



# TELEMODERNITIES

Television and Transforming Lives in Asia

TANIA LEWIS   FRAN MARTIN   WANNING SUN

## Telemodernities

**Console-ing Passions** Television and Cultural Power  
A SERIES EDITED BY LYNN SPIGEL

# **Telemodernities** Television and Transforming Lives in Asia

TANIA LEWIS, FRAN MARTIN, AND WANNING SUN

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## INTRODUCTION. Telemodernities

### On Location

In 2010 the South Indian TV channel Suvarna aired a fish-out-of-water-style TV program titled *Halli Haida Pyateg Bandha* (Village boys go to the city), which follows the adventures of eight lungi-wearing “tribal youths” extracted from their villages and introduced to the bright lights of city life while being partnered with eight urbane and attractive city girls. Offered an instant consumption-oriented lifestyle makeover, the hapless and somewhat shell-shocked contestants are taken to their first malls to learn how to shop, taught handy life skills like how to walk on a cat walk, and coached to perform on stage in front of an audience. Although in some ways this show is a standard rags-to-riches reality format—premised on the desirability of learning to exude an air of cosmopolitan and entrepreneurial individualism—at the same time, the program also plays on a certain anxiety about a perceived loss of connection with the authenticity of village life. Indeed, the program followed the success of an earlier Suvarna show, *Pyate Hudgir Halli Life* (City girls, village life), where the story was reversed: eight young female contestants accustomed to living the urban high life were transported to a hitherto little known South Indian village to test their capacity to live traditionally for three months.

On the surface, these formats mimic numerous lifestyle swap shows familiar to Western audiences, from reality shows featuring ordinary urbanites struggling with the deprivations of the everyday lives of their forebears (*Colonial House*; *Frontier House*) to morally charged formats where rampant consumers are transported off to live frugally in developing regions like Africa (*Worlds Apart*). But what distinguishes these South Indian shows from their

Euro-American counterparts is their portrayal of a meeting of traditional and modern cultures and lifestyles *within* the single nation of India in the present day. Scenes where contestants learn to be savvy consumers or to dress for success are played out against the backdrop of competing cultural and religious identities, urban/rural and socioeconomic divides, and nostalgic yearnings for traditionalism at a time of rapid sociocultural transformation.

This book is about lifestyle television in Asia and its role in teaching people how to live. As our discussion of the South Indian examples above suggests, in *Telemodernities* we are concerned precisely with this type of programming's role in the social and cultural negotiation of modernization and modernities. For the above examples are far from isolated cases: in recent years, TV screens across Asia have become host to an explosion of programs aimed at providing modern lifestyle guidance to viewers, particularly the consumer middle classes. In this book, through a focus on three key countries—the People's Republic of China (PRC or mainland China), India, and Taiwan—we take up lifestyle-oriented popular factual television as a critical lens through which to examine shifting and emergent social and cultural formations. The wide range of life guidance shows we discuss takes in everything from magazine-style travel programs, to glossy reality shows helping contestants negotiate the complexities of modern love and dating, to home renovation formats aimed at aspirational urbanites, and religious lifestyle shows promoting a blend of spiritualism, entrepreneurialism, and self-help. From enterprising yogic spiritualism to cosmopolitan romance scripts negotiated through the family, we explore these shows' variegated engagements with cultural modernity across South and East Asia. Lifestyle television as a recognizable genre is unevenly distributed across South and East Asia and is not by any means the most popular or prevalent mode of programming on the small screen. Nevertheless, the characteristic directness of lifestyle television's instruction in correct ways of being—its blatant pedagogies of good taste, appropriate consumption, and desirable identity—make it a uniquely rich object of study when we seek to understand dominant and emergent templates for selfhood and constructions of the good life in a given society.

Another factor in lifestyle television's significance is the way in which it articulates to a series of ongoing social and economic changes in Asia today. Across South and East Asia, the past three decades have seen hyperaccelerated social, cultural, and economic transformation. Consumer culture increasingly shapes everyday life as market economies are fostered by (post)socialist states like China and India, and a dizzying diversity of media and consumer goods continues to proliferate in those nations where capitalism has been longer

entrenched, like the four Asian “tiger economies” (Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and South Korea). Governments in Asia, as elsewhere in the world, increasingly address their citizens as individualized, sovereign consumers with reflexive choices about their lifestyles and identities.

It is against this backdrop that South and East Asia have seen a proliferation not only of lifestyle television but of a wide range of media aimed at instructing the middle classes in matters of consumption, taste, and “the good life.” However, we argue that television plays a particularly central role in Asia, both as a broadcast and increasingly also as a digital and narrowcast medium. While Eurocentric media studies narratives now routinely depict television as a heritage form, in South and East Asia television is far from in decline; on the contrary, in many Asian countries it represents the most powerful and ubiquitous media form, with large and growing investment from the commercial and, in some cases, state sector.

These questions of social, political, and economic context and geocultural location are key to our analysis of lifestyle television. As Ana Cristina Pertierra and Graeme Turner note in *Locating Television*, much recent Western scholarship on television in the postbroadcast era has been not only Eurocentric but also decidedly *dislocated* in its approach, preoccupied in a fairly abstract way with the affordances of technical convergence and new media developments and platforms in a multichannel environment. As a result, they argue, “what television *does*—how it is imbricated into the practices of everyday life, what kinds of social and cultural function it can perform, and how it participates in the construction of communities—has been much less explored” in the Western-centric mainstream of global television studies (2013, 10). As these remarks underline, while on the one hand television content is highly mobile, “ordinary television” (Bonner 2005) is also profoundly connected to the everyday, the domestic, and the personal, and to intensely localized modes of address. This is certainly true of lifestyle advice television, which offers a prime site for critical comparative analyses of specific, situated formations of lifestyle, modernity, and television cultures. What, for example, is the social and cultural significance of the appearance of a licensed version of the BBC’s *MasterChef* in India, a country battling with ongoing issues of food security and malnutrition? How should we understand the popularity of a thinly disguised copy of *Changing Rooms* in China, where the emergence of individualized, consumption-based models of identity are shaped by persistent forms of collectivist cultural citizenship and a sense of social and familial duty? In addressing questions like these, the socially and culturally embedded, multiperspectival analysis offered in this book responds to Pertierra and Turner’s

contention that “to be understood in its complexity, television has to be studied from a range of research approaches and in a diversity of regional and historical contexts” (2013, 11).<sup>1</sup>

Moving beyond a geoculturally exceptionalist approach, however, we suggest that Asian popular factual programming as an object of inquiry also offers insights into the evolving sociocultural role of television more broadly. While media scholars often ask about the impact of global TV formats on local cultures outside the West, this book poses this question rather differently. With China and India now becoming major players in global television (and broader entertainment) industries, how might the experiences of these and other Asian sites impact on our thinking about *global* media processes? How does the evolution of lifestyle TV in a variety of national spaces—which need not be limited to Western European and Anglophone contexts—speak to changing relationships between popular media, audiences, and social, moral, and political engagement? What kinds of mediated civic spaces are emerging in postcolonial, postsocialist, and established Asian capitalist nation-states grappling with the potentials and challenges of globalizing commercial media and culture?

