

Space of Possibilities: Civic Discourse and Multicultural Citizenship in Locally Produced Chinese Television Programs in Metro Vancouver

Shuyu Kong

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Abstract This paper uses content analysis and interviews to produce case studies of Fairchild Group’s Talentvision (Mandarin) and two local current-affairs talk show programs in Mandarin. Based on the concept of geo-ethnic media and multicultural communication infrastructure model, the paper argues that geo-ethnic media can be a powerful means to promote civic virtues in a large, pluralistic modern society and to help new immigrants transform their “formal” citizenship into a “substantive” citizenship. The geo-ethnic media also provides a transnational supplement to the mainstream public sphere, which allows a sub-national ethnic community to maintain its cultural identity. The paper concludes that further efforts should be made to foster communication and interaction between the mainstream media and the diverse world of ethnic media in Canada.

Keywords Geo-ethnic media · Multicultural citizenship · Public sphere · Local content · Chinese transnationalism

Introduction

In the last three decades, the demographic appearance and linguistic structures of Canadian society have changed dramatically. According to the Census of Canada 2006, in Metro Vancouver the immigrant proportion has now reached 40% as compared with 35% in 1996 and 29% in 1986. And visible minorities constitute 41.7% of the total population of Metro Vancouver, with the Chinese population making up 18.2%, a growth of 22.8% since 1996 (Statistics Canada 2006a). One consequence of this boom in immigrants is the growing importance of native languages other than English and French. More than 1.1 million immigrants arrived in Canada in the 5 years preceding the 2006 Census, and 81% of them had a mother

S. Kong (✉)
Department of Humanities and Asia-Canada Program, Simon Fraser University,
8888 University Drive, Burnaby, BC V5A 1S6, Canada
e-mail: shuyu_kong@sfu.ca

tongue other than English or French (Statistics Canada 2006b). The total population with one of the Chinese dialects as its mother tongue experienced the largest increase, more than 160,000 since 2001. Two out of three people whose mother tongue is a Chinese dialect arrived in Canada in the last 25 years. As nearly three quarters of Chinese people in Metro Vancouver were born outside Canada, and 45.8% of them arrived during the 1990s, the language they most often speak at home is a non-official language. This fact matches the national trend where non-English/French speakers have reached 20.1% of the total population in Canada (2006 Census).

Corresponding to these recent immigration patterns, and aided by new global media distribution technologies, there have been dramatic changes in diasporic cultural production and consumption. One noticeable phenomenon is the rapid growth of ethnic media outlets that aim to satisfy the differing needs of new immigrants. In a recent report on BC ethnic media produced by researchers from Simon Fraser University, the main finding is that the ethnic media market is not only larger than previously supposed but is also growing quickly. The report located 144 ethnic media outlets in BC, with over two thirds of the outlets established since the 1990s (Murray et al. 2007).

The demographic and linguistic changes occurring in Canadian society, and the growing market for ethnic cultural and media products, not only bring added relevance and urgency to the longstanding debates on cultural diversity, minority rights, multiculturalism, and differentiated citizenship. They also raise meaningful questions and provide significant topics for the study of ethnic media and its social capacities, including the potential for ethnic media to become an alternative public sphere for civil participation by ethnic citizens in a multicultural society.¹

Previous research on ethnic media in Canada has explored its different roles in minority representation (Fleras and Kunz 2001), binding with the home country (Fleras 2009; Cheng 2005), and group identity construction (Karim 2003; Yu 2005). However the role of ethnic media in facilitating public discourse, educating citizens, and promoting civic responsibilities has yet to be fully explored, and many related issues have not been addressed, such as the correlation between articulating minority rights and promoting multicultural citizenship under the policy of multiculturalism and facilitating a sharing of alternative communicative spaces between mainstream media and ethnic media. In fact, because of the great variety of media forms, ethnic communities, and origins of media materials, the level of civic discourse and the role of ethnic media vary widely. For example, a study based on Korean media sources finds that ethnic media mainly act as feeds for information from home countries, and they “represent a hollow in national and provincial civic life” (Yu and Murray 2007). Worries have also been expressed, mainly in the mainstream English and French language media, about the isolationist tendency among ethnic media and their consequence of “parallel societies” and fragmented citizenship (Karim 2002b; Hafez 2007). As ethnic media represent a very complicated and multifarious phenomenon,

¹ Ethnic media is defined as “media printed, broadcast or published in languages other than English or French” (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission). For a general discussion of the role of television in democratic societies, see Price 1995; for discussions of ethnic media and public sphere, see Curran and Gurevitch 1991; Karim 2002a; and Couldry and Dreher 2007.

it is important not to over-generalize; instead, we must pay careful attention to individual cases of different media communities in order to draw out the full spectrum of content, functions, and roles of ethnic media, and thus properly evaluate the possibilities and potential they open up within the Canadian communication space.

More recent research from North American scholars has started to investigate the actual operation and content production of ethnic media in specific locations and within the communication ecology of communities in order to analyze how ethnic media “actually exist” and thus more fully assess their social capacity (Karim 2002a, 2002c; Cheng 2005; Yu and Murray 2007; Ahadi and Murray 2009; Yu and Ahadi 2010). I find two concepts and approaches from this work to be particularly useful: geo-ethnic media and multicultural communication infrastructure. Developed by the research team of the Metamorphosis Project based in Los Angeles, the concept of geo-ethnic media—media that “are both ethnically and geographically specific in their focus and content”—emphasizes the specific location of ethnic media and its local community orientation. By engaging in geo-ethnic storytelling, geo-ethnic media “produce culturally relevant, locally focused content for their audience that encourages audiences to connect with community resources and organizations” (Matsaganis et al. 2010; Lin and Song 2006). Complementary to this geo-ethnic approach, a research team at Simon Fraser University proposes a “multicultural communication infrastructure” model based on their study of ethnic media in British Columbia (Murray et al. 2007), which also highlights the local content and social capacity of ethnic media produced in Canada, and the impact and potential it has in engaging new immigrants in community belonging and civic engagement. According to this model, “a well functioning communication infrastructure consists of ‘think’ media and a social production system of outlets that create and disseminate everyday conversations and formal news, opinion, and commentary to any given community within a specific geographical region. Access to a supportive communication infrastructure in their own language of origin is crucial for individual immigrants to build their sense of orientation and belonging in the receiving society” (Ahadi and Murray 2009, 589).

