

Ethics in the Production of Chinese Reality TV

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Abstract : China has become one of the markets with the biggest potential for UK exporters, but it remains difficult for outsiders to explore Chinese media's inner workings due to a lack of access. Having worked in Chinese media, the author conducted six month's participant-observation in China Central Television (CCTV) and three independent production companies. This paper mainly explores how TV production ethics were implemented in the casting process of three Chinese reality shows that are well-known within the country. The three production teams had issues in common: unorganised management, subjective casting standards and lack of production ethics. Casting directors, who were multitasking, could only rely on their professional experience and ad-hoc demands from the management. More concerning phenomena such as borderline corruption, passive-aggressiveness, and blame cultures were prevalent during the entire production, especially during casting. The casting process also often involved the celebrity status of the many 'ordinary' participants who were not that 'ordinary' as they claimed. Many of these participants were professional talents who were not famous enough but worked as many other well-known celebrities who had their own employees. On the other hand, as comprehensive production and ethics guidelines were missing, junior television practitioners struggled between their ideal professional standards and real-life events that fell into grey areas – telling white lies, bribery, shifting blame, and lack of employee training. Although facing challenges, many practitioners came up with self-management solutions and worked with positivity.

Keywords : production studies, ethics, television production, ethnography, reality TV, Chinese TV

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