

***Ke Wang*, a Chinese television soap opera with a message**

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Abstract. China's first domestically-produced, long-running television soap opera, *Ke Wang* ('Aspirations'), was immensely popular with its audiences since it was first broadcast on a local Beijing television station in October, 1990. An audience of at least 550 million people in China watched *Ke Wang*, the largest audience in any single country for any television program. While *Ke Wang* was designed primarily to entertain people, it addressed many of the important social issues confronting the Chinese society: Status of women, social morality, family harmony, class conflict, responsible parenthood, maintenance of traditional culture, volunteerism, child development, physical disability, and others. We trace the history of *Ke Wang*, showing how the soap opera represents a watershed in Chinese television programming. We analyze *Ke Wang*'s audience success, and investigate the various social impacts of *Ke Wang*. The promises and problems of entertainment-education soap operas like *Ke Wang* are discussed.

***Ke Wang*, A Chinese television soap opera with a message**

During the decade of the 1980s, the number of television sets rapidly grew in such Third World countries as China and India. Between 1980 and 1990, a period of ten years, the number of television sets increased from 5 million to 160 million (32 times) in China, and from 1.2 million to 24 million (20 times) in India (Nie, 1991; Singhal and Rogers, 1991). In 1991, over 600 million of China's 1.13 billion people, and 300 million of India's 850 million people, regularly watch television.

In recent years, the hundreds of millions of new television viewers in China and India have become especially hooked to the television genre of soap operas. Not any alien, imported soap opera from the United States or any other country, but soap operas that are domestically-produced with familiar characters, storylines, and plots; and those which carry socially-relevant messages (Singhal and Rogers, 1991).

The purpose of the present paper is to analyze China's experience with *Ke Wang* ("Aspirations"), a first-of-a-kind, domestically-produced television soap opera, which set all kinds of viewership records in China. *Ke Wang* addressed many important social issues in China, representing a unique blend of entertainment and education for its many millions of viewers. Here we review the experiences of certain countries with entertainment-education soap operas. We trace the history of *Ke Wang*'s creation, demonstrating how the soap opera represents a watershed in Chinese television programming. We analyze the tremendous audience success of *Ke Wang*, and investigate the various impacts of the soap opera on Chinese society. We conclude by discussing the promises and problems of entertainment-education soap operas like *Ke Wang*.

The present paper draws upon our (1) thorough viewing of all 50-episodes of *Ke Wang*, (2) our review of over 70 articles on *Ke Wang* published during October, 1990 and July, 1991 in Chinese newspapers and magazines and in the Chinese ethnic press in the U.S., (3) personal interviews with officials of Chinese television stations in New York (who are planning to broadcast *Ke Wang* in the U.S. for Chinese expatriates), and (4) personal interviews with about 60 Chinese students in the U.S., who either watched *Ke Wang* when it was broadcast in China or here in the U.S. on videotape. While we do feel we have a good understanding about the context, content, and consequences of *Ke Wang* (from our variety of data sources) we do not claim our paper represents the last word on the effects of *Ke Wang* in China. We rather see the present paper as a first step toward learning more about the *Ke Wang* experience in China.

Entertainment soap operas for education

Entertainment soap operas are one of the most popular genres of television in North America, Latin America, and Asia. Some 50 million Americans are fans of at least one soap opera (Whetmore and Kielwasser, 1983); In Brazil, typical prime-time *telenovelas* (literally 'television novels') are watched by an estimated 60 million viewers (ratings of about 50 percent) (Caparelli, 1982); in India, entertainment soap operas have consistently commanded audience ratings from 65 to 90 percent (Singhal and Rogers, 1989a).

Entertainment soap operas display certain key characteristics (Cantor and Pingree, 1983): (1) they are sponsored by advertisers; (2) their production

costs are relatively low compared with other television serials; and (3) their content is composed of slow-moving, multifaceted plots of women's fiction. The motivation of producing soap operas differs in different countries. In the United States, as in most other countries soap operas are generally produced to entertain people, achieve high audience ratings, and consequently sell advertised products.

