pitch first. The meeting

usually starts at midnight and ends at 2 am. The producer empathised with her ill condition and allowed her team to speak first, otherwise they had to wait as some other teams arrived earlier. If other teams had successfully pitched their ideas, her team might lose some topics as there will not be enough studio recording time for all the topics assigned to different *biandao* teams. It is also only via these late-night meetings that the producer finally decides on which *biandao*'s topic can be brought onto stage, after the backup filming. After the female *biandao* and her team had left, my team leader secretly revealed to us that she was not even that ill as she was speaking loudly during the day. There was no evidence to prove her poor health, but given her lively performance earlier during the day, it was likely that she faked it to gain the producer's sympathy.

Apart from acting in front of the producer, some *biandao* also talk behind the back of their competitors and seize opportunities to inform the producer of others' shortcomings. For *Waiting for Me*, when everyone checked in the hotel of Xingguang Media Park, before the studio filming for *Waiting for Me*, our team leader told us that one participant from another team, who shared the same room with our participants, complained to the producer that our team's intern 'chat too much' with the studio participants. Our team leader immediately told the intern to inform her team's participants not to add participants from other groups on social media, in case they share too much information with each other. This allegation against the 'unprofessional' act of the intern in our team was released by a *biandao* from another team. He was competitive and always disliked our team leader (from now on will be called as 'the team leader'). Because of this incident, the producer had to criticise the team leader.

The reason for competition is largely due to limited promotion opportunities and the entrenched labour system of CCTV. Despite the team leader's well-known professional skills, she only had a *waixie* contract. She once warned her intern to stay away from another *biandao* with a *taipin* contract who graduated from Peking University and was recruited via the graduate scheme. In contrast, our team leader worked two years unpaid at the programme to gain her current *waixie* contract. From her perspective, colleagues who own 'better' contracts sound condescending when speaking to others with 'worse' contracts. Another reason being that some interns are friends or relatives of their leading *biandao*,

making the working relations even more complex. This is down to CCTV's loose rules on recruiting interns as the jobs are almost certainly unpaid.

During semi-structured interviews, television practitioners admitted to having experienced poor management at previous or current workplaces. Their managers had intentionally ignored some office conflicts to balance the power struggle within the office. A *zhipian zhuren* of CCTV *zongyi* programme explained that due to ferocious competition, managers hang onto their power by giving little decision-making tasks to relevant subordinates. As a result, *biandao* of different levels are merely given limited power, let alone any promotion opportunities. Under such management, the average workers have formed interest groups to compete with other groups. If a new employee is assigned to join in one team under the leadership of a certain senior *biandao*, it would be difficult for the person to build good relationships with workers from other groups. If someone happens to get closer to another team, the person would be considered a 'traitor' and risk losing trust from their own team. This phenomenon is well-acknowledged by the managers, but they choose to downplay the seriousness. Sometimes, managers may adjust the power delegation when their authority is challenged, for instance, when the host of *Waiting for Me* quarrelled with the producer in public.

Interviewee 6: The managers have their own concerns. They have been through the same things and don't really think our internal competition is worth their time. They designed the current power distribution in order to ensure most people, especially the newcomers, will get opportunities to make television.

SZ: How is this for the greater good?

Interviewee 6: In our programme, people's income mainly depends on how many episodes they make, which will be scheduled for broadcast. For now, our managers distribute all *biandao* into several levels – 'level 1', 'level 2' and 'level 3'. 'Level 1' is for experienced *biandao* like me, who lead their own teams. 'Level 2' is for intermediate *biandao* who just got promoted from their internships. 'Level 3' is for new interns and newly promoted *biandao* who haven't produced one single episode on their own. 'Level 1' people are under great pressure because we need to train newcomers and help them do their jobs when they are confused. But we don't get paid for being productive as the managers have limited the maximum number of episodes each *biandao* can broadcast on TV. It means even if I recorded six episodes this month, I would only

get paid for making four as the other two will not be scheduled for broadcast, except for emergencies. In my team I'm the only 'level 1' and the rest are 'level 3'. There was a 'level 2', but she was assigned to another group last month. Imagine if newcomers were on their own to make episodes, they wouldn't be able to reach the producer's standard without help from senior colleagues. They may work unpaid or only receive basic salaries for a long time until they successfully make one episode that is qualified enough to be scheduled for broadcast.

SZ: How does this 'level' system affect colleagues' working relations?

Interviewee 6: It's very competitive here. People from different teams can be hostile to each other. They must protect their own intellectual properties. Sometimes it's likely that two teams find the same topic. They must be the first to inform the producer of their proposal. If another team is ahead of them in proposing, their effort would be in vain.

Whilst conflicts between practitioners with similar job ranks are difficult to solve due to competition, conflicts between workers from different hierarchies can cause more problems, especially those involving celebrities. Guy Debord (1995:22-23) commented that 'celebrities embody the inaccessible result of social labour by dramatizing its by-products magically projected above it as its goal: power and vacations, decision and consumption, which are the beginning and end of an undiscussed process.' During a general meeting in *Win the Bill*, one *biandao* made a joke about their female host's newly published memoir. In response to the joke, the other *biandao* including the producer, came to agree that the host did not think highly of this production team as she clearly only wrote one sentence about her work experience with *Win the Bill* whilst writing many pages about her experience with another production team in CCTV. The team became satirical and some suggested they might as well write a book without mentioning the host. People laughed but soon went silent. They realised they did not have the best working relations with the host but had to carry on. All these *biandao* were on *waixie* contracts whereas the host had a permanent one. Throughout all time, the *Win the Bill* production team has been trying to work happily with the hosts, especially with the female celebrity host. All they found was an unbreakable hierarchy that alienate and disappoint themselves.

Similar situations existed in other production teams as well. During a lunch break of *Waiting for Me*, a *biandao* mentioned a former chief director whom they worked with and how this person had notoriously mistreated the junior staff. This former chief director was described

as 'unmarried, middle-aged, not good-looking, and short-tempered' according to the senior *biandao* and staff from management. This former chief director would get angry with colleagues' social media if she found anything she disliked. Another *biandao* was once criticised severely after posting photos which included someone who disputed with this chief director. On that day, she had already left the office earlier but rushed back immediately to criticise the *biandao* when she saw the post. The *biandao* was so scared and burst into tears. At that moment, this chief director became embarrassed and warned the *biandao* not to post photos on social media. On another occasion, she had once 'left the programme furiously' clashing with the producer and indicated that she had always wanted to replace the producer. One media manager was even more straightforward, describing her as 'ambitious but mean to others.' This manager also confirmed that the producer could not cope her job ever since. As a result, *Waiting for Me* no longer had a chief director.

After the chief director left, there came another tough figure who equally brought hard time to the entire production team. In July 2018, the previous commentator of the show was assigned as the new host. The producer believed in her, based on her previous experience as a logical commentator and her familiarity with the audience. But soon, they discovered her to be a changed person. During a studio filming, she threw her portable headset microphone onto the floor and stormed off the stage when a *biandao* went on stage to remind her of the studio script during the filming. She shouted at the *biandao* in front of 200 studio audience: 'You don't trust my ability in hosting!' The previous host was a famous figure who had hosted several years of the CCTV New Year's Evening Gala but resigned due to health issues. When the new host made a scene on stage, one celebrity guest tried to console her, but she shouted back immediately, having already been angry with him during the previous recording. The producer from the main control room rushed to convince her to go on stage again. The long persuasion time meant a long waiting time for everyone and had set back the whole day's schedule. On the same evening, the host wrote a long message in the production team's WeChat group, which earned no response. After this incident, the producer and the *zhipian zhuren* were less satisfied with her. They almost gave up on filming one episode which involved an English-speaking participant as well as an interpreter, as the host could not speak English. Initially, they could not find an interpreter. Despite that, the team would have also liked to witness the host making a scene due to the language barrier.

Aside from the particularly dramatic incident in front of the audience, her general behaviour was also frequently disruptive. During one of the pre-interview stage, the producer, the *biandao* and the host were required to sit in front of the participant and listen to their stories carefully. Instead, the host often would not listen, and leave the studio for a walk during the recording. Each time when the recording was finished, she returned to the studio and began criticising the *biandao* in front of the producer, showing off her seniority. However, her advice was often hard to follow. For example, she suggested that the team ask obscurely phrased questions in Chinese to an English-speaking participant, who would find it difficult to comprehend the question's logic. If anyone tried to defend themselves against her, she would immediately interrupt and criticise them even more.

In September 2018, the host was fired, but as a result, most programmes hosted by her from July would never be broadcast. The reason being that all previous episodes featuring the host had finished broadcasting in the earlier season. The channel's executive therefore decided to abandon the remaining episodes that were originally scheduled into the next season. This was the only way the programme could retain consistency with their newly appointed host. Meanwhile, the team was concerned about how to explain the changes to all the participants, which included an army platoon commander and policemen who only took part after getting difficult approvals from top executives of the People's Liberation Army. Initially, the Army's top executives were reluctant to grant leave and the programme had to send an invitation letter to convince them. Since the episode would never be seen on TV, and nobody knew how to explain to the Army. In December 2018, a junior *biandao* informed the soldier that the show was cancelled due to 'internal management.' Only one episode was re-edited and scheduled for broadcast as the team had failed to find the missing person, whereas for the other abandoned episodes, the lost were all found.

For some programmes in CCTV, hosts can only be replaced but not fired by the production team. That is because some hosts are directly assigned to the programme without discussion with the team. The only way to replace the host is to appeal to higher executives. For *Job Hunting*, the host pitched the entire format to the indie and invited the CEO interviewers from well-known companies to the programme. Without the host, the interviewers may not

stay in the show, and the popularity of the show would not be upheld. As aforementioned, although hosts are important elements for a show, they can cause serious trouble for the team. In May 2018, during the filming of *Win the Bill*, one host needed to change several outfits and therefore delayed the pre-arranged opening dance. The *biandao* then had to reschedule the filming order. Due to the celebrity status and seniority of the host, the *biandao* could not and dare not challenge her. After all the filming was finished and everyone had returned to the office, the producer was furious at the general meeting, blaming the *biandao* for poor time management, despite the reason for the delay being obvious. Ironically, the producer stayed in the same make-up room as the hosts and other staff, yet she failed to fix the delay. Another issue is that unequal opportunities are distributed between the hosts and ordinary participants. During the recording, *biandao* would usually give more opportunities to the hosts to correct their mistakes, but barely give any to the participants unless it was necessary. These issues were difficult to tackle mostly because the hosts were unchangeable, and clearly because of the uneven power dynamics.

