Entertainment, Education, or Propaganda? A Longitudinal Analysis of China Central Television’s Spring Festival Galas

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Previous research on the Chinese media focused on political propaganda in the information media. This project extends this stream of research to analyze mass mediated entertainment, China Central Television’s annual Spring Festival Galas, in the previous 26 years. Based on 475 performances from a sample of 13 complete Galas, this study confirmed a high presence of political propaganda and social education content. Among the many dominant values, values related to national pride and the traditional New Year observed an increased presence in the Galas over the years. Results are discussed in light of the Chinese media, social, and political environment.

As the primary cultural storyteller and perhaps the most popular source of family entertainment, television has long been the focus of scholarly research. The repetition of stories, facts, and values in televised entertainment programs shapes audience’s perceptions of social reality and cultivates cultural values (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2002; Zhang & Harwood, 2002). For example, Zhang and Harwood observed that the total viewing of imported programming among Chinese college students was negatively associated with their endorsement of interpersonal harmony. Recent research in entertainment-education maintained that the educational content or interventions embedded in mass mediated entertainment programs can affect listeners’ or viewers’ pro-social attitudes and behaviors, and may lead to social change (e.g., Do & Kincaid, 2006).

The idea that television can be utilized as a vehicle for national integration through the dissemination of images, ideas, myths, and cultural rituals is not new. Yet, previous research on the Chinese media focused mainly on the information media and the propaganda content. Because of the possible, tremendous impact of televised entertainment, the present study sought to provide a longitudinal analysis of China Central Television’s (CCTV) annual Spring Festival Galas (SFGs), the most...
watched entertainment show in the world (Sina.com Entertainment, 2008), as a special case of televised entertainment. In addition to identifying various political, social, and cultural values/themes, a longitudinal analysis of the Galas from the early 1980s to the late 2000s may reveal possible changes in the government’s control of the medium and the changing political, social, and cultural values as a result of modernization and globalization.

An Overview of CCTV and Propaganda

Since 1983, the SFGs are elaborately staged by CCTV on the Chinese New Year’s Eve. As a state entity and the sole national television station, CCTV broadcasts its news and entertainment programs though its own relay stations and satellites, and through regional and local stations since the late 1970s. CCTV expanded its program offerings since the mid-1990s, and currently has 20 channels, including a comprehensive channel, drama and movie, sports, news, and international channels (CCTV.com, 2010). As with other Chinese media, the television industry was developed “under the direct supervision of the key members of the Politburo of the Communist Party” (Guo, 1991). According to the Chinese State Council (1997), the objectives of the press, however, have shifted from the pure propagandist pursuit of “social impact” to “an optimal integration between social impact and economic impact, with social impact taking precedence” (quoted in Zhao, 2000, p. 6). Recent observations reveal that the television industry obtained financial independence through its own profit-making operations (Zhao, 1999). However, unlike the majority of the television stations, CCTV gained disproportionate profit based on its political affiliation with the Party and the state (Wei, 2000), and may be considered as the “tongue and throat” of the central government.

The SFGs and Importance of Studying the SFGs

From its inception, each Gala runs from 8 p.m. to 12:30 a.m., and contains about three dozen performances, including traditional or modern dances and singing, cross-talks (a traditional form of Chinese stand-up comedy), and mini-dramas (Cheng, 2005; SFGs Homepage, 2008). As the SFGs are broadcast on the traditional Chinese New Year’s Eve, and a greater penetration of television sets occurred in China during the past 30 years, watching the Galas has become institutionalized as part of the New Year celebration (Cheng, 2005). In response to ever-heightened expectations from the audience and the advance in new technologies, the show has incorporated more eye-catching features and audience interactions, for instance, text-messaging, hotlines, and Internet activities (Cheng, 2005). Lately, with more channels and program offerings by CCTV, the SFGs are broadcast on multiple channels, and to audiences overseas. For instance, the 2006 Spring Festival Gala was broadcast over four channels of CCTV, including the International channel, and was relayed by 465 regional or local television stations (2006 SFG, 2006). Recent A. C. Nielsen
Media Research in China revealed that viewership of the 2008 Gala reached 68% in many urban areas in China, and ratings at different time spots over the 4.5 hours reached approximately 20% (Sina.com Entertainment, 2008).