### **Framing Lifestyle: Late Modern**

#### **Transformations in Identity and Social Life**

A central focus of this book is television’s relationship to projects of modernity—or projects of *modernities*, to be more precise. As we elaborate in detail below, we do not understand television as simply a global distributor of universal (read Euro-American) models of modernity, as in earlier theories of cultural imperialism where globalization was often equated with cultural homogenization. Instead, the “multiple modernities” paradigm that we adopt as a central framework is underpinned by the idea that modernity is not and never has been the sole preserve of the West. Studying lifestyle television in Asia demands that we balance an appreciation of the *plurality and specificity* of modern cultures beyond the West, with attentiveness to how the global mobility of lifestyle formats may bespeak certain *shared* experiences in the (late) modern world, particularly concerning the transformation of social identity (Bignell 2005; Kraidy and Sender 2011).

In relation to the latter issue, many scholars writing from Euro-American perspectives have argued that the rise of lifestyle TV reflects the increasing dominance of an individualist, consumerist approach to everyday life, in which selfhood is seen as endlessly malleable—a project to be worked on and invested in (Wood and Skeggs 2004; Lewis 2007; Redden 2007). Within

Euro-American contexts, the rise of this pliable conception of the self has been understood as a shift away from the predictability and structural certainties of traditional societies, marked by collective identities and communal norms and values, toward what Anthony Giddens (1991) has called a “post-traditional society.” The mainstreaming of lifestyle television and lifestyle expertise over the past decade or so in Western Europe and the developed Anglophone world has been interpreted as offering new codes for living in an uncertain, post-traditional social landscape (Lewis 2008). As Giddens argues (1991, 5), as “reflexively organised life-planning . . . becomes a central feature of the structuring of self-identity,” people increasingly turn to abstract, rationalized systems of expertise for guidance, much of which is provided today through the consumer marketplace (Lury 1996; Rose 1996; Petersen 1997).

Relatedly, Foucauldian-influenced scholarship on governmentality, particularly Nikolas Rose’s work (1989), has proposed that the emergence of the lifestyle consumer is linked to new technologies of governing the self in late-modern Western societies. Rose contends that the rise of neoliberal governments in many nations in the 1980s (in particular in the United Kingdom and United States) has seen the figure of the self-governing citizen—an individual who is constructed as enterprising and self-directed—become a cultural dominant. On television, so the argument goes, such trends are reflected in the personal, health, and relationship advice offered on moralistic lifestyle-reality shows like the weight-loss show *The Biggest Loser*. Here, lifestyle gurus fill the gap left by the neoliberal state as it passes responsibility for once public concerns like obesity onto self-managing consumer citizens (Lewis 2008; Lewis 2011a; Ouellette and Hay 2008).

The proliferation of lifestyle programming in Western Europe, the United States, and Australasia can thus be seen as the product of a very particular historical-ideological moment. But to what extent does the emergence of lifestyle media in South and East Asia reflect similar sociopolitical developments? While we argue that lifestyle media in these contexts undoubtedly do speak to certain transnational trends associated with the consolidation of consumer culture and individualizing identities, as outlined above, we are also convinced that lifestyle media in China, Taiwan, and India need to be understood in the context of specific sociopolitical and cultural circumstances marked by distinct and variegated modernities. To develop that line of thought, in the following section, we offer a brief summary of the multiple modernities paradigm, followed by a discussion of the reasons behind our choice to focus on India, China, and Taiwan. We then offer introductory discussions of the distinctive modernizing processes that have shaped the public and media cultures

of these three countries over recent decades. The final section of this chapter explains how we undertook our research on lifestyle television in these sites.

### **The Modernities Paradigm**

While for Western viewers, competitive dating formats from China, such as *If You Are the One*, or Indian wedding makeover shows may, on the surface, appear to bear many familiar markers of competitive individualism and consumerism, a key argument in this book is that such shows also involve complex negotiations of social, political, economic, and cultural structures that are embedded in the specific, geolocated histories of modernity in their countries of production. A major limitation of the “post-traditional” arguments forwarded by social theorists like Giddens, discussed above, is that they assume a globally homogeneous experience of modernity. Sociological definitions of modernity in the Euro-American scholarship conventionally depict it as a fixed constellation of institutional developments, from the industrialization of production and the rise of capitalist market economies and wage labor to the emergence of bureaucratically administered states, democratization, the rule of law, and the emergence of mass media (Wittrock 2000; Gaonkar 2001). Oft-cited modern cultural transformations include secularization and the rise of scientific thinking, the doctrine of progress and self-improvement, the imagination of the nation as a community, and the detraditionalization of gender roles (Lefebvre [1971] 2002; Berman 1982; Anderson 1983; Bauman 2000; Eisenstadt 2000; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Schmidt 2006).

While aspects of these processes are indeed undoubtedly shared—albeit unevenly, differentially, and unpredictably—across many societies in the world today, numerous critics agree that classic modernization theory is intrinsically limited by its tendency to posit Euro-American historical processes as normative. For example, arguing for “a non-Eurocentric interpretation of the history of the world-system,” Enrique Dussel (2002, 224) contends that a narrow two-hundred-year focus on European modernity effaces the role of early modern formations elsewhere, such as China and India, in shaping modern processes. This observation foregrounds the complex, long-standing worlds of these civilizations not simply as varieties of a singular modernity but as *alternative* articulations of cultural modernization. Such arguments suggest the need to conceptualize modernities in the plural, despite the recent hegemony of Euro-American modernity (J. Abu-Lughod 1989; Ong and Nonini 1997; L. Lee 1999; Rofel 1999; Eisenstadt 2000; Wittrock 2000; S. Shih 2001; Knauf 2002; Chakrabarty 2007; Kraidy 2008; Shome 2012).

