

## The Reform of Chinese Media System

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With the development of Chinese market economy market mechanism is playing more and more roles in many fields. Of course the media industry is not the exception. Especially after 90's, the goals of Chinese media reform became more clearly, one is to guarantee the guidance of public opinion, the other is to advance the marketization reform positively. Based on the analysis of some main reform policies and several case studies this paper sums up four ways of Chinese media system reform. They are: partial separation, the whole transformation of system, shareholding reform and seeking to go public in the stock market.

**Keyword : Marketization, Media Reform, China media system**

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## 1. Backgrounds

### 1) Course of the Marketization Reform of Chinese Media

The Chinese media marketization refers that the media enters the market as one kind of special enterprise and becomes a special part of the whole market system(Huang, S.M., & Ding, J.J., 1997). Other scholar believes that media marketization is the process that the non-commercial media becomes self-supporting based on its original ownership, political standpoint and editing policy. Media marketization will make the non-commercial media reduce or get rid of the dependence on government's finances, which will promote them to obtain the independent status(Chen, H.L., 1996).

Since China began to take the policy of reform and opening up in 1978, the Chinese media has also started a series of marketization reforms including commercialized management, restoring advertisement, setting up TV stations in four levels, newspaper handling its issuing by itself, setting up media groups etc. The main direction of the reform is that the government's control on media is gradually relaxing and the market mechanism plays more and more role sin the media development.

In 1978, Ministry of Finance of China authorized eight media, *People's Daily* etc, to be the reform experimentation organizations to carry out the policy "institution<sup>1)</sup>, commercialized management". In 1979, advertisement was restored, which was an important symbol of the media marketization reform because the media get the finance support

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1) In China there is one kind of organization which is called *shi ye dan wei*. It is financed by the government and its leader is decided by the Communist Party of China(CPC) and the government. And it is non-profit. Comparatively with it there is enterprise(company) whose goal is profit. However, with the marketization reform media has been having dual attributes, *shi ye* attribute and enterprise attribute. In this paper institution means *shi ye dan wei*.

from the government totally before this.

In 80's, the government began to set up TV station in four levels<sup>2)</sup> and permitted newspaper to issue by itself. The Chinese TV stations boomed up in quantity quickly, which showed that the course of marketization reform of Chinese media had entered a new stage. Especially the newspaper's handling its issuing by itself was considered as a critical step to the marketization, because the Chinese postal system was responsible for all newspapers'issuing in former, and now newspapers were forced to face with market and conform to the market rules.

In 90's, with the establishment and development of the Chinese Socialist Market Economy System<sup>3)</sup>, the marketization reform of media was speeded up obviously. *The Decision on speeding up the Development of Tertiary Industry* made by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China(CPC) officially ranked newspaper management into the tertiary industry in 1990, which was a key symbol of newspaper industrialized reform. When Ze-Min, Jiang, the former President inspected *People's Daily* on 26 September 1996, he said the media should pay attention not only to the propaganda but also to the management(*People's Daily*, 1996). After that the media management got much attention in the field. In 1996, Guangzhou Daily Newspaper Group, the first media group in China, was set up, which started the development of Chinese media groups. From then on the marketization and industrialized reform entered a new important stage, a period of setting up media groups.

Entering the 21st century, the idea and frame of media marketization

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2) Four levels: national level, province level, city level and county level. Every level TV stations are all institutions in every level. At that time and until now the Chinese government doesn't permit the private and overseas capital to own TV stations or newspapers.

3) In 1992, the Chinese socialist market economy system was confirmed on the 14th National Congress of CPC at last. Afterward marketization reform was speeded up in many fields.

reform became more clearly with the former reform experience. One is to guarantee the guidance of public opinion, the other is to advance the marketization reform positively. In 2002 the report of the 16th National Congress of CPC explicitly proposed to speed up the development of cultural undertakings and cultural industry. The industrial attribute of media was admitted formally at last. The media began to rethink and orientate the original policy of "institution, commercialized management", and started to transform from institutions to enterprises. In 2004 the State Administration of Radio Film and Television(SARFT)<sup>4)</sup> put forward the slogan "2004, the industrialized year", so the system transformation became the focus word and the year 2004 was also called the first year of system transformation. So we can see the reform of media system is an inevitable choice in the market economy. It will be a profound system innovation for the development of media industry. Especially the system transformation will give much more space for private and overseas capital entering the Chinese media industry, thus it will further the marketization reform and promote the development of Chinese media.

## 2) Status of the Chinese media system before and after the reform

The Chinese media, such as newspaper, broadcasting, television and film are all institutions for a long time. They were supported by the state and their leaders were appointed by the government. The main task of these media is propaganda, and they are non-profit.