The concept of geo-ethnic media and the multicultural communication infrastructure approach both emphasize the interaction between ethnicity and location in studying the production and consumption of ethnic media and the social capacity of such media outlets in community and nation building. This approach is particularly effective in studying the highly diversified ethnic media landscape in Canada because it distinguishes ethnic media programs that are produced in Canada, with their substantial Canadian content, from those originating in immigrants' home countries (for example, satellite television programs transmitted to Canada). This distinction enables us not only to fully understand the geo-ethnic media's unique social functions and distinctive communication patterns in a multicultural setting, but also to assess the significance of Canada's policy of multiculturalism (especially the Community Revitalization Training Center's (CRTC's) ethnic media policy) in assisting immigrants' integration process and in creating “a sustainable multicultural communication infrastructure” (Ahadi and Murray 2009, 607).

However, this stream of research is still a small one and limited mainly to print media. Its focus is also confined to news programs and the political mobilization

function of ethnic media, which is only one aspect of their social role. It is in this context that this paper attempts to address the debated role of ethnic Chinese media in Canada by focusing on locally produced Chinese-language television programs and their representation of the “multicultural citizenship” (Kymlicka 1995) of Chinese Canadians in Metro Vancouver. I use the term “multicultural” rather than “cultural” citizenship here as it more precisely reflects the multiple identities of both the ethnic Chinese media and Chinese Canadians, attempting on the one hand to maintain the links to their ethnic culture while at the same time participating as mainstream Canadian citizens, or assisting their audiences to participate. My main cases are locally produced programs from Talentvision (Chengshi dianshi), a national network broadcasting mainly in Mandarin Chinese, and two current affairs talk shows or weekly news forums, “The Straits Today” (Liang'an sandi jiaguoqing) from Talentvision, and “Chinese Canadian Voices” (Fengsheng huayu) from Huayu NetTV. My content analysis of these two programs is based on an 8-week period of program monitoring, supplemented with a quantitative analysis of one hundred episodes each of “Straits Today” and “Weekly News Forum” from the period 2007 to 2008.

The research questions addressed here are, first, what kind of communicative space is provided by Chinese language television for Chinese Canadians, and how does it differ from the mainstream media in English or French? Second, can local Chinese television function as an alternative public sphere, “a communicative and institutional space wherein the principles of democracy can be practiced and the rights of citizenship be nurtured and expressed” (Husband 2000, 200–201), and if so, in what way? Third, in the context of globalization, how does the multicultural citizenship of Chinese Canadians intersect with Chinese transnationalism, and what are the political and cultural ramifications of this intersection for Canadian society?

Before I discuss the content and presentation of the two selected programs, I will briefly provide some background context on the Chinese language mediascape in Metro Vancouver, especially locally oriented Chinese-language television broadcasting and programming under Canada's multiculturalism policy.

Context

Ethnic Chinese media has a long history in BC, and recent years have witnessed rapid growth in the numbers of Chinese-language media in the region. According to one research report, there are currently 24 Chinese media outlets, second in number only to Korean media outlets but comprising the biggest ethnic media market in terms of readership and audiences, with *Sing Tao Daily* alone printing between 50,000 and 110,000 copies every day, and Fairchild TV and Talentvision together covering two thirds of Chinese adults in Metro Vancouver who speak Chinese at home (Murray et al. 2007, 29).² The growth of Chinese language media not only results from the Asian immigration situation and Canadian multiculturalism policy,

² I have modified the figures in Murray's report based on two independent surveys, the “ACNielsen Vancouver Chinese Media Index 2000” and the “Reid 2007 Canadian Chinese Media Monitor,” which indicate that a two thirds daily reach is more close to reality.

but also reflects accelerated media globalization, and the emergence of a global Chinese linguistic-cultural market that “complicates global cultural flows and power dynamics” (Zhu 2008, 101).

To take the recent development of Chinese language television programming in B.C. as an example, besides Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese) programs on public service channels such as the Shaw Multicultural Channel, the privately owned Canadian Fairchild Media Group delivers a full range of Chinese language TV programming services through its two national networks, with Cantonese Fairchild TV (*Xin shidai dianshi*) established in 1993, and Mandarin Talentvision established in 1998. These networks are delivered via all the major cable and telecommunication providers 7 days a week and over 20 h a day. In 2003, another multilingual television station, Channel M, now called OMNI and acquired by Rogers Media, was established, delivering a significant proportion of locally produced Mandarin and Cantonese news and imported entertainment programs. Besides these licensed TV stations, there are also local TV production companies which exploit new digital technologies and investment from recent immigrants to produce programs for local audiences. One such example is the internet-based TV station Huayu NetTV, which started a new model of content delivery through the internet by integrating TV production and broadcasting with print media and the internet.

The local broadcasting environment is further enriched by Chinese-language TV programs received through satellite, cable, and more recently internet protocol television broadcasting, through which programs from various regions of Greater China can be accessed simultaneously without relay (Huang 2008). Recently, with the rise of China as a world economic power, the Chinese government has actively enlarged the scale of Chinese-language media and promoted its cultural products offshore. Aided by various business incentives and the creation of transnational media organizations, mainland Chinese television programs have begun to permeate the overseas media market through the major cable networks, and also through re-broadcasts on local ethnic media (Wong, Cindy Hing-Yuk 2009; Chan 2004 and Zhu 2008).