This recognition of the plural and variegated nature of modernities provides a key conceptual framework for our book. Indeed, we are primarily interested in engaging with the various modalities of Asian lifestyle programming discussed in this book as entry points into understanding the complexity of Asian modernities. As we illustrate in the chapters that follow, the local, national, and regional particularities of lifestyle advice television across the range of Asian contexts that we examine reinforce our conviction that people and institutions engage, produce, and mediate modern ways of thinking and being in geoculturally specific ways. Such engagements are shaped both by nationally specific state, economic, and political drives and by more recent global-scale processes (Larkin 1997; Liechty 2003; Kang 2004; Keane 2004a; L. Abu-Lughod 2008; Gerow 2010; Sundaram 2010; Wen 2013). However, in Asian media contexts the rise of discourses of self-improvement, individualized identity, and reflexive selfhood often mark the parallel (and at times distinctly divergent) evolution of these late modern concepts rather than a simple diffusion from, or convergence toward, any putative Western center (Beck and Grande 2010; Martin and Lewis 2016).

Taking seriously the plural and variegated character of cultural modernities becomes particularly urgent when dealing with the complex cultural and political economies of Asian media. East Asia is widely recognized as a semiautonomous media region whose transborder flows of TV dramas, variety shows, manga, anime, pop music, and commercial cinema knit together a specific “East Asian cultural imagination” of modernity (Iwabuchi 2002, 2004; Keane, Fung, and Moran 2007; Chua 2012). The wide transnational reach of Bollywood cinema, music, celebrity culture, and aesthetics provides another obvious challenge to Eurocentric diffusionist models (Athique 2010). In this context, it is clearly not tenable to assume that, following the partial erosion of national broadcast television and the increase in transnational televisual flows of various kinds, television—conceived as a singular, global force—must necessarily be advancing the worldwide spread of Western-style cultures and identities. Instead, adopting a multiple modernities paradigm cues us to pay detailed attention to how television is actually produced and consumed in specific contexts, and to remain alert to variations from Euro-American models in the visions of modern selfhood and citizenship that television projects.

Our use of the term *telemmodernities* for this book’s title puns on the two associations of the *tele-* prefix: *tele* as in television, and *tele* from the Greek *τῆλε*, meaning “at a distance.” On the one hand, this latter sense of *telemmodernities* relates to our intention to continue the work of provincializing Anglophone television studies, and to demonstrate the importance of centering formations



of televisual modernity located at a geocultural distance from Western Europe, North America, and Australasia (Murphy and Kraidy 2003; Chakrabarty 2007). On the other hand, the telemodernities concept also implies that internal to modernity itself is a certain sense of subjective distance: modernity as an ideal to which one aspires rather than a state that is straightforwardly embodied. Given lifestyle television's repeated narratives of personal transformation, self-empowerment, and nimble adaptation to changing social and economic conditions, the aspirational character of modern formations of identity is clearly central to many examples of the genre being produced today—to some extent regardless of their countries of origin (Weber 2009). However, the concrete manifestations of these modern dreams in particular media contexts—dreams of ideal selfhood, good taste, appropriate consumption, optimally functioning relationships, proper gender—are very location-specific.

Eric Ma, among others, has observed the distinctive sharpness of cultural modernity as an aspirational ideal in developing countries in particular (Ma 2012; see also Knauf 2002; Robbins 2002; Karlström 2004; Mazzarella 2012). Ma's example is of Hong Kong as an embodiment of the dream of modernization for audiences of Hong Kong media in southern China's cities in the 1970s and 1980s. The locational specificity of people's modern dreams is undeniable, and is indeed often connected to a sense of their homeland's relative positioning in a global hierarchy of economic development. This is what Bruce M. Knauf refers to as “the force of the modern as an ideology of aspiration and differential power” (2002, 33); Pertierra and Turner concur, noting the immense force generated by the desire for modernity as channeled through television but also emphasizing that such a desire “works differently depending on where you are” (2013, 112). We take the locational specificity of people's modern aspirations as axiomatic: it is these specificities that we explore in the chapters that follow.

### **South and East Asian Modernities: China, Taiwan, and India**

In the following sections, we offer a brief snapshot of the recent histories of modernity in China, Taiwan, and India, the three sites chosen for this study. In particular, we outline the distinctive social, cultural, and economic backgrounds for the emergence of middle-class formations in these countries as a broad context for understanding their lifestyle television cultures. Given lifestyle television's recurrent preoccupations with consumption, middle-class identity, people's emotional and economic survival in times of rapid social change, and

the individualization of social life and civic responsibility, this outline of the basic conditions attending Chinese, Taiwanese, and Indian modernities provides crucial context for the detailed analyses that follow in the book's chapters.

Our relatively narrow range of focus sites is obviously not intended to present a comprehensive—or indeed even a representative—picture of lifestyle television across Asia as a whole. Instead, we have chosen our sites based on the principle of including the region's two largest media markets and the nations that are currently experiencing the fastest growing middle classes and consumer cultures (China and India). Taiwan is included as a representative of the earlier tiger economy nations that experienced industrialization, urbanization, and economic growth several decades prior, whose economies have experienced slowing growth in more recent years (Chua 2016). In chapter 8, we also draw upon audience research conducted in another tiger economy nation—Singapore—as a way of exploring the wider transnational reach of Taiwanese media culture in Sinophone Asia.

In addition to its role as a representative of the group of longer-established (post)industrial economies and national middle classes in the Asian region, there are also two more reasons behind our decision to include Taiwan in our study. First, disproportionately to its relatively small size, Taiwan remains a major player in transnational Chinese-language media circuits in East Asia and worldwide, especially through its production of Mandarin pop music and television (Chua 2012). While China remains a net importer of popular media by a wide margin (Chua 2012), Taiwanese and Hong Kong commercial media, known colloquially as *Gang-Tai* (Hong Kong-and-Taiwan) media, are widely influential throughout the transnational Sinophone world as vectors of what Eric Ma has called “satellite” modernity; that is, hybrid imaginaries of modernity that are Western-inflected and aspirational but also regionally specific (Ma 2012, 11–31; see also Kraidy 2007). Second and relatedly, as we will see, Taiwan television culture has a strong influence on television culture in China in particular, through its export of commercial entertainment genres, the cross-strait outflow of TV talents, and the direct consumption of Taiwan-produced content by Chinese audiences, today largely via online media piracy. In this sense, our focus on Taiwan television genres and trends offers enriching information on developments also affecting television in mainland China.