However, several countries have produced entertainment soap operas in an effort to educate its viewers about certain pro-social issues. Pro-social behavior is one that is socially desirable and beneficial to other individuals and/or society at large (Rushton, 1982). In Mexico, Miguel Sabido, a creative writer-producer-director created several entertainment telenovelas between 1967 and 1982, each designed to educate its viewers about a certain pro-social issue: Adult literacy, family planning, status of women, child development, etc. Each of Sabido's soap operas earned high audience ratings and were successful in meeting their educational-development goals (Singhal and Rogers, 1989a; 1989b; Televisa's Institute of Communication Research, 1981). For instance, *Ven Conmigo* ('Come With Me') during the time of its broadcast in 1975-76 encouraged 840,000 adults to enroll in adult literacy classes (Televisa's Institute for Communication Research, 1981). The following Sabido telenovela, *Acompáñame* ('Come along with Me') encouraged 562,464 Mexicans to visit government family planning clinics, and led to the registration of 2,500 Mexican women as voluntary family planning workers (Televisa's Institute for Communication Research, 1981; Singhal, 1990).

Inspired by the Sabido strategy of combining entertainment with education, India, Kenya, Nigeria, Egypt, Turkey, and various other countries began to create entertainment-educational soap operas dealing with such topics as status-of-women, family planning, health, nutrition, literacy, and so on. For instance, during 1984-85, India created a highly-popular, long-running soap opera called *Hum Log* ('We People'), which promoted such pro-social issues in India as the status-of-women, family harmony, and smaller family size norms (Singhal and Rogers, 1988; Singhal and Rogers, 1989a; Brown, 1990). These soap opera efforts are commonly referred to as 'enter-education', 'edu-tainment', 'info-tainment', and the like. While the choice of an exact terminology is arbitrary, these soap operas combine entertainment with education, to capitalize on the advantages of each (Singhal, 1990).

Ke Wang, the first indigenously-produced, long-running soap opera in China represents a fine example of 'enter-education'.

What was *Ke Wang*?

Ke Wang ('Aspirations') was the first Chinese soap opera the plot of which focussed on the aspirations of ordinary Chinese people during the time of the 'Cultural Revolution' (1966–1976) and the reform period of the early 1980s. Designed to provide indigenous entertainment to Chinese audiences (at a time when Brazilian and imported soap operas were popular), *Ke Wang*'s audience popularity was unprecedented in the history of Chinese television. In addition to its enormous entertainment value, the 50-episodes of *Ke Wang* (of 60 minutes each) addressed many important social and moral issues confronting Chinese society: Status of women, social morality, family harmony, class conflict, responsible parenthood, maintenance of traditional culture, volunteerism, child development, coping with physical disability, and others.

First broadcast by Beijing Yianshan Petrochemical Company's television Station (BYPCTV) in October, 1990, *Ke Wang* was watched by 98 percent of television viewers in Beijing (Zhang, 1991). Another Beijing station began broadcasting *Ke Wang* every other day, but due to audience demand it soon broadcast three to five episodes each night. This Beijing television station has already rerun *Ke Wang* three times on popular demand (Chen, 1991). Noting the audience fascination with *Ke Wang*, the Chinese national television network (CCTV) changed its original schedule to broadcast three episodes of *Ke Wang* on prime-time everyday during December, 1990 and January, 1991. To date, over 100 television stations in China have broadcast the series with a total estimated audience of 550 million people (Shi, 1991). Seven industrial companies (including a major watch maker) bought advertising time on the soap opera; their advertisements ran before, between, and after each episode of *Ke Wang*.

An audience survey conducted by *Beijing Youth Daily* showed that more than 98 percent of *Ke Wang* viewers liked the program a lot, and a majority of them said that they learned something from it (Zhang, 1991). One store in the city of Wuhan sold 1,500 color television sets in a few days after *Ke Wang* began broadcasting, while a store in Beijing sold more than 800 cassettes of the theme music from *Ke Wang* in just one day (Chen, 1991). Chen Changben, a senior producer of *Ke Wang* was soon installed by the government to be the Chinese Deputy Minister of Culture (Zhang, 1991). The Chinese government awarded *Ke Wang* a prize of \$20,000 (U.S.), hailing it as a model television program (Sheryl, 1991).

The history of *Ke Wang*'s creation

The creation of *Ke Wang* was not a chance occurrence. The history of *Ke Wang* is inextricably linked to the history of Chinese television. The first television station was established in China in 1958 and in 1980 there were less than five million television sets in this country of a billion people. During the 1980s, television rapidly expanded in China (as it did in several other countries like India, Egypt, Kenya, and others). In the past ten years, the number of television sets in China increased 32 times from 5 million in 1980 to 160 million in 1990 (Nie, 1991). Today, television is viewed by an audience of 600 million, some 52 percent of China's 1.13 billion people. Some 500 television transmitters exist today (in contrast to 22 in 1980). Some 3,000 episodes of various television serials were produced by Chinese television stations in 1989 compared to about 100 episodes in 1980.