Consumption of these various media products has become central to the daily lives and cultural activities of Chinese Canadians, especially the huge proportion of new immigrants. According to one survey, 92% of Vancouver's Chinese Canadians over 18 years watch TV, and of these, 78% watch Chinese programs and 13% English programs. This contrasts with 63% who read newspapers/magazines, of whom 53% read Chinese publications, and 15% English publications (ACNielsen 2000). Of the top five Chinese media vehicles, three are TV channels—Fairchild, Talentvision, and Channel M—with 55% of Chinese adults who speak Chinese at home watching Fairchild every week and 49% watching Talentvision (Reid 2007).

The sources and content of ethnic Chinese television can be roughly divided into two streams: imported and locally produced. With the rapid development of new communications technologies such as satellite TV transmission and the internet, and the increasingly transnational media flows and global circulation of cultural products, a substantial portion of Metro Vancouver's Chinese media content is imported, coming directly from production centers in “Greater China,” i.e., Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Taking Talentvision as an example,

roughly two thirds of its programs are from various foreign media sources such as Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB) in Hong Kong; TVBS and China Television Co. (CTV) in Taiwan; and Chinese Central Television Overseas (CCTV 4), Beijing TV, and other provincial TV stations in Mainland China. The proportions and origins of these imported programs have obviously changed through the years, in response to the changing demographics and linguistic hierarchies in Metro Vancouver's Chinese community, as well as changing dynamics in local producers' relationships with the Chinese, Taiwanese, and Hong Kong media industries.

Among these various imported programs, the dominant ones are news and entertainment shows, TV dramas, and “cultural” programs including travel, Chinese history, language, and traditional Chinese medicine. Importing such programs obviously makes sense from an economic or business perspective, as it saves on production costs. But it also responds to the cultural demands of the Chinese Diaspora community, an increasingly mobile population with “flexible citizenship” in more than one country (Ong 1999). Extensive coverage of the viewers' place of origin, whether it is Mainland China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan, is both culturally consoling and a useful source of practical information. For example, the daily news programs on Talentvision not only feature locally produced evening news centered around Canada (1 h, twice a day), but also include Mainland China News (from CCTV 4) and Taiwanese news (from CTV), with each lasting for half an hour and broadcast three times a day. The different strands of media sources and the interfaces among them within Vancouver's Chinese diasporic mediascape create a manifold, sometimes contested, communicative network of interlocking space and heterogeneous voices.

At the same time, under Canada's policy of multiculturalism, especially the CRTC's ethnic media policy (1985, revised 1999) which requires that close to one third of the content of Canadian television and radio broadcasts features Canadian stories, the Chinese-language TV stations in Canada have also developed their own locally produced programs. This has arguably made Chinese language television and radio programs in Canada “the richest and most sophisticated outside China, Hong Kong and Taiwan.” (Zhou et al. 2006, 66)

The most established examples are Fairchild and Talentvision. Each delivers over 31.5% (rising to 33% in prime time) of their content in the form of various locally produced programs in Chinese, including national and community news, lifestyle magazines, entertainment guides, and language education programs. Among the locally produced programs, news programs including the daily evening news and other news forums or magazines are central, despite the fact that they are costly in terms of budget and human resources. For example, besides its 1-h daily evening news, which includes segments on National, Western Canadian, Eastern Canadian, and International News, Talentvision also runs weekly current affairs and news forums, such as “Canadian Weekly News Roundup” (Jianada xinwen zhouji), “My Country, My Family” (Jiaguo zongheng) and “Straits Today” (Liang'an sandi jiaguoqing). The sources of this locally produced news include translations from mainstream English stations (such as Global, CTV, and CBC), as well as Talentvision's own reporting, and some imported news feeds (CCTV, TVBS, and CTV). Consequently, these locally produced news programs become an important intersection between different media spaces, while at the same time responding

effectively to the more local and immediate needs of diasporic audiences. In the case of Talentvision's evening news program, for example, the news format and coverage across the country helps the audience to become aware of a national identity on a daily basis. At the same time, the Community News and Events Announcements which follow the national news directly address local community needs and function as its bulletin board.

In fact, with the growth of the local Chinese community in Canada, some media practitioners have consciously exploited this market by focusing mainly on local content. The most obvious example in the TV market is Huayu NetTV. Since its launch in early 2007, it has produced as many as ten different types of programs, eight of which focus on local community-oriented content including financial advice, education, food, and health. The content mostly consists of practical information and advice that would be helpful and interesting to new immigrants.

The multiple strands of media sources, the complicated dynamics among different media spaces, and the trans-local nature of ethnic media that cut across national boundaries in Metro Vancouver make Chinese-language television programs a fine example of the variety and diversity of the ethnic mediascape in an era of globalization. They are also an ideal site to investigate how the interlocking and co-existence of different media spaces can influence the development of the public sphere and foster some of the attributes of a civil society (Couldry and Dreher 2007, 79–80).

Methodology

In order to examine the public sphere function of Chinese media in Canada, in the following pages, I will focus my case study on two locally produced current affairs talk show programs. The first is “Straits Today” from Talentvision, first broadcast in July 1998, a weekly news forum mainly discussing issues relevant to the relationship between Mainland China and Taiwan. In October 2001, the program changed its name to “Liang'an sandi jiaguoqing” (literal translation is “Cross Straits, Three Regions, Canadian Hearts”) which includes Canada to better reflect its broader focus. Over the 10 years that it has been broadcast, “Straits Today” has grown into an influential program and gained a solid and enthusiastic viewing audience.

One interesting point to note is that this format was directly borrowed from a popular Taiwanese talk show, “Speaking your Mind at 21:00” (21:00 Quanmin kaijiang) from TVBS, a satellite television channel and nationwide cable TV network in Taiwan which has a small ownership stake in Talentvision and provides most of the Taiwanese content for the network. This Taiwanese talk show gained respect and many followers partly because of the current issues it raised, and partly due to its lively format as the first call-in television program in Taiwan, which reflected the public enthusiasm for debate in a transitional society where democratic ideals and practices were being gradually introduced. In the late 1990s, when Talentvision was first launched, Taiwanese immigrants were a major component of its audience and the future development of Taiwan, and its impact on the Taiwan–China relationship, was a hotly debated topic both in those two regions

and among overseas Chinese. Hence this familiar format seemed particularly suited to its purpose and quickly established itself as a hit among audiences (Huang 2009, interview).