## Chinese Modernity: The Tensions and Contradictions of Postsocialist Culture

China is often held up by multiple modernities theorists as the ultimate exemplar of an alternative, non-European modernity: until the eighteenth century, Europeans and neighboring Asian powers alike recognized China as a major economic, political, and cultural power (Dussel 2002). Since the turn of the twentieth century and the relative economic, military, and cultural hegemony of European formations of modernity, China's leaders and elites have dreamed of building a strong and modern China and restoring its former glory (Schwarcz 1986). As a direct response to imperial subjugation by the West, this modernization dream was fueled by nationalism. When the Chinese Communist Party took power in 1949, it promoted a vision of a modernized and unified nation, consisting of the Han majority and fifty-five other "ethnic minorities," all of which were loyal to the notion of China as a sovereign entity (C. Shih 2003). The standardization of the national language (Putonghua) and the simplification of the classic Chinese script during this era were crucial dimensions of achieving national unity and modernization. In the decades of socialism, with its collectivist farming, Soviet-style central planning, and isolation from the world economy, Chinese society was egalitarian but poor and underdeveloped (Goodman 2013). Subjecting its population to one political movement after another, China emerged in the mid-1970s with the lowest per capita income in the world, and with living standards that had remained stagnant for several decades (Naughton 2006).

The three decades of economic reforms that started in the late 1970s brought about an effective end to the socialist vision of modernity. Adopting developmental strategies and embracing the logic of market liberalization, from 1979 China opened itself to the world, welcomed foreign investment, set up special economic zones, and in 2001 joined the World Trade Organization (WTO). Between 1978 and 2004, China's GDP grew at an average rate of 9.4 percent per annum, with its per capita GDP growing at 8 percent (Shirk 2007). The result is nothing short of staggering. China is now the world's second-largest economy, with a national GDP of over US\$9 trillion in 2013, and a per capita GDP (PPP) of \$10,011 (International Monetary Fund 2013). It has had the highest average annual growth rate in the world over the past two decades, and is the world's largest energy consumer. China also boasts of being the world's largest exporter, second-largest importer, third-largest trader in services, and second-largest trading nation (Shambaugh 2013, 156).

Rapid economic growth has considerably reduced overall poverty. A World Bank statistic indicates that in 1990, China still had 360 million people living

below the poverty line, but in 2011, only 170 million people lived on less than \$1.25 per day (Vairon 2013). At the same time, however, the gap between the rich and poor has widened. In fact, three decades of economic reforms have transformed China from one of the most equal societies in Asia and the world to one of the most unequal ones (C. Lee and Selden 2007). With a third of the nation's wealth held by 1 percent of its citizens, it is widely felt in China that economic inequality could be a serious trigger for social instability (Kaiman 2014).<sup>2</sup>

Both the spectacular economic achievement and the deepening of inequality are results of China having pursued a neoliberal-style economic development trajectory. However, this is quite distinct from American-style economic and political neoliberalism. On the one hand, anthropologists and observers of China's cultural industries have produced ample evidence pointing to myriad neoliberal aspects of governance and subject formation (Rofel 2007; Yan 2008; Zhang and Ong 2008, Zhao 2008b, Hoffman 2010; Hong 2010; Ren 2010, 2013; Sun 2014). But on the other hand, China attributes its status as the main engine of global economic growth to the "China Model," which represents a unique alternative to the Washington Consensus approach to politics and economics (Callahan 2013, 66). Indeed, China remains a country where the party-state holds a considerable portion of the country's fixed assets, and where liberal institutions, such as the rule of law, transparent markets, and democracy, are largely missing. As Ching Kwan Lee observes, engaging critically with Harvey's (2005) proposal that China offers an example of neoliberalism with "Chinese characteristics," China has never had the prehistory of embedded economic liberalism from which neoliberalism purportedly grows out (2014, 245).

Nevertheless, the state-led project of instituting a market economy has fundamentally reshaped social and cultural life in China since the end of the 1970s. A fundamental difference between socialist and capitalist visions of modernity lies in their legitimation of social identities. Whereas workers, peasants, and soldiers embodied the most legitimate social groups in China's socialist discourses under Maoism, in the reforms era, they have been replaced by entrepreneurs, professionals, and managers (Chen and Goodman 2013a, 1). In China's cities, the middle classes are clearly expanding. The East Asian Middle Class Project (EAMC), a transnational collaborative research project led by Hsin-huang Michael Hsiao, estimated that by 2006—leaving aside the vast, relatively impoverished rural hinterland—the new middle class (professionals, managers, and government officials) accounted for 18.8 percent of the population, the old middle class (employers and owner-operators with small staffs, and the self-employed) 19.6 percent, and the marginal middle class (low white-collar workers or routine

workers) 25.4 percent (Li 2014). Although the definition and size of the middle class remain contested, the reappearance of such a class in the last decades of the twentieth century was seen as politically, socially, and economically useful to the party-state. Considered as a stabilizing force, the middle class is seen as more likely than the underclass to support the authoritarian regime, thus hindering political radicalization; it functions as a buffer between the upper class and the underclass, thus ensuring social stability; and it constitutes the most active consumer group, thus stimulating economic growth (Li 2013). It is precisely for this reason that the development of a middle class is considered as a “state project of managing risks in Chinese society” (Ren 2013, 9).

Due to its perceived importance, it is not surprising that sociological work inside mainland China has paid significant attention to the middle class. In fact, the sociological categorization of the middle class in much of the state-funded research (for example, from the China Academy of Social Sciences) has been crucial in turning China’s middle class into a normative category (Greenhalgh 2005). Such processes of legitimation cannot be completed without also normalizing certain values and lifestyles as proper to the middle class in the realm of consumption and everyday practices. Correspondingly, the reforms era has seen the socialist logic of class identity as the privileged measure of personhood (peasant, worker, or soldier good; bourgeois bad) effectively inverted by a new discourse of “human quality” (*suzhi*) that valorizes education, cultivation, competition, and broadly middle-class cultural norms (Bakken 2000; Kipnis 2006). Børge Bakken (2000) observes that the now-pervasive discourse of *suzhi* marks the establishment of a new suite of “exemplary norms” to which individuals are held accountable, as the state attempts to impose social order through population management at both micro- and macroscales during the chaotic process of accelerating modernization. Anthropological work has shown that in contrast to the putatively *suzhi*-deficit rural populace, middle-class, urban, educated professionals are considered “sites of high levels of *suzhi*” (Hoffman 2010, 105; see also Anagnost 2004; Jacka 2006; Yan 2008; Sun 2009). An understanding of how *suzhi* discourse makes reforms-era China an “exemplary society,” by idealizing a type of personhood associated with urban modernity (Fong 2007, 86), has obvious resonance in our investigation of the pedagogies of life advice television in the following chapters.