The rapid diffusion of television sets in China and the millions of new viewers provided an impetus for Chinese broadcast officials to assess television programming needs. Most new television stations in China carried minimal advertising, had a small budget, and lacked professionally-trained staff. One recourse was to import television programs. *The Man From Atlantis*, was one of the first U.S. programs aired in China in 1980. Intrigued by a character who swam like a fish, the Chinese audiences immensely liked the show (Butterfield, 1982). Other imported programs, mostly soap operas from Mexico, Brazil, Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong followed. Broadcast by most of China's television stations, television series such as '*Slander*', '*Female Slave*', and '*Bianka*' were popular with Chinese audiences. The average audience rating for imported soap operas on Chinese television was about 22 percent (Chen, 1991). An hour of imported television series cost Chinese officials about \$500 to \$1,000 (U.S.), much less than the cost of producing a series locally.

In 1987, the Beijing Television Arts Center (BTAC) was established to encourage indigenous production of television series with socially relevant content. Why a country with a 5,000-year old history could not make television programs relevant to the lives of ordinary Chinese people? In 1988, 30 staff members of BTAC were sent to Beijing Broadcasting Institute (BBI) to undergo training to produce soap operas. The result was *Ke Wang*.

For BTAC, *Ke Wang* represented an experiment in producing an indigenous, yet low-cost, television series. Previously, producing an hour of

television series in China cost about 50,000 Chinese yuan (about \$9,000). Realizing that production costs had to be brought down, BTAC's television producers looked for television genres which were relatively less expensive to produce. According to Chen Changbeng, *Ke Wang*'s senior producer, the reason why *Ke Wang* was planned as a long-running soap opera was to keep costs low: A soap opera's story mostly unfolds indoors, so the cost of production sets (whether for twenty episodes or fifty episodes) remains about the same (providing an economy of scale). Soap operas are also easier/faster to shoot/edit as the story unfolds in a few settings. Thus, a soap opera's production budget could be brought down to as low as about a third of other television series (Zhang, 1991). All 50 one-hour episodes of *Ke Wang* were shot between August, 1989, and June, 1990. Final editing took only two months. One episode of *Ke Wang* only took an average of four days to complete and cost about \$4,650 (U.S.), about half the cost of producing another television series in China.

Li Xiaoming, scriptwriter of *Ke Wang*, created a completely indigenous Chinese soap opera (Zhang, 1991). The themes addressed in the soap opera were deeply-rooted in the Chinese culture. The plot of the soap opera revolved around the lives of ordinary Chinese people, with whom many in the audience could identify. The soap opera depicted the conflict between traditional and modern Chinese values, representative of the era in which the soap opera was set (pre and post Cultural Revolution). In creating *Ke Wang*, script-writer Li drew upon his knowledge of a 1987 national survey conducted by the Ministry of Broadcasting and Film on Chinese audience preferences. The survey showed that Chinese audiences preferred television programs that reflected the reality of their lives and which were entertaining (Nie, 1991). Appropriately, *Ke Wang* was deeply-rooted in the Chinese socio-cultural milieu.

A tremendous audience success

Ke Wang was extremely popular with its audiences, achieving ratings of over 95 percent in Beijing, and about 90 percent in other parts of China. In certain regions of China, viewers demanded that the Mandarin spoken on *Ke Wang* be translated to the local dialect in order that they could fully comprehend the nuances of the plot. When *Ke Wang* was being broadcast, the Chinese print media gave it immense coverage. Newspapers began columns exclusively dedicated to the soap opera with such titles as 'What

have I learned from *Ke Wang*', '*Ke Wang*' as I see it', and so on. Such an elaborate coverage for any television program is highly unusual in the Chinese media. Suffice to say that *Ke Wang*'s audience popularity went beyond the expectations of its producers and the Chinese government.