With the process of marketization reform, advertising was restored.

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4) In China there are two main governments to administrate the media industry, one is SARFT, another is GAPPC (General Administration of Press and Publication of China). SARFT's main task is the administration and supervision of the enterprises engaged in the television, radio and movie business. It controls directly China Central Television, China National Radio as well as other movie and television studios and others non-business organizations. GAPPC mainly administrate and supervise the newspaper, publishing and journal etc.

Many media began to self-support by advertisement fee and the financial support coming from the state became less and less. This mode was called "institution, commercialized management", which was a very important mode since 1978 and lasted for a long time. Later, many Chinese media groups were set up since 1996<sup>5)</sup>, and they all adopted this mode.

However, with the development of media groups they encountered many difficulties deriving from the attribute of institution. For example, institutions can't get finance in the stock market. Therefore, the government began to seek the reform of system transformation, that is to say some institutions will transform into companies. For example, in December 2004 SARFT said that SARFT would not authorize to set up broadcasting groups of institution attribute and would only authorize to set up broadcasting groups of enterprise attribute in the future. As to the former broadcasting groups of institution character, they should separate the management assets from the group to set up a new industrial group(company). That is to say, the editing and the management would be separated. The editing belongs to the institution, private capital and overseas capital would not be permitted entering. The media group company based on management business by separation could attract some social capital but the capital can't take the controlling stake.

Now, after a few years of transformation some media are seeking the whole transformation into company without separation. After transformation they will be complete companies. Liaoning Publishing Media Corporation is an example of total transformation, and became a public company in Shanghai Stock Exchange.

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5) In 1996, *Guangzhou Daily* Newspaper Group was set up. It was the first media group in China. Later many media groups appeared.

## 2. Methods

This paper is mainly based on case study and theoretical analysis. This study choose some reform experimentation organizations to analyze, such as Zhejiang Radio and Television Group, Nanjing Broadcasting Group Company Ltd, Mudanjiang News Media Group, *China Insurance News*, Beijing Media Corporation Limited and Liaoning Publishing Media Corporation etc.

This paper also lists many main policies on system reform of Chinese media, from which we can see the reform process is speeded up gradually and the goals of reform become more clearly.

## 3. Analysis

### 1) Meaning of the Reform of Chinese Media System

The former marketization and industrialized reform of Chinese media has promoted media to become a relatively independent industry with broad growing space. The establishment and evolution of "institution, commercialized management" policy was the main power. The market idea varied from weak to strong, the market operation appeared and became the media's self-conscious thing gradually. However, in this process our thought has also been solidified by the policy of "institution, commercialized management". We are afraid that the ideology attribute of media would be discarded if institutions be changed into enterprises. Today we can still feel that this policy is influencing the future development of media industry to some extent, for example the financing problem is much difficult for the institutions. The media industry needs much bigger development space which will be released by the reform of media system.

On 20 October 2004, when inspecting Liaoning Publication Group, Chang-Chun, Li, a member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee said, "The biggest barrier to the development of culture industry is the malpractice of the system, especially is the institution attribute. It makes market operation and financing impossible(Luo, J. H., 2005)."

Many scholars also believe that the reform of Chinese media must make a breakthrough in system. Just like Guo-Ming, Yu, a professor of Renmin University of China said, the lag of media system reform was extremely asymmetrical with the media development. The reform of media system will be the result of many factors such as technology development, international rules and the logic of media industry itself etc. Now it is facing the best opportunity to startup the reform of media system(Zhang, C. Y., 2003).

Therefore the reform of media system we talk about in this paper refers mainly to the "transformation of system" since the 21st century, especially since the 16th National Congress of CPC in 2002. It is a profound and structural reform, including not only the macroscopic system reform but also a microscopic change in the operation pattern, the management goal and the rules(Yu, G. M., 2003). It will produce the main players in the media market and enhance the media's competitiveness.

According to Bin-Jie, Liu's view, the chief of the General Administration of Press and Publication of China(GAPPC)<sup>6</sup>, "transformation of system" has two-level meanings, one refers that some institutions will be transformed into state-owned or state-controlling companies, the other is that some media which have already been transformed into companies would take shareholding reform and seek to go public in the stock market(Zhu, X. D. & Gao, J. C., 2004).

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6) GAPPC mainly administrate and supervise the newspaper, publishing and journal etc.