The importance of the SFGs may be explained using cultivation theory (Gerbner et al., 2002) and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2002). Cultivation scholars argue that the more individuals watch television, the more likely that their perceptions of social reality and their beliefs and values are consistent with those communicated in the television world (Gerbner et al., 2002; Yang, Ramasubramanian, & Oliver, 2008). The conventional cultivation analysis focuses on the cumulative effects of overall television viewing; however, as a yearly program, the SFGs also have the potential to cultivate viewers’ beliefs and values through repeated viewing of the shows over the years, or through rebroadcasts, DVDs, or free video streaming on various websites (e.g., CCTV.com). Furthermore, according to Shrum’s (2002) analysis on the underlying psychological process of cultivation effects, repeated viewing of the SFGs can enhance accessibility of the beliefs and attitudes stored in viewers’ memory, which operates a heuristic cue to influence their beliefs and attitudes. Quick (2009) found that viewing a specific television program (i.e., Grey’s Anatomy) was positively, although indirectly, associated with viewers’ perceptions of real-world doctors. This school of research usually begins with message system analysis and identifies the most recurrent and overarching patterns of television content or in specific programs in recent studies (e.g., Baker & Raney, 2007), which serves as the starting point for cultivation analysis (Gerbner et al., 2002).

In addition, mass mediated entertainment (e.g., the SFGs) as a narrative form of education is considered to influence viewers’ beliefs and behaviors (e.g., Eyal & Kunkel, 2008). Theorizing entertainment-education mainly draws upon Bandura’s social cognitive theory (2002) which stipulates that mass mediated entertainment provides examples for viewers to model. The frequency and salience of the programs and examples, together with perceived rewards or punishment, may facilitate cognitive, vicarious rehearsal among the viewers, enhance their attitudes toward a given behavior and their perception of self-efficacy, and possibly effect the desired behavioral or social change. In an analysis of American television programs, Smith et al. (2006) measured the rate of altruistic acts per hour because the frequency of the events would facilitate viewers’ encoding and modeling of the events. To provide a basis for cultivation or media effects research and to illustrate how the Galas were used for national integration purposes, the following section focuses on three main, recurring themes (i.e., political propaganda, social education, and cultural values).

**Political Propaganda and Social Education in the SFGs**

Previous literature identified that the Chinese Communist Party frequently used mass media campaigns or Chinese media to introduce new institutions/leaders, to denounce the old institutions or political enemies, to support the study of new
political doctrines, and to familiarize the public with new policies (Liu, 2001; Pan & Chan, 2000). In the only study of the SFGs, Zhao (1998) stated that the Galas were censored by the central government before they were allowed to broadcast. Zhao’s critical analysis of the 1997 SFG revealed that different entertainment forms (e.g., songs, cross-talks, mini-dramas) communicated communist ideologies, and reflected contemporary political events and happenings: the death of the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping, the 15th Chinese Communist Party Congress, praise for the Chinese Navy, and the return of previously colonized Hong Kong.

According to Pan and Chan (2000), Chinese television, together with other media systems, was utilized for national integration purposes. National integration of “political control and administrative penetration of the state” (Pan & Chan, 2000, p. 235) refers to the state involvement in promoting or imposing symbolic resources and nationalism to bolster their argument that the Communist Party represents the Chinese nation. For example, in the 1997 Gala, the return of Hong Kong as a boost to national pride was achieved under the leadership of the Communist Party, and praise for the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping explicitly pointed to the Communist leadership that led to a modern, prosperous China. On the other hand, national integration of “cultural and historical identification of one people as a nation” (Pan & Chan, 2000, p. 235) refers to the development of values, customs, and cultural practices between regional and local communities through common experiences and shared symbols and meanings. Pan and Chan further argue that although the latter may take place historically, the state’s promotion or measures are inevitable, and different symbolic resources from cultural or ethnic nationalism may be drawn to strengthen or legitimize the government’s claim of representing the Chinese nation. Thus, national integration of the political kind and the cultural kind can be distinct by definition, although they can be intertwined in history as well.

