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**CHINA'S POLITICAL REFORM AND MEDIA REFORM:  
CHANGES IN THE SHANGHAI TELEVISION STATION'S  
NEWS PROGRAMMING (1978-1988)**

**By**

**Junhao Hong**

**A Thesis  
submitted to the  
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research  
through the Department of  
Communication Studies in Partial Fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Degree  
of Master of Arts at the  
University of Windsor**

**Windsor, Ontario, Canada**

**1990**

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## ABSTRACT

China's TV news programming has three unique features: 1. it is the most tightly controlled medium; 2. it is an one-voice medium -- one billion people can only receive news program from the same one channel and no one has any other choice; and 3. it is also the most effective medium wielded by the regime of that country. These unique features, along with the nation's politics, system and ideology, therefore, have made the situation of China's TV news programming in the past thirty years quite complex.

However, China's economic and political reforms in the last decade have eventually and inevitably generated the country's media reform. Many changes, in terms of both content and format, have occurred in China's TV news programming, and they have brought a brand-new face to its television broadcasting, although a number of principal problems still remain.

As the only TV station in Shanghai and the second largest TV station in China, during the last decade, Shanghai has developed most quickly in China's television broadcasting. This thesis, through a case study of Shanghai Television's news programming, examines what have happened, what is going on and what will possibly occur in China's media reform, and seeks the relation between programming changes and social changes. While this thesis pays more attention to finding out the significance of those changes, it also discusses the remaining problems and suggests the future trends of China's media reform.

**DEDICATION**

**To my parents, wife and son**

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background and Purpose of This Study

China is a country with over 5000 years of written history and 1.1 billion people. "In area, it is the world's third largest country, ranked only after the USSR and Canada (which is only slightly larger); with the USA being slightly smaller.... It supports nearly one-quarter of the world's population" (Howkins 1982:1). Having experienced dozens of feudal dynasties and one century of semi-colonial and semi-feudal society, China became a socialist country in 1949. In the forty years since the establishment of a socialist government, although the country has entered the international scene, it is only in the last decade that China has become more and more noticeable in the world. The main reason for this change is the unprecedented economic and political reforms initiated in 1978.

So far, a decade has passed since China embarked on a course of reform that Deng Xiaoping, the most powerful person in China, called a "new revolution" (Barnett 1986:37). China is now in the midst of a historic transition. It has entered a new period of its history. "It is the fate of China today that all its actions, policies, and incidents, however small, are exposed to a world avid for information about the struggle of one of the oldest civilizations to modernize itself" (Howkins 1982:119).

China's reform was initiated in economic fields in the late 1970s, and in the

early 1980s it was expanded to political life. These reforms signal a new stage in China's long march toward modernization. Because of these reforms, many remarkable changes in China's economy, politics, ideology and society have occurred. These changes, however, are becoming more and more impressive in the world since they happened in such a huge country, a socialist country which is playing a more and more important role in international affairs. Likewise, changes in China's media practice have also been noticed by the world. Asa Briggs points out: "No comparative or international study of late twentieth-century communications policies can leave out China" (1982:xi). Some scholars predict: "When China changes, the world will change as well. Not only in terms of numbers, although they are in no way insignificant" ("China's Short March to Modernization" 1986:1). It is because China's problems in political legitimacy are not unique; similar problems have been occurring in other communist and noncommunist countries. China's changes may not only affect 1/5 of the world population, but may also provide the other socialist and Third World countries with a model. It is during the last decade that the most profound, far-reaching changes, although sometimes controversial, have been happening in China.

Under the political reform, China's mass media have also been reformed. One reason is that China's mass media are part of her politics. Another reason is that one of the principal tasks of China's mass media is to serve the regime's political line. If the regime's political line is reformed, its mass media also tend to be reformed in order to serve the political line appropriately. "It is generally believed that the political reform ... cannot be carried out successfully unless it is

accompanied by the mass media reform. To promote democracy and to improve the legal system -- important goals of the political reform -- it is important for the mass media to perform their function of criticism and supervision" (Wang, Z. 1989:21)

As a matter of fact, since the late 1970s, along with the vigorous economic and political reforms, the mass media in China have also undergone drastic changes and transformation in practice (Ming 1987:3). Among them, television is the one in which many significant changes have occurred. China's television is not only rapidly increasing its audience share, but also rapidly assuming importance as an information medium comparable to its role in the West (Townsend and Womack 1986:234). Unfortunately, unlike changes in China's economic and political reform which have been studied by many scholars and researchers, both Chinese and overseas, little study and research has focused on changes in China's mass media, especially changes in China's television, though research on China's mass media -- the media with the largest audience in the world -- might be of great significance (Wang, Z. 1989:22).

This is not unusual. Firstly, communication studies were introduced to Mainland China in the early 1980s (it was introduced to Taiwan in the mid-1950s and to Hongkong in the mid-1960s). Secondly, in Mainland China, where Western social science studies were interrupted for more than thirty years, the concept of communication as a field of academic interest has been fairly recent. The introduction of Western communication theories to Mainland China, however, has just begun. Thirdly, while communication theories have been applied in many other countries, they are severely criticized in Mainland China as "bourgeois" (Chu

1986:14).

These historical and political factors will make it difficult for the researcher to fulfil this study, but at the same time, it will also make this study more significant.

In the last decade, China's media reform, bound to political reform, has caused many drastic changes in China's TV news programming. Tremendous changes in terms of policy, content, technology and effect of TV news programming have occurred. This study will, by examining the changes in Shanghai Television's news programming, explore the following problems:

1. What are the main changes in China's TV news programming from 1978 to 1988?
2. What are the causes for these changes?
3. What is the significance of these changes?
4. What are the principal problems in China's TV news programming and newly-emerging problems brought about by those changes?
5. What will be the future trends of China's TV news programming?

In summary, the purpose of this study is to examine what has happened, what is going on and what will possibly occur in Shanghai's TV news programming, and find out the significance of these changes.

## 1.2 Justification

1. Why is China's media reform chosen as the subject of this study?

During the past years, media reform has occurred not only in China, but also in many other nations. In the previous years, mass media in Western countries, such

as the United States and Britain, in some socialist countries, such as Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, and also in some Third World countries, such as Latin American countries, have all experienced reform. Media reform has become an important phenomenon in mass media development, and studies and research on media reform have become an important part of communication studies. Although there is much difference among media reforms in different nations, media reform is always related to the politics, economy, ideology and society of that nation. Thus, studies and research on media reform are of great significance. A number of studies have been done on media reform in Western countries and some Third World countries, but little has been done on socialist countries, especially China's media reform (see Communication Research Trends, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1980). Therefore, the researcher is hopeful that this study will begin to fill in the gap.