It seems that uneven power relations not only made everybody involved dissatisfied, but also tremendously hindered the production process, even to the extent of forcing everyone to improvise during the last five minutes of recording. Most damagingly, as of the case with *Waiting for Me*, no matter how satisfactory the filming was, it would never even be aired since the host was fired and the remaining episodes with her participation were to be axed. Most of the team's efforts were in vain – the sleepless nights, the running orders they wrote, the training they offered to the participants, the late-night-meetings, the £100k budgets spent on the production, and the hopes from the studio participants that their missing relatives may be found. The unfair hierarchy had cost a lot more money and resources in the long run. On the other hand, the seemingly unbreakable hierarchy was an opportunity for the production teams to realise how heavily the shows were relying on the domineering hosts. Some production teams decided to modify the shows' formats that relied heavily on the celebrities. In September 2018 and November 2018, both *Waiting for Me* and *Job Hunting* teams had replaced their hosts and modified the programmes' formats accordingly.

Section Four: Blame culture vs. supportive culture

Creative workers not only form interest groups for mutual interests, but they have also learnt to find others for whom they can make responsible for errors. As mentioned, a producer blamed her subordinate *biandao* for failing to enforce time control restrictions onto the hosts. Although it was the *biandao's* responsibility to manage the production time, the producer was in the same make-up room with the host. She witnessed the hosts' procrastination but did not help the *biandao* persuade the hosts to be quicker. She only blamed them afterwards. It was possible that the producer, same with the hosts as *taipin* employees, were in the same hierarchical category. Hence it would have been embarrassing for the producer to rush the hosts. Therefore, blaming a subordinate afterwards would remedy a face-losing situation and hide management incompetence. It is clear that *biandao* have to deal with uneven power relationships that often affect work efficiency.

One production team leader, a senior *biandao* of CCTV, had constantly blamed her intern, although it eventually reflected badly onto herself. The intern was asked by the senior *biandao* to contact a studio participant's work manager to grant leave for the participant. That manager insisted on seeing an official invitation letter, which the intern failed to present timely, as she could only obtain the letter once the production team had returned to the CCTV headquarters. The manager then requested for a digital invitation letter to be sent. However, this was against CCTV's rules, yet the manager still demanded a letter. The intern turned to the senior *biandao* for help, only then to be scolded for wasting time arguing with the manager on the phone. Eventually, the *biandao* instructed the intern to cancel the invitation as they had enough participants. The intern was utterly confused and upset by the solution: 'How could she blame me for wasting time when she was the one who asked me to call the guy? Why did she tell me to make the phone call when she knows that we have enough participants?' In another situation, the same *biandao* blamed the interns for being inefficient and blurted harsh remarks as they often worked until midnight. Despite that, it was said that she was the one who would wake up at midday, but no one dared to point this out boldly.

On other occasions, the interns were often shouted at by their team leader for failing to reach expectations, although in some cases, the team leader did not give clear instructions. One

intern was scolded when she did not edit ID information for the team leader on time. The intern was upset and believed the team leader had ignored one participant whom the intern contacted. The intern spoke about the team leader's unreliable schedule and how ashamed she felt for frequently adjusting time arrangements with the studio participants.

The intern: Initially, she told me the filming would take place on the 1st, so the policeman booked tickets home for the 2nd July. But then she suddenly told me the filming was rearranged to the 2nd, so the policeman couldn't go home on the 2nd. I felt embarrassed but had to ring him and tell him to change the ticket. The participants cooperate with me all the time, but I don't even have any chance to return the favour. This unreliable schedule drives everyone crazy! I end up being the bad person bothering other people!

Indeed, the intern had to do the unwanted job which would upset others, but she was more upset by the fact that most of her work was in vain and largely under-appreciated due to her team leader's (and others') poor management. The team leader was hardly satisfied with this intern and constantly complained to another *biandao* during her absence. The team leader believed the intern had been finding excuses to get away with her job.

The team leader: I don't understand what's in her head... she always finds excuses to eat hotpot with our studio participants in the name of building *guanxi*. She needs to understand that she shouldn't befriend the participants.

SZ: She told us that it's because she feels like she owes them favours as they have always cooperated with her?

The team leader: That's because we, as a team, are helping them to find their relatives. They indeed owe us a favour, but it shouldn't be personal. Our staff shouldn't think that they are powerful enough to make these people do what they are required. That's why I find her (the intern) very naïve!

Although it is fair to say the intern did not distinguish her professional self from her personal self, it is difficult for anyone living in a *renqing* society to cut clear distinctions between professional and personal relationships. Instead of having a professional conversation with the intern, the team leader chose to speak behind her back and get angry with her over minor issues. Clearly, the team leader should have managed the intern better and given more

professional support. Due to the blame culture, multiple misunderstandings had occurred. There could have been less work for everyone, but the person in charge (in this case, the team leader) did not plan, at least not well enough. As a result, the team wasted a lot of energy finding whom to blame rather than finding solutions to finish the work. Hence, they procrastinated until midnight (apart from times when they were forced to have midnight meetings with the producer), and the cycle continued. Eventually, the production was not as efficient as it could have been. Throughout this fieldwork, it was common to see workers blaming others for something. It was usually the unclear work division and careless management that caused the blame culture. Under the blame culture, people at the bottom of the hierarchy are easily scapegoated and suffer consequences. On the other hand, where there is clear and logical management, there are happy and efficient television practitioners. Several workers interviewed were grateful for their managers, who have been supportive and responsible. These workers have had several opportunities to quit their jobs for higher incomes, but they all refused to take risks. They weighed out their income with other factors and decided to stay with supportive leadership. WN (interviewee 9) commented:

WN: I firmly believe that having a good manager is more important than earning good money in this industry. I had worked with many teams before I met my current boss. She always protects us in front of others, even if sometimes we are at fault. She would take all the blames and responsibilities to make us feel safe. But of course, when we go back to the office, she would criticise us behind closed doors, but she would never embarrass us in front of other production teams. We've seen horrible stuff from different production teams – sometimes a producer could criticise the *biandao* in front of everyone. That's disrespectful. My boss would never do that. That's why we (the employees) are all very grateful – she teaches us to stick together.

SZ: Have you had other job offers?

WN: To be honest, I was approached by many companies for higher salaries, but I don't want to risk losing my current lifestyle. I know those companies have more profitable projects, but the workload can be scary. This industry is known for being stressful, and trust me, working overtime is most people's daily life. In contrast, my boss is very chill, and she barely makes us work overtime. If we have a deadline, she will allow us to work from home if it doesn't need to be finished in the office. Also, we only need to be in the office for meetings, and the rest of the time is flexible. Where else can I find a job like this? If I couldn't manage my time flexibly, I

wouldn't have agreed to have this interview. After weighing everything, I've decided to stay with my boss.

In order to view WN's comments on television practitioners' working conditions from another perspective, her boss JY (interviewee 8), a CEO of an independent production company, was also interviewed, without knowing what WN had said during their interview.

SZ: In your opinion, what makes good leadership?

JY: I'm never a perfect leader, but I think I'm good because I always put myself into my employees' shoes. I don't make my employees do things I wouldn't like, and I always respect their opinions. This does not mean I don't make decisions. A good leader needs to make the right decisions quickly, and sometimes it is important to have fewer people making decisions. That means they need to deal with pressure and still survive. Secondly, I never give anyone a hard time in public, unlike many other producers who think of themselves as God. I learnt this from my previous boss. Back then, I was just an intern, but my boss was very patient and protective. He never allowed anyone to bully us and always took the blame before anyone else. Many years later, I started my own company. I want to be like him. Also, I hate working long hours, and I believe efficiency is the key to success. I give my employees flexible working hours, and it's working just as well as staying in the office all day long.

Like JY, who prioritises efficiency and scheduling, Wang Fang, a well-known television host who owns her own media company, applies the same strategy to her management. LA (interviewee 19), a senior *biandao* before promoted to the secretary, agreed with Wang Fang's leadership style.

LA: When I came to Wang's company, I started from the bottom. As an intern, I did pretty much everything. It took me two years to become a full-time *biandao*, and within one year, I was promoted to become Wang's PA. Here we all call her 'sister Fang'. Sister Fang is very nice to her employees, and she is a very organised person. Everything she does is carefully planned, and she's never asked us to stay up or work overtime. As a *biandao*, our working time is flexible. As long as we finish the job before the deadline, it doesn't matter when we come or leave.

SZ: What does a *biandao* do in Wang's company?

LA: A *biandao* is responsible for all aspects of the production, from finding studio participants to final editing.

SZ: It seems to be a lot of work. Do you have enough time to handle all the work?

LA: Our company is very organised, and although a *biandao* needs to do most things, their workload and time allowance is planned. Sister Fang usually records eight episodes every two months, and we have two episodes for broadcast every weekend. One *biandao* is responsible for one episode, so a *biandao* has around one month to work on one episode. It's not a lot of work.

SZ: Has anyone ever stayed up for work?

LA: Maybe an inexperienced *biandao* who needs to finish the editing. We are flexible with working hours. Sister Fang isn't like many other CEOs who monitor people's working hours by scanning their work ID each time they come and leave. Also, sister Fang always makes sure employees get enough holidays. They may stay in the editing room after dinner, but they can start late the next day if they stay up late.

SZ: How would you describe the working relations in the company?

LA: This is what matters the most in this company. In some companies, colleagues become strangers as soon as they are off duty, but it's never like that in our company. People here are straightforward and work-oriented. They get along, and you barely see any office drama. Employees are young – the oldest producer is 32 year's old, and the rest are in their mid-twenties. We often go out for dinner and karaoke together. We are like brothers and sisters. One of our colleagues left last year for a bigger media company, but a few months ago she came back. It turned out that she couldn't cope with the complicated working relations in the new company. Instead, our sister Fang is a woman of integrity. She is supportive and warm-hearted. If you know her background, you will understand why. She is experienced – she started hosting television programmes at the age of nineteen and set up her own company from scratch. She completely understands the hardships which young people are going through nowadays. I'd say if you find any workplace full of drama, it's because the leaders are drama-queens themselves.

SZ: Has this working relation given positive effects on people's work?

LA: Absolutely. Our company produces eight studio-based programmes, and last year four of them hit the top fifteen nationwide in terms of viewing ratings. Of course, sister Fang's celebrity status helped, but our team has contributed greatly as well via coordinated teamwork. We don't waste our energy on office politics.

