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Anxiety and utopian sensibility: media  
professionals in the Chinese TV drama  
*Cell Phone*

**Iiris Ruoho**

University of Tampere, Finland

**Jie Gao**

University of Copenhagen, Denmark

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The Chinese serial  
drama *Cell Phone* (手机,  
Shouji 2010)

- Directed by Yan Shen and Lei  
Wang. Screenplay Fang-jin  
Song. Produced by Jun Wang  
and Xiao Zhang.



# Why study TV drama?

The Chinese television series can be seen generating a wide range of public discussion including the issues of a globalizing world, economic reforms and cultural transformations. On the other hand, the production of television drama is highly regulated and controlled in China.

As shown (e.g. Chow 2003) the Chinese film productions are the result of the different practices and negotiations. So, partly because of control, television drama can also be very ambiguous, and usually offer multiple ways of reading the fiction.

This complexity in mind our study analyzes the 36-episode Chinese TV drama serial *Cell Phone* (2010).

# The study

- 1) Our interest in this case study is to look for the internal conflicts and antitheses of the content of the TV drama, above all in relation to the media culture in which the role of market-orientations is bigger than before.
- 2) How *Cell Phone* (手机, Shouji 2010) organizes various affects and emotions; how people are shown to be affected by and about media; and accordingly, how these affects are articulated in both the professional and everyday life of people living regionally, socially and culturally different realities
- 3) Our special interest is to consider how *Cell Phone* organizes various affective realities of its main characters, especially the work and life of media elite and the life of young people migrated from the countryside to the city



# Tentative conclusions

1. Against international studies (Zhu 2008, Keane & Bai 2008, Zhu 2008, Zhong 2010, Song 2010, Ng 2014), it is possible to say that the Chinese TV drama consists of multiple social, cultural, and historical voices. This is also the case of *TV series Cell Phone*. It *negotiates*, consciously or unconsciously, about how people are shown affected by and about media and consumer culture.
2. *Cell Phone* seems to claim that the traditional media elite meets conflicts when fulfilling its professional role in the current media market. Their situation resembles such a subject position of what Lauren Berlant (2010) call “a slip within the man of modernity”.
3. Unlike the media elite, the young generation is shown to become familiar with the market-oriented media through the consumption of media. At the same time there is a new kind of media publicity available for this generation - and they use this publicity in day-to-day life imaginatively.