Early mass media campaigns in China were extended to the areas of public health, and promoted appropriate social behaviors and etiquette (e.g., birth control, anti-spitting, or snail eradication; Liu, 2001). More recent analysis of the Chinese television system (e.g., Wei, 2000) revealed the first and foremost mission of television is to glorify socialist ideals and help create socialist moral standards in addition to promoting the government’s policies (Li, 1991, quoted in Wei, 2000). Although certain social behaviors and thoughts may be promoted by the government, they are not necessarily propagandistic. Zhao (1998) did not treat the political propaganda and social education separately, but the analysis revealed that songs such as “True Love Lasts Forever” praised and glorified stable relationships when the divorce rate among the urban young generation was high in the 1990s in China. In addition, Zhao’s qualitative analysis did not examine the extent to which the political content and social/entertainment education appeared in the Galas. Given that only a limited amount of research has been conducted on the political and social education content in the SFGs, a research question was posited:

**RQ1:** (a) What were the major themes related to political propaganda and social education, and (b) to what extent were they included in the SFGs?
Another aim of the present study was to investigate whether the content of the SFGs reflected the many changes in Chinese society. After three decades of economic reform, the Open Door policy, and continuous exposure to Western culture and media, China has undergone many political, social, and cultural changes (Faure, 2008). As Chinese society moved away from the revolutionary period in the first half of the twentieth century and entered the post-Mao period of the time, Chinese audiences, especially the younger generations, increasingly were indifferent to the blatant political indoctrination (Huang & Zhan, 2008; Zhao, 1998). Zhao (1998) further states that the current younger generations use the world or other Asian countries as a point of reference. On the other hand, the media audience shows a greater interest in the popular programs related to Chinese culture and history (The Yearbook of China Radio and Television, 1995). The marketization of the television industry called for a balance between fulfilling the party organ function and appealing to a mass audience (Pan & Chan, 2000). As a result, the Party started to rely more on using national pride and economic growth achievements to legitimize their claims of the importance of the Party leadership and to help foster a national identity. Thus, the following hypothesis was proposed:

\[ H_1: \text{The use of national pride themes in the SFGs would increase over the years.} \]

**Cultural Values in the SFGs**

The SFGs are “meant to tap the cultural significance of the traditional Spring Festival” (Yuan, 1997, p. 4; quoted in Zhao, 1998). The focus on cultural significance aims to preserve the cultural tradition, improve audience appeal, and get closer to the audiences. Cultural significance is conveyed through values, defined as the enduring beliefs that “a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to alternate modes of conduct or end-state of existence” (Rokeach, 1968, p. 160). Sillars (1991) states that messages or arguments containing (vs. not) the values that the audience holds are more effective and persuasive. In addition, values communicated to the potential audiences are essential in achieving the goals of national integration, social education, and political propaganda.

Central to the SFGs are the values related to the traditional New Year, namely, the symbolic meaning of spring and family gathering and reunion. The longing for spring affords an occasion for the Chinese people to wish for a new start and a prosperous new year, whereas the latter provides an opportunity for the Chinese to celebrate family reunion and show family harmony (Pan & Chan, 2000). Furthermore, with advances in new communication technologies (e.g., satellite broadcast), local family gatherings and reunions have taken the Confucian concept of “Great Oneness” (i.e., great harmony and integration) and extended to the reunion and celebration among Chinese nationwide and overseas. Lastly, the SFGs showcase traditional ways of life or values which are based on the four principles of Confucianism (i.e., humanism, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom), and put an emphasis on social harmony.
On a less abstract level, traditional values are related to, for instance, family, filial piety, caring for the old and the young, education, health, and collectivism (e.g., Zhang & Harwood, 2004).