It would be unfair to directly compare TV ratings of programmes produced by state-owned television and independent production companies, as state-owned TV is usually significantly advantaged in terms of resources, budget and *renmai*. Independent production companies,

such as Wang Fang's Jiashi Media, is in stark contrast to CCTV. As China's biggest talk show production company, Jiashi Media has been able to gain profit since its creation in 2015, which is incredible due to its limited budgets and resources. This section holds that creative workers' overall satisfaction towards their workplace is also an important indicator of a healthy corporate culture. This means that although some shows produced by CCTV perform better on the market, the production crew behind them may not stay long enough on the job to uphold the show's popularity due to unhealthy working relations and blame cultures.

Section Five: Employees' mindsets – powerlessness and optimism

This section introduces the typical mindsets of creative workers from all hierarchies and sees how they perceive their work. The fieldwork data indicates that the feelings are usually ambivalent, mixed and complicated. First and foremost, the feeling of powerlessness is widely experienced. Most creative workers are aware of the exploitative nature of being an employee – their jobs could be at stake if they do not impress the media managers. As most television practitioners are employees, they often find it difficult to say 'no' when they are expected to obey orders. Many employees who sought changes chose to either accept the status-quo or find another job (Roy, 2019; Smith, n.d.). Some workers have negotiated with the management, but few saw the changes they wished for eventually. During the fieldwork interviews, some creative workers kept saying, 'I cannot change it', 'I did not have any choice', and 'this is how we should be doing it even though I do not like it.' It is clear that many employees have no other choice but to accept the status quo, even though they wish their situation could be somehow different.

This feeling of powerlessness lies in that employers can sometimes ignore employees' needs, as employers typically have the upper hand. Although many television workers know they have little power compared to their employers, they take pride in the creative work. They can be frustrated when realising that sometimes they can only make limited contributions to the creative side of television production. Some often feel down, and many have turned cynical because of it. Junior *biandao* JNZ (interviewee 20), commented:

JNZ: When I started this job, I thought making TV was fascinating, and I could make full use of my creativity. I was often assigned to do tedious jobs. Soon, I realised that it is the chief *biandao*

or the producers that make all the decisions. Sometimes, I do not agree with their decisions, but I cannot do anything about it since I am not the decision-maker. I have to modify my work constantly to cater for the sponsors' requirements. Where is my creative autonomy? How many of my ideas were adopted?

JNZ's comments represent the opinion of many junior *biandao* new to contracted television jobs. Junior *biandao* are given more creative freedom than the interns, and some even lead a small team. However, as they are seen to have lacked production experience, the managers are likely to assign basic and repetitive work to them, hoping that they could help reduce the workload of senior *biandao*. In some production companies, junior *biandao* need to do the same tasks as the senior *biandao*, giving them equal opportunities to use their talents. If a junior *biandao* is competent enough to reach the managers' expectations, they will be fast-tracked onto the payroll, regardless of the time they have served in the programme. Although opportunities to climb the career ladder are available for junior *biandao*, many find it intolerant to repeat basic tasks, especially when most have worked as interns for several years.

Moreover, the junior *biandao* who fail to reach the criteria for advanced positions must ultimately resign due to fierce competition. JSS (interviewee 17), who was in the same production team as JA, also passed the internal interview after working for two months. He worked as a full-time photographer in the Documentary Channel of CCTV before this internship. His referee was confident and persuaded the managers of *Waiting for Me* to fast-track him after the short-term internship. However, after working at the programme for one year, JSS realised that he could not handle the job, which required the *biandao* to dig deeply into the studio participants' psyche. During an in-depth interview, JSS revealed that he regretted applying for the job but promised that he would do better in another programme.

JSS: As a man, I should've been stronger, but I wasn't. I grew up in a wealthy family, and I couldn't comprehend the miserable stories of my participants. I was assigned to write the interview scripts, but I couldn't impress my team leader for once. She had been upset with me and quarrelled with me many times. In the end, I had to resign. I don't think I'm good at comprehending the theme of this programme.

After struggling to stay at *Waiting for Me*, he had an opportunity to work for another channel within CCTV, but he declined the offer. He left CCTV for good and moved on to working for an independent production company. He said that his overall health has improved after leaving *Waiting for Me*. If junior *biandao* cannot reach the new expectations when they officially become full-time employees, their fate will remain uncertain until they impress their managers. Whether they can manage to stay or not, only time will tell.

Whilst junior *biandao* are bothered by the amount of creative input they can contribute to a programme's production process, senior *biandao* face the opposite problem – they can be considered as being 'too experienced', as described by ZD (interviewee 18), a former *biandao* who had worked for 18 years at Hunan Satellite TV. ZD believes that managers can easily treat senior employees as threats, which was the dilemma she was caught in.

ZD: I have witnessed the growth of Hunan Satellite TV and was deeply cultured by its creative regime. Hunan TV is undoubtedly well-known for its open attitude to creativity. While I agree with it, I must say that Hunan also favours younger employees, not necessarily the experienced ones.

SZ: How so?

ZD: It's part of Hunan TV's culture. They believe that young people know the latest trend better. Also, young people are Hunan's target audience, so Hunan automatically favours young employees.

SZ: As an experienced employee, how do you feel?

ZD: As I turned more experienced, I began to worry about my future. I could have stayed in Hunan TV and hopefully retire at 55 with a considerable government pension. However, most senior *biandao* cannot bear to see themselves wasting their intelligence at a place that gradually sees them as threats – if you are too experienced, you could become bossy. How do you expect your boss to manage you, especially when you are older than the boss? I've seen many power struggles, and usually, the senior *biandao* were sacked and replaced by younger and more submissive newcomers.

ZD's point is that senior *biandao* are more likely to disagree with the managers over work based on their years of experience. There is always a higher possibility of conflicts between experienced employees and management. However, it is usually the managers who have the final say. Such a situation has made many experienced employees feel helpless and

powerless. ZD was not the only senior *biandao* who faced such a dilemma. Other senior workers have encountered similar situations. Some junior *biandao* had noticed the tendency and could not help but worry about their future. Many have agreed that the 'best destination' for a senior television practitioner is to start entrepreneurship or become an investor.

Amongst the 26 in-depth interviews conducted in this fieldwork, fifteen practitioners are in management – five are in senior management, and ten are in middle management. While each has different personalities, they have several things in common: firstly, they all started from the bottom; secondly, they all strive to be better regardless of their current positions. Those in middle management aim to move into senior management; senior managers aim to establish their own business; the CEOs aim to expand their businesses. Thirdly, they are willing to prioritise the projects on hand, leaving other things aside. Amongst the managers interviewed, HW (interviewee 21) was the only one fast-tracked to the management. She is now the Head of Research of an international format trade company. She shared her opinions on career prospects and work attitudes.

HW: I love this job because I manage all the creative tasks for this programme. I've met many talented figures in the industry. I am so proud to see our company's programmes on TV as my team designs them.

SZ: How did you get this job?

HW: I got a promotion not long ago. I started as a junior *biandao* when I joined the company. Our company trains the newcomers by assigning them slightly challenging tasks. I passed all the tests and worked another five years before the promotion. I'd say hard work and patience helped me. Also, I was lucky to be among the first few who joined the company when it was newly founded. I worked together with the CEO for many years, and today I have my shares in the company.

HW was promoted after years of hard work and patience. More importantly, she has stayed motivated and is convinced that television is her lifelong career. Although HW is successful, she warned that the TV job is not for everyone, as the work pace can be unpredictable. She said people come and leave for various reasons, but many left due to unequal investment and reward. 'If your priority is to make money, you should not consider the television industry,' she added.

Managers (such as producers and executives) find it more challenging to quit a job according to their own will because they are responsible for the entire production team. Compared to below-the-line workers who can only care about their own jobs, managers face extra pressure to run the whole project at hand. On the one hand, they may be the television programme's creators. Therefore, their absence may result in a complete transformation or even the closure of the programme. On the other hand, as they usually supervise all aspects of a television project, they are not allowed to quit whenever they like. If they insist on doing so, they will risk losing their reputation in the industry. As a result, the managers spend less time thinking about themselves, and instead, as they are at the top of the hierarchy, their primary concern is to compete with other programmes. Successful executives have climbed higher on their career ladder – the former producer of *Waiting for Me* was promoted one level higher in CCTV, and he now appears in the permanent payroll of CCTV's senior management. The assistant producer of *Waiting for Me* will retire in a few years and become the Chief Operating Officer (COO) of a well-known independent production company.

Whereas most practitioners keep their jobs, some have left, and others have decided to leave. Those who have left could no longer find anything beneficial from their previous jobs; for those who wish to leave, it is just a matter of time. In an interview with a former employee of a well-known television company, Sabrina (interviewee 22) admitted that she could no longer incorporate the heavy workload into her personal status.

Sabrina: I quit my job a few weeks before my wedding. Getting married was not the reason I quit, but it was the best excuse. After I got married, I found another job in another industry and started afresh. Now I am running my own business.

SZ: What was the real reason that you quit?

Sabrina: I did not see myself progressing anymore in that company, nor did I wish to make more efforts into another media company. I have had enough of media work. It was time for me to move on with my life, both personally and professionally. It was not easy the first few months after I quit, as I risked being a housewife. It was a big decision, and it takes courage.

Like Sabrina, some former practitioners encountered various life events that eventually pushed them away from the television industry. Troy (interviewee 23), a former *biandao* and

sub-anchor of CCTV, quit his job in 2017 and became a university lecturer. He had quit his previous job due to mental health and family issues.

Troy: I suffered from severe depression during my second year as a TV *biandao*. I usually had to edit till midnight while preparing myself for the live broadcast the next day. Doing two jobs at the same time was not easy. I was under tremendous pressure and often found it hard to breathe. Luckily, I had an opportunity to study abroad, and during that one year's time, I took many medications. I decided to leave the industry for good when I came back to China. I soon met my wife, and we both aimed to work regular hours to invest time in the family. I was very fortunate to have gained this lectureship with my overseas degree.

Troy was one of those who ultimately left the television industry. Others found it easier to stay in the same industry but do different types of jobs. EJ (interviewee 7) aspired to become a television *biandao*, and after working at an independent production company for two years, he hopped into CGTN, CCTV's English international channel, as a TV audience researcher. He said he prefers to be 'somewhere in-between.'

