



Over the past decade, numbers of television sets in China have soared. It is now estimated that there are over 400 million television households in the country.

This month has brought huge changes to the TV scene in China. Last week, China formalised laws which allow international media companies to form TV production joint ventures with Chinese media firms. The laws will take effect on 28 November.

Preliminary stages of this law have already meant that earlier this year the Viacom-Shanghai Media Group began transmitting MTV China. This was the first company to take advantage of the new media regulations.

At the same time, China is slowly moving towards digital TV. Although current figures remain low – 1.2 million digital TV users by the end of this year – the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) has set a goal of 30 million digital TV subscribers by the end of 2006. SARFT is also hoping to achieve full implementation of ground digital television in 2008, when Beijing holds the Olympic Games.

In order to promote digital TV, residents in Beijing are set to receive free digital set-up boxes from the local government.

Other changes underline that China's television is modernising. This month, for the first time, a



The logo for MTV China

new network television call-in show, entitled "For the Ladies" will be shown. The programme is innovative in that it is based on a platform that unifies television with broadband, fixed line and mobile communications. Viewers can leave messages or ask questions online, by phone and SMS, while experts respond through a digital camera.



"For the Ladies", a new interactive TV programme

Increasingly, viewers prefer original, Chinese programmes. In response to this demand, new networks have appeared, such as Rupert Murdoch's Mandarin-language *Xing Kong Wei Shi* (Starry Sky) channel, a subsidiary of his Asian Star Group. The channel airs popular programmes such as *Women in Control* and *TV Court*. The first reverses female-male roles and consists of a male beauty contest.

The second show offers re-enacted court cases in front of a judge who dispenses justice on family issues.

Such new programmes represent an enormous change in a TV context which, until recently, consisted mainly of cultural, economic and educational programming aired on official China Central Television.

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