On the other hand, in recent decades, Chinese society observed a regression from traditional collectivistic values towards individualistic values, a materialistic orientation, and a continuous exposure to the Western culture and media (Faure, 2008). Regarding the SFGs, Zhao (1998) observed that the 1997 Gala included new cultural values (e.g., individualism) to improve the show’s appeal to the younger generation. Although not related to the SFGs, a number of studies on cultural values in advertising revealed that in addition to the traditional values (e.g., family, health, and education), nontraditional values (e.g., consumerism, pleasure, hedonism, beauty/youth, success/status, and environmentalism) appeared in Chinese television commercials (e.g., Cheng & Schweitzer, 1996; Zhang & Harwood, 2004). Given that only a limited amount of research has been conducted to assess the traditional and new cultural values/ways of life in the SFGs, a research question was posited:

RQ2: (a) What were the major cultural values in the SFGs? (b) To what extent were they included in the SFGs?

Although it was difficult to predict the communication of cultural values in the SFGs, it was expected that both values related to the traditional New Year and other traditional values would see an increased use in the more recent SFGs. There are two possible reasons. First, in the recent decade, the SFGs gradually lost audience to other media and alternative lifestyles (e.g., the younger generation partying outside the home on the New Year’s Eve). In order to regain many of these viewers, the creators of the SFGs reasserted the traditional values related to the New Year in an attempt to enhance the SFGs’ appeal to the audience and to become part of their New Year celebration. Second, over the past few years, Chinese people adopted a number of new cultural values; for example, they became more individualistic and materialistic, and are less likely to heed the principle of self-restraint than in the past (Faure, 2008). The 17th Communist Congress explicitly stated that the media should utilize the traditional Chinese culture to counter the growing influence from foreign media and to safeguard national identity and cultural distinctiveness (Huang & Zhan, 2008). On the other hand, because the media also reflect the changing cultural values, it was expected that the SFGs would incorporate more non-traditional values in recent years.

H2: The use of (a) the traditional values related to the Spring Festival and (b) other traditional values in the SFGs would increase over the years.

H3: The use of non-traditional values in the SFGs would increase over the years.

A final research question explored whether other themes identified in RQ1 and RQ2 underwent any changes.
RQ$_3$: Did the use of other political, social, and cultural themes change over the years?

**Method**

This study relied on a quantitative content analysis. A total of 26 full-length Galas were broadcast from 1983 to 2008. A preliminary examination of the SFGs determined that each program ran about 4 hours and 30 minutes, and contained about 35 performance items. The starting year of 1984 was randomly determined, and every other broadcast was selected for analysis, resulting in a total of 13 broadcasts. A further preliminary qualitative examination did not detect major variations between the broadcasts selected for analysis and those not selected.

**Unit of Coding and Analysis**

The 13 stages of the Galas selected for the current analysis contained 475 performance items or special shows, i.e., units of coding and analysis. Because the study sought to analyze the entertainment narratives or special performances embedded in the Galas, hosts’ brief greetings and complementary introduction of following performances were not coded as performance items, unless they lasted relatively a long time and the content had some special meaning and themes. In addition, early Galas occasionally featured one singer with 2 or 3 complete songs, whereas recent ones tended to combine several similar-style, partial songs performed by several singers. All those were coded as one performance or analysis unit because those performances were not considered distinct among themselves and they were different from the other performances broadcast either before or after them.

**Coding Scheme**

Performances and special shows were coded first according to the genre of the performances, and gender and the number of the performers. Previous research on the 1997 SFG (Zhao, 1998), Chinese media, entertainment-education, and cultural values (e.g., Zhang & Harwood, 2004) were revisited for guidelines for coding categories. A number of new categories were tentatively created and further tested for the coding work. The final coding scheme is as follows.