EJ: Have you read the novel *Fortress Besieged*? It says, 'marriage is like a beleaguered fortress: those who are outside want to get in, and those inside want to get out ⁴⁰.' In my humble opinion, people experience the same mentality when having a TV job. Many people want to quit while many other young people try every effort to get in. One day they will be disappointed. And if they are not, it's because they somehow have a vested interest.

SZ: What makes you think so?

EJ: When you first started a media internship, were you excited? When you were there for a while, were you disappointed?

Television workers, such as Sabrina and Troy, chose to leave the television industry for good, whereas others preferred to find a middle ground. Others have reconsidered their career prospect and claimed that they would leave shortly. These 'leavers-to-be' believe they will hit a glass ceiling when they turn to a certain age or experience a certain life event. Ultimately, they have decided to leave soon due to lacking faith in the industry's future. SAW

⁴⁰ This sentence was quoted in the novel *Fortress Besieged* (novel's name in Chinese: 围城) from a French proverb: Le mariage est une forteresse assiégée, ceux qui sont dehors veulent y entrer, ceux qui sont dedans veulent en sortir.

(interviewee 4), a senior *biandao* who has worked in both state-owned television and independent production companies, stated that she faced pressure to raise a new-born child in the family. She was not satisfied with her income even though she had been working for seven years.

SAW: My husband and I both work in the TV industry, and he is earning slightly more than me. We have saved some money for our newly born child, but we still struggle to maintain our current lifestyle. I soon need to worry about his education. We think if one of us leaves the industry for a more lucrative job, we would be able to send our kid to an international school.

SZ: Is it possible to make more money as you become more experienced within the industry?

SAW: The best I can do is to run my own business one day, but I don't see it coming any time soon. However, my child cannot wait. I want to quit and find a better job. My husband can stay in the industry as he is making reasonably good money.

SAW decided to leave the industry due to financial difficulty. She could not make ends meet without leaving her previous job. Moreover, she presumed that even if she stayed, she would not meet the family's expectations. As her husband remained the primary source of income, she had the flexibility of taking a risk on job-hopping. In a way, television practitioners such as SAW were forced out of the industry, whereas others saw this coming before they were in SAW's situation. SWY (interviewee 6) expressed her opinions on the future of female television workers. She left the industry in January 2019 and worked in an automobile company instead.

SWY: Female TV workers face more challenges than men. Women are more likely to hit a glass ceiling than men in almost every industry. It is usual for women of my age to work as production assistants or *biandao*. When they become older, they may go into management. However, management roles are limited, and they also require more energy and time. Many female managers struggle to work without distractions from family or their own health, especially when they turn 40. If I'm lucky enough to be a senior executive, I will face the same issues. Why don't I go to another industry that is slightly more women-friendly?

Undoubtedly, the leavers are aware of the potential risks. They still take risks because leaving seems to be the only way to work out in the long run. It is not to say that they will

undoubtedly do better once they leave, but it is worth taking a great leap forward from their perspectives. On the other hand, to the remainers, it is in their wish to climb the career ladder, whether for money or fame. To do so, practitioners have no other choice but to devote more time to work. The idea of having a colourful life outside of work is unrealistic due to the competitive environment and the unforeseeable future of the television industry.

Eager to maintain her current *shebao*, SAW (interviewee 4) is continuously looking for jobs while staying in her current job to avoid any gap between employments.

SAW: I tried to leave the industry by applying for multiple jobs in other sectors, but I didn't receive any positive feedback from those employers. I'm stuck in this limbo. My husband said we could move to Yunnan province in a few years and start afresh. I really like this idea, but there are many things to consider, such as my kid's education. Yunnan is beautiful, but it does not have the best schools in the country.

SZ: If you stay in Beijing, what are the obstacles to overcome?

SAW: I am facing expensive living costs and worrying about my kid's education. I want to send my child to an international school, but if we continue to stay here, we won't be able to afford that. I may need to send him back to my hometown Heilongjiang, where prices are much lower. Also, I'm desperate to buy a car, but I haven't reached the criteria to participate in the *yaohao* system yet. There are two more years to go. God knows what will happen by then!

Television workers like SAW struggle between 'leave' and 'remain'. Compared to SAW, who is afraid of the future, SWY showed her disappointment in the industry and was determined to leave the industry one day, with a detailed early retirement plan.

SWY: I once wanted to go back to university because I was fed up with the interest group culture. However, I don't think I can live a simple student life again. How would I endure students' naïve dramas? My entire mindset has changed after I graduated from university, and I don't see myself thinking like a naïve student anymore. I don't think I could fit in university easily. Also, I haven't found a better job. I don't think I would be happy living a simpler life. Am I contradicting myself?

SZ: Where do you see yourself in ten years?

SWY: I guess I will be married and have a family in ten years. I really want to marry myself off to a wealthy guy, so I don't need to work my arse off for this peanut income.

SZ: Are you serious?

SWY: I am serious. I see myself leaving the industry when I turn 40. People, especially women at that age, will find it extremely hard to get a promotion. If I'm not rich enough to own a business by then, I would definitely leave this industry.

On the other hand, YD is amongst the few who are ambitious for a higher status in the industry. Working as a *biandao* in CCTV, YD has shown talents and dedication towards her directing job. Although having an uncle who is a well-known figure in the industry, YD has never disclosed their kinship openly to anyone until it was discovered by one of her interns. YD sacrificed most of her time for the job.

YD: In CCTV, all employees have holiday allowances, and theoretically, I can flexibly book time off after a long studio production period. However, I barely take any time off because I want to spend more time on work. I want to become a producer in the future.

SZ: It may be helpful to relax occasionally. You are not a robot.

YD: I know, but whenever I am in the editing room, I can't help staying there until I finely edit all the episodes. I just can't stop.

SZ: How long did you stay last time?

YD: Three full days, and I stayed up one night. I fell asleep on the desk for a couple of hours and continued to work afterwards. I ordered takeaway.

SZ: Have you thought about leaving this industry?

YD: Never. If I don't stay in this programme, what else can I do? I'm only familiar with this genre, and I believe I'm only good at what I'm doing now. If I was assigned to make light entertainment shows, I guess I would be fired shortly.

SZ: Apart from your long-term dream to become a producer, what is your short-term goal?

YD: To pass my annual review. I want to impress the producer. I am supervising three interns and two newly appointed junior *biandao*. It's so much responsibility, and I hope the producer can see that.

SZ: Is there anything else you want to achieve except for the annual review?

YD: I would like to have a boyfriend, but I know with my current workload, it is almost impossible.

Like YD, many other television workers do not expect much from their personal life because of the heavy workload. Not everyone enjoys living a busy life like YD, except that they are

living it, mostly unwillingly. In a focus-group interview, JA and JSS, both working at a CCTV entertainment programme, expressed their concerns about their personal lives in a focus-group interview. JA comes from a small village in a rural area of Sichuan province. Her dream is to settle down in Beijing. JSS, however, comes from a wealthy family. He often uses his luxurious cars as work vehicles when his team needs transportation.

SZ: How do you like your current holiday allowance?

JA: Allowance is great, but I can barely take a whole weekend off. Nobody will date me because my job is taking up all my time. I was dating a studio technician, but we were both too busy to see each other. In the end, we had to break up. It is hard for us to have regular time off like people in other industries.

JSS: Same. My girlfriend broke up with me because I spent little time with her. Working in CCTV looks excellent on the outside, but it is not as good as it appears.

SZ: What causes your limited time off?

JSS: Leadership problem. The managers do not make appropriate working schedules. They don't seem to understand that employees need time off to themselves. To be fair, I shouldn't blame my managers because they work harder than me. There is an institutional error that prevents us from working like ordinary people.

JA: I'd say it's the nature of the television job. *Biandao* cannot expect the studio participants to do what they expect, neither can they control their colleagues. If they procrastinate, you should smile and wait. Television is teamwork. If you are unfortunately working with inefficient people, you either endure it or leave. The only thing I can do is to do better each time. Even so, I always regret it when I realise that I could have done something better.

SZ: Let's talk about your work goals.

JSS: I came to this programme a year ago, and I still can't figure out the key to effective communication with the studio participants. I admire my senior colleagues' communication skills. I didn't come here for money, but since I haven't done well in this job, I'm not proud of myself. I wish I could be smarter.

JA: I'd like to practice interview skills and patience. I would like to lead a team one day.

Besides being deprived of personal life, creative workers also admitted to having mental health issues to various degrees. According to the *Report on the mental and heart health of media practitioners in 2017*, 70.3% of media practitioners have a higher risk of having heart-related diseases, and the middle-aged practitioners overwhelmingly suffer from mental

health issues (Xiao,2017). Several workers who have suffered from mental health issues expressed their concerns over the continuous pressure they face.

SAW: During the first year of my career, I often cried for no reason after eating. I was too tired and often had negative thoughts about my life. I never went to the doctor's, but I'm sure I had depression.

XW: There was a time when I burst into tears over trivial things. My colleagues were scared of me, and I ended up working on my own. I remember I was working overnight during that time. It was a new project, and I was entirely responsible for it. When I finished the project, I was diagnosed with depression. It took me a long time to recover. Some of my colleagues also suffered from depression. This job is affecting my overall health.

In comparison to those who work in state-owned television, television workers at independent production companies suffer from more pressure since the market plays a more significant role in the survival of private companies. WJ (interviewee 24), a senior director who owns a long-term *gongzuoshi*, expressed his concerns about the industry's prospects.

SZ: How is the business recently?

WJ: China's overall economy is going down due to the trade war with the US. Every industry is affected, especially in the creative industry. That's why I have lowered my fee to get more business. My team don't like me doing this. What can I do? Less money, or no money?

Despite the gap between imagination and reality, most creative workers have shown an enormous passion for their jobs and have worked hard to keep up-to-date with new knowledge, believing that they are making full use of their creativity. During the studio rehearsal of *Job Hunting*, the *biandao* showed passion and hard work. Everyone was willing to help others immediately, except for the technicians from third-party companies. On the first evening of studio rehearsal in May 2018, one senior *biandao* explained all the procedures in great detail and patience to the candidates and answered every question they asked. She acted as a candidate to demonstrate all the possible outcomes of the game show. At 11 pm, a candidate from Taiwan started his rehearsal, but he did not describe his career plan the same way as he did during the casting interview. The chief director and a senior *biandao* realised that this would not be good for filming in two days. They immediately held a

meeting with the candidate and helped him distinguish different job titles between Mainland China and Taiwan. The rest of the team waited until they finished the meeting in half an hour and the whole team returned to their hotel together. On the filming day, the candidate received six job offers. Without the rehearsal, this problem would not have been spotted. Although the selling point of *Job Hunting* is the CEO interviewers, the *biandao* still help the candidates as much as they can. During this process, the *biandao* naturally developed friendships with the candidates and genuinely hoped they could receive as many offers as possible.