A favorable response from the government

The high popularity of *Ke Wang* pleasantly surprised the Chinese government. Not only did the Chinese government award a prize of 100,000 Chinese yuan (about \$20,000) to *Ke Wang*, but on January 8, 1991, Li Ruihuan, a member of the Politburo of the Chinese Communist Political Bureau in-charge of propaganda, felicitated the entire cast of *Ke Wang* in Zhong Nanhai, a ceremonial venue usually reserved to honor visiting heads-of-state. Jiang Zeming, the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party and Li Peng, the Prime Minister of China both took time out to fully watch the 50 hour-long *Ke Wang* on video. Li said the soap opera 'has enriched (the Chinese) people's spiritual life and has opened up a channel for producing our own soap opera' (Yu, 1991).

Ke Wang's popularity jogged the memory of Chinese audiences about another television program, *He Shang* ('Yellow River'), a six-part series that attacked such Chinese cultural symbols as the dragon and the Yellow river. When broadcast on national television, *He Shang* was a very popular, though controversial, program. More than 500,000 Chinese people in the city of Canton took part in public debates about *He Shang*, often buying tickets to enter the debate room. Hardline Communist Party members disliked *He Shang*; some leaders like Deng Xiaoping called it 'a load of rubbish' (*The Economist*, November 19, 1988, p. 105). The more liberal-minded Zhao Ziyang, the then General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, supported the program and presented videotape copies of *He Shang* as a state gift to Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew.

He Shang ended with the 1989 'Tiananmen Square Incident' when Zhao was arrested for supporting the students' cause. Su Xiaokang, Fang Zhiyuan, the two scriptwriters of *He Shang* came to the U.S. as political dissidents. *He Shang* was denounced by the new government as 'bourgeois liberalism' 'vilification of Chinese culture', 'anti-party and anti-socialist', and banned. The *He Shang* experience clearly suggests that the Communist hardliners are very sensitive to television programs, especially those which are highly popular. Why then did *Ke Wang* received such support from the same communist hardliners?

The Chinese government perhaps believed that *Ke Wang* represented an adequate counterpoint for *He Shang*. While the characters in *Ke Wang* upheld traditional Chinese values and culture, *He Shang*'s elitist characters were somewhat out of line with traditional Chinese norms. It seems *Ke Wang*'s messages also helped boost the nationalistic spirit of China, wounded since the 'Tiananmen Square Incident'. Li Ruihuan, the official in-charge of propaganda, said (quoted in *People's Daily*, January 9, 1991): '*Ke Wang* represented the traditional Chinese view of human relations in a socialist context, a reason why it was so successful. Such human relationships should be inherited and passed on. I encourage people to learn from *Ke Wang*'s characters about how to be close to people, life, and reality. *Ke Wang* is a fine illustration of education in entertainment'. Li's speech was aimed at officials of China's entertainment, literary, and art circles, goading them to use creative art forms for nation-building.

Overwhelming audience response

Ke Wang was popular with Chinese people of all walks of life: From an ordinary factory worker in Shanghai to the Head-of-State in Beijing. No other program on Chinese television had previously received such spectacular audience ratings (up to 98 percent). It was a trend setter. Consider the following instances of *Ke Wang*'s popularity:

- * In the city of Wuhan, where factory workers work until quite late at night, the factory President allowed the workers to go home in time to watch *Ke Wang* at 8:00 p.m.
- * In another city, when power supply to a neighborhood was shut off (a common occurrence in China), a huge crowd surrounded the power station demanding that the electric supply be restored. When the mayor of the city learned that *Ke Wang* was being broadcast at that time, the power supply was restored immediately.
- * The audiocassette containing the theme music of *Ke Wang* and its songs has become so popular in China that some 16 companies have brought out pirated versions of the audiotape. Now BTAC, the producer of *Ke Wang* is in a dilemma: Which company should they first take to court?
- * In a Chinese book store in New York City, *Ke Wang*'s video tapes have become the most hot-selling/renting item for local Chinese students and the American-Chinese population.

Audience members regularly provided feedback to BTAC about the *Ke Wang* storyline. Such was also the case with India's first domestically-

produced, long-running soap opera, *Hum Log* ('We People'), where audience feedback helped rewrite the story (Singhal and Rogers, 1989a). Many of *Ke Wang*'s audience were dissatisfied with the way the story ended (The central character Liu Huifang was hit by a car and she could no longer walk). They called and wrote to BTAC demanding a sequel. Responding to the audience's demand, CCTV (the national Chinese television network) hosted a television program called 'There are true feelings everywhere' on the occasion of Chinese New Year celebrations in 1991. During this program, which was watched by 900 million Chinese viewers (both within and outside of China), the actors and actresses of *Ke Wang* appeared as special guests, including a walking, talking, cheerful Liu Huifang. The program ended with a screen family reunion for *Ke Wang*'s characters, which was a source of tremendous comfort for audience members.