*Promotion of political agendas* refers to the performance that is related to the structure or affairs of the government, the army, or the nation/state. Adapted and modified from Liu (2001) and Zhao (1998), this study proposed the following categories: (a) reference to/introduction of a new institution (i.e., national unity and sovereignty), (b) praise for the Communist Party and the Army, (c) familiarization of the public with/reference to the current political events, issues, or policies, (d) nationalism (e.g., love and work for the country), and (e) reference to better, wealthy life or changes as a result of party leadership.
National pride mainly refers to (a) national tradition, history, and civilization, (b) economic growth and general reference to better life/living conditions, (c) new interventions and new contributions, and (d) reference to changes (e.g., new buildings). Such references aim to bring the nation together based on the tradition or new inventions, although some involvement of the government is inevitable. However, if a performance did not explicitly mention how the government or the Party contributed to national pride, it was classified as national pride (or the national integration of the cultural and social kind).

The term social education refers to promoting any socially desirable messages and acts. At the same time, they do not have a political agenda or do not refer to national unity, the Party, or the country. For example, the “Melody on a Bus” broadcast in the 2008 Gala, presented a harmonious society where migrant workers and local Beijing residents helped each other in different ways. This current analysis also defined performances with reference to any current social problems as promoting a social agenda because such references usually set public agendas and sometimes provided solutions to problems. Thus, to be classified to promote a social agenda, any performance programs should contain any of the following: (a) promote a new social idea or a way to behave (e.g., education for the children of immigrant workers in cities), (b) reference to current social problems (e.g., problems that farmers or workers face).

Values associated with the Galas also were investigated. This study divided values into four major categories: The first category included values related to the traditional New Year, which included (a) New Year’s greetings and wishes, including happiness, luck, fortune, and peace, (b) spring and new life, and (c) family unity and gathering; values related to traditional ways of life, which include filial piety and taking care of the young, and other behaviors according to the traditions (e.g., collectivism, helping people in need). The second category included reference to new ways of celebration (i.e., national gathering, and among overseas Chinese). The third category dealt with references to new ways of life and new cultural values. The last category included the following: (a) reference to new ways to treat or interact with people in society; for example, technology has changed the ways to socialize or interact with people (e.g., text messaging New Year’s greetings), (b) reference to new inventions, for example, computers and the Internet, (c) reference to new ways of life or new cultural values (e.g., individualism and materialism), and (d) reference to new, questionable social attitudes or behaviors.

Finally, performances intended for entertainment only were coded. That is, the performances did not contain any references to the political and social agendas or cultural value themes (e.g., performances of magic tricks, piano solo, and Beijing operas).

Coding Procedure and Intercoder Reliability

Coding decisions were made for each performance unit or the unit of coding and analysis in the present project. To allow for being assigned to more than one
content category for a performance unit, the coding protocol adopted the dummy classification procedure using present and absent categories. For example, when a performance included both traditional greetings and values, it was coded for “reference to the traditional New Year” and “reference to traditional values.” In addition, the coding work did not follow the chronological order of the Galas (i.e., from 1984 to 2008) in order to minimize the possible bias associated with the coder as the coding work progressed; for example, if the coder suspected that more new cultural values appeared in the 1990s than in the 1980s, the coder might search for more new cultural values in the 2000s.

One Chinese coder coded all 475 performance units. The coder was instructed to identify any of the themes that appeared in each performance unit. If the coder found any performance that could not be coded into those categories, “other” categories were used and brief descriptions provided. Later analysis indicated that overall “other” categories were used infrequently and deserved little scholarly attention. An inter-coder reliability check was conducted with another bilingual Chinese coder who coded all 105 performance units from three randomly selected, complete Galas from the sample. Intercoder reliability coefficients were calculated based on Cohen’s Kappa which accounts for chance agreement. All coefficients exceeded the conventionally acceptable standard of .80. More specifically, Kappa coefficients for promotion of political agendas, social agendas, and national pride were .81, .83, and .98, respectively. For the traditional New Year, traditional values and morals, new celebration, and new values and morals, Kappa coefficients were .83, .89, .84, and .90, respectively.