## 2. Why is television communication chosen as the area of this study?

The reason for choosing television communication as the area of this study is that television is more like a mixed manifestation of a society than only one kind of cultural expression. Obviously, as a combined synthesis of all kinds of artistic forms, television, in a broad sense, embodies a concentrated reflection of film, music, dance, painting, sports and even advertising of a particular nation. Doing research on television communication of a certain nation, in fact, is doing research on its culture. Moreover, television is also a combined synthesis of a society. In any country, regardless of what social system it belongs to, television communication embodies a concentrated reflection of the politics, economic system, tradition and ideology, morality and legislation, and social progress and problems of that country.

Therefore, doing research on a particular television station is a valuable way of doing research on a particular society.

### 3. Why is China's television chosen as the object of this study?

One reason is that China is the country which has the most TV viewers in the world. To China's regime, television is its most important ideological tool for conducting its leadership. In the meantime, to Chinese people, television is the most important mass media form through which they get information, education and entertainment. Obviously, China's television serves both the country's regime and its people. It is affected by the society, but also affects the society. So the function of television in China is very important. Another reason is that although the speed and scope of the development of China's television in the period from 1978 to 1988 have overrun that of most countries, including some Western countries, and have reached a quite advanced level in a few respects, many Western observers of Chinese affairs still maintain their impression about China's television which they got years ago -- China imported "television" from Western countries and the only way to operate this "luxurious medium" well is to follow Western countries. However, this biased impression has been preventing them from learning about the function of TV in an economically poor country. Therefore, there is also a need to promote an understanding of this matter.

### 4. Why is the Shanghai Television Station chosen as a case to study?

Being the largest city in China and a center of China's economy, trade, finance, culture and communication for more than one hundred years, Shanghai is commonly regarded as a window through which people of the world can see and

know China. As the only TV station in Shanghai and the second largest TV station in China, the Shanghai Television Station has over one million potential viewers living in China's most prosperous area. In several aspects, such as program production, broadcasting hours, personnel, and equipment and facilities, the Shanghai Television Station has been occupying the first place among all China's television stations. Particularly, during the last ten years the Shanghai Television Station has developed most quickly in China's television broadcasting. Accordingly, the case of the Shanghai Television Station can provide us with a vivid miniature version of China's television broadcasting. In addition, the researcher has worked as a TV reporter and producer for more than ten years, familiar with the country's media policies and practice. All these will greatly facilitate the researcher to fulfil this study.

5. Why does the researcher choose TV news programming to fulfil this study?

TV news programming in China, either compared to other kinds of TV programming or to other kinds of news media is the most tightly controlled medium. It has the closest connection with the regime's political line and policies. Therefore, changes in TV news programming can reflect, most accurately and in a timely way, the changes in the regime's political line and policies, the nation's objectives and China's society. As well, to a certain degree, such changes can also reflect the people's demands.

6. Why does the researcher choose 1978 to 1988 as the time period for this study?

The decade from 1978 to 1988 is a very important period in China's history. China's reform has been in full blossom throughout the country during the previous ten years. No matter what direction the reform will go in the future, it has already been regarded, at home and abroad, as a turning point in China's history. In the last decade, the regime's open-door policy to the outside world and publicity policy to China's ordinary people are the major impetus which caused drastic changes in China's mass media, while the regime's severe criticism of "bourgeois liberalization" is the most serious factor which hindered those changes in the meantime. However, different from those of the 1950's, 1960's and the early 1970's, China's media policies in the last decade have both encouraged and confined China's media development, including Shanghai Television's news programming.

### 1.3 Method of This Study

This thesis is a case study of China's media reform. Media reform includes a host of planned and spontaneous developments in both print and electronic media. While an in-depth survey of China's media reform should, ideally, examine all the media affected by the reform, this study has focused on the re-structuring of news programming in Shanghai's TV. In order to fulfil this case study, the development of China's TV news programming, along with the regime's political line and policy in different time periods, are briefly described, while changes in content, technology and effect of TV news programming, society's impact on TV news programming, as well as the remaining problems and possible future trends of China's TV news programming are critically analyzed.

Methodology of this study is based on the words of both James. A. Anderson and Robert K. Yin. Anderson points out: "When a researcher begins to consider why something happens, that analyst is considering the cause and consequences of phenomena. Cause and consequences concentrate on relationships between phenomena -- how one phenomenon affects another" (1987:9). Yin states: "Case studies are the preferred strategy when 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context, since the case study allows an investigation to retain the historic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (1984:28). Therefore, in this study some examples of changes in different contexts and in different stages are treated as representative cases to review.

Several kinds of comparisons are used in order to show changes in different contexts. For example, there are comparisons of changes in news quantity, news broadcasting format, news source, news rating, news broadcasting order and news broadcasting hours, and also changes in some categories of news items, such as political news reporting, economic news reporting, social news reporting, entertainment news reporting and international news reporting. In some comparisons, quantitative criteria may be deemed more important than qualitative ones, since sometimes the statistical method may provide a powerful set of tools not only for precise and parsimonious summary of findings, but also for improving the quality of interpretation and inference. In some comparisons, for example that of annual output of news programming production of the Shanghai Television station, the data are selected from continuous years, while in some other comparisons, such as changes

in the same categories of news items at different time periods, the data are randomly selected from a fixed composite time period. This sample framework is borrowed from the UNESCO research design for the analysis of foreign news content (Srebemy 1981:11).

To fulfil this study is not an easy job. The researcher is faced with some limitations in conducting this project. One is that "the literature about the press of China is relatively sparse" (Starck and Xu 1988:145). Another is that the literature regarding China's television is even more sparse. Finally but more importantly, there is also a limitation on access to materials (such as documents) from China.

The main data sources consist of the following:

1. some relevant journals, such as Radio and Television Research (GuangboDiansiYianjiou, published in Shanghai), Radio and Television Affairs (GuangboDiansiYiwu, published in Shanghai) and Journal of Journalism (XinwenXuekan, published in Beijing);
2. some newspapers published either in China or in other countries, such as the People's Daily (Renmingribao) and the Shanghai Radio and TV Weekly (ShanghaiGuangboDiansibao);
3. various primary documents, including TV rating reports, survey reports, and public statistics published in China during the 1980s.

#### 1.4 Organization of This Study

This thesis is organized into six chapters.