Para-social interaction with Ke Wang's characters

The actors and actresses of *Ke Wang*, relatively unknown in China prior to the soap opera's broadcast, have now become stars who are recognized and loved by hundreds of millions of Chinese. Over three thousand viewers' letters were received by BTAC in the first two weeks of *Ke Wang*'s broadcasts (Zhang, 1991), many pointing out the real-life nature of the soap opera and its believable characters. The cast of *Ke Wang* has travelled to over twenty different Chinese cities. Where ever they go, traffic jams are common. Police reinforcements are called in to control the tremendous audience outpouring.

A tremendous amount of para-social interaction occurred between *Ke Wang*'s viewers and its characters. *Para-social interaction* is the seemingly face-to-face interpersonal relationships which can develop between a viewer and a mass media personality, like a television performer (Horton and Wohl, 1958). Viewers perceive their relationship with the television character as real, as if they were in a face-to-face encounter. For instance, Kai Li who played the role of Liu Huifang, the central female character in *Ke Wang*, received many herbal medicines at home from *Ke Wang* viewers when she briefly fell ill on the soap opera. A movie in which Kai Li had previously starred, *Mo Nan Yu Mo Niu* ('A Man and A Woman') was recalled in several Chinese movie theatres and received spectacular audience attention.

It came as little surprise when in September, 1991, the *Ke Wang* cast won

five top national awards (the 'Golden Eagle Award') for putting up the best television series, the best actor, the best actress, the best supporting actor, and the best supporting actress.

Why was *Ke Wang* so popular?

The rapid diffusion of television sets in China, while *Ke Wang* was being broadcast, certainly contributed to *Ke Wang*'s popularity. The 'novelty' effect of *Ke Wang*, being the first-of-a-kind, domestically-produced, long-running soap opera, also contributed to its audience popularity. Various other factors impacted *Ke Wang*'s popularity.

Value-based content

Ke Wang was set in a time-period when the Chinese society underwent noticeable changes. During the 'Cultural Revolution' (1966–1967), suspicion ran high between people, and caution was displayed in human relationships. Certain scars of the 'Cultural Revolution', even after the 'Cultural Revolution' ended, persisted in the Chinese psyche. After the 'Cultural Revolution', the Chinese government adopted a more liberal, 'open door policy' which promoted 'materialistic' values in China, threatening such traditional Chinese values as social harmony and selflessness.

Then *Ke Wang* was broadcast. It loftily praised the lifestyles of ordinary people, promoting social harmony and selflessness: 'The world will be a better place if everyone contributes just a little love,' were the lyrics of *Ke Wang*'s theme song. As one viewer told an actor of *Ke Wang*, 'I love the soap opera because it reflects the emotions felt by everyone in our society and releases our pent up feelings' (Chen, 1991). The content of *Ke Wang* seems to have had a type of 'cathartic' effect on some viewers.

The real-life nature of Ke Wang

Ke Wang was close to 'real-life' for a majority of its viewers. Its characters, situations, and props were not strange to Chinese audiences, as were the characters, situations and props of previously-broadcast imported soap operas in China. Li Xiaoming, *Ke Wang*'s scriptwriter, believed that: 'If the characters and the events in the soap opera matched the audience's daily life experiences, it could conquer them' (Meng, 1990). Li tried to blur the gap between *Ke Wang*'s 'real' world and the audiences' 'real' world.

A refreshing change

Ke Wang was a refreshing change for Chinese audiences who were tired of dull and highly-regulated television programming. After the 'Tiananmen Square Incident', the Chinese government realized the important role of media in influencing public opinion, and established various restrictions on the mass media (Shi, 1991). Western movies, imported soap operas, and certain types of books and magazines were banned in China. The popular television program *He Shang* was also banned (as mentioned previously). *Ke Wang* was a cultural product which the audience heartily welcomed.