## **Taiwanese Modernity: Neoliberal Transition in a Postindustrial Tiger Economy**

The Republic of China that today occupies Taiwan was originally founded in 1911 on the Chinese mainland. It moved to exile on Taiwan with the Kuo-mintang (KMT, or Chinese Nationalist Party) in the late 1940s, when the KMT army and leadership fled to the island following their defeat by Mao Zedong's Communist forces in the Chinese civil war. Over the Cold War decades that followed, Taiwan's totalitarian regime, headed by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, was supported politically, militarily, and economically by the United States as part of its strategy of creating a right-wing, capitalist bulwark against the spread of Communism in the Pacific. In significant part, it was this U.S. economic support and military protection that enabled Taiwan to number among the Asian tiger economies—along with Singapore, South Korea, and Hong Kong—that underwent rapid economic growth through industrialization in this postwar period. In Taiwan's case, these developments took place within a decentralized industrial structure based on small- and medium-sized family-based enterprises (SMEs), overseen by the KMT developmental state (A. Lee 2004). Between the late 1940s and the mid-1980s, culture, media, and politics in Taiwan were strictly controlled by the state, based on the political principle of anti-Communism and the cultural principle of ensuring the dominance of the Mandarin-speaking northern Chinese culture of the KMT regime, in opposition to both the Japanese language and culture of the island's former colonizers (1895–1945) and the southern Chinese Minnan and Hakka languages and cultures of the majority of the island's inhabitants.

Since the mid-1980s, the old statist model has shifted toward what some characterize as a neoliberal transition (Tsai 2001), with economic liberalization, the privatization of public-sector enterprises, and the introduction of market-oriented labor reforms. From the mid-1990s, a new wave of economic restructuring saw Taiwan's economy shift away from industrial manufacturing—which migrated across the strait to mainland China—and toward the service sector, which today constitutes the center of gravity of Taiwan's economic structure (DGBAS 2010, 16). At the same time, economic growth slowed, due in large part to the massive capital outflows to China (Tsai, Fan, Hsiao, and Wang 2014, 33). In 2012, GDP growth sat at just 1.32 percent (Executive Yuan 2013). Transforming from an agrarian to postindustrial society in about four decades, Taiwan, like Korea, has been aptly described as an example of compressed modernity (Chang and Song 2010).

Politically, socially, and culturally, Taiwan saw immense transformations in the late twentieth century, following the revocation of martial law by Chiang

Kai-shek's more liberal son, Chiang Ching-kuo, in 1987. The new middle classes that emerged from the economic growth of the preceding decades tended to favor democratization; this helped fuel the far-reaching political changes of the post-martial law period (Hsiao 2014). These include the rise of a multiparty democracy with direct presidential election, which resulted in the first non-KMT president, Chen Shui-bian of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), being elected in 2000. In this same period, the political censorship of media was lifted and state regulation of culture virtually abandoned. A vibrant civil society emerged, along with a wide range of social movements from trade unionism to environmentalism to advocacy for the rights of the island's indigenous peoples, an antinuclear movement, feminism(s), and queer activism. Minnan and Hakka languages and cultures emerged strongly in revivalist movements after the long decades of suppression by the old KMT regime; these movements have had significant, lasting impacts on televisual and other media, especially in their new linguistic pluralism. The same period witnessed Taiwan's intensifying interlinkage into transnational cultural, commodity, labor, and media circuits, and the rapid expansion and diversification of its media cultures following commercialization and deregulation in the early 1990s (see chapter 1).

Notwithstanding what some see as evidence of global neoliberal trends in Taiwan's government's economic strategies in recent decades, it is important to note that, as with China, many commentators argue for the specificity of Taiwan's engagement with economic neoliberalism. It is seen as markedly different from neoliberalism as manifested in Euro-American contexts due to the persistent structural legacies of the developmental state: like several other comparable examples in the Asian region, it is argued, Taiwan's economy might therefore be better described as postdevelopmental or neodevelopmental (Kong 2005; Chen and Li 2012; Wang 2012). In the cultural sphere, however (again, as is the case in China), it is undeniable that ideologies broadly consonant with neoliberalism—self-responsibilization, a privatized conceptualization of the social, the evaluation of human value in commodity terms, and so on—have become increasingly influential, as our analyses in the following chapters explore (Chen and Chien 2009; Pazderic 2013; Thomas and Yang 2013; Yang 2016).

As a result of the economic and social histories sketched out above, today, Taiwanese society is dominated by its middle classes. In 2013, Taiwan's GDP sat at US\$494.85 billion, with a per capita GDP (PPP) of \$40,392 (International Monetary Fund 2013). In postindustrial Taiwan, social inequality is markedly lower than across the strait in developing China: in 2011 its GINI coefficient

sat at 0.34, compared to China's 0.74 (CIA 2013; Kaiman 2014). In 2006 over 70 percent of Taiwan's working population fell within the middle classes. These comprised 27 percent in the new middle class (professionals, managers, and government officials), 20 percent in the old middle class (small employers, small owner-operators, and the self-employed), and 23.1 percent in the marginal middle class (low white-collar workers or routine workers) (Li 2013; Tsai, Fan, Hsiao, and Wang 2014). Taiwan's expansive and well-established middle classes of today have consolidated as a result of upward class mobility enabled by business opportunities flowing from Taiwan's state-led industrialization during the 1960s to 1990s, coupled with rising levels of education over this period (Hsiao 2010, 254). As the analyses in the chapters that follow demonstrate, media produced in Taiwan and for Taiwanese audiences is, unsurprisingly, dominated by broadly middle-class interests.

### **Indian Modernity: From Postcoloniality to the Contested Middle Class**

The third country of focus in this book is India, a nation whose contemporary media industries and institutions have emerged against the backdrop of a complex and extended engagement with globalization and vernacular modernities. Like China, India has played an important role in the *longue durée* of world history (Dussel 2002). With its key position in the spice trade, one of the main trades in the early world economy, it has also long been the site of European colonization. The expansion of British power in much of India in the early nineteenth century saw it transition from military-commercial domination (under the rule of the East India company) to a system of colonial governance (Guha 1997), with the British carving out the dominion into a manageable territory with maps, trains, and the introduction of demographic surveys (Prakash 1999). Colonial governance saw the British educating a class of indigenous elites as civil servants to mediate colonial rule (Chatterjee 1993), though this elite also sought to reclaim ancient Indic knowledge in order to articulate new modernities of their own (Prakash 1999). These largely cultural endeavors at salvaging Indian self-identity preceded the rise of a more radical generation of politicized leaders, unleashing the mass movements that would lead to India's independence in 1947 (Chatterjee 1986).