1. Chapter 1 is an introduction, which consists of four parts, respectively dealing with the background and purpose, justification, method and organization of this study.

2. Chapter 2 is concerned with general information about the history, theory and practice of China's mass media. It contains three parts. The first part provides an overview of the historical development of China's mass media. The second part presents a brief introduction about China's mass media theory. And the third part examines China's mass media practice. Particular attention is paid to the time period of the last decade. Some necessary background information about China's politics, social system and traditional ideology is also included in this chapter.

3. Chapter 3 reviews the historical evolution and development of a) China's television, b) China's TV news programming, and c) the Shanghai Television Station and its news programming. There are three parts in this chapter, each discussing one of the above-mentioned aspects.

4. Chapter 4 focuses on China's reforms, both economic and political, while emphasis is placed upon the latter. Also, this chapter illustrates the relationship between China's political reform and media reform. In addition, it is also designed to survey China's media reform -- the media reform's goals, main achievements, remaining problems, as well as the similarities and difference compared to those of other countries.

5. The main changes in news programming of the Shanghai Television station in 1978-88 are presented in detail in Chapter 5. This chapter compares changes in the Shanghai Television Station's news programming in four aspects: a) content of the news programming, which include changes in percentage of different categories of news items and the breakthrough of prohibited areas of news coverage, news programming format and quantities; b) the techniques of news programming, which includes changes in news programming broadcasting hours, means, structure, as well as in equipment for news gathering and broadcasting; c) the effect of news programming, which includes the changes in rating of the Shanghai Television Station's news programming and survey of its creditabilities; d) the control of the Party and government over the Shanghai Television Station's news programming, which includes changes in the leadership's direct interference, censorship and administration.

6. Basically, chapter 6 surveys the relationship between programming changes and political reform. Specifically, it analyzes the relationship between changes in the Shanghai Television Station's news programming and those of China's media policy, political guidelines, national objectives, ideology and society. In other words, chapter 6 is the one which explores the causes as well as the significance of the changes. As well, chapter 6 investigates the limitation of changes in the Shanghai Television Station's news programming. In the meantime, some remaining problems in the Shanghai television Station's news programming are indicated in this chapter. Both of these limitations and remaining problems are related to China's political reform and media reform. Although the limitation and remaining problems are examined

mostly within the context of the Shanghai Television Station's news programming, it can be regarded as a common situation of China's TV news programming, and to a certain degree, as a prevalent phenomenon of China's television broadcasting or mass media.

In addition, part of this chapter is a brief prediction of the possible future trends of the Shanghai Television Station's news programming. In fact, any possibility of China's media reform depends ultimately on China's political reform. However, based on the development strategy of the Shanghai Television Station for the next seven years made in 1988, along with the regime's media policy issued in recent years and China's social changes which have been occurring throughout the whole country, some preliminary suggestions about the future trends of China's mass media reform, as well as the economic and political reforms, are also illustrated in this chapter. The final part of this chapter is a brief conclusion of this study.

## CHAPTER 2: THE HISTORY, THEORY AND PRACTICE OF CHINA'S MASS MEDIA

This chapter provides general information about the history, theory and practice of China's mass media.

### 2.1 History of China's Mass Media

To many people, especially those living in the West, China is a quite confusing country. Although they know little about the old country, they have their vague but firm impression about the nation. Some people think China is an extremely good country, while some consider it an extremely bad one. Actually, "in the real world, we need to see that China is less completely charming than the land of panda bears and the Great Wall and also less completely evil than a night in June when the 'Goddess of Democracy' was crushed by tanks in Tiananmem" (Eagleburger 1990:1).

Nevertheless, China is a unique country for various reasons. "Historically speaking, China is not a country open to the outside world. Its geographic features have prevented it from having convenient contacts with nations in Europe and the Middle East; its culture and traditions are very different from other cultures and traditions; and China tends to perpetuate its isolationism" (Zhang, J. 1990:4).

Because of these unique historical, economic, political and ideological factors, China's case, including its mass media, is complicated rather than simple and straight forward, "for China's circumstances are very special -- some advantageous

but some very difficult" (Epstein 1990:14).

Although China's first "newspaper" emerged in the Tang dynasty, as early as 1400 years ago, its first group of newspaper, the real newspaper which can be formerly regarded as part of China's mass media, only emerged less than 200 years ago. As for the history of China's radio broadcasting, it is only about 60 years long, and China did not begin its television broadcasting until 30 years ago (Jiang, H. 1986:12).

The history of China's mass media, compared to the histories of mass media in Western countries, is not as long as theirs, but might be more complicated than the latter. It is true that, in a broad sense, China "imported" modern mass media from Western countries, especially radio and television. But during the previous one or two centuries, China has experienced several totally different social stages -- feudalism, semi-feudalism and semi-colonialism, and socialism. China's mass media in different social systems, therefore, have been used in different ways and for different purposes, and featured different historical characteristics.

In this thesis, "China's mass media" refers to the mass media established by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and the emphasis of this study is placed on the period from 1978 to 1988.

Historically, five periods of the modern Chinese mass media can be identified. The first period began in 1921 when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was established and ended in 1949 when the People's Republic of China was founded. Shortly after the birth of the Party, the Party also established its own mass media in order to both fight against its political opponent party and fulfil its own political

objectives. The first newspaper, called "Workers' Daily" (Gongrenribao), was begun by the Party in 1921. The first radio station began operation in 1940 (Starck and Xu 1988:145). They have been used as instruments of communist propaganda and tools of class struggle for a long time. "During this period mass media came to be integral components in the Party's management system. The impact of the press in influencing public opinion and winning people over was strikingly felt during those 28 years of civil strife. Obviously the party attached great importance to the press. This Tradition has continued to the present" (Ibid).

The second period, from 1949 to 1965, was a time of consolidation of media and tightening control by the Party. At that time, China entered a new stage -- socialist revolution and construction, and its mass media have been operated centering on these two general goals. Mass media became even more important. "The CCP was faced not only with establishing its government in one of the world's largest and most fragmented countries, devastated by years of fighting , but also with gaining the support of a people many of whom were either indifferent or hostile" (Howkins 1982:4). Beginning from the late 1950s, China's mass media witnessed a period in which the "left" trend of thought was prevailing and the mass media became pure tools for class struggle (Yu, Y. 1985:5). "The press was virtually completely owned and operated by the Party. The primary purpose was to publicize Party policies and direct people toward the socialist cause" (Strack and Xu 1988:145-146). The influence of this "left trend" was weakened during the first half of the 1960s, but became strong again and reached its peak during the ten years of the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976.