In summary, this chapter further discusses Chapters 9 and 10, focusing on the consequences of management and self-management. Firstly, it is not to say that media managers have not realised the volatile nature of decision-making within the industry. Due to the complication of departmental structures and power struggles, managers cannot make one decision entirely on their own. Therefore, from the management's perspective, they have made efforts to strike a balance between policies and group cohesion to the best of their ability. Sometimes, efforts are made on both sides. God-worshipping ceremonies are good examples of joint efforts from television practitioners at all levels. Secondly, facing changing management styles within a *renqing* society, television workers at all levels have come up with solutions to survive in the industry. Trust-building becomes the most challenging task, especially when they are compelled to compete and pick sides. If one picks the 'wrong' side, one may become the sacrifice of a blame culture. As a result, practitioners are endeavoured to join interest groups to become more competitive potentially. Once a circle is formed, it automatically excludes others who try to get in. Undoubtedly, close-knit interest groups have created a barrier for newcomers. Consequently, those who did not choose to play along left the industry as soon as they discovered the exclusive nature of the interest group culture. It also inputs further strain onto the already fragile working relations. On the other hand, not all workplaces are hostile, and some have indeed encouraged their employees with a supportive working culture. Wang Fang's media company was an example of a friendly working culture where employees were encouraged. Overall, it seems that the industry has fallen into the battle between rules and solutions. Should there even be solutions if the rules are acceptable for most people? The last section reflects explicitly the contrast between feeling powerless and optimistic at the same time, which adds to the ambivalence of the

employees' attitudes towards their working conditions. It seems that the industry should reflect on the relationship between management and employees, especially when the majority feel powerless but still hold onto optimism with hard work.

Chapter 12 Conclusion

Section One: Towards a precarious production culture

This thesis has examined how Chinese television practitioners work together on a daily basis and how they each contribute to the overall production culture. It contends that the production culture of Chinese television production has had a far-reaching impact on the everyday working practices of Chinese television practitioners. In particular, this working culture further contributed to the phenomenon of precarity, or precariat, a term that points to a broader set of concerns about the relations of production and the quality of social life worldwide (Curtin and Sanson, 2016:5). This thesis has also paid particular attention to the impact of the inexplicit division of labour and the culture of outsourcing within the Chinese television industry. Although there are institutional differences, the television industry is also affected by Chinese business culture. These factors are related to each other, and collectively, they make it difficult for the Chinese television industry to improve the quality of its products. Moreover, creative workers' opinions of their working conditions are valued. It seems that the current environment does not fit their ideal version of the good life, including autonomy, interest and involvement, sociality, self-esteem, self-realisation, and work-life balance and security. Instead, creative workers feel powerless and precarious. These two words literally echo with the title of the thesis – power and precarity. Ironically, the 'power' turned out to be 'powerless' in the thesis's conclusion.

Chapter 1 clarified the aim and significance of this thesis – how do people work together and why it is important to listen to the creative workers and see their lives from their own perspectives. It has defined power and precarity in the context of this thesis and presented essential signposting information for the following chapters. The Chinese equivalent of entertainment show, the redistribution of power, redistribution of power within China's media censor NRTA, and different job titles are illustrated. Chapter 2, the literature review, showed that little previous research had been conducted on the growing yet somehow invisible group of television *zongyi* practitioners. Many Chinese media scholars seem to be more interested in the political-economic aspects of the media industry without paying much attention to the working conditions and livelihood of creative workers. Although little research has been conducted directly concerning television practitioners, some scholars

have indeed focused on news journalists and their career aspirations. In sum, more research is required to explore the relationship between working cultures and television employees. Chapter 3 explained the suitability of ethnographic research for this thesis and the background stories of how I gained access to the field, how I communicated with the university's research committee, the compromises I made, and the complex role of an ethnographer (even in one's own culture) are demonstrated. In Chapter 4, the root of hierarchical employment contracts, the common phenomenon of labour dispatch, and overall employee training neglect are analysed. It sets the expectation of creative workers' working conditions and outlines recruitment as one of the management issues in China's TV industry. Chapter 5 offered an overview of China's *hukou* system and the social welfare system. These elements have shaped the boundaries of the Chinese television industry and have also contributed to the industry's overall political-economic environment. It also interpreted how national policies have aggravated precarity within the industry. It is clear at this stage that the overall national labour policies and the mid-level management system exacerbate precarity in the TV industry, especially when the TV industry is globally known as highly precarious. Chapters 6 and 7 introduced the entire television production process, from pre-production to post-production. They demonstrated how media censorship, internal competition, and production improvisation had caused precarity. Chapter 8 highlighted the ethical concerns around some aspects of the current television production process. More importantly, it confirms that a lack of employee training does not help creative workers feel confident about their work. Instead, some feel anxious, guilty and disappointed. Chapters 9, 10 and 11 used concrete examples to demonstrate how unorganised management styles have caused precarity and how television workers have reacted to this system via informal self-management.

Each chapter has focused on different aspects of the working culture, which all interact, and when taken all together, one factor can exacerbate another. For instance, national policies have contributed to television practitioners' precarious state of mind and hence, encouraged the industry to exploit the state of precarity. For television practitioners who come from underrepresented backgrounds, it is a significant opportunity to start a career in developed cities where there are more opportunities, although limited, for their offspring to obtain city *hukou* to climb the social ladder by receiving better healthcare, education, social welfare, and

other benefits that favour the city residents. The process of obtaining *hukou* involves signing the 'right' employment contract, competing with colleagues, and meeting the various requirements of the system. The total time it takes to obtain a *hukou* varies, and it can easily take up to ten years. In addition to the competitive *hukou* system, the current social welfare system favours those who have stable employment and a 'local' residence permit. Since the switching of *hukou* is a once-in-a-lifetime event for the average Chinese citizen (especially those from smaller regions), television practitioners who do not possess the *hukou* where they reside must endeavour to be continuously employed to retain a consistent record of paying into medical care, maternity leave and pension schemes.

Due to this, television employers have taken advantage of these national policies for their own benefit. Firstly, as many practitioners are legally contractors, they are inevitably under pressure to look for stable employment that may not be financially rewarded compared to short-term projects. This means they are in a weaker position to negotiate better salaries. Secondly, state-owned television stations, such as CCTV, have found multiple routes to bypass restrictions imposed upon government-affiliated institutions. For example, CCTV is not directly responsible for some employees' income and healthcare by accepting dispatched labours from private companies. These solutions have helped CCTV maximise its television production resources and benefited senior-level employees, who, in return, will help CCTV gain more power within the industry. Undoubtedly, such an exploitative system has put its employees in a vulnerable situation. On the other hand, television employees may not have realised the existence of pre-defined hierarchies based on employment contracts, inherited bureaucracy from government organisations, outsourced facilities, inexplicit work divisions, and improvisation during the production process. All these have led to precarious working conditions. These factors also contribute to the complication of studio production, especially in the case of state-owned institutions such as CCTV, since a programme's producer may not have complete control of all employees present in the studio.

Unlike CCTV's clear-cut hierarchies, private independent production companies tend to share benefits and risks with their employees. For example, *biandao* of independent project groups are likely to have signed contracts with one company while retaining the autonomy to work with others. Having agreed to share interests and risks with their employees, creative

workers of private companies can have more relaxed workplace relationships – they are more open with discussions about sexuality, marital status and other sensitive topics, whereas, in CCTV, these topics are most likely limited within small interest groups. Nonetheless, television practitioners of private companies still need to cope with the inexplicit division of labour caused by unclear management and hidden rules.

Chinese television production is also affected by Chinese culture. The *renqing* culture, wine culture and god-worshipping culture have played a significant role in the management and self-management of the Chinese television industry. With substantial financial and political obligations at hand, media managers must ensure all these aspects are taken care of, and take into account hierarchies, favours owed, and team cohesion. These extra elements are a double-edged sword. On the one hand, they have indeed saved money and face in the short run; on the other, they have contributed to corruption, unwilling return of favours and reluctant team-building activities. Moreover, nationalism and censorship often lead to self-censorship at every production stage, making it more challenging for producers to follow their original plans. However, it is the average television worker that is affected the most by these elements. For example, managers can sometimes be authoritarian, leaving workers with little creative autonomy and disappointment when their voices are unheard. Since it is difficult to be heard, television workers have endeavoured to build stronger relationships with their managers. As a result, behind-the-scene deals only further complicate internal office politics, leading to unhealthy competition and deteriorating working relations. Some can even affect the final launch of a programme.

Working within such a complicated environment, television practitioners must learn to play by the rules. On the one hand, to secure their jobs, they have to compete with colleagues at all costs and avoid sharing responsibilities. As time goes by, a blame culture is caused by this unhealthy working environment. Without a clear understanding of each role's responsibilities, employees find it difficult to fix mistakes, let alone work efficiently with one another. Consequently, there is often little trust between colleagues. On the other hand, television practitioners have also attempted to build better working relations by sharing workloads, forming interest groups and spending time together outside of work. These attempts seemed spontaneous at first but were eventually made mandatory when they

became unspoken rules. It is worth noting that these self-management behaviours have helped practitioners integrate into a close community. However, the culture of interest groups inevitably excludes those who refuse to play by the rules. These unspoken rules caused an increased effort to maintain interpersonal relationships, which pushed practitioners to work harder than they initially expected or intended to. In this sense, all self-management solutions have turned into self-restriction, which, in turn, devoured practitioners' precious time off work. When everyone is dragged into the cycle, they are, ironically, becoming the creators of such an unstable regime.