The first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, driven by the pragmatics of nation-building, saw the state as the engine of change that would haul the nation into industrial modernity (Corbridge and Harriss 2013). Propelled by Nehru's famous maxim, "dams [are] the temples of modern India," the



postindependence decade saw the creation of large public-sector companies, heavy industries, and a range of major public works. The developmental state, however, was fraught with difficulties, arguably due in part to its failure to mobilize big business toward developmental goals along the lines of state-led industrialization in East Asia, such as the rapid industrialization and economic success of South Korea (Chibber 2003). As a result, the economy languished from the 1950s to the 1980s at the infamous 3.5 percent “Hindu rate of growth.”

In 1980 Prime Minister Indira Gandhi launched pro-business reforms that were subsequently aggressively expanded by her successor Rajiv Gandhi, who promoted and embraced the growing strength of domestic capitalists (Kohli 2006). A balance of payments crisis in 1991 drove India to deregulatory, pro-free market reforms in the changed global context of a disintegrating Soviet Union and the imminent arrival of the WTO (Corbridge and Harriss 2013). With the dismantling of the planned economy, market liberalization saw growth rates pick up to 6 percent in the 1990s and 8 percent in the 2000s, though rates have dropped to around 5 percent in recent years.

The benefits of economic liberalization have been bitterly debated, with a broad consensus now emerging that most of the post-1991 growth is owed to the 1980s reforms (Rodrik and Subramanian 2004), which achieved poverty reduction and job creation unequalled in the post-1991 period (Chandrashekhar and Ghosh 2002). Contrary to the pattern observed in other late-industrializing countries, the post-1991 period only saw minor expansion in manufacturing in the large-scale skill-intensive industries (Kotwal, Bharat, and Wilima 2011). On the other hand, the service sector grew exponentially, with the information technology (IT) boom creating business services within the domestic economy and outsourcing jobs from developed nations on the back of India's cheap, educated labor pool (Kotwal, Bharat, and Wilima 2011). India's contemporary rhetoric of integration into global markets has to be seen within this landscape of lopsided growth that has privileged skilled labor and largely reinforced existing class disparities.

As in China, this pairing of economic growth with a deepening of social inequality is often seen as the result of the pursuit of neoliberal policies. Again, though, there has been much debate as to whether this fully accounts for the complexity and specificity of what has taken place in the Indian context. For example, Akhil Gupta and Aradhana Sharma (2006) discuss the limitations of applying the Foucauldian concept of neoliberal governmentality in a post-colonial state where the coexistence of poverty and a neoliberalized economy has seen the rise of both state welfare and postwelfare “empowerment”

programs aimed at the rural poor. Meanwhile, Patrick Neveling (2014) has challenged conceptions of the Nehruvian state as the radical other of reformist post-1991 India, showing that it already included significant and powerful institutional arrangements that might be labeled neoliberal. Similarly, there is a wide range of opinion on the degree to which neoliberalism as an everyday cultural logic is shaping people's lives in India today. Nandini Gooptu introduces her edited collection, *Enterprise Culture in Neoliberal India*, by noting its pervasiveness in current public discourse: "In India . . . multiple agents and institutions (state and non-state) [seek] to create heightened aspirations and expectations, promoting the ideology of self-making, providing self-help and self-development tools, [and] purveying the evidence of success of self-propelled individuals as [a] motivational instrument" (2013, 8–9).

At the same time, Steve Derné's longitudinal research from the 1980s to the 2000s on young male film viewers in a midsize town in Northern India suggests that the impact and experience of global ideologies of neoliberalism and individualism are highly stratified (Derné 2008). He argues that while "cultural globalization" has seen the Indian elite embrace forms of transitional cosmopolitanism and entrepreneurialism, such late modern cultural transformations have not dramatically impacted what he calls the locally oriented "ordinary middle class"; that is, non-English-speaking professionals, students, and successfully self-employed people, as well as drivers and clerks, who arguably form the bulk of the Indian solidly middle and lower middle class.

Derné's observations regarding the need to recognize the very different experiences and lifestyles of cosmopolitan upper-middle-class urbanites versus more ordinary middle-class Indians points to the complexity of the term *middle class* in the Indian context, with class hierarchies continuing to be shaped by residual caste and colonial influences (Deshpande 2004). Estimated to be anywhere between seventy and four hundred million by differing benchmarks, using the yardstick of a per capita daily income of above US\$8–40, the middle class has grown from 5.7 percent of the population in 2001 to 12.8 percent in 2010 (153 million) (Shukla 2010). In India, extremely uneven economic development has seen the poverty rate reduce much more slowly compared with China. The incidence of people subsisting on \$1.25 a day declined from 55 percent in 1990 to around 40 percent in 2005, with this impoverished section of the population still being a long way from reaching anything near middle-class status (Chen and Ravallion 2004). Meanwhile, the middle classes themselves experience significant precarity. As Jan Nijman shows, data on the distribution of household incomes in Mumbai demonstrate that while the

upper-middle-class incomes have grown relative to the total, lower-middle-class incomes have shrunk, while much of the growth in consumption in the urban middle classes is credit based (Nijman 2006).

Given this context, Leela Fernandes argues that the rise of an entrepreneurial, cosmopolitan middle class in India is perhaps best understood in discursive rather than purely economic terms, as the production of a distinctive social and political identity that represents and lays claims to the benefits of neoliberalization (Fernandes 2006). Post 1991, the urban middle classes and their associated consumer goods and increasingly globally connected lifestyles have become the symbol of a new liberalizing India, replacing state-led modernization, rural development, and uplifting images of rural workers as symbols of national pride and progress (Mazzarella 2003; Fernandes 2006; Brosius 2010). In contemporary India, then—as in China and Taiwan—the increasing naturalization of representations of consumerist, urban, middle-class lifestyles on television, while not necessarily widely matched by people's material experiences, may contribute significantly to shaping the social horizons and aspirations of many ordinary people. It is this possibility that we investigate in depth in the chapters that follow.

## **Researching Lifestyle Television:**

### **Contexts of Production and Consumption**

The project that this book came out of involved a three-pronged approach to studying lifestyle television, designed to enable us to compare, contrast, and trace possible links and flows between our sites across the areas of television content, production, and reception. We employ the term *lifestyle television* to embrace a range of programs airing on both daytime and evening television. This includes everything from magazine and variety shows incorporating life advice segments, to cooking, health, home renovation, and personal makeover programs. As we will see, adopting this generic term is not without its difficulties, in relation both to different televisual conventions and to the varied meanings of lifestyle across these sites. However, in this book we adopt the term as a starting point for comparison and critical reflection.