The third period, from 1966 to 1976, was that of the Cultural Revolution. Control over mass media was confused and chaotic. The Cultural revolution severely affected some aspects of media development. The number of official publications declined sharply. But "its most severe effects was the restriction of variety and content" (Townsend and Momack 1986:234). Local media tended to parrot the Central Party organ. "One voice for the whole nation, One thought for the whole people" is the typical phenomenon of that period. The Party insisted that "the slogan of 'whether to admit that the newspaper is the tool for class struggle is the focus of the long-term struggle in the field of journalism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie and between Marxism and revisionism' became the guiding principle in the work of the journalists" (Yu, Y. 1985:6). Because of this, "the press was characterized by Party monopoly, single-minded expressions of opinions, politicization to the extreme, personal cultism of Mao and content exuding 'big talk, empty talk and falsehood'" (Strack and Xu 1988:146).

The fourth period, from 1976 to 1988, is the era of China's open door policy and sweeping reforms which began in 1978. During this period, on one hand, the number of mass media has proliferated, and this has come about in all communication sectors - newspaper, radio and TV, film, books, video, advertising and public relations (*Ibid*). The growth coincides with the government's modernization program. On the other hand, many remarkable changes have also occurred in China's mass media content, policies, and even models. The Gang of Four is accused of having distorted and deliberately radicalized the doctrine of mass media and exploited it for its own political gains. "The mass media is no longer

regarded as a 'tool for class struggle', but 'a tie bridging the gap between the Party and the people' (Hu, Y. 1982:1). "The functions of the mass media are to inform, educate and entertain" (Yu, Y. 1985:7).

The fifth period, which began with the student democracy movement in 1989, is a time of uncertainty. It is hard to characterize this period as it has just begun. But what can be said is that it has, in some aspects and to a certain degree, been restricted so far. Because of the student democracy movement, the reform policies -- economic reform, political reform and media reform as well -- have to some degree been put on hold by the Party. The Party has blamed the student democracy movement in part on the possibility they have given up too much freedom to the media. Though the Party cannot totally stop the reforms, it is reluctant to continue them in the previous way. Therefore, a kind of dilemma is facing the Party. However, only time will tell what will happen to the media of China in the fifth period.

In summary, as Zhixing Wang has noted, "China's mass media were used as the instruments of communist propaganda in the harsh conditions of the anti-Japanese war and the civil wars until 1949, when the Party took over China and began to structure a new communication system" (1989:20). Also, as John Howkins points out, "In its initial years during the civil wars (the twenties and thirties) and during the war with Japan (1937-1945), the Chinese communist Party required communications to survive, and they knew that good communications would assist them greatly to victory" (1982:4).

After 1978, the Chinese Communist Party initiated its reforms, and implemented its new policy -- open-door policy. Since then, China's mass media have undergone tremendous changes (Townsend and Momack 1986:234). Not only the number of China's mass media has considerably proliferated (Starck and Xu 1988:146), moreover, the extreme-leftist theory has been under severe criticism. The party began to give a new interpretation to the nature and functions of the mass media. Hu Yaobang, the former General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, said in 1985 that China's mass media "should serve as an organ of the Party, the government and the people. It is also a tie and bridge linking the Party and the general public and a tool to transmit information in and out of the Party and the country, the press of the party should also be able to pass on the one hand the Party's policies to general public and on the other hand the demands and wishes of the public to the Party. Therefore, it should be the voice of the Party and that of the people as well" (Hu, Y. 1985:1).

Nevertheless, "the function of the mass media in China since 1949 has been slowly changing. Originally it was neither the Fourth Estate nor the watchdog of government.....Its task was to promote stability, unite the people for the modernization drive, and contribute to the advancement of socialism in China" (Won, H. 1989:x).

## 2.2 Theory of China's Mass Media

Generally speaking, China's mass media theory is a combination of foreign doctrine and its own creation. According to James Wang, "The theoretical

foundation of the Chinese communist ideology is Marxism-Leninism. It is the guiding principle for both the party and the state. It is pure theory with universal application" (1989:49). Mao Zedong, the former Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, not only established China's modern mass media system, but also established his own theory for the media. It is based on Marxism-Leninism, borrowed from the Soviet model, and developed on China's own wartime, socialist construction and revolution experience" (Wang, Z. 1989:20).

From the beginning of the establishment of China's mass media to the present, within the past 70 years, although many changes have occurred in China's mass media, both in practice and theory, the fundamental conception of China's mass media theory has never changed. The core of the theory is: mass media are always part of politics, and these two can never be separated. Mass media always serve some political goals. It is true not only in socialist countries, but also in capitalist countries. It is a universal rule (Gan 1986:76). Therefore, the Party always insists that the task of China's mass media is to serve its political aim which for a long time has been identified as "class struggle". And because of this, the main feature of China's mass media theory can thus be identified as "conflict" (Singh 1979:98).

The theory of China's mass media is derived from the Marxist-Leninist doctrine that integrates the mass media with the political machinery. Min Chen and James Chu state: "The theory of the press in China flows directly from Marxist-Leninist doctrine, which emphasizes the effective manipulation of coercive and persuasive mass media as an instrument of national development. Marxism-Leninism holds that the press is a tool of class struggle" (1982:219). Specifically, the Party

has been stressing that "the command roles of Chinese press remain a mouthpiece of the Party, a powerful weapon in fighting against the 'people's enemies' and a textbook of the people" (*Ibid*, p. 229). A former CCP leader also created his own "theory", which was very extensively cited in the 1960s and 1970s, to describe the function of China's mass media: "Carrying out a revolution is inseparable from two barrels. One is the barrel of a gun and the other, the barrel of a pen. To establish a political power, we must depend on these two barrels" (Bishop 1989:92).

Although China's mass media theory owes much to the Soviet model for its guiding ideology, structure and management (Strack and Xu 1988:150), we may also find in them ingredients of other theories.

Formulated in a country with thousands of years of feudalism and only one political party, China's mass media theory, in some ways, is also like the authoritarian theory -- one which advocates the most closely controlled media systems in history (Altschull 1984:108). Denis McQuail points out: "There is an overlap between authoritarian theory and Soviet theory, especially in the strong emphasis in both on support for the existing social order" (1987:119). For instance, the authoritarian theory emphasizes:

--Media should do nothing which could undermine established authority or disturb order.

--Media should always (or ultimately) be subordinate to established authority.

--Unacceptable attacks on authority, deviations from official policy or offenses against moral codes should be criminal offenses.