Such a vicious cycle has undoubtedly affected the internal working culture of Chinese television and the production processes of entertainment programmes. During pre-production, practitioners tend to make hasty decisions, resulting in an under-developed final product. Meanwhile, as guidelines are unclear, *zongyi biandao* find it challenging to coach studio participants until they reach management's expectations, which can be subjective. To coach studio participants, *biandao* need to write 'decent' television scripts and gain complete trust from participants. Neither is an easy task. When the coaching is nearly finished, studio rehearsal becomes the final push in the performance of a production team, especially for the *biandao* who have coached their participants. During studio productions, practitioners are expected to deal with unexpected events via teamwork, which can be highly improvised, unorganised and unenthusiastic. Aside from studio production, *zongyi biandao* also work on the supplementary material used in the studio, including videos shot at other locations, archived material, pre-recorded interviews, voiceover and props. Their mission is only half done when they finish studio production and finally get back to their office. *Biandao*, who need to edit on their own spend a considerable amount of time in the post-production room while starting pre-production for the next round of production, while *biandao*, who collaborate with third-party editors, must supervise other editors to meet their deadline. With or without the help of third-party editors, a *biandao* is the only person responsible for the edited episode that will be assessed by their managers (usually the producers). If the editing has not reached their expectations, the *biandao* must modify the work until it reaches broadcasting standards. Otherwise, all personnel involved in the production process may face disciplinary action. *Zongyi biandao* are given unclear directions, which could be interpreted as 'autonomy', but when their managers quickly change their minds, such

autonomy is diminished and becomes restrictive. It is fair to conclude that creative workers face low pay, long working hours, job insecurity and diminished creative autonomy. Also, many *biandao*, especially young and inexperienced ones, are afraid to raise these concerns in fear of jeopardising their future career prospects. Since few have spoken up, television *biandao* have become invisible and silent workers as time goes on.

What is worse, since ethics training is neglected, workers are left to make decisions on their own when interacting with studio participants. Television production teams, especially *zongyi biandao*, have found it more challenging to deal with production ethics that have become obstacles during the television production process. Even though professional codes of conduct are available in many workplaces, they are not followed entirely or even acknowledged by some employees, who ultimately have to present satisfactory results. Without clear instructions on production ethics, *zongyi biandao* have to work with instinct and professional experience, which have failed to protect either the practitioners or others involved in the production process. Some senior *biandao* have gradually realised the importance of ethical production to potentially protect vulnerable studio participants from further harm. These *biandao* are especially careful when dealing with *biandao*-participant relationships. As most *biandao*-participant relationships effectively place the *biandao* in a position of power, *biandao* understand they could easily take advantage of such unequal relationships. During the production processes of many *zongyi* programmes, television *biandao* have to manipulate studio participants and tell them white lies, to some extent. In comparison to light entertainment shows where studio participants primarily volunteer for fun, other *zongyi* with serious themes, such as *Waiting for Me*, have encountered significantly more problems regarding production ethics. For instance, *biandao* working on *Waiting for Me* feel a strong responsibility to look after their studio participants, but some admitted they could have and should have done more to protect these vulnerable participants.

On the other hand, if *biandao* care too much about their participants, they will exert more pressure on themselves and the participants, especially when the work is results-oriented. Indeed, *biandao* have a delicate balance to maintain, especially when everyone is under pressure to perform well. It seems *biandao* have not been given enough support from management, who also downplay production ethics. After all, casting ordinary participants

is a business that favours the production team. A *biandao* can easily replace a studio participant who failed the casting standard, and there is no shortage of ordinary participants and professional actors, including children, who are seeking media exposure. Since competition is real, so is the accompanying bribery and corruption, and unknown actors will do everything possible to gain exposure on television. Management can only punish any act of misconduct if it causes negative consequences to the programme, but they have struggled to be proactive in preventing abuses of power. Additionally, as many managers exert an authoritative leadership style, *biandao* are given little space to raise issues. As time passes, television *biandao* have lost the aspiration to give 100% to the production process under the authoritative leadership. Correspondingly, they may provide studio participants with a bare minimum level of support. After all, being at the bottom of the job hierarchy, *biandao* can barely look after themselves, let alone fight for the rights of their studio candidates. What is ignored is that a standard and fair code of ethics would safeguard the legitimacy of a television programme and protect all parties involved in the production process, proactively reducing the risk of controversies. However, unless the managers start to reflect on professional conduct and reform the employee training system, issues regarding production ethics will remain downplayed and go unaddressed. More importantly, the neglect of production ethics has made many workers feel anxious, guilty, and disappointed at the same time, which does not fit in with their idea of good working conditions or a good life. In other words, the poor handling of production ethics and other aspects of employee training have aggravated precarity in the industry.

Television workers of all levels encounter many obstacles when climbing the career ladder within such an unsupportive environment. Their mentality also changes as each enters a new phase on his/her career path. On the other hand, where there is an expectation, there is fear. Practitioners have struggled to safeguard their achievements whilst exploring potential opportunities. There seems to be a glass ceiling that hinders ambitious workers from improving their working conditions. The only solution available is to adapt to the unspoken rules quickly. Interns must quickly adapt to the exploitative environment while strategically joining interest groups. Despite having already obtained an official employment contract, the junior *biandao* are not treated much differently from the interns. Junior *biandao* must continue to work on tedious tasks while proving they are on the right track to be promoted,

as obtaining an employment contract is only the beginning of one's career. Senior *biandao*, on the other hand, have more difficult decisions to make. They hope to work until retirement or become a member of management. This means they either need to find a higher-paid management role or start their own business, most likely within the media industry. Managers have similar decisions to make, just like senior *biandao*. Some become entrepreneurs or part-time consultants in private production companies, and others have been promoted to even higher roles. Whichever path they go down, creative workers often find themselves in an awkward situation where they can only go up or quit for good. This rule is especially true for experienced workers, as they may find it difficult to get along with a younger or less experienced manager. The last option, unfortunately, is to leave the industry for good. Although there is no guarantee for a more comfortable life, some people are brave enough to explore other career options. While the industry has indeed failed many people, it is also shaping its own culture of competition under this precarious working culture.

Section Two: What's next?

Ross (2007) characterises precariousness as a common condition for workers worldwide, and the precarious livelihoods of Chinese media practitioners are similarly indicative of a new order of social and economic instability. Multiple external and internal factors have contributed to the precarious nature of the Chinese television industry, and in turn, the industry has shaped its workers into the new precariat of society. With the commercialisation of state-owned television stations and the outsourcing of the television production process, television managers must prioritise the programme's survival over employees' benefits. Consequently, workdays are growing longer, productivity pressures are more intense than ever, and creative autonomy is diminishing. Overall, this has put financial, physical, and emotional strain on television workers and their families, further threatening the many independent businesses servicing major broadcasters.

In China, migrant workers are vulnerable, especially migrant television workers, who already work in a globally precarious industry. Additionally, since companies and TV stations cannot have full control of their staff, producers have found it difficult to fire or hire anyone, which means they will struggle to hold those staff responsible for the production quality. As many

staff members can avoid responsibility without severe consequences, they have underperformed, resulting in compromised production quality. If this vicious cycle continues, producers will struggle to produce quality shows, and the whole industry will fail to develop the strong global reputation it strives to achieve. Additionally, due to the volatile nature of television production, practitioners hold different opinions about the amount of effort and time that should be spent on a programme's development. Those who state that television production is a work-in-progress would not think their programme is in any sense underdeveloped since they have naturalised their own development process that is likely to be based on hasty decisions. As a consequence, some television practitioners are sceptical about learning from the West. Eventually, Chinese television will enter a downward spiral, and it will struggle to achieve its aim of exporting its television formats.

Furthermore, the industry will stagnate as it has presented itself as a poor option for bright and ambitious people. Before conducting this ethnographic study, I often asked myself whether I wanted to develop a career in Chinese television in the future. This question has motivated me to pursue the 'truth' of the industry's working culture, and now it is merely a question I ask other people who wish to build a career in Chinese television. In doing so, I very much hope they can share more positive experiences of working in the industry, or at least more positive than my own. On the other hand, as more and more television practitioners have adapted to existing problems, they have inadvertently helped maintain the current competitive and hierarchical production culture. Although the industry is not suitable for everyone, it will continue to be as exploitative as it has been until at least one of the elements in the vicious cycle is changed. After all, a production team can overcome the many obstacles discussed in the thesis. The *If You Are the One* production team presented a positive example of how television workers can work efficiently through effective management, explicit division of labour, and years of practice. However, not every production team can perform as successfully, and shows are somewhat dependent on surviving in the competitive marketplace long enough to have the opportunity to put those reforms in place. Ultimately, the overall production quality of Chinese TV is likely to be compromised as everyone instinctively plays it safe and therefore underperforms. The adverse effects of informal management have gradually challenged the initial goals of labour dispatch and television commissioning, which aimed for flexibility, efficiency and fair competition.

During the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020, many of my contacts who work in Chinese television told me they could not receive their full salary due to the damaged economy. At the time of writing, private companies are struggling to keep their employees, and state-owned television stations can only afford to pay basic salaries to their employees. In CCTV, the basic salary of a *waixie biandao* is around 2,000 yuan/month (around £230) as of 2018. This figure barely covers most people's basic expenses in the capital city, Beijing, but ironically, this has always been the case. As of July 2020, only one of my previous colleagues in CCTV was still working on the same programme, while others have either left for new programmes or private production companies, some directly after I left in July 2018. No one can stay in the long run without any bonuses or at least some sort of reward, except those from wealthy backgrounds. Nonetheless, even wealthy interns will be reluctant to take a full-time job after getting a taste of the industry full of powerlessness and precarity.

Reform of working practices is needed more urgently than ever, especially after the outbreak of COVID-19, which has drastically changed people's way of working in general throughout the world. More and more people are required to work from home, including television practitioners. My previous colleagues are conducting most 'face-to-face' interviews via telephone and, in response to government regulations, Chinese production teams must shoot in studios without studio audiences from the start of July 2020 until further notice. Meanwhile, most of my television contacts admitted they have struggled to make ends meet ever since the pandemic, and many are actively looking for new jobs in other sectors. Therefore, the future of Chinese television remains uncertain, especially with given the many underlying problems discussed in this thesis. Whether the industry will carry out gradual reforms in terms of the employment system, the working culture and reactions to national policies affect the industry's internal strength and external reputation. If talented people are unwilling to stay in the long run, the industry will lose its core competency.

Last but not least, given that this thesis is based on fieldwork from 2018, the status quo must have changed since this data was collected. Hopefully, some problems pointed out in this thesis have been acknowledged and tackled. After all, as the Greek philosopher Heraclitus

described, change is the only constant. I still hope for the best, but we should also prepare for the worst.