The second case study, “Chinese Canadian Voices,” was launched in February 2007 as a weekly 45-min program made for the Shaw Multicultural Channel. It was privately financed by a Mainland Chinese business immigrant, and produced and hosted by a local media figure, Ma Zaixin, who also runs the local newspaper *Dawa Business News*. In June 2007, Huayu NetTV was set up to broadcast this program on the internet, and since that time, an increasing number of other programs have been produced and broadcast on the network.

Although not so established as “Straits Today,” and with professional standards obviously lower due to its lack of human and media resources, “Chinese Canadian Voices” pioneered the innovative delivery of its content through three platforms: each episode of the program is first broadcast on the internet on Wednesday and repeated on Sunday evenings; it is also broadcast on the Shaw Multicultural Channel (Channel 119) every Friday evening, and on Shaw’s Studio 4 (Channel 4) early Friday morning and Sunday evening; finally, complete transcripts of the program are published in *Dawa Business News* on Saturdays.

In order to examine the nature of the media spaces that the weekly news forums of “Straits Today” and “Chinese Canadian Voices” open up, and to evaluate the extent of activity and impact of these media spaces, I monitored and analyzed these two programs during an 8-week period from the beginning of March to the end of April, 2008. I then supplemented this discourse analysis with a quantitative survey of 100 episodes each of “Straits Today” and “Chinese Canadian Voices” from the period 2007 to 2008. My discourse analysis focused on the following two aspects of these programs: (1) What kinds of topics are presented and discussed? Especially, how are the topics relevant to Canadian public affairs, Chinese/Taiwanese concerns, or other international concerns? (2) Does the format and presentation of the programs, especially the interaction between host, guests and (call-in) audiences open up a communicative space that encourages community members to practice democratic citizenship and poly-ethnic rights (Kymlicka 1995)? If it does, how active is this communicative space?

For the first aspect, I have created seven tables to indicate the public issues and geographical focus of the topics from the two programs (see [Appendix](#)). What follows is a brief summary of each table.

Results

As “Straits Today” is primarily a news program, the selection of the topics reflects its focus on current affairs, with featured news events from different media sources, and the program is overseen by Talentvision’s news director (Ye, Sept 2009, interview).

The 8 weeks of topics in “Straits Today” (Table 1) indicate dual geographical and topical interests, with more or less equal attention to current affairs taking place in Canada (The Canadian Economy March 13, China–Canada diplomatic relations April 10, the Canadian election April 17, and environmental issues April 24) and

“Greater China” (Mainland China: China's impact on the Canadian economy and financial system March 13 and 27; Taiwan: a Taiwanese political scandal March 20, and the overseas Chinese Community, March 6). While the forum reflects a Chinese Canadian perspective in discussing current Canadian affairs (March 13, April 10), it also conveys awareness of transnational Chinese identity through featuring events that captured the interest of the overseas Chinese community. These included the controversy over Christie's auction of Bronze Animal Heads looted from the Old Summer Palace (March 6); and the political scandal of Guo Guanying, a senior Taiwanese diplomatic officer in Canada and cyber activist, whose pro-communist Mainlander blog ruffled many political feathers (March 20).

These topical and geographical trends are consistent with episodes from “Straits Today” drawn from a longer time period. The quantitative survey of 100 episodes from 2007 to 2008 (Tables 2 and 3) shows a similarly balanced interest in Canada (45) and China/Taiwan affairs (44), with national and political issues dominating the Canadian topics (27). This emphasis on civil culture is particularly reflected by the number of topics related to the federal election in 2008 (Table 4), which took up one eighth of the topics for the whole year. The topics covered many different aspects of the election, not only introducing the different parties and their candidates, but also comparing their different approaches to diplomatic and international relations, environmental issues and social welfare. In terms of Chinese and Taiwanese affairs, equal attention was given to the two regions respectively (19 and 19), and there is also a recurring discussion on their mutual relationship (6). These episodes often take the perspective of a “third party” and try to provide a forum on the Taiwan/China relationship that transcends either side's political position (see, for example, “The Ramifications of the Tenth Anniversary of Hong Kong's Return to the Mainland for Taiwan and Hong Kong”; and “Chen Shuibian's Taiwan Independence Party Causes New Tensions on Both Sides of the Strait”). This “third party” or “third space” position is a major component of the transnational Chinese identity consciously cultivated by diasporic media and cultural production, a point that I will discuss in more detail later.³

“Chinese Canadian Voices” (Table 5, 6, and 7) shows a slightly different approach in its topic selection by leaning heavily on Canadian affairs (67), and more attention is given to Mainland China (16) instead of Taiwan (5), which might reflect the main investor's interests and the program's targeted audience (Ma 2009, interview). Another noticeable difference is that “Chinese Canadian Voices” shows more interest in economics and broader social and cultural issues than “Straits Today,” particular aspects of these topics relevant to immigrants at the local and everyday levels, such as investment fraud (April 1), gas prices in Greater Vancouver (March 18), immigration policy (March 25), and reform of the Canadian pension system (April 22). This economic and new immigrant focus is partly related to producer Ma Zaixin's editorial orientation and involvement in building the Canada–China business community through the media (Lu 2007). The third noticeable difference

³ Third culture or third space is a term used by some diaspora Chinese journalists to refer to a media space and cultural identity among Chinese diaspora that goes beyond China vs. Taiwan, or China vs US/Canada when discussing China-related public issues. See Ding 1998. This idea is closely related with Bhabha's (1994) concept of the “third space” in which immigrant minorities operate, distinct from the hegemonic public sphere.

is Huayu's strong interest in the Canada China relationship (22) which comprises over one fifth of the topics during the whole two year period. Of these, six discuss business and trade barriers and the potential for improving the unsatisfactory state of the commercial relationship between the two countries.