--Journalists or other media professionals have no independence within their media organization (Ibid, p. 112).

Nevertheless, all these above-mentioned phenomena, which are commonly regarded as the main features of the authoritarian theory, can also be found in China's mass media theory. Moreover, just like the authoritarian theory, China's mass media theory also "justifies advanced censorship and punishment for deviation from externally set guidelines which are especially likely to apply to political matters of any with clear ideological implications" (Ibid, p. 111). Some aspects of China's mass media theory are similar to the development media theory, especially in recent years. For instance, mass media in China have also been used "in a planned way to bring about changes by applying them in large-scale programmes of development" (Ibid, p. 97). Denis McQuail describes the main principles of development media theory:

--Media should accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy.

--Freedom of the media should be open to restriction according to (1) economic priorities and (2) development needs of society.

--Media should give priority in news and information to links with other developing countries which are close geographically, culturally or politically (Ibid, p. 121).

These principles of development media theory can be easily found in China's mass media theory. In recent years, the communication needs in China have also tended "to be stated in terms of existing institutional arrangements, with a special

emphasis on the positive role of commercial media to stimulate development or on media campaigns to stimulate economic change in the direction of the model of the industrial society" (*Ibid*, p. 120).

It should be noted that there is also some difference in terms of the purpose of implementing development media theory in different developing countries. Although "the term development press, which appeared first in Asia, was established to define a press free of political direction, where the first duty of the press was seen as reporting news about economic development" (Altschull 1984:151), China tends to follow the development media theory to serve its political goals.

Besides Marxist-Leninist, authoritarian and development theories, China's mass media theory also includes elements of the social responsibility theory, since the mass media also intend to serve the society, promote social morality, the nation's tradition and ideology. During the reform period, some factors of market theory even began to enter China's media theory. For instance, since the 1970s, advertising has appeared in China's mass media -- not only in newspapers and magazines, but also on radio and TV. The adoption of market theory, no matter how small the amount is, shows that the media of this nation have stepped into a new era. Harry J. Skomia states: "Nations that have resisted commercial TV have made little progress. Nations that have adopted commercial TV have made rapid strides" (1965:181).

In sum, no single media theory can fit China's media system exactly. China's mass media theory is mainly based on the Marxist-Leninist theory, the Soviet theory, but also absorbs many factors from other theories -- authoritarian,

development media, and as well, as social responsibility and market theories.<sup>1</sup>

The most prominent feature of China's mass media theory is that, although the fundamental conceptions of its media theory have never changed, the ratio of the five theories in China's mass media theory have changed period by period in order to meet the needs in different situations. This ratio seems to follow the mood of the Party and its internal power struggles. All things being considered, China's mass media is a reflection of the dominant ideology, the ideology of the Chinese

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<sup>1</sup> These formulations of media (or press) theories and systems are based on Siebert et al. (1956)'s Four Theories of the Press. In recent years, the assumptions underlying the four theories have been criticized by critical researchers in the West. The validity of one of their important assumptions -- i.e. separation of state and press powers -- which assigns the capitalist press a free and democratic nature and treats the socialist press as authoritarian has been questioned (Lorimer and McNulty 1987:71). Rejecting the assumptions of Siebert et al., Altschul (1985:298) presents "seven laws of journalism" which he holds to have a high degree of cross-system application (McQuail 1987:124):

1. In all press systems, the news media are agents of those who exercise political and economic power. Newspapers, magazines, and broadcasting outlets thus are not independent actors, although they have the potential to exercise independent power.

2. The content of the news media always reflects the interests of those who finance the press.

3. All press systems are based on belief in free expression, although free expression is defined in different ways.

4. All press systems endorse the doctrine of social responsibility, proclaim that they serve the needs and interests of the people, and state their willingness to provide access to the people.

5. In each of the three press models [Market or First World, Marxist or Second World, Advancing or Third World], the press of the other models is perceived to be deviant.

6. Schools of journalism transmit ideologies and value systems of the society in which they exist and inevitably assist in power to maintain their control of the news media.

7. Press practices always differ from theory.

## Communist Party

The adoption of combined media theory and an unfixed ratio of these theories are based on the following principle: any theory, if it can be utilized by China, must suit China's own situation. Robert L. Bishop points out: "What is the CCP's top priority for communication? It depends on time and place" (1989:94). The reason is that "for Chinese Marxism, the truth of theory is dependent on practice" (Kincaid 1987:58-59). For instance, since the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the political and economic situation in China has changed dramatically, particularly during the last decade. China's mass media with their conventional theory and policies have thus faced serious challenges. China is now believed to be in the initial stage of socialism during which the law of value continues to function and to constitute a feature of the socialist economy. "If the economic base is different from that in the past, the nature of the mass media as an element of the ideology and superstructure must change correspondingly. The nature and functions of the mass media have to be reconsidered" (Wang, Z. 1989:20). Denis Mcquail states: "It should also be stressed that different values have different priorities in different societies at different points in time, and no complete or lasting consensus can be expected over what the media should deliver" (1987:125).

However, during the period from 1978 to 1988, the Chinese Communist Party has adjusted its policies from emphasizing political and class struggle to the priorities of modernization and advance in democracy and culture (Wang, Z. 1989:20). Thus, the mass media have, to a considerable degree, moved away from the issues of political and class struggle and turned their attention to the

development of the economy and culture, and to the promotion of democracy. Their function as "tools of class struggle" is greatly reduced.

The core of the current theory of China's mass media consists of two parts:

1) The general theory of the political guideline of the Chinese Communist Party: serving to uphold the Party's four cardinal principles: Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, socialism, leadership of the Party and dictatorship of the proletariat (Strack and Xu 1988:143-144).

2) The nation's general objective: serving to realize the nation's four modernizations -- agriculture, industry, science and technology, and national defence (Terrell 1984:143), and the two socialist civilizations -- material civilization and spiritual civilization (Ming 1987:5).

In summary, traditional mass media theory and policies still maintain their authoritative position in China, and the present theory of China's mass media is still built on Marxism and Leninism with adoption from other media theories, but tempered by distinctively Chinese interpretations (Strack and Xu 1988:143). China's mass media are still an instrument of the Party and a vital cog in the machinery of the government.

### 2.3 Practice of China's Mass Media

Although the same theories of mass media can be used by different nations, the mass media practices in these nations might be quite different. This is not unusual since "press practices always differ from theory" (McQuail 1987:124).