## 2) Main Policy Arrangements of the Reform of Chinese Media System

The Chinese government promulgated many policies in order to promote the reform of media system transformation. The mains are as follows:

In November 2002, the report of the 16th National Congress of CPC explicitly proposed to speed up the development of cultural undertakings and industry<sup>7)</sup>, and divided cultural organizations into two kinds. One kind is cultural institutions which provide non-profit service, the other kind is cultural industrial organizations which produce cultural products and moreover the majority of the products could realize their value through market mechanism.

In June 2003, SARFT decided to choose seven media organizations as the reform experimentation organizations of cultural system. They are Zhejiang Radio and Television Group, Shandong Television Station, Shenzhen Media Group, Xiamen Radio and Television Group, Nanjing Broadcasting Group Company Ltd, China Film Group Corporation and Changchun Film Group Corporation. Afterward *the Implementation Plan of Radio Film and Television Reform Experimentation* promulgated by SARFT made a detailed plan of system transformation, especially about marketization operation and deepening the reform etc, for the experiment organizations according to the Central Committee's reform spirit of culture system. *The Implementation Plan* demanded to separate the management assets, resource and service to set up enterprises and carry out the system transformation and reorganization. The two parts, editing and management, would be operated and managed separately. *The Implementation Plan* was aimed to produce some media enterprises

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7) In China media is one field of culture industry, so the media reform should follow not only the media policies but also the policies for all cultural organizations.

abundant in vigor, strength and competitiveness.

In February 2004, SARFT promulgated the *Suggestion on Promoting the Development of Radio Film and Television Industry*, put forward the explicit policy for the reform of media system and the development of media industry. It was a significant action in deepening the reform of media system. The *Suggestion* continued to demand the separation of editing and management, and proposed that the media organizations should follow market mechanism, optimize resources collocation and adjust structure. Through these reforms a batch of large scale media groups full of strength and core competitiveness would be set up, and as backbones to promote the whole industry development.

In July 2004, SARFT hold the *Forum of National Secretary of Radio Film and Television* in Shanghai, further systematize the strategy and measures of the media system reform and industry development. The conference demanded that the reform experiment organizations take the lead to implement the policy which separates industry from undertakings, separates management right from ownership and separates broadcasting from producing.<sup>8)</sup> This is a key point and breakthrough of the reform of media system. Some entertainment or service channels could be transformed into state-owned or state-controlling companies to carry out the commercialized management. The *Forum* also defined the scope and conditions of this policy, only the film & drama channel, sports channel, entertainment channel, life & service channel and transportation frequency, travel frequency, music frequency etc of reform experiment units, could be carry out this policy. And overseas fund can't be introduced into the companies. When domestic private fund comes in, it is not permitted to take the controlling stake.

In December 2004, Shi, Zhao, the vice chief of SARFT, said that SARFT would not authorize to set up the broadcasting groups of institution character in the future at the *National Radio Film and*

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8) In Chinese is *san fen kai*, three separations.

*Television Working Conference* in Hainan province. That is to say SARFT would authorize only to set up the broadcasting groups of enterprise character. As to the former broadcasting groups of institution character, they should separate the management assets from the groups to set up a new industrial group(company)(Zhou, Z. P., 2004).

On 30 March 2006, *the National Working Conference of the Reform of Culture System* which was held in Beijing pointed out the reform of culture system would be spread all over the country. The effects of system reform would be released completely after more than two-year reform experimentation.

On 17 October 2007, Bin-Jie, Liu, the chief of GAPPC said that Chinese government would support the publication, newspaper and official backbone news website to go public as a whole in the stock market when accepting the interview of *Guangming Daily* and *Financial Times*. The government will no longer request them to separate the editing with management, but encourage them to go public as a whole (Xin, X., 2007). It means that the reform of Chinese media system will enter into a new stage.

### 3) Cases of Reform Experimentation

Some media organizations has taken the reform experimentation and acquired a lot of experience. The following are some typical examples.

Zhejiang Radio and Television Group(ZJRTG) continues the channel system management for propaganda part, but separated the management part including advertisement, extending industry, program buying and selling, marketing and operation etc from the group to set up companies which are controlled by ZJRTG. ZJRTG took the film & drama channel, the transportation frequency and the travel frequency as the reform experimentation, setting up two companies separately. They are Zhejiang Film and Television Entertainment Media Company and Zhejiang

Transportation and Travel Media Company Limited, carrying out the commercialized management. For example, the latter is a state-owned company based on Zhejiang Transportation Frequency and Travel Frequency, and it mainly takes charge of the advertisement and other extending industry's development of the two frequencies.