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Appendices

Interview information and consent form

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Department of Media Arts

Royal Holloway, University of London, Egham, Surrey TW20 0EX, UK

Information Sheet Production Culture of Studio-based Chinese TV

My name is Tianyu Zhang (Sophia) and I am a PhD candidate at Royal Holloway, University of London. I am carrying out my research on the production culture of studio-based television programmes within Chinese television. My methodology is ethnography and as part of this I am required to perform semi-structured interviews with television practitioners who have had work experience in Chinese TV. I am looking for practitioners who have had work experience in or with Chinese TV since the 1980s. I wish to interview 30 people in total.

What Is The Purpose Of The Study?

My research focuses on the everyday life of media practitioners. I would like to understand the production cultures of Chinese TV in producing studio-based zongyi programmes.

What Will The Study Involve?

If you agree to take part, I will visit you in person for an academic interview. In rare occasions where you cannot meet me in person, we can arrange skype calls. All the interviews are expected to be audio-recorded. If you wish not to, I will take notes instead. The questions are semi-structured, which means I may ask you some more questions in relation to your answers during the interview. When the interview is finished, you can contact me if you wish to change any statements you have made during the interview or add new comments. This can be done via email and other forms of communication.

Confidentiality

You will not be identified by name in my thesis or in any other publications. I will ensure all people who are quoted in the thesis are identified only by their job role and their approximate age.

What Should I Do If I Would Like To Find Out More?

Please call +44 (0)754 777 0426 or email Tianyu.Zhang.2015@rhul.ac.uk. You may also contact me via WeChat 'SophiaZhang92' or LinkedIn 'Tianyu Zhang'.

What If There Is A Problem?

If you have a concern about any aspects of this study, you should speak with Tianyu Zhang directly. If you remain unhappy and wish to speak to someone else in the department, please contact my supervisor Professor John Ellis John.Ellis@rhul.ac.uk or Dr. George Guo George.Guo@rhul.ac.uk at the Media Arts Department, Royal Holloway, University of London on 01784 443734.

Please keep this part of the sheet yourself for reference. Please feel free to ask any questions before you complete the consent form below. The consent form will be stored separately from the anonymous information you provide for this research. This study has been reviewed and approved by the Media Arts Department and the Ethical Review Committee at Royal Holloway, University of London.

List of all interviewees from semi-structured interviews (in pseudonym)

Please note that some of the people interviewed did not appear in the thesis but the information they provided is useful for the thesis writing.

Name	Job Title	Started working since year...	Sector	Genres	Work Location
HW	Head of Research	2010	Private	Entertainment; Factual	China & UK
YF	Head of Research	1989	State-owned	News; Entertainment; Factual	China
David	TV Producer	1980	Public	Entertainment; Factual	UK
XW	News Producer	1985	State-owned	Factual; News	China & UK
LL	TV Presenter	2010	Private	News; Entertainment; Factual	China & UK
ZD	<i>Biandao</i>	2009	State-owned	Entertainment; Factual	China & UK
ML	CEO; TV Producer	2005	State-owned; Private	News; Entertainment; Factual; Animation	China & UK
SJ	TV Producer	1994	State-owned	Entertainment; Factual	China
DF	<i>Biandao</i>	2016	State-owned	Entertainment; Factual	China
JA	<i>Biandao</i>	2016	State-owned	Entertainment; Factual	China
JS	<i>Biandao</i>	2013	State-owned	Documentary; Entertainment; Factual	China
WJ	Director; Producer	2002	State-owned; Private	News; Entertainment; Factual	China
JNZ	<i>Biandao</i>	2010	Private	Entertainment; Factual	China
SHL	<i>Biandao</i>	2010	Private	Entertainment; Factual	China
JJJ	Artist Coordinator	2011	Private	Entertainment; Factual	China
SAW	<i>Biandao</i>	2011	State-owned; Private	Entertainment; Factual	China
EJ	News Editor; TV Researcher	2017	State-owned	News	China
Larry Z	Head of PR & Marketing	2015	Private	Entertainment; Factual	China
SWY	Production assistant	2012	State-owned; Private	Entertainment; Factual	China
YJ	CEO	2008	Private	Documentary; Entertainment; Factual	China
SAW	<i>Biandao</i> ; Researcher	2013	Private	Entertainment; Factual	China
Mike	<i>Biandao</i> ; Editor; Head of Research	2010	State-owned	News; Documentary; Entertainment; Factual	China
YQ	<i>Biandao</i> ; Assistant Producer	2013	Private; State-owned	News; Entertainment; Factual	China
HJ	Senior <i>biandao</i> ; producer	2000	State-owned	Entertainment; Factual	China
LA	TV host personal assistant; senior <i>biandao</i>	2010	private	Entertainment; Factual	China
YNZ	Chief director; senior <i>biandao</i>	2010	private	Entertainment; Factual	China

Interviewees and informants appearing in this thesis

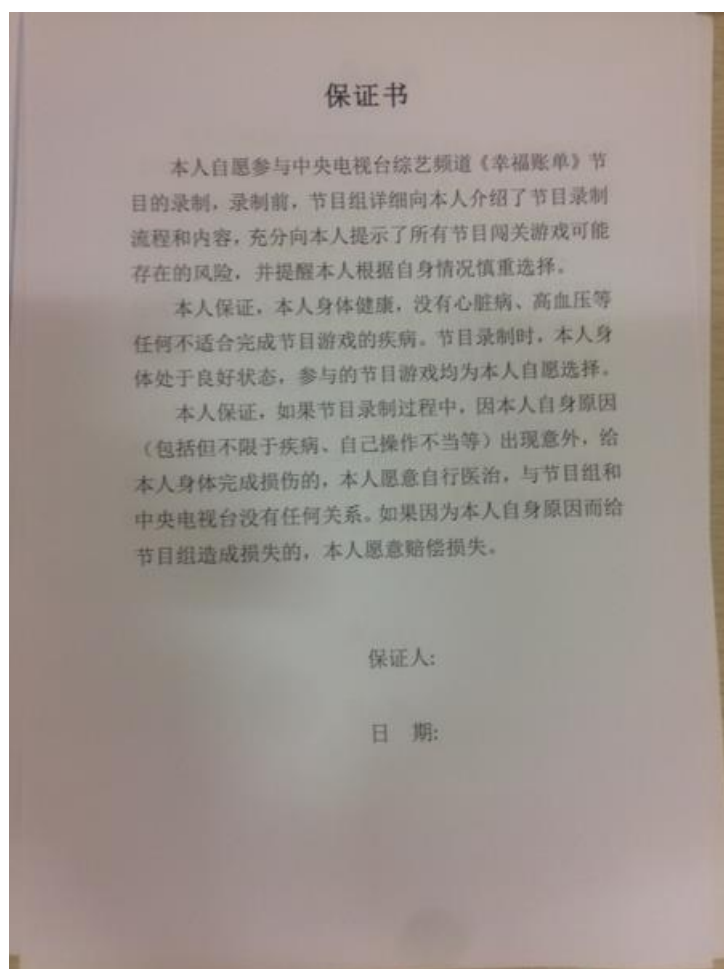
Please note that I had a lot more informants who do not appear in the thesis. On the other hand, all interviews and conversations appeared in the thesis are numbered and all interviewees were anonymised with pseudonyms. All (except one) interviews were carried out in Chinese mandarin. Amongst 26 semi-structured interviews, 14 interviews were recorded by an iPhone, with the consent of the interviewees. Another 12 interviews were not recorded, but I was allowed to take notes. Another 8 conversations happened during my internships. Hence there was no recording. I have transcribed the recorded interviews and have saved the other un-recorded interviews in a written document. The following chart provides basic information about the interviewees: job roles, approximate age, gender, residency status, how long they have worked in the industry.

Number	Interviewee pseudonym	Job title	Approximate age	Gender	Started working since year...	Residency status	Interview time/date	Interview location
1	HBL	Intern <i>biandao</i>	23	Female	2013	Jiangsu	30 th April 2018	Beijing
2	SJ	Producer	50	Male	1994	Beijing	20 th Feb 2019	Beijing
3	TW	Camera manager	50	Male	1995	Beijing	21 st June 2018	Beijing
4	SAW	<i>Biandao</i>	25	Female	2013	Heilongjiang	26 th Feb 2019	Beijing
5	YD	<i>Biandao</i>	28	Female	2013	Beijing	21 st Feb 2019	Beijing
6	SWY	Production assistant	25	Female	2012	Beijing	25 th Feb 2019	Beijing
7	EJ	News editor	27	Male	2017	Hebei	22 nd Feb 2019	Beijing
8	YJ	CEO	35	Female	2008	Hebei	25 th Feb 2019	Beijing
9	WN	<i>Biandao</i>	28	Female	2013	Jiangsu	21 st Feb 2019	Beijing
10	LL	TV host	32	Male	2010	Zhejiang	29 th Jan 2019	London
11	XW	Producer	60	Male	1985	NA	27 th Dec 2018	London

12	SQ	Production manager	29	Male	2012	Taipei	3 rd May 2018	Beijing
13	JA	<i>Intern biandao</i>	28	Female	2016	Sichuan	8 th July 2018	Beijing
14	YQ	Producer	30	Female	2013	Heilongjiang	28 th Feb 2019	Shenzhen
15	LP	<i>Zhipian</i>	25	Female	2013	Hebei	4 th May 2018	Beijing
16	TB	<i>Biandao</i>	28	Female	2012	Shenzhen	2 nd Feb 2019	Shenzhen
17	JSS	<i>Intern biandao</i>	30	Male	2013	Jiangxi	3 rd July 2018	Beijing
18	ZD	<i>Biandao</i>	35	Female	2009	Hunan	5 th March 2019	London
19	LA	<i>Biandao</i>	28	Female	2012	NA	7 th June 2018	Beijing
20	JNZ	<i>Biandao</i>	30	Female	2013	Beijing	2 nd May 2018	Beijing
21	HW	Head of development	32	Female	2010	Hunan	20 th Mar 2019	London
22	Sabrina	News editor	40	Female	2005	NA	15 th Jan 2019	London
23	Troy	News editor	30	Male	2012	Jiangsu	10 th Jan 2019	Beijing
24	WJ	Chief <i>biandao</i>	40	Male	2002	Beijing	21 st Feb 2019	Beijing
25	HJ	<i>Biandao</i>	42	Male	2000	Beijing	22 nd June 2018	Beijing
26	YF	Head of development	50	Female	1989	Hunan	22 nd Jan 2019	London
27	ZF	<i>Biandao</i>	35	Female	2010	Shaanxi	26 th May 2018	Beijing
28	Mike	Head of development	36	Male	2008	Shenzhen	28 th Feb 2019	Shenzhen
29	SH	<i>Biandao</i>	30	Male	2014	Hebei	2 nd May 2018	Beijing
30	CC	Producer	37	Female	2006	Hebei	22 nd June 2018	Beijing
31	MW	Chief <i>biandao</i>	31	Female	2010	NA	15 th June 2018	Beijing

32	LJG	Producer	50	Male	1995	Shenzhen	8 th March 2018	Shenzhen
33	ML	CEO	NA	Female	2005	NA	13 th Jan 2019	London
34	HH	<i>Biandao</i>	32	Female	2010	Jiangsu	2 nd June 2018	Nanjing

CCTV disclaimer signed by studio participants (保证书)



CCTV Transfer of IP signed by studio participants (确认书)

CCTV	
2 节目基本信息	
节目名称: 《多城观察》	节目名称:
类别: 日常栏目/栏内特别节目/栏外特别节目	节目代码:
预定播出时间:	预定播出频道: 综艺频道 (CCTV3)
编导:	制片人: 黎 虹

确 认 书

编号: Q_____

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特别说明: _____

确认人签字 (盖章): _____

电话: _____

日期: _____年____月____日

第 1 页, 共 1 页 确认书三级

Chinese god-worshipping



Glossary in alphabetical order

The chart bellows is an outline of Chinese terms that appeared in the thesis, that either do not have English equivalents, or are niche terms that should be used in their original forms.