For the second aspect of these programs, namely, the quality of the communicative space that they open up, I will focus on "Straits Today" alone, as "Canadian Chinese Voices" has not yet established an effective call-in mechanism, although the program claims that audiences can "interact with their guests" by calling in or e-mailing the Huayu NetTV website (Huayu NetTV website). As it is difficult to collect hard data and statistics to measure the audience involvement and participation stimulated by this program, I have had to rely on more qualitative methods, including interviews with the host and producer, reading relevant reports and documents, and my own personal observations, to describe the kinds of activities and participation that are facilitated.

The format for "Straits Today" is as follows: the program host/hostess starts by introducing the topic including showing a couple of minutes of news clips from Talentvision on that particular topic. Then the invited guests (three or four normally) will each take turns to respond to the host's questions related to this topic. After 15 min or so of presentations from the guests, the first session of audience call-in begins, and lasts for about 5 min with about eight to ten call-ins. Then the discussion will continue with guests discussing the call-in audience's questions and comments for another 10 min, followed by a second 5-min call-in session which usually has five or six calls, again followed by further responses from the guests. Finally, the host will ask the guests to sum up their opinions and conclude the program. There are also three commercial breaks during this 1-h program.

The following observations, supplemented with findings from interviews with Ye Yitao, the producer/host of the program for the last 5 years, provide a sense of the quality of the public space that it opens up.

First, overall, the guests invited have relevant experience and know the topic well, and they are drawn from a variety of different professional and academic backgrounds. While many are "current affairs commentators", who are apparently very active on the local media scene, there are also college professors, media representatives, politicians and government officials, and other professionals and experts. For example, in the episode titled "The Impact of China's Economic Stimulus on Canada," the following four guests were invited: Zhang Wusheng, a businessman in China-Canada imports and exports; Li Canming (Richard T. Lee), of the BC Liberal Party; Zhu Xinyan, who teaches Economics at Capilano University; and Huang Yunrong the chief editor of *Global Chinese Press*.

One important point made by Ye Yitao is that a conscious effort has been made to bring in divergent opinions or people with different political beliefs and cultural backgrounds. In another episode, "Topics and Dialogue on the 2009 BC Election," two candidates from the Liberal Party and two from the NDP were invited to present their parties' policies and challenge each other on many issues face to face; they included an NDP candidate who doesn't speak Chinese but communicated with the guests and audience through the host's translation.

Second, while the host presents the topic from a very neutral position and mediates among the guests and audience in a non-interfering way, the public issues that the producers select and frame are often intended to appeal to certain perspectives and group interests. For example, the current financial crisis and economic issues are often discussed from a Canadian or Chinese perspective (such as in the episode titled “The Pressure of the Falling U.S. Dollar on China's Foreign Exchange Reserves”); and Canadian immigration and other policies as seen from the Chinese Canadian perspective frequently recur, as in the episode titled “Changes in Immigration Policies and the Overseas Chinese Population in Canada.” Sometimes the framing occurs through very subtle use of words and tone, such as in “APEC's Influence on Canada, the US and China” (where Canada is intentionally placed first); and “The Impact of China's Economic Slow-down on Our Country” (where in the Chinese original the phrase “ben guo” [our country] is used to refer to Canada). Moreover, this framing of the issues is also embodied in questions that the host asks the guests, or in guests' comments, which often generate debates among both the invited guests and the call-in audience. This partially invisible guiding hand, as confirmed by Ye (Ye, Sept. 2009, interview), can be seen as a self-positioning and identity-building exercise of the ethnic Chinese media in Canada.

Third, the audience involvement is a major attraction of these programs, and this public forum aspect has been consciously cultivated through the years. In the case of Talentvision, after over a decade of development, there is now a solid and engaged audience that calls in, including many regular participants, which contrasts with the scarcity of call-in participants in the program's earlier years (Ye, Sept. 2009, Interview,). I have noticed during the 8 weeks of observation that every episode has plenty of calls, with most from the Greater Vancouver area, but also some from Toronto, Calgary and Montreal, and many of these callers are highly engaged and strongly opinionated, if not always knowledgeable about the topics. They seem also to represent a degree of heterogeneity among the Chinese community, in terms of gender, countries of origin, and political positions. Occasionally, with certain controversial topics, the opinions voiced are so strong and controversial that it becomes very emotional and veers towards personal attack. For example in the episode titled “Will the Animal Head Statues from the Old Summer Palace be Returned to China?” where Christie's auction of relics looted from Qing dynasty China was discussed, it was clear that some guests and many of the audience had such strong Chinese nationalist sentiments that when one of the guests, who is apparently well known in the community for his anti-mainland government position, voiced his different view on Christie's auction and the Chinese buyer they attacked him as a “traitor”. The host Ye Yitao had to remind both sides to restrain themselves from personal attacks and maintain a rational discussion.

Ye Yitao has also noticed a gradual change in audience composition: in the earlier period, the audience for “Straits Today” used to be roughly half from Mainland China and half from Taiwan; but in recent years, the number of Mainlanders has increased. At the same time, there is a growing enthusiasm for call-ins from these Mainland-originating viewers, including both new immigrants and international students. Ye suggests that besides the obvious factor of a recent increase in

immigrants and students from Mainland China, the public forum format itself attracts people with little experience of such democratic media venues where personal opinions can be publicly and freely expressed.