Elaborate media coverage

The present authors reviewed over 30 different kinds of Chinese newspapers and magazines (published in mainland China, Hong Kong, and New York), published during late-1990 to mid-1991. We found that 100 percent of these newspapers and magazines had at least one story on *Ke Wang*. Eighty-five percent of our sources had two or more stories on *Ke Wang*. The overseas edition of *People's Daily*, China's best-known daily, featured an eight-part series on *Ke Wang*'s story.

Ke Wang was overwhelmingly covered by the Chinese media, more than any television program in Chinese history. Many newspapers opened new columns on *Ke Wang*: For instance, the *Beijing Daily* in one of its issues devoted three entire pages to *Ke Wang* (The *Beijing Daily* is a four-page newspaper); the *China Youth Daily* began a column titled 'Watch and Discuss *Ke Wang*', and organized an essay contest, '*Ke Wang* as I see it; the *Beijing Evening News* often put *Ke Wang* as its first news item on the front page; the *Beijing Broadcasting Press* started a column titled 'How I perceive *Ke Wang*'; and the *Beijing Youth Press* started a column titled 'What I have Learned from Liu Huifang'.

The unprecedented media coverage of *Ke Wang* is an indication of its tremendous audience popularity, as well as its important influence on Chinese society. The media coverage helped fuel the popularity of *Ke Wang*.

The language

Often last-minute changes were incorporated in *Ke Wang*'s dialogues to more closely match audience preferences. The language used in *Ke Wang*

was a combination of Mandarin (the official language of China) and a Beijing dialect. The audience, especially from the Beijing area, enjoyed such a language combination. A survey conducted by *Beijing Youth Press* indicated that the language of *Ke Wang* was a major reason why the audience enjoyed *Ke Wang* (Zhang, 1991).

Social impacts of *Ke Wang*

It seems *Ke Wang*'s viewers learned various pro-social behaviors from the soap opera's characters who served as role models. Pro-social behavior is one that is socially desirable and beneficial to other individuals and/or society at large.

Bandura's (1977; 1986) social learning theory details the social-psychological process through which humans learn new behaviors by observing role models. Bandura claims that real-life models and models presented on television do not differ in influencing the learning of new behaviors. Models presented in televised series are so effective in holding attention that viewers can easily learn a model's behaviors (Bandura, Grusec, and Menlove, 1966). Various types of behaviors were modeled by *Ke Wang*'s characters, a description of which is provided in Table 1.

Many viewers felt that a woman like Liu Huifang was too 'ideal' to exist in real life; she clearly was considered as a highly positive woman role model by many viewers. Song Dacheng, who fell in love with Liu, was also highly liked by the audience for his warm-heartedness and kindness. After *Ke Wang* was broadcast, the saying, 'choose Liu Huifang as daughter-in-law, and Song Dacheng as son-in-law' became very popular in China (*People's Daily*, January 2, 1991, p. 4). Often Chinese couples would tease each other by saying 'You should learn from Liu Huifang ... You should model Song Dacheng'.

Ke Wang helped resolve several family conflicts, especially in extended families, where family had stopped talking to each other due to previous arguments and disagreements. Many reported they learned from *Ke Wang* about how to boost family harmony and unity (Zhang, 1991). *Ke Wang* taught many Chinese teenagers the high value of education, and discouraged them to waste time in disco's and bars (Yu, 1991).

In the city of Kaifeng in Henan Province, when an unmarried woman found an abandoned baby girl whose life was in danger, the woman took her immediately to a hospital, saving the baby's life (A similar situation was depicted in *Ke Wang*, when Liu Huifang saved an abandoned baby's

Table 1. The main characters of *Ke Wang*.

Character	Characterization
1. Liu Huifang	The central female character who is traditional and open-minded. She is warm-hearted, caring, self-sufficient, and highly moral.
2. Liu Dama (Liu Huifang's mother)	A typical Chinese mother who lives in Beijing's winding alleyways. She works hard and loves her children.
3. Liu Xiaoyan (Liu Huifang's younger sister)	A dynamic, liberal woman who helps others.
4. Wang Husheng (Liu Huifang's husband)	A highly-educated man, who is upwardly mobile and selfish. His self-serving motives result in his divorce with wife Liu Huifang.
5. Wang Zitao (Wang Husheng's father)	A professor who comes under much criticism during the 'Culture Revolution'. He is troubled by the behavior of his son and daughter, and worries about their marriage.
6. Wang Yaru (Wang Husheng's sister)	A skillful doctor who is highly prejudiced toward ordinary people, including her sister-in-law and her family.
7. Song Dacheng	A kind, honest man who falls in love with Liu Huifang when her marriage is not working with Wang Husheng.
8. Xu Yuejuan (Song Dacheng's wife)	A good friend of Liu Huifang, who has difficulty in keeping the friendship when she learns her husband loves Liu Huifang.
9. Luo Gang (Wang Yaru's boyfriend)	A person who had a terrible experience during the 'Cultural Revolution', but is eternally optimistic. He is helpful and caring.
10. Tian Li (Wang Yaru's best friend)	An excellent medical doctor who not only helps her patients but also serves as a mediator to resolve conflicts between Wang's and Liu's family.