The first part of our three-pronged approach was a series of industry studies. Between 2008 and 2011, we conducted a total of forty-four in-depth, semi-structured interviews with television professionals (14 in China; 18 in India; 9 in Taiwan; 3 in Singapore). We conducted these interviews in Shanghai, Bengbu (in Anhui province in mideastern China), Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Taipei, and Singapore, targeting a mixture of programming heads with their

big-picture take on programming strategies, and on-the-ground producers and other professional staff, across a range of public, commercial, and cable channels as well as independent production houses. These industry studies aimed to flesh out the regional industry history of lifestyle programming, to access information about the production context of lifestyle TV, and to map the role played by television producers as cultural intermediaries who shape the values promoted by lifestyle shows. In India and China, it was impossible to capture a comprehensive picture of *all* lifestyle content produced and consumed across national, regional, and municipal levels. We therefore chose to focus our industry studies on one major metropolis and media center in each country (Shanghai and Mumbai), plus one smaller regional city (Bengbu in China and the southern city of Bangalore in India). This allowed us to capture some sense of the diversity of television cultures in these massive media markets and also, importantly, to offer a partial corrective to the general neglect of nonmetropolitan sites in extant English-language studies of television in these countries. Insights gleaned from these industry interviews into the production contexts of the lifestyle advice shows that we analyze in our chapters are woven into our discussions throughout the book, especially chapter 1.

Our second research method involved textual studies of a range of free-to-air, cable, and satellite lifestyle programs, including both daytime and primetime programming, from each of our main sites. Between 2009 and 2014, we purchased and recorded hundreds of hours of programming across a wide variety of genres, the critical contextual analysis of which forms a central component of the chapters that follow. Given the diffusion of lifestyle advice-related content across a wide range of genres in the countries on which we focus, and the relative lack of a clearly defined lifestyle genre in some of them, we had to cast a wide net in our recording strategy. Our principle was to sample any nonfictional, non-news programming that incorporated direct advice to the viewer on the proper execution of everyday life activities. Using a mix of satellite and online feeds, DVD purchases, and recordings made with the help of our in-country research assistants, we archived everything from magazine-format daytime television on cooking and housekeeping; to prime-time comic variety shows from Taiwan with life advice sections embedded among the games, quizzes, and other hijinks; to the far straighter moral pedagogies of CCTV's psychological advice and personal makeover formats in China; and to morning yoga shows in India hosted by religious gurus. We then drew on this massive archive to refine our sense of the dominant genres and patterns in each country, and selected examples for analysis based on both the centrality of particular genres and themes (for example, *yangsheng* [health]

shows in China, variety formats in Taiwan, and religious lifestyle television in India), and the popularity of specific programs, in both urban and rural sites. Our key question regarding our selected examples is how the programs make imaginable particular configurations of identity and lifestyle.

The third component of our method consisted of audience studies. Between 2011 and 2013, we conducted in-depth, semistructured interviews with viewers of lifestyle advice programming in Shanghai (32 viewers), Bengbu (8 viewers), Mumbai (18 household interviews with 36 viewers), Tovinkere, southern India (16 household interviews with 34 viewers), Bangalore (2 viewers), Taipei (30 viewers), and Singapore (16 viewers).<sup>3</sup> Our strategies with the China and India audience studies mirrored those adopted in the industry and content studies, focusing again on both metropolitan and regional sites. In the audience interviews, we sought to understand how different viewers interpret and subjectively relate to the lifestyle programming that they habitually consume; how the cultural, linguistic, gendered, and socioeconomic specificity of viewers' existing social identities affects their interpretation of the programs; and whether, and if so how, the consumption of lifestyle programs relates to viewers' elaboration of social identities and lifestyle practices in each location. The audience studies provide some of the richest, most complex data generated by this project. Viewer interactions with the programs in question constitute the key moment in which lifestyle television as media form(s) intersect directly with identity, subjectivity, and everyday practices; since that intersection between media and identity is the ultimate focus of our project, discussion of the audience studies constitutes a central focus in several of the chapters that follow.

As is implicit in the discussion above, the multisite research project on which this book is based is centrally structured by a transnational orientation. We have approached television not (only) as a series of national industries and apparatuses but also as an inherently transnational form that is marked by flows of content, talent, genres, and ideas across the borders of nation-states. The chapters that follow show how cross-border flows are often of defining significance within local manifestations of lifestyle TV (Chinese copies of American lifestyle makeover formats like *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*; the outflow of Taiwanese TV talents to China and concomitant cross-strait spread of Taiwanese TV genres and styles; Indian versions of global formats such as the *MasterChef* franchise and *The Biggest Loser*). Beyond the *content* of our research, though, our research *method* has also been marked—and challenged—by the transnationality of its operations. Funded by the Australian Research Council, our project had its institutional location in Australia, with the central

investigators employed in Australian universities, from where we had to find ways of researching television overseas. And notwithstanding the intensification of its movements beyond national borders via satellite, international cable, and online delivery (Chadha and Kavoori 2012), we were quickly reminded that television remains a medium whose flows are strongly channeled and directed by geospatial technologies and geographically delimited markets.

The project faced major technical challenges in capturing domestic TV content from a distance. For instance, to capture Chinese content, we ultimately installed a 2.3-meter-wide pole-mounted mesh satellite dish on top of a building at the University of Melbourne. Tuned to the seven relevant locally accessible satellites and routed through a baroque techno-legal configuration involving meters of in-wall cabling, a set-top box, a television, a hard-drive recorder, a personal computer (PC), and a public liability insurance purchase lest the dish detach itself from the six-story roof and descend onto students below, the dish allowed us to record a high-quality feed from *some* channels in mainland China, and a couple in Taiwan (though during the life of the project, more and more of the Chinese programs became available via video archives on channel websites). At the time of our research, however, local Bengbu television was utterly inaccessible in Australia, so we relied on our in-country research assistants to make DVD recordings, which they then mailed to us. For India, we accessed lifestyle programming via a domestic satellite dish and through a commercial subscription service delivered via Internet, and also sourced key shows via the now extensive range of catch-up television offered online by commercial channels in India, as well as via recordings provided by in-country research assistants. For Taiwan, we followed the lead of Melbourne's diasporic Taiwanese community and used an informal, gray, Internet-based distribution system (Lobato 2012, 95–109), purchasing an annual subscription to a service that delivered a pixelated feed of Taiwanese domestic television (more than 150 channels) live to PC, via an unlocking program provided on a USB stick. Such complex exigencies of simply getting access to overseas television continually brought home to us the still-located nature of TV. We suspect that this very practical issue may be one reason why there have been so few in-depth multisited studies of television to date.