Results

Before addressing the research questions and hypotheses, the characteristics of the performances are presented. Of the 475 performance units, there were 217 songs, 24 dances, 36 cross-talks, 81 mini-dramas, 25 traditional shows (e.g., Beijing Opera), and 92 other performances (e.g., acrobatics, magic shows, and piano performances). For the performances where the number of talking characters or performers could be identified with reasonable effort ($n = 422$), the average number of performers was 3.3 ($SD = 3.9$). Males ($M = 1.7$, $SD = 2.1$) and females ($M = 1.6$, $SD = 2.5$) were almost equally represented. Performances for entertainment (e.g., the magic shows and piano performances) appeared 89 times, or in 18.7% of the sample.

RQ$_1$ considered the percentage of political propaganda over the years. Overall, political themes appeared in 141 (29.7%) of all 475 performances in the 13 SFGs. Table 1 shows the more specific political themes that appeared in the sample. Reference to better life as the result of party leadership appeared in 32 (6.7%) performances. On the other hand, national pride appeared in 126 (26.5%) performances, and most of these performances (119 or 25.1%) mentioned new interventions, better life, and economic growth instead of the nation’s tradition and history (24 or 5.1%; note: double coding allowed). In addition, it was revealed that the promotion of new
Table 1

Frequencies and Percentages of Performances Containing Political Propaganda, National Pride, and Social Education Themes in the Spring Festival Galas (N = 475)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Categories</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political Agenda</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National unity and sovereignty</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praise of the Party and the Army</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference to political events and issues</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patriotism (e.g., love and work for the country)</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference to better life/country as a result of party leadership</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUBTOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>29.7</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National Pride</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National history and tradition</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better life, stronger economy, changes</td>
<td>25.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(no mention of party leadership)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUBTOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>26.5</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion of social behaviors</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference to social problems</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUBTOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>32.4</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. *Performances may contain themes or values from more than one content category such that subtotals may not equal to the sum of the individual themes.*

ideas and new social behaviors and references to social problems appeared in 148 (31.2%) and 16 (3.4%) performances. When the two categories were combined, 154 (32.4%) performances contained a social education theme or agenda.

RQ2 examined cultural value themes in the SFGs. When collapsed, values related to the traditional New Year appeared in 209 (44%) of performances, traditional values were communicated in 65 (13.7%), new celebration (nationwide and among overseas Chinese) appeared in 60 (13.7%), and new values appeared in 153 (32.2%) performances. Table 2 presents the percentages of the more specific value themes appearing in the sample.

Logistic regression analysis was conducted to examine whether the use of the above categories changed over the time. Initial analysis controlled for the effects of program genres and used “year” as the independent variable (1984 was coded as 1, 1986 was coded as 2, and so on). However, the genres of the programs did
### Table 2

Frequencies and Percentages of Performances Containing Cultural Value Themes in the Spring Festival Galas (N = 475)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Categories</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traditional New Year</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Year greetings and wishes</td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring and new life</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family unity and gathering</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUBTOTAL</strong>&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td><strong>44.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Traditional Values</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filial piety and caring for the young</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others (e.g., collectivism, help in the time of crisis)</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUBTOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>13.7</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National Celebration or Celebration Among Overseas Chinese</strong></td>
<td><strong>12.6</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New Ways of Life and New Values</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New ways to interact with others in society (e.g., text messaging)</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New cultural values (e.g., individualism &amp; materialism)</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference to new interventions and technology (e.g., computer, the Internet)</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference to new, questionable social attitudes &amp; behavior</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUBTOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>32.2</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. <sup>a</sup>Performances may contain themes or values from more than one individual value themes such that subtotals may not equal to the sum of the individual themes.

not have an impact on the magnitude or significance of regression coefficients or odds ratios and were then dropped from further analysis. The dependent variables were collapsed if several of subcategories contained too few “counts.” For example, for political agendas, the several subcategories were collapsed so that the presence of one or several of those categories counted as presence of a political agenda(s), whereas non-presence of any of categories counted as absence.