Nanjing Broadcasting Group Company Ltd(NJBG) has set up three channel management companies separately based on three channels, culture & sports channel, life service channel and information channel. For example, based on the culture & sports channel and combined with Jiangsu Xinwang Technology Company Ltd., NJBG set up Nanjing Fashion Media Company with the investment of three-year management right and some fixed assets of this channel. The registration capital of the new company is 23 million yuan, and NJBG has the controlling-stake by 51%. Similarly, NJBG set up another company, Nanjing Television Guide Company, based on information channel and combined with Shenzhen Golden Palm Company, the registration capital is 20 million yuan and NJBG has the controlling-stake by 60%. Further, based on life service channel NJBG set up Nanjing Mingshi Media Company, its registration capital is 24 million yuan and NJBG has the whole stake. Through setting up the channel management companies NJBG has created the new system of channel management which is different from before(Yan, Z.J., 2005).

Mudanjiang News Media Group(MDJNMG) is considered as one real media group with company mode, the first media industrialized group and the first city level cross-mediagroup in China(Zhou, H.D., 2004). Its former is Mudanjiang Radio and Television Group which was a state-owned company when established in 1999. It was a special thing in that time.<sup>9)</sup> Then in May, 2004, authorized by the Mudanjiang municipal government Mudanjiang Radio and Television Group annexed Mudanjiang

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9) Because in that time the media groups were all institutions, only Mudanjiang Radio and Television Group was registered as a state-owned company by the special authority of Mudanjiang government.

Newspaper Group and changed the name to MDJNMG. MDJNMG is the state-owned company, its governance structure is set up according to the modern corporate structure, having board system and general manager, and the general manager is responsible to the board. The group has eleven subsidiary companies. As a company it has already showed the very strong vigor and its revenue has got rapid growth. From 1999 to 2004, the total asset has grew 1.8 times, increased to 250 million yuan, the assets yield ratio reached 50%; the gross revenue coming from film and television grew from 30 million yuan to 130 million yuan, has got more than three times; and the tax of every year increased from 2 million yuan to 6.7 million yuan(Yang, C.Y., 2005).

*China Insurance News* became a multi-capital company after the whole transformation consisting of the editing and the management, without separation the management only like others. The new China Insurance News Corporation Limited(CINC) attracted many investors such as China Reinsurance(Group) Company, China Life Insurance(Group) Company, Beijing Imagination Media Investment Group Company Limited, Fuxi Investment Holding Company Limited and the People's Insurance Company of China. The setting up of CINC has initiated the shareholding reform of Chinese media because there is private capital entering the company, although it doesn't take the controlling-stake. This will influence the reform of media industry profoundly and greatly.

On 22 December 2004, Beijing Media Corporation Limited(BJMC) whose controlling stake is owned by *Beijing Youth*, went public in the Stock Exchange of Hong Kong(SEHK)(Hong Kong stock code: 1000), and became the first stock of Chinese media in overseas security market. Its main business is the advertising and printing business of four newspapers, *Beijing Youth*, *Beijing Today(in English)*, *Middle School Times* and *Beijing Children Weekly*, as well as the ten-years right of promoting and extending of *China Open* collaborated with TOM Group. Its success of going public in SEHK benefited from not only the macro

environment of the reform of culture system but also the positive exploration of Beijing as a reform experimentation city.

## 4. Conclusion

This paper mainly discussed the marketization reform of Chinese media system, analyzed the process, ways and main policy arrangements of the reform. We can see that the reform process is step by step, from outer to inner, from low-level to deep-level. This gave a relatively stable environment for the development of Chinese media. However, because of the particularity of Chinese media the reform also encounter some difficulties even errors. Especially in order to keep the institution attribute of Chinese media, "institution, commercialized management" became the basic idea and mode for a long time. In fact this mode gave many limits to the further development of Chinese media. In addition, it took the Chinese media eight years<sup>10)</sup> to realize that media group should be a company. Now the reform ideas and goals became more clearly, not only to guarantee the guidance of public opinion but also to advance the marketization positively.

Based on the analysis of some main reform policies and several case studies this paper sums up four ways of the reform of Chinese media system. They are: partial separation, the whole transformation of system, shareholding reform and seeking to go public in the security market.

### 1) Partial Separation

The way of partial separation refers that it would separate the management business from the media to set up a company or group. The

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10) Since Guangzhou Daily Newspaper Group was set up in 1996, till 2004 the media groups were all institutes. In 2004 the transformation started and new media groups (companies) appeared.

company is state-owned. Then the two parts, the editing and the management, will be managed and operated separately.

Except the news propaganda, the social service and entertainment programs, especially the drama's producing, advertisement and issuing etc, could be separated from the existing system. According to modern corporate structure, set up the company that does self-management and takes the responsibility for its own profits and losses. Zhejiang Radio and Television Group took this measure.