life). When the woman could not afford to pay the hospital and medicine bills, several *Ke Wang* viewers donated over ten thousand yuan (about \$2,000). Moreover, the local government presented the woman with an award for representing the 'Real-life Model of Liu Huifang'.

Another real-life incident occurred on January 23, 1991 when *Ke Wang* was being broadcast in the city of Xian. Laura, an American woman who taught English at a local university met an old Chinese woman in a hospital, who asked Laura to hold her baby for a few minutes. The old woman left, never to come back. Laura found a note in the baby's bag which said the baby's mother had died, and she (the old woman) could not afford to take care of it. Laura had previously watched the *Ke Wang* episode in which Liu Huifang was confronted with a similar situation. Inspired by Liu Huifang, Laura adopted the baby orphan (Ming, 1991). The Chinese media hailed Laura as 'America's Liu Huifang'.

There is evidence to show that *Ke Wang* had other social impacts (both direct and indirect) in China. According to the records of the Chinese Police Department, far fewer robberies were committed during the days when *Ke Wang* was being broadcast. Many Chinese police officers wished *Ke Wang* would never end (Yu, 1991). Many viewers of *Ke Wang* wrote letters to newspapers explaining the tremendous changes that occurred in their neighborhood since the soap opera began broadcasting. The public bathrooms were cleaned by volunteers; the elderly were receiving more care and attention from their neighbors (Zhang, 1991). Both the themes of 'volunteerism' and 'respect for elders' were emphasized in *Ke Wang*. A headline in *Beijing Daily* said: People in Beijing Are Nicer to Each Other After *Ke Wang*.

It is clear that *Ke Wang*'s viewers learned certain pro-social values and behaviors from the role models depicted in the television series.

Promise or problems?

Capitalizing on the success of *Ke Wang*, the Chinese government is planning to produce other entertainment-education soap operas (Shi, 1991). BTAC, the creator of *Ke Wang*, is presently in the process of producing four television soap operas (Zhang, 1991). Whether these soap operas would promote educational-development messages or be used for blatant propaganda only time will tell. Here lies one of the gravest ethical dilemmas associated with the use of the entertainment media for educational purposes: *Who is to determine what is right for whom?* (Brown and Singhal, 1990).

The fact that *Ke Wang*'s senior producer, Chen Changbeng, was installed as the Deputy Minister of Culture is a sign that the Chinese government views soap operas as a pedagogical tool. Chen believes that soap operas are

a cost-effective, entertaining genre in which socially and morally relevant content can be included. Chen also believes that soap operas can strike a familiar chord with both family and individuals; so more soap operas should be created (Zhang, 1991).

Clearly the success of a first-of-a-kind, long-running soap opera has provided Chinese government officials a reason to pay heed to the founder of China, Mao Zedong who said: 'Mass media should propagate the policies of the Party, educate the masses, organize the masses, and mobilize the masses' (Lu, 1979/1980; Hong and Cuthbert, 1991). But, the *promise* of creating entertainment soap operas for educational purposes can become a *problem*, if the underlying motive is blatant political propaganda.

Conclusions

The overwhelming audience success of *Ke Wang* in China reinforces the idea of using entertainment-educational soap operas to promote pro-social values and behaviors. While the Chinese producers of *Ke Wang* did not consciously attempt to combine entertainment with education, they now realize the advantages of doing so. Whether they will utilize the entertainment-education strategy (via soap operas) to promote pro-social behaviors or propaganda, only time will tell.

Ke Wang represents a sort of a turning point in the history of Chinese television which now knows the value of producing indigenous television fare (as opposed to importing television programs). *Ke Wang* also demonstrated that television programs addressing pro-social issues need not be dull. There is room for entertainment and education to co-exist.

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