China's mass media are the mass media of the Chinese Communist Party. They have been totally and tightly controlled by the Party since their inception. The control of the Party not only comes from the central committee. As well, "the Party secretary at each level -- provincial, county, commune -- must directly supervise all propaganda work, including publishing and broadcasting" (Bishop 1989:150). The Party's control over its mass media have been conducted mainly through three channels.

### 2.3.1 All Media Institutions Are State-owned

No media institutions other than those operated by the government are allowed to exist in China. Each of China's mass media systems is operated as a government agency, whether it is print or broadcast media, and regardless of whether it is under the auspices of a local, regional, provincial or national agency (Terrell 1986:4). "Private ownership of the press does not exist in China (Chen, M. and Chu, J. 1982:223). All media personnel in China are government employees. Townsend and Momack point out: "The public communications network in China is almost exclusively an official (state or party) operation, subject in its content and management to the control of central political authorities" (1986:229). For decades, party and government officials were in direct charge "handling not only financing matters but content as well" (Altschull 1984:141).

Because of the strict restriction on the operation of media institutions, for a long time, the development of China's mass media in terms of quantity was quite slow. For instance, by 1978 the initial year of China's reform, in such a huge

country with one billion population, there were 43 dailies, 93 radio stations and 47 television stations. The daily newspaper circulation per 1,000 people in China in 1978 was only 33.8 (Chen, M. and Chu, J. 1982, pp. 219). This was quite low even compared to other socialist and Third World countries. For example, in 1978 the circulation of daily newspapers per 1,000 inhabitants in Yugoslavia was 106, and that in Mexico was 224 (see Statistical Digest UNESCO, 1982, pp. 134-135 and pp. 308-309).

### **2.3.2 News Values Are Defined by the Party**

The Party sets its definition of news value for China's mass media institutions, and each of China's mass media institutions must operate its news publication and broadcasting according to the given definition.

In most countries, as Wilbur Schramm states, "The basic principle is that the controls any society places on its communication institutions grow out of the society and represent its beliefs and values" (1973:161). It is evident that different societies are defining news value differently. But in most cases, a society does not mean a certain political party. Only in some socialist countries and some Third World countries where only one political party is allowed to exist, does society become a synonym of that ruling party.

Among all kinds of media, the Chinese Communist Party pays more attention to its news media. This is because news service can most directly and effectively serve the Party's stand, line and objectives. To achieve this goal, the Party always defines news value for its mass media institutions, thus controlling their routine

working.

In China, almost all news is supplied by official sources. "The public is told what the leadership wants it to know; competing or contradictory messages have no organized vehicles for response. Thus every news item in the Chinese press has a quasi-official quality" (Townsend and Momack 1986:230). Yu Yueming writes: "While admitting that conflict, impact, magnitude, proximity, timeliness, prominence and oddity are important components of news value, Chinese newspapers have added more principles to its definition: a) How an event embodies the Party's political line and policy and whether it serves to promote the four modernizations; b) What role the event plays in the political life and social progress of the country; c) How one event expresses the general demands and wishes of the public and affects social order, family life, people's morality; d) Whether the event helps people acquire new cultural knowledge and enrich people's spiritual life" (1985:10-15). The explanation for these definitions for news value is that China's mass media, as an active part of the superstructure and integrated part of the economic base, naturally should and could contribute their significant share to both by fully performing their functions (Ming 1987:5).

Still, although the Party also admits that the major functions of China's mass media are to inform, educate and entertain, like those in the West, however, how to interpret the three words and how much emphasis should be given to each of them varies a great deal, and the specific content involved and emphasis laid on each of them are very different (Yu, Y. 1985:8-9). First of all, the most important function of mass media is to educate, not only to educate people with new knowledge of the

developments in science and technology, arts and literature, but also to teach the Party's political line, policies and the concept of social morality required by the society. To inform is another important function of the media, but among the information provided a large proportion is about the activities of the Party and state leaders, and decisions and policies adopted by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. For other information, only those which are regarded as positive can have their access to the public. Crimes, though they are also happening everyday in China, seldom appear in the media except when they can serve as good materials for moral education. However, when a negative story is reported, what is emphasized and given more attention is still the positive elements in the event. Although newspapers also carry entertaining articles, the proportion is very insignificant and very often those articles also embody some moral issues so that the public can learn something from these stories.

Because of this definition of news value set by the Party, "thus a PRC (the People's Republic of China) journalist's position is quite different from that of a colleague operating in the West. Chinese journalists do 'serve' a political system by 'providing information, discussion and debate on public affairs', like their 'socially responsible' Western colleagues. However, PRC journalists do so within a fundamentally different political system, designed and administered by a Communist Party" (Grant 1988:54).

### **2.3.3 The Party's Preview Censorship System**

The Party conducts a unique style of censorship in order to guarantee that China's mass media always operate their business in a fixed track.

"Unlike the Soviet Union, China does not have systematic censorship" (Won 1989:256). Compared to those in both socialist, Third world and the Western countries, China's censorship has at least two unique characteristics.

a) The scope of censorship is much broader than in other countries. Since there is no press law, many restrictions often appear in the form of censorship. Censorship is therefore somehow based on a melange of laws, restrictions and political prohibitions. It can be roughly divided into two kinds. One concerns politics, including the Party's policies, state security, ethnic conflicts and religious activities and the other deals with social ethics, including sex, violence and moral thoughts and doings.

Censorship is implemented in two forms. One is the pre-review system, and the other is the self-imposed censorship (Chen, M. and Chu, J. 1982:224). "While routine materials does not require 'clarification' (meaning approval) from Party authorities, important editorials and news stories all require prior endorsement by the upper-ladder Party committees" (*Ibid*, p. 225). In the meantime, every media worker must always keep aware that what s/he is doing should be in accordance with the Party's political line and policies. This is somewhat like the situation in some Latin American countries (Faraone and Fox, 1988:153).

Although some censorship is unavoidable or even necessary, for instance, censorship related to state security and overt portrayal of sex and violence, some contrary to the Party's line, whether they originate from within or without, are kept

out. Zhixing Wang gives his further description: "Anything that may cause unrest or confusion in society or create a negative image of the Communist Party or the socialist state should not be published" (1989:20). No doubt, this view results in limiting the variety of news reporting.

Moreover, while all of China's mass media institutions must avoid publishing or broadcasting criticism of the Party's policies, reports of illness among national leaders and discussion of politically sensitive issues have to be cleared by the relevant local party authorities. Thus, "it often provides a chance for the local authority to interfere in the reportage" (*Ibid*, p. 20). Obviously, the aftermath is very serious, since it could be "like 'speeding on one-way tracks'" (Chu 1986:10).