Moreover, some channels or frequency such as sports, transportation, film & television, music, life, finance & economy, science & education and so on, can be permitted to set up a company to carry on the commercialized management, like the reform of Nanjing Broadcasting Group Company Ltd. The companies are state-owned, their ownership belong to Nanjing Broadcasting Group Company Ltd.

It can be seen that the way of partial separation has differentiated culture undertakings and cultural industry in great degree, thus could promote the development of media industry. However, partial separation has not been the thorough way of transformation yet, and perhaps it would bring some new erroneous thought and problems. For instance, can advertisement be truly separated from program? Can management be truly separated from the editing? Therefore, some media organizations started probing into the whole transformation of system.

## 2) The Whole Transformation of System

The whole transformation of system refers that media group(company) would be set up as a complete company. The company would have the industrial assets and sub-newspaper, sub-publication, channel or frequency of industrial character. The sub-newspaper etc whose system have been transformed could obtain the whole rights of both editing and management, and realize the unification of production and management.

The company can set up the corporate governance structure, and become the new main player in the media market(Huang, Y.B., & Zhang, J. H., 2006).

In this aspect, Mudanjiang News Media Group is the focus. There are also many other media groups having transformed as a whole, such as Chinese Publication Group, Guangdong Publication Group, Shanghai Publication Group etc and some film groups.

The whole transformation of system is helpful for the government to strengthen the management of media industry in macro aspect, and helpful for media groups to establish the competitive roles in the market in micro aspect. And it can also seek breakthrough in the property system, corporate governance structure, capital operation, cross-media and cross-region management etc(Huang, Y. B., & Zhang, J. H., 2006).

### **3) Shareholding Reform**

In the process of system transformation, some media organizations took the reform to introduce the shareholding system directly, like the shareholding reform of China Insurance News. This way has realized to introduce multi-investment structure, even including some private capital. It is a breakthrough although the state-owned capital still controls the stake. And the ownership structure, management system and inner operation mechanism are all clearly, which not only establish a good base to perfect the governance structure in the future but also guarantee the company's vigor and competitiveness.

Just like Feng, Shi, the vice chief of GAPPC said at the establishing ceremony on 18 April 2005, "The establishment of China Insurance News is not only an important trial of the system reform in Chinese industry newspaper, but also a new development of the whole system reform in news publishing(Yang, C. Y., 2005)."

#### 4) Seeking to go public in the stock market

Some media seek to go public in the stock market after introducing shareholding system, just like the going public of Beijing Media Corporation Limited and Liaoning Publishing Media Corporation.

BJMC's going public doesn't involve the editing, just the management part. Therefore many questions were put forward, how could the management be separated from the editing because the editing is the core business in a media? How to solve the affiliated business? As to these questions, new policy has been put forward in 2007, it will permit media to go public as a whole, without separation between the editing and management. In fact, Liaoning Publishing Media Corporation has gone public in the Shanghai Stock Exchange on 21 December 2007. It is the first media company going public with the editing and management as a whole approved specially by Propaganda Department of the CPC Central Committee and GAPPC.

The way of going public is more open to the market and multi-capitals, thus it will help the media company become more efficient in terms of management.

Just like above mentioned, transformation of system has two-level meaning, one refers that some institutions transform into state-owned companies, the other is that some media which have already transformed into state-owned companies would introduce multi-capitals to take the shareholding system reform, furthermore some will seek to go public in the stock market. The four ways of system transformation cover the two-level meaning. Partial separation and the whole transformation mainly carry out the first-level transformation, the shareholding reform and seeking to go public in stock market carry out the second-level transformation.

To summarize, we can see China has already started speeding up the media reform largely. The experience coming from the experimental

reform made the idea and direction of media system reform in the future more clearly. In the new period, the reform of Chinese media system will certainly release more space for the development of media industry. And the Chinese media industry will obtain considerable development with new vigor.

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## 중국 미디어 시스템의 개혁

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중국 시장경제체제의 상징과 함께 시장구조의 메커니즘이 많은 분야에서 그 역할을 하고 있으며 물론 미디어 산업도 예외가 아니다. 특히 90년대 이후, 중국 미디어개혁의 목표가 명확해졌다. 그 하나는 여론 수호를 보장하는 것이며, 다른 하나는 긍정적으로 시장화 개혁을 진행하는 것이다. 몇 개의 주요 개혁 정책과 사례연구의 분석을 통해 본 연구는 중국의 미디어 시스템 개혁을 부분 분리, 시스템의 총체적 변형, 지분구조 개혁, 주식시장 상장화 노력이라는 네 가지로 설명한다.

**키워드 : 시장화, 언론개혁, 중국언론체제**