Altogether seven separate logistic regression analyses were performed on seven major themes/values (see Table 3). Results revealed that both the use of national pride or national integration of the social and cultural kind (\( B = 0.07, SE = .03, df = 1, \text{Odds Ratio} [OR] = 1.07, p < .05 \)) and the use of traditional values related to the New Year (\( B = 0.11, SE = .03, df = 1, \text{OR} = 1.10, p < .01 \)) increased over the years. The performances in a later SFG would be 1.07 and 1.10 times
Table 3
Logistic Regression Analysis on the Major Themes/Values in CCTV’s Spring Festival Galas\textsuperscript{a} Using Year as the Independent Variable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable\textsuperscript{b}</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>$SE$</th>
<th>$df$</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
<th>Wald</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political Agenda</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.93 $\sim$ 1.03</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Education</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>0.99 $\sim$ 1.10</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Pride\textsuperscript{c}</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.07*</td>
<td>1.01 $\sim$ 1.13</td>
<td>4.95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional New Year\textsuperscript{d}</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.10**</td>
<td>1.05 $\sim$ 1.16</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Values</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>0.95 $\sim$ 1.12</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Celebration</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>0.96 $\sim$ 1.11</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Ways of Life and New Values</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>0.98 $\sim$ 1.33</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. \textsuperscript{a} Thirteen complete Galas (475 performance units) of the “even” years (e.g., 1984, 1986 ... 2008) were analyzed. 
\textsuperscript{b} One logistic regression analysis was performed for each of the major themes/values using year as the independent variable (1984 was coded as 1, 1986 was coded as 2, and so on). 
\textsuperscript{c} $R^2 = .01$ (Cox & Snell), .02 (Nagelkerke). Model $\chi^2(1) = 5.03, p < .05$.
\textsuperscript{d} $R^2 = .03$ (Cox & Snell), .04 (Nagelkerke). Model $\chi^2(1) = 15.91, p < .001$.

as likely to use national pride and traditional values related to the New Year as would the performances in the SFG of two years ago (i.e., a 1 unit increase in the independent variable). On the other hand, the use of traditional values such as filial piety and collectivism ($B = 0.03, SE = .04, df = 1, OR = 1.03, ns$), or the use of nontraditional values in the SFGs remained the same over the three decades. Thus, $H_1$ and $H_{2a}$ were supported, whereas $H_{2b}$ and $H_3$ were not. For RQ\textsubscript{3}, results in Table 3 revealed no statistically significant variation over the three decades in incorporating political content, social agenda, national or overseas celebration, and new ways of life or new cultural values in the SFGs.

Discussion and Conclusion

This project sought to address the presence of political propaganda and social education content, in addition to identifying different cultural values in CCTV’s SFGs. The project first observed that 29.7% of the performances promoted a political agenda. Consistent with the literature review, the Chinese government and the Gala directors utilized CCTV to its fullest potential. Over the years, the propaganda function of the SFGs has not diminished, indicating that despite several years’ marketization and the changing function of the state-sponsored television, the government or the Party still controls the content of the Galas.
The act or intent to promote new and socially acceptable behaviors and morals, and reference to current social problems were identified in 32.4% of all performances and remained relatively stable over the years. This suggests that CCTV realizes the importance of using television to promote positive behaviors and morals, or to set social agendas for possible changes in the future. This, together with the findings on political propaganda, indicates that future research on the Chinese entertainment media, or more broadly, the information media, should not only focus on political propaganda but also investigate its social education function. As a special case of televised entertainment, this study provides evidence for the SFGs and does not shed light on the extent to which the Party exercises editorial control and influence on other programs or media.

One statistically significant trend regarding the use of national pride was revealed by the present project. First, more recent SFGs (vs. earlier ones) were more likely to focus on national pride. The reason could be that in the recent years, China emphasized the goals of modernity (Zhang & Harwood, 2004) or observed better, improved living conditions and economy, which were reflected in the SFGs. Another reason might be that the Chinese government seeks to provide another unifying ideology that is used to replace the more explicit promotion of political propaganda which is less popular among the Chinese audience in recent years (Zhao, 1998). In a time when Chinese are aware of their unfinished historical tasks (e.g., building a stronger nation), searching for a new national identity, and comparing China with other countries, the use of national pride is potentially more effective than the traditional, blatant chanting for loving and serving the country and the people.