In this chapter, we have surveyed the history, theory and practice of China's mass media. In next chapter, we will review the historical evolution and development of China's television, China's TV news programming, and the Shanghai Television Station and its news programming.

## CHAPTER 3: THE EVOLUTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF CHINA'S TELEVISION

This chapter will review the historical evolution and development of China's television, TV news programming, and the Shanghai Television Station and its news programming.

### 3.1 Evolution and Development of China's Television

Television emerged in China almost twenty years later than in Western industrial countries such as U.S. and Britain. China's first television station, the China Central TV Station (formerly the Beijing TV Station), was established on May 1, 1958, and the second one, the Shanghai Television Station, was established on October 1 of the same year. These symbolized the beginning of China's television (Wang, R. 1988:4-9). So in the late 1950s, China started the most popular and influential modern medium (Si 1987:15), and "the Party and the government have paid great attention to the development of television in China" (Won 1989:216). After 30 years, today, "television is China's most rapidly growing medium" (Bishop 1989:108).

During the past thirty years (1958-1988), the development pace of China's television has been changing during different periods. Roughly, China's television in the last three decades has developed in three stages.

### 3.1.1 Before the Cultural Revolution (1958-1966)

This period is a beginning period of China's television. In 1957, the Chinese government sent a delegation to the Soviet Union and the East Germany to learn about their experience of television. Then in 1958, China established its own television (Zhuang 1985:2). Undoubtedly, from the system to the content and format, China's television owed much to the Soviet model.

The development pace of China's television during this period was quite slow. In addition to the troubled economy and underdeveloped technology, a main reason was the Party's policy of self-reliance, which was set by Mao Zedong, meaning China should chiefly rely on herself to develop industry, agriculture, technology and science. However, this policy more or less stimulated China's construction pace, but in the meantime also isolated China from many other economically developed countries, thus having somehow limited its development process.

In 1958, there were only two television stations in the whole country: the China Central Television Station (CCTV) -- China's only network, and the Shanghai Television Station (STV) -- China's only local TV station. CCTV had a very simple structure at that time. With less than 50 staff members, its only studio was built in a abandoned office with an area of 60 square meters. It broadcast twice a week. The ability for TV production was very limited, so daily broadcasting hours were around two to three hours. Until 1960, CCTV did not start fixed programming schedule (*ibid*, pp. 4-5).

Nevertheless, China's television did start its first step. Then, for several years, the development was quite stable. By 1960, the number of television stations

reached 15, which meant that half of China's provinces established their TV stations. By 1962, the number went up to 23, thus, except for several poorest provinces in the remote and mountain areas all other provinces had established their TV stations (Ibid, pp. 7-8). Because of the three year natural disasters from 1961 to 1963 and the dispute between China and the Soviet Union from 1962 to 1964, the development of China's television had to be stopped. In 1963, the Chinese government cancelled the operation in almost 80% of China's TV stations. In the whole nation, there were only 5 TV stations continuing to broadcast (Ibid).

### 3.1.2 During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)

The Cultural Revolution was initiated by Mao Zedong with the purpose of preventing China from becoming imperialist, capitalist and revisionist. Although it was called a "cultural revolution", it was a political movement and eventually it became a power struggle within the Party's high level.

The development of China's television during this period was both dramatic and contradictory. On one hand, the content and format, the variety and category of TV programming was seriously damaged. But on the other hand, the number of TV stations was greatly increased and the technology for TV was much improved.

In January 1967, all the Chinese TV stations stopped their normal broadcasting in order to "build up proletarian staff" and "clean out capitalist garbage" (Zhuang 1985:8). For several months, except occasionally broadcasting some important political events under the instructions of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, CCTV's staff concentrated on the political movement, reviewing

their previous programming and criticizing the "mistakes" they made before. This was also the case in local TV stations. After three to six months, these TV stations began to broadcast, but the content of the programming was changed considerably. For example, by 1965, because of the backward economy and the negative influence of the Sino-Soviet conflict, although the development speed of China's television was slow, it was stable, and after several years of endeavour, China's television programming in terms of content, format, variety and category was catching up with international standards while maintaining its own national features. By mid-1967, however, there were only two kinds of programming: news and opera; all other programming, such as entertainment, education, documentaries and music and dancing shows, were eliminated (Si 1987:16). Moreover, as a matter of fact, news items were reduced to political slogans and quotations from Mao Zedong's works. As for the opera programming, "only eight model revolutionary operas were shown over a twelve-year reign" (Bishop 1989:111). These operas were either created or directed by Jiang Qing, Mao's wife, for the purpose of serving the political guidelines of the Cultural Revolution.

While the content of TV programming was seriously affected by the Cultural Revolution, interestingly, after 1968, the number of TV stations was greatly increased and the television technology was widely improved. This was contributed by three factors. First, China's economic situation gradually recovered after 1965, therefore China was able to quicken its pace in developing television industry; second, both the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the municipal or provincial party committees wanted to use television, the most

powerful and effective medium, to fulfil their political objectives; third, the Party once again emphasized the "self-reliance" policy for the purpose of competing with imperialist, capitalist and revisionist countries in the world. Due to these factors, the number of TV stations in China was jumped from 5 in 1967 to 23 in 1968, reaching the peak of 1962. By 1971, the number went up to 32, including one national network (CCTV) and 31 municipal or provincial TV stations. Thus, every province of China's thirty provinces, except Tibet, Inner-Mongolia and XinJiang, the three poorest ethnic provinces, already established their own TV stations, and some provinces even had two TV stations (Zhuang 1985:10).

Meanwhile, not only the broadcasting condition and transmission equipment were substantially improved, based on China's own technological ability, the color TV industry also emerged. On May 1, 1973, CCTV began to broadcast its second programming in color transmission. On August 1 of the same year, STV also started its color broadcasting (Ibid, pp. 13-14). By 1976, the end of the Cultural Revolution, China had six color TV stations, and by 1986, all China's TV stations had realized color transmission. The development speed from black-white TV to color TV in China is much more quicker than not only other socialist or Third World countries, but also than most industrial countries (Si 1987:17).

### 3.1.3 After the Cultural Revolution (1976-1988)

"Although China's television program services started as early as 1958, they did not become a way of life for Chinese people until the late 1970s. The past few years have witnessed the rapid development of China's television" (Won 1989:213).

More precisely, the evolution and development of China's television in this period can also be divided into two stages.