### Structure of the Book

While the chapters in this book can be read as stand-alone essays, we have structured the book to be ideally engaged as a whole, with each chapter connecting to, building on, and responding to conceptual frames and questions

introduced earlier. This introduction and chapter 1 introduce the key conceptual, theoretical, and empirical contexts underpinning the book. Following this introductory chapter, chapter 1 discusses the political economy of lifestyle programming in China, India, and Taiwan. Combining policy analysis with institutional and historical snapshots, interviews with industry staffers, and mapping of television schedules and ratings, we outline the political, economic, and cultural forces that have shaped the rise of lifestyle-oriented TV programming in our three focus sites.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 pivot around the question of imaginative geographies. Drawing from our interviews with viewers of lifestyle advice TV in China, India, and Taiwan, this section of the book focuses on how people's engagements with lifestyle television involve imagining place at a range of scales, from the link between regional localities and national metropolises to the relation between identification with a national homeland versus the alluring vision of limitless global mobility. Chapter 2 examines the complex, multiscalar nature of Chinese television through a discussion of metropolitan and regional lifestyle television industries, with a focus on two channels: Shanghai TV and Bengbu TV. Studies of Chinese television often betray an urban, technological, and class bias, ignoring formations of local media cultures below the scale of the province (Sun and Chio 2012). This chapter addresses this analytical and methodological gap in conceptualizing Chinese mediascapes, discussing a range of geographic imaginaries, and in the process exploring the links between lifestyle formats, structures of taste and perceived needs, and place.

Chapter 3 examines another vast televisual landscape, that of India. This chapter maps the shifting and varied constructions of place, space, and socio-temporalities that have formed Indian TV, noting that questions of scale in India are strongly shaped by social and cultural distinction, with media markets split along linguistic and regional lines (Bollywood versus Sandalwood, the Kannada-language film industry in southwest India, for instance) as well as religious, class, and caste lines. In discussing place and scale in the Indian context we draw upon Ash Amin's nonterritorial way of conceptualizing place, where place and spatiality are understood as increasingly virtual, such that "the proximate and the remote [can coexist] at the same geographical level" (Amin 2002, 389).

In chapter 4, we extend our analysis of lifestyle television's role in shaping imaginative geographies through a study of the American cable Travel and Living Channel—available in many countries across Asia—in Taiwan. Our interviews with Taiwanese viewers suggest that one of the most notable impacts of this channel is the way it works to shore up the global orientation of young, urban, middle-class internationalist subjects, consolidating their

consciousness of their own perceived potential for future mobility both outward, toward the global, and upward, toward upper-middle-class consumer lifestyles. In using TLC to think through new identities based on the capacity for social and geographic movement, we argue that these viewers are accumulating an immaterial form of movement capital; it is through shoring up the value of such movement capital that lifestyle programming on TLC Taiwan contributes to the transformation of identities.

Chapters 5 through 8 offer in-depth analyses of specific examples of life advice television across our three countries, providing insights into the ways in which transforming relationships between state- and market-led regulation of culture are played out in lifestyle TV's representations of identity, interpersonal relations, and everyday life practices. Chapter 5 examines the proliferation of life experts on Chinese and Indian TV, from transnationally recognizable figures such as makeover experts and celebrity chefs to more culturally distinctive forms of popular expertise. Discussing the rise of psychologized, individualized models of everyday expertise aimed at responsabilizing citizens, and the growing rationalization and informationalization of everyday life, the chapter examines how culturally inflected forms of expertise and expert practices speak to the specificity of engagements with emergent forms of sociality and first and second modernities in China and India.

This theme is developed further in chapter 6 on enchanted rather than modern-rational forms of expertise. Here, we turn to religious, spiritual, and supernatural life advice television in India and Taiwan to explore the distinctive counternarratives of modernity that emerge there from the confluence of religious, supernatural beliefs and late modern media cultures. While religious programming is banned by the state in China, in India and Taiwan, a variety of gods, sages, sacred texts, and rituals are presented to and interpreted for viewers to help them manage the challenges of escalating risk, transcendent meaning, and collective affiliation in times of rapid social change. This chapter considers what is historically and locally specific about the interpenetration of religious and supernatural belief systems and contemporary media cultures, as well as how spiritual elements shape both the genre(s) of lifestyle advice TV and the forms of identity it projects in these countries.

Chapter 7 moves into the territory of love and relationships. In recent years, TV audiences in both China and India have been exposed to a growing number of reality and lifestyle shows focused on dating, marriage, parenting, and love relationships. While, like spirituality, the affective and intangible space of love might seem to inhabit a realm beyond the logics of late modern struggles, we argue that the study of televisual treatments of love and marriage offers



a privileged perspective from which one can gain an understanding of the cultural process of modernity. Drawing on a range of examples, from game show–based dating formats to reality shows dealing with love and romance to more advice-oriented formats, we examine how these shows navigate the contradictions between apparent forms of gender empowerment and marketized aspirations toward social and cultural fluidity, versus the realities of powerful gendered social and economic inequities, and the continued cultural potency of familial and communitarian notions of duty.

Continuing the exploration of reflexive individualization and gender from chapter 7, chapter 8 surveys a range of women’s lifestyle advice shows from China and Taiwan, drawing on audience research on the reception of these shows across China, Taiwan, and also Singapore, in order to explore transforming models of feminine identity in the transnational Sinophone world. The Chinese example analyzed in this chapter foregrounds the normative definition—promulgated in this case by state media (CCTV)—of adult femininity as an identity focused on familial care work. In contrast, an alternative subcategory of women’s lifestyle television, originating in Taiwan, centers on an emergent and idealized feminine identity in Sinophone East Asia, the “young-mature lady” (*qingshounü*): urban, unmarried, white-collar women who are seen as individualistic in attitude, with a high level of education and a penchant for beauty and fashion consumption. However, based on our audience research, we show that the idealization of this emergent form of feminine identity does not reflect the self-perceived situation of Taiwanese viewers but rather provides imaginative resources for contesting the locally dominant cultural hegemony of patriarchal familism.

Finally, the conclusion summarizes some of the central themes of the book, addressing key questions raised by the case studies. How does the impact and evolution of lifestyle TV in these sites speak to changing relationships between popular media, audiences, and social, moral, and political engagement? What kinds of mediated civic spaces are emerging in postcolonial, postsocialist, and post–economic miracle Asian nation-states grappling with the potentials and challenges of commercial global media? Returning to our multiple modernities framework, this chapter asks how developments in these rapidly shifting and emerging media spaces—marked by very different speeds and experiences of modernity—might speak back to and transform conventional understandings of the mediated relations between social identities, politics, and citizenship.