Another objective of the study was to analyze whether the Galas reflected and promoted cultural values. Not surprisingly, the Galas adopted the traditional New Year’s wishes and family unity most to tap the cultural significance of the Spring Festival, and recent Galas were more likely to use the traditional values related to the Spring Festival. In addition, the results also show that the traditional family unity was elevated to a new level of celebration: among the many who cannot be united with their family members during the New Year celebration, or the celebration of the whole nation and the Chinese overseas. It is believed that traditional New Year celebration and family unity might provide sources of inspiration for the show and set the Galas apart from other competing media programs, and provide reasons for the Chinese audience to view the Galas on the New Year’s Eve. Secondly, Chinese society is viewed by many as a “sand tray” (Faure, 2008). The elevation of family unity to a national level shows how small families are tied to the national family. Pan and Chan (2002) state that the big, national family represents the traditional piety filial order such that the party leaders are the elders and the families are the junior members; that is, a national family also conveys the wish for a more cohesive nation. On a more symbolic level, family unity at the national level extends the Confucian concept of harmony and integration and implies the desire for a national unity, or the return of Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan (Zhao, 1998).

Although traditional values related to the Spring Festival were the most frequently communicated values, it might only suggest that such values are the theme values
for the traditional New Year celebration and that they may not appear as often in other programs. For example, Zhang and Harwood (2004) found that commercials aired on CCTV featured more modern values than the traditional ones. Furthermore, some researchers indicate traditional and modern values are competing against one another; that is, the inclusion of one means the exclusion of the other. However, this does not seem to be the case with the SFGs. New values or new ways of life, such as, how to deal with relationships in the new age, the use of computers and technology, also appeared frequently in the Galas. With both new and old cultural values incorporated in the performances, the Galas serve as a cultural depository, and with their wide reach, they promote both traditional and new values.

The analysis only dealt with one very special case of entertainment programs, with limited generalization to other entertainment programs or to the Chinese media. However, by analyzing the most widely watched entertainment program in the world, this study, to a large extent, reflects that after many years of media commercialization, the state controlled media, or more specifically, CCTV, still largely work for government propaganda or for social impact. In addition, an increasing number of television stations also host their own television galas on the Chinese New Year’s Eve. Further analysis could sample the galas from those stations and provide a better generalized inference to the Chinese entertainment media, and reveal the differences between the regional and state controlled television stations.

Content analyses, such as this one, are important because they provide descriptions and explanations regarding important media phenomena and serve as a “prelude to other types of research, often in domains not previously explored” (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005). Future research might consider assessing the effects of the political propaganda and social education content in the SFGs. Based on cultivation theory (Gerbner et al., 2002) and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2002), researchers might reveal whether the SFGs would influence viewers’ perceptions of social reality and their beliefs and attitudes. Second, unlike the traditional persuasion attempts, entertainment-education or propaganda (e.g., using national pride and traditional values related to the New Year) are more subtle and less likely to elicit psychological reactance, making persuasion easier and more effective. Finally, appealing to the viewers’ cultural background and inclusion of both new and traditional cultural values could enhance their disposition and enjoyment of the shows (cf. Zillmann, 1988 for a treatment of disposition theory). However, the effects need to be further confirmed by experimental studies and/or survey research.

In conclusion, this study revealed that over the years, CCTV’s Spring Festival Galas promoted both political and social agendas and reflected both traditional and new cultural values. The study indicates that future research on the Chinese media needs to examine the promotion of social agendas because it is also an integral function of the Chinese media. In addition, this study examined how the content of the SFGs reflected the shifting political, social, and cultural environments, and provided content evidence for how the government used the shows for national integration purposes. This study is one of the first few that dealt with the Chinese government’s use of entertainment media for political and social impact. With its greater power
than the press, and more subtle persuasion than the traditional approach, the effects of entertainment-education or propaganda could be greater than other forms of persuasion that researchers have analyzed.

References