Analysis

Overall, my research findings lead to a positive conclusion that the Chinese language media has played an active and unique role in representing multicultural citizenship as well as nurturing an alternative communicative space and public sphere. It recognizes and facilitates the rights and needs of Chinese Canadians to maintain commitments both to their linguistic-cultural communities and to Canadian civil society. Some more detailed findings are as follows:

Firstly, the role of the Chinese media in Canada goes far beyond feeding home-generated information to immigrants. Programs such as the daily news and various life magazines, and in particular current affairs talk show programs such as “Straits Today” and “Chinese Canadian Voices,” show a conscious and consistent effort not only to provide useful information that helps Chinese immigrants adjust to a new environment and integrate into Canadian society, but also to help them to understand and practice the privileges and responsibilities inherent in Canadian citizenship. More specifically, it encourages, engages, and facilitates them in entering the public debate on Canadian and international public affairs and in becoming actively involved in Canadian civil society through a specific mediated position. Locally produced Chinese-language programs open a media space for Chinese Canadians to voice their specific concerns about national affairs. Just as important, by inviting experts to comment on and interpret many public issues, these programs encourage new immigrants to integrate and adapt, to learn about civil and political culture, and to build bridges between their local Chinese communities and mainstream Canadian society. In this way, we see the geo-ethnic media fostering community building, facilitating social activism among new immigrants, and acting as a kind of citizenship educator for people from different societies.

This role of the Chinese ethnic media is not accidental, but is part of the editorial consciousness of networks like Talentvision. At a media roundtable discussion where eight media practitioners from Metro Vancouver area shared their views on the journalistic agenda and public role of Chinese media in Canadian society, Winnie Hwo, the news director of Talentvision, who also oversees the “Straits Today” program, explained their coverage of the Federal election in 2008: “Our Chinese viewers should be armed with the most important knowledge to enable them to function better than, or at least as well as, the non-Fairchild TV subscribers. ... The ultimate question we need to ask ourselves when we put together programs in the format that we choose is: does it help our Chinese Canadian viewers or readers to be better citizens of Canada, the country we call home.” Hwo also contrasted the previous role of the Canadian Chinese media as merely a mouthpiece for mainstream ideas about the Chinese community with its present transformation into a two-way bridge between the immigrant community and mainstream society, or a dialogue initiator: “We are part of what Canada is all about. The multicultural Chinese media

is a key component that sets us apart from the situation in the US” (Chinatown and Beyond 2010).

Second, the alternative communicative space that geo-ethnic media open up is indeed “distinct from the dominant public sphere” (Karim 2002a, 239). The Chinese language media recognizes a specific Chinese Canadian identity within multicultural citizenship, and encourages viewers to maintain their own unique Chinese cultural heritage, group identity, and representation rights (including their linguistic/cultural approach to the media). Programs such as “Straits Today” consciously emphasize a Chinese Canadian perspective on public issues, and it is from this perspective that the Canada–China relationship or China-related national issues are engaged and debated. See, for example, topics such as “Defence Minister Day's visit to China and Canada–China relations,” or “The impact of China's economic stimulus on Canada,” or “Changes in immigration policies and the overseas Chinese population in Canada.” This in-group interest can affect the agenda setting of ethnic media. For instance, some broader national and international issues which are not obviously related to Chinese diaspora may hardly be discussed at all on these current affairs talk shows, even though they dominate the mainstream Canadian media at that time. Such cases include the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; the Red River floods; Obama's visit to Canada, and the Canadian–American relationship. Apparently, the difference in subject matter between the ethnic media and mainstream current affairs programs is because Chinese Canadians prefer to focus on a specific range of issues that directly concern their relationship with their country of residence Canada. “Chinese Canadian Voices” drives this point home very clearly. Different aspects of community life and immigration policies are discussed extensively in this program, often accompanied by experts' guides on how to survive in Canada, from everyday life to job hunting to children's education and senior benefits.

Third, the ethnic Chinese media tries to create a balance between multicultural Canadian citizenship and a transnational or multilocal Chineseness. In other words, being a global Chinese and being a (Chinese) Canadian are by no means exclusive. One cultural stance or viewpoint adopted by Chinese-language media, as we observe it, is a transcendent “third party” or “third space” perspective which overcomes the “us-them” dichotomy and negotiates between “home” and “host” country. On the one hand, the media clearly encourages the viewers to identify multicultural Canada as their country, and consciously nurtures and promotes multicultural citizenship among the Chinese diaspora. We see this from the dominant focus on Canada-related news topics in these programs, and from the framing and typical modes of address, for example, the host or topics refer to Canada as “our country.” On the other hand, Chinese TV programs also actively provide links between “Greater China” and the diasporic communities. As discussed above, Chinese television stations give considerable time to transmitting home-generated news from various Greater Chinese sources (be it CCTV4, CTV, or TVBS). There is also consistently strong coverage of international news in the locally produced programs, for example, OMNI news (in its Mandarin and Cantonese editions) includes an international news segment that lasts substantially longer than that of most mainstream Canadian news programs, and tends to focus mainly on “in-group” news (i.e., Mainland China,

Taiwan, Hong Kong, or other Chinese communities globally). This finding seems consistent with other research on BC's ethnic media in general (Murray et al. 2007, 74–75). In this way, the Chinese diasporic media provide a communicative space for cultivating a transnational Chinese community and forging a global Chinese identity by channeling some common concerns such as the tensions across the Taiwan Strait, the relationship between China and the USA (or other parts of the world), and issues concerning Chinese immigrants.

The two forms of citizenship or senses of belonging identified here do not necessarily conflict with each other; instead, they may be harnessed together to form a fluid consciousness of citizenship among Chinese Canadians, which seem to reflect the living conditions of many Asian Canadians and their economic and political situations. For many recently immigrated Chinese who have become more globally oriented rather than staying in one place consistently, the “third space” that the ethnic media opens up both “manifests and produces such a multilocal sense of belonging . . . a new sense of locality that transcends the polarity between place of origin and residence” (Cheng 2005, 150). While the Chinese diasporic media helps to create a “flexible citizenship” as a cultural strategy for capital accumulation (Ong 1999), it also plays a vital role in disseminating basic liberal values and educating new immigrants in different social and cultural norms from the ones they are used to. For example, due to the “open and transcendent,” “third party” standpoint adopted by the diasporic media to Chinese national affairs, many sensitive public issues concerning Chinese communities that cannot be openly discussed within China, such as “How Can China Deal with Its Social Unrest” (Nov 2008), and “What We Can Learn from the Twentieth Anniversary of June Fourth” (June 2009), are discussed and debated on “Straits Today”. Furthermore, diasporic Chinese-language media exert a positive impact on the Chinese audience's understanding of the virtues and practices of democratic citizenship. The ideas of open debate on public issues and the media's role in building a fair and democratic country will certainly have an impact on the thought and behavior of Chinese audiences – many of whom are international students or “flexible” citizens who may bring back to China what they have learned about democracy and civil society in Canada. In fact, many changes in the media in Mainland China already seem to reflect such “outside influence” to a certain extent, with much more debate of various controversial issues being aired on television and in the press (Hong 1998).