The first stage is from 1976 to 1980. During these years, the whole nation was recovering from the Cultural Revolution -- the ultra-leftism. The changes in China's television in these years mainly happened in the content of its programming. Television broadcasting gradually returned to the previous normal situation, programming content and format became audience-oriented, and many kinds of programming which were eliminated during the Cultural Revolution came back to the screen again (Ming 1986:13-14). However, these changes prepared the basic preconditions for the drastic changes occurring in the following reform years.

The second stage is from 1980 to 1988. These years were the prime time of China's reforms. However, during these years, China's television experienced an explosion not only in the number of TV stations and the variety of programming but also in its technology and contact with its overseas counterparts.

The most prominent explosion in China's television is the increase of TV stations (Table 1).

Table 1: Increase of China's TV Stations

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. of TV stations</u>
1. Before the Cultural Revolution	
1958	2
1960	10
1962	23
1963	5
2. During the Cultural Revolution	
1967	23
1971	32
3. After the Cultural Revolution	
1979	38
1983	52
1985	330
1987	350
1988	400

Source: Radio and TV Information (GuangboDiansiXinxi), No. 2, 1989, p. 5.

Also, the ratio of ownership of TV sets rapidly jumped up (see Table 2).

Table 2: Increase of TV Sets in PRC, 1960 - 1988

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. of TV Sets</u>	<u>Ratio</u>
1960	10,000	1/70,000
1970	80,000	1/16,400
1980	500,000	1/280
1987	80,000,000	1/11
1988	140,000,000	1/7.5

Source: "Progress made in the Past 40 Years in PRC", People's Daily (Renmingribao) Oct. 2, 1989, p. 3.

In addition, the TV production capacity was remarkably raised. It resulted in the increase of broadcasting hours as well as the variety of programming. For instance, the increase of TV play (single and serial) broadcast on CCTV is dramatic (Table 3).

Table 3: Increase of TV Play Broadcast on CCTV

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. of TV Play Broadcast on CCTV</u>
1. Before the Cultural Revolution	
1958	2
2. During the Cultural Revolution	
1968	0
3. After the Cultural Revolution	
1978	8
1980	130
1982	300
1984	500
1988	800

Source: "Changes in China's TV Play Production",  
Wenhui Daily (Wenhuibao), Sep. 14, 1989, p. 4.

As a matter of fact, the total number of TV plays produced throughout the country in 1988 reached to a record of 3,000 (Ibid). During this reform period, not only all China's provinces and major cities, including Tibet which is commonly regarded as China's poorest area, established their TV stations, but also all of them

had their color TV transmission. Moreover, based on its own technological ability, China made a number of satellites, and launched them for communication use ("China made and launched Communication Satellites" 1990:1) Because of these satellites, by 1988, China's television transmission was able to cover 80% of its total area, which is equal to 13 Frances. Thus, China's television today has become mature. "Nowadays, there is a huge concentration of power of the written and the spoken words as is also the case with the visual media" ("The Media and Life" 1990:17), and like other media, China's television "can do whatever it wishes" (Ibid).

### 3.2 Evolution and Development of China's TV News Programming

Television news programming emerged in China as early as did China's television. But for several years, there was no fixed schedule for TV news programming. In CCTV, for instance, news was at first broadcast twice a week, and then three times a week. Because of lack of professional TV news personnel, news production ability was very low. Each time the news programming only lasted two or three minutes (Zhuang 1985:5-6). This was also the situation in China's provincial TV stations. Some local TV stations only relayed CCTV's news program, since they were not able to produce their own news program due to outdated equipment and insufficient personnel.

Although China's TV news programming was quite slow to develop for a long time, it has been one of the most important mouthpieces of the Chinese Communist Party and the government (Won 1989:162). "It has been used, to the greatest

possible extent, by the Party and the government to popularize their policies and decisions and to help motivate the general public to act in line with Party directions and objectives. In a sense, it acts in a management function to help define the objectives and philosophy of the Communist Party and the central government" (Ibid).

The content and format of China's TV news programming also owed very much to the Soviet model. The "leading" roles of the news programming were always either the Party and state heads, or advanced workers, peasants and soldiers. The main subjects of the news programming were always those who were closely related to the "socialist revolution and construction" (Zhuang 1985:15). For instance, in the 1970s, the opening program in China's TV was always "a newscast with stories on topics such as the commemoration of a hero, the work of an educated youth in a remote village, the reception of foreign visitors by the Chinese leadership, and the heroic struggle of the North Vietnamese against the United States" (Won 1989:55). Robert L. Bishop gives his conclusion that "news to Communists is not the latest report of an event. It is any information that can be used to build socialism" (1989:92). So, "while many Americans believe the media in their country report too much 'bad news', many Chinese think their media report too much 'good news'" (Won 1989:257).

The first day when CCTV broadcast to the public on May 1, 1958, the topic of the only one news item was an interview with several workers and peasants about their plans in the "big leap movement" (Zhuang 1985:3). (The purpose of the "big leap movement", initiated by the Chinese Communist Party, was to make China's

economy surpass British economy within 15 years; it was admitted by the Party as a big mistake later in the 1960s.)

Although it was called TV news program, for a long time most news items were just the repetition of newspaper stories and radio news broadcasting. The pre-recorded oral presentation of news reporting occupied more than half of the TV news programs. The rest consisted of 16m/m film newsreels and still photos. The modern TV news presentation, which uses electronic news gathering (ENG) equipment and is broadcast by various TV special effect ways, did not appear in China until the late 1970s.

As news media are the ones to which the Chinese Communist Party pays more attention, TV news programming is accorded special distinction. For instance, a preview control system was implemented at the beginning of China's TV news programs. Negative images of the Party and government were not allowed to be on the air. The "dark" semi-side of the society was prohibited to be shown. "The masses must be told what is expected, given directions and goals, and continually monitored" (Bishop 1989:94). During the Cultural Revolution, the situation was even worse. Although the broadcasting hours for news programming increased, as for the content, it became a pure tool of class struggle, an entire political instrument of a few Party elites.

It should be noted that unlike other kinds of TV programming which developed and changed even in the first period (1958-1966), China's TV news programming changed little during this period. Partly, it is because of the poor economic situation, and the lack of professional personnel and advanced equipment, but the chief reason

is the over-tight control on the news programming by the Party. However, when the Party began to relax its control over the TV news programming in 1978, considerable changes happened in China's TV news programming. These changes in content, format, technology and effect of TV news programming have enabled China's TV news programming to become the most developed in the reform period, compared to other media or other kinds of TV programming.

The changes in