Please see chart below:

Pinyin with tones ⁴¹	Chinese Characters (Simplified)	Proposed English Translation/explanation	Notes
Běi piāo	北漂	北漂 means 'Beijing vagabond', referring to the group of people who do not have a Beijing <i>hukou</i> (household registration), who migrated to Beijing from other areas of China seeking opportunities and a better life.	'北' refers to Beijing, and '漂' means 'drift'. <i>Běipiāo</i> is also a lifestyle of being a drifter in Beijing.
Biān dǎo	编导	<i>Biandao</i> is a foundational role on all entertainment shows. They are responsible for all creative tasks but in most situations, are at the bottom rank of the management pyramid (with interns at the lowest rank).	One Chinese <i>biandao</i> is the equivalent of: one scriptwriter + one (assistant) director + one stage manager (during filming) + one artist coordinator (occasionally) + one editor (frequently) + other jobs (dependent on studio requirements).
Gōng zuò shì	工作室	Studio; project group	A borrowed word, implying that the scale of the company is small and the work is creative.

⁴¹ Pinyin, introduced in the 1950s, is widely used in mainland China, as the official romanization system for Standard Chinese. The system includes four diacritics denoting tones. Pinyin without tone marks is used to spell Chinese names and words in languages written with the Latin alphabet, and also in certain computer input methods to enter Chinese characters. In Taiwan, people use Bopomofo/*zhuyin fuhao* as the major transliteration system. In Hong Kong, people use Cangjie input method and Cantonese pinyin input instead of Mandarin pinyin.

Guānxi	关系	<i>Guānxi</i> literally means relationship or connection. According to the Oxford dictionary, ' <i>guanxi</i> ' means (In China) the system of social networks and influential relationships which facilitate business and other dealings.	<i>Guānxi</i> is a typical Chinese concept based on the returning of favours in Chinese society. The word itself is neutral, but when used in different contexts, it can have a derogatory meaning as the 'relationship' may not be appropriate or legal. Accordingly, the person who has the power to achieve the desired goal for another is a <i>guānxi</i> hù (关系户).
Hǎi guī	海归	Chinese students who studied abroad and returned to China afterwards	<i>Hǎi</i> means 'abroad' and <i>guī</i> means 'return'. 海归 were often used to be in privileged situations, especially in the 1990s.
Hù kǒu	户口	Household registration	A <i>hukou</i> record officially identifies a person as a resident of an area which is usually issued per family. It includes the births, deaths, marriages, divorces, and movements of all members in the family.
Jiāng hú	江湖	'江湖' is a very niche word that first appeared in traditional Taoism philosophy books with multiple meanings, dating back to the 770 B.C. <i>Jiāng</i> literally means rivers and <i>hú</i> means lakes. Rivers and lakes together become an analogy of many lands, implying a big place. As time passes by, <i>Jiānghú</i> becomes a set phrase which means 'complicated world', especially a world that is out of the government's control. It became a popular word since it has been used in martial art novels written by well-known novelists such as <i>Jīn Yōng</i> and <i>Gǔ lóng</i> .	

Kāi chuāng	tiān 开天窗	'开' means 'open' and '天窗' is a sunroof. It is a term originates from early newspapers production. When facing censorship, some newspaper would leave a void on the paper in order to tell readers that they had planned to publish something but failed due to censorship or other issues. The shape of the void looks like a sunroof.	Nowadays this term is used in the media industry indicating that the planned programme will not be broadcast. Audiences will notice this when seeing a sudden advertisement replacing the scheduled programme.
Mén pài	门派	Originally meant any school of martial arts. Chinese people now use its implied meaning more than its original. The implied meaning is 'interest group that have a specific craftsmanship'.	As Chinese is an ideographic language, (as opposed to English which is letter-based), words themselves do not have singular or plural forms. Therefore, a Chinese term can be both singular and plural form, depending on the context and other combined words. Unless stated otherwise, the term <i>ménpài</i> can be seen as both singular and plural.
Qǐ pìn	企聘	In the context of this thesis, <i>Qipin</i> means 'hired by the company called zhongshi huicai'. In the general Chinese language, this term means 'hired by a company'.	
Rén mài	人脉	Contacts and connections that could potentially help someone benefit in their business or other areas of their life/personal life.	

Rén qíng	人情	The exchange of favours, sympathy and help. <i>renqing</i> is the activity that is conducted within a <i>guanxi</i> relationship and represents the behavioural aspect of the relationship. <i>Renqing</i> could blur boundaries between business and interpersonal relationships, and inevitably, it would not be easy to distinguish between personal and organisational actions. On the other hand, <i>renqing</i> could potentially strengthen interpersonal ties and relationships within a business relationship.	If someone owes a favour, they need to return the favour next time.
Shè bǎo	社保	Full term is <i>shèhùi bǎoxiǎn</i> , 社会 保 险, equivalent of national insurance in the UK, but the specific rules and covered areas may differ.	In China, it is compulsory for both the employer and employee to pay <i>shebao</i> , which includes <i>yǎnglǎo bǎoxiǎn</i> 养 老 保 险 (endowment insurance), <i>shīyè bǎoxiǎn</i> 失 业 保 险 (unemployment insurance), <i>yīliáo bǎoxiǎn</i> 医 疗 保 险 (medical insurance), <i>gōngshāng bǎoxiǎn</i> 工 伤 保 险 (work-related injury insurance), and <i>shēngyù bǎoxiǎn</i> 生 育 保 险 (childbirth insurance). These five insurances are called <i>wǔxiǎn</i> 五 险. Apart from <i>wǔxiǎn</i> , it is also compulsory to pay <i>yījīn</i> , 一 金, housing accumulation funds. For each insurance, there are different minimum time limits to ensure the employee will get the benefit. An employee must pay in for at least 15 years in order to benefit from the insurance when retired. For medical insurance, the minimum is from 20-30 years, depending on each province. For unemployment and childbirth

			insurance, the minimum is one year. There is no requirement for work-related injury insurance. In Beijing, paying <i>shebao</i> for at least five years continually, plus paying individual income tax for five years is a prerequisite for buying properties and cars.
Shěn piān	审片	In Chinese, ‘审’ means ‘check’ and ‘片’ means ‘videos’. Therefore, <i>shenpian</i> is literally translated as ‘checking videos’. This is a broader term for ‘censorship’. In the Chinese context, prohibiting or removing contents is only a small part of the <i>shenpian</i> process. The primary task of <i>shenpian</i> is to check and review an edited show to improve the inner logic, the story arc, the aesthetics in images, the audio effects, and then, if necessary, to remove some contents due to political or other reasons.	
Shì yè biān zhì	事业编制	事业编制 are permanent job(s) in Chinese government-affiliated institutions that are on the permanent payroll of that institution’s human resource department. The person is directly paid by China’s state revenue and is almost impossible to be fired.	<i>Shiyè</i> and <i>biānzhì</i> are two terms. <i>Shiyè</i> is a prefix of the term <i>Shiyè dānwèi</i> (事业单位), governmental-affiliated institutions. Any term that starts with <i>shiyè</i> indicates that it is governmental. The term only exists in Chinese state-owned institutions and institutions of a similar nature.
Tái pìn	台聘	台聘 means ‘hired by state-owned television stations’.	<i>Tái</i> means ‘television station’ and <i>pìn</i> means ‘employment’. Combining the two characters, creates the phrase ‘hired by the television station’. In the context of this thesis, the <i>taí</i> is CCTV. However, if we use a case study of another state-owned television station, the

			<i>taí</i> will be that television station.
Wài xié	外协	In the context of this thesis, <i>wàixié</i> means 'hired by a company controlled by state-owned television stations'.	
Xīn wén mǐn gōng	新闻民工	Contracted news practitioners (including news journalists and editors)	
Yáo hào	摇号	In order to get an automobile license plate, one must take part in a lottery-like system, which randomly selects names of the applicants each month.	To be eligible, you must be a Beijing <i>hukou</i> -holder without a car, or a non- <i>hukou</i> holder without a car who has worked in Beijing and simultaneously paid national insurance for five years or more. If you are eligible, you receive a random serial number, which may be selected as the 'winner'. If the number is selected, the applicant must purchase a car within six months. Otherwise, s/he will lose eligibility and must rejoin the <i>yaohao</i> system again. If the number does not win, it is put into the pool for next month, and so on until the number gets selected. This is a complicated lottery system by design, which largely depends on luck. As of June 2016, every 1 in 756 applicants could get a license to buy an automobile.
Zì xué chéng cái	自学成才	Self-learning in order to become an expert	Many traditional Chinese idioms, or 成语 (<i>chéng yǔ</i>), are typically composed of four characters. <i>Chéng yǔ</i> usually come from traditional Chinese history and stories.
Zhì piān zhǔ rén	制片主任	The role of <i>zhipian zhuren</i> only exists in state-owned television or large-scale production companies.	In CCTV, <i>zhipian zhuren</i> do not take part in creative tasks. They are similar to a Western production manager but have more power than production managers. They are more like co-producers, except for the fact that CCTV producers oversee the creative decisions while the <i>zhipian zhuren</i> only

			needs to take care of the budget.
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