Finally, we should raise the issue of the outreach of geo-ethnic media beyond their communities, or put another way, the interlocking of manifold public spheres and sharing between different strands of media spaces. This is an area that requires further development in Canada. On the one hand, more people and institutions outside Chinese communities, from policy makers to environmentalists to the entertainment industry, have come to recognize the power of ethnic media in Canadian society; yet on the other hand, although there have been some efforts made to build bridges between the English/French and ethnic media, the latter, including the Chinese-language media, is largely consumed within its own communities, and many of the concerns and issues debated are not heard or given attention by the mainstream media or other ethnic communities. In order to engage different ethnic groups in developing dialogues on civic issue and national affairs, and to let policy

makers and the mainstream public be aware of alternative views and perspectives of its multicultural public, more systematic channels need to be developed through institutional collaboration and policy implementation. For example, one previous effort was a bilingual editorial collaboration between the *Vancouver Sun* and *Ming Pao Daily* between 1997 and 1999, where selected opinion articles were translated and published simultaneously for both the English and Chinese speaking readerships of the two papers (Ding 2009, interview). More such cross-fertilization should be encouraged. Another possible way to create awareness of these issues is through public conferences. The Chinatown and Beyond Conference (13–15 May 2009), organized by Simon Fraser University, brought together media producers from several ethnic Chinese TV stations and newspapers for a media roundtable, which also attracted the attention of the mainstream English media. Still, obstacles remain for such bridge building: one of the main concerns voiced by several Chinese media practitioners at this roundtable was the lack of funding available, and the difficulties of finding qualified human resources to engage in the linguistic and cross-cultural translation required for bridging the gap between ethnic and mainstream media (Chinatown and Beyond 2010). This is presumably one reason why the *Ming Pao/Vancouver Sun* collaboration was also relatively short-lived.

A constructive interaction between multiple communicative spaces, including among different geo-ethnic media as well as between the ethnic and mainstream media, is crucial not only for fostering the “quality of relations between publics” (Couldry and Dreher 2007, 96), that is, greater understanding between the different ethnic groups in Canada, but also for geo-ethnic media to be developed into a fully effective alternative public sphere in Canada's multicultural society. But, as noted above, there are certain financial, linguistic, and human resource constraints that will need to be clearly identified and overcome in order for this interaction to take place (ibid.).

Conclusion

Canadian multiculturalism policy has played a pivotal role in developing a professional and responsible ethnic Chinese media and in the expansion of the Chinese linguistic-cultural market. The CRTC has not only licensed ethnic television stations such as Fairchild, Talentvision, OMNI, and CJNT-TV (Montreal), but since 2005, it has also opened up the market for more offshore Chinese language TV programs which are offered by local cable and satellite providers as part of their value-added bundles. The CRTC's policy of local content has directly and effectively geared Chinese language TV production to include local content, thus creating the potential for ethnic media to play its indispensable role in integration and citizenship education.

The media, as a “principal institution of the public sphere” (Curran and Gurevitch 1991, 2), plays an important role in facilitating public discourse, in citizenship education, and in promoting civic responsibilities. Considering the fact that Chinese Canadians, and especially new Chinese immigrants, are marginalized in consuming mainstream media (either English or French) for various cultural or linguistic

reasons, and consequently their involvement and participation in mainstream media and social activities conducted in the two official languages is low, the ethnic Chinese media can provide a valuable alternative public sphere for Chinese Canadians to express their commitment to multicultural citizenship, and to enable them to exercise their in-group rights more effectively. When researching the ethnic media in BC, a research group at Simon Fraser University has found that “local ethnic media represent for immigrants a means of maintaining and tightening links with their own culture while mediating their integration and recognition within the host country” (Murray et al. 2007,123). Another study also points to the indispensable and distinctive role that ethnic media played in promoting civic engagement within ethnic communities compared to the mainstream media during the Federal election of 2008 (Yu and Ahadi 2010).

My study of Chinese language television programs also points to various functions and possibilities for geo-ethnic media under the multicultural policy. The focused analysis of two TV programs is but a small indicative portion of the locally produced Chinese-language TV programming in Canada which explicitly addresses the specific concerns, needs, and aspirations of Chinese ethnic groups in Canada. At the same time, these programs encourage the ethnic communities to engage with national issues and become aware of their shared identities. The fact that “Straits Today” has become one of the most successful and established programs on Talentvision, and “Canadian Chinese Voices” was the first and most consistently viewed anchor program on Huayu NetTV shows that this kind of media practice is in high demand among the Chinese communities and has been well received by viewers (Ye April 1009, interview; Ma Zaixin 2009, interview).

With increasing globalization, more and more new forms or strands of public sphere are beginning to develop in cosmopolitan cities such as Toronto and Vancouver, and new forms of multicultural citizenship are being enacted. Seen in this light, the geo-ethnic media are playing a pivotal role in nation building and national integration, not only providing information on settlement services to new immigrants, but also providing an alternative arena for new citizens to access public debate and civil participation, and even reconstituting individual immigrants as a public interest group, expressing their “Chinese Canadian Voices.”

The geo-ethnic media, with its unique linguistic/cultural appeal to new immigrants, can be an appropriate and powerful means to promote civic virtues in a large pluralistic modern society such as Canada, and to help new immigrants transform their “formal” citizenship (i.e. membership of a state) into a “substantive” citizenship, which implies the possession and exercise of rights, and participation in the public and private spheres (Marshall and Bottomore 1992, 69). Differing from, yet complementary to, the English/French mainstream media, the ethnic media is an important constituent of a diverse media structure reflecting Canadian ethnic diversity. It also provides a transnational supplement to the mainstream public sphere (be it in China or Canada) which allows a sub-national ethnic community to maintain its distinct identity. Canadian government policy makers should continue to encourage and support this kind of diverse media structure through the CRTC's regulatory structure. At the same time, further efforts should be made to foster communication and interaction among the mainstream media and the diverse world of ethnic media in Canada.

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Appendix: See attached document “Chinese TV Tables”

Table 1 Topics of “Straits Today” (Talentvision) during the 8-week period from March 1 to April 25

	Topic (Chinese)	Topic (English)	Canada	China/Taiwan
Week 1 (March 6)	圆明园兽首能否完璧归赵	Will the animal head statues from the Old Summer Palace be returned to China?		Y
Week 2 (March 13)	中国经济放缓和对本国的影响	The impact of China’s economic stimulus on Canada	Y	Y
Week 3 (March 20)	郭冠英事件看公务员的操守	The Guo Guanying incident and civil servants’ personal integrity		Y
Week 4 (March 27)	美元贬值对中国外汇储备的压力	The pressure of the falling U.S. dollar on China’s foreign exchange reserves		Y
Week 5 (April 3)	G20 峰会能否成为全球金融危机的转折点	Can G20 Become the Turning Point of Global Financial Crisis	Y	Y
Week 6 (April 10)	从戴国卫访华看加中关系	Defence Minister Day’s visit to China and Canada–China relations	Y	
Week 7 (April 17)	09年BC 省选议题对话	Topics and Dialogue on the 2009 BC Election	Y	
Week 8 (April 24)	地球日的反思本国环保政策前景	Earth Day: reflections on Canada’s future environmental policies	Y	

Table 2 Subject Focus “Straits Today” (100 episodes, 2007 to 2008)

Politics (57%)				Economics (15%)	Law/Order (4%)	Arts and culture 3%	Education 2%	Health 6%	Environment 3%
Canada	Canada–China	China/TW	Others	15	4	3	2	6	3
20	7	34	6						

Table 3 Geographical Focus of “Straits Today” (100 episodes, 2007 to 2008)

Canada (45%)				China/Taiwan (44%)			International (11%)			
Federal	Provincial	Territory	Canada–China	Canada–US	China (inc.HK)	Taiwan	China–Taiwan	United States	Asia (China/TW excluded)	Other
30	4	1	7	3	19	19	6	8	2	1

Table 4 Topics on elections from “Straits Today” (2008–2009)

0817 從保守黨競選經費風波看隨時一觸即發的聯邦大選
• Reflecting on the Power to Call Federal Elections at Any Time in Light of the Conservative Party's Election Funding Controversy
0835 加美兩國大選氣氛濃
• Election Fever in Canada and the United States
0837 大選議題: 自由黨的綠色轉移計畫與綠黨
• Election Issues: The Liberals' Green Shift and the Green Party
0838 經濟議題對於聯邦大選的影響
• The Impact of Economic Issues on the Federal Election
0839 大選民生議題: 托兒 醫療 食品安全
• Election Issues on Peoples' Livelihood: Childcare; Healthcare and Food Safety
0840 大選外交議題: 阿富汗駐軍 加中關係
• The Election and Foreign Affairs Issues: The Afghan Campaign and Canada–China Relations
0843 誰可最終獲得民意
• Who Will Win the Peoples' Support in the End?
0844 從大選結果看自由黨的前途
• The Liberal Party's Future in the Light of the Election Results
0916 and 0919 卑詩省選議題對話
• The B.C. Election: Debating the Issues
0920 卑詩省選直擊
• Eye-Witness Account of the B.C. Election
0937 選民如何面對又一次的聯邦大選
• How Will the Voters Face Yet Another Federal Election?

Table 5 Topics of “Chinese Canadian Voices” (Huayu NetTV) during the 8-week period from March 1 to April 25

	Topics (Chinese)	Topics (English)	Canada	China/Taiwan
Week 1 (March 4)	妇女节话她经济	Women's Day: focus on women and the economy	Y	Y
Week 2 (March 11)	两会观察: 保增长与高赤字	Spotlight on the Chinese People's Congress sessions: maintaining growth and a high budget deficit		Y
Week 3 (March 18)	大温油价为何居高不下	Why are oil prices in Greater Vancouver staying so high?	Y	
Week 4 (March 25)	移民政策之变化与华人之增减	Changes in immigration policies and the overseas Chinese population in Canada	Y	Y
Week 5 (April 1)	唐伟侦事件: 投资还是诈骗	The Tang Weizhen incident: investment or fraud?	Y	
Week 6 (March 8)	BC省选正式开锣	The BC election bandwagon formally gets going	Y	
Week 7 (April 15)	戴国卫访华及加中关系新进展	Defence Minister Day's visit to China: new developments in Canada–China relations	Y	Y
Week 8 (April 22)	加拿大退休金制度应否改革	Should Canada's pension system be reformed?	Y	

Table 6 Subject focus “Chinese Canadian Voices” (100 episodes, Feb. 23, 2007 to Sept. 31, 2008)

Politics (51%)				Economics 24%	Law/Order 11%	Arts & Culture 9%	Education 2%	Health 2%	Environment 2%
Canada	Canada–China	China/TW	Others	24	11	9	2	2	2
22	7	20	2						

Table 7 Geographical focus “Chinese Canadian Voices” (100 episodes, Feb. 23, 2007 to Sept. 31, 2008)

Canada (67%)				China/Taiwan (25%)			International (8%)			
Federal	Provincial	Territory	Canada– China	Canada– US	China (inc.HK)	Taiwan	China– Taiwan	United States	Asia (China/ TW excluded)	Other
25	7	8	23	4	16	5	4	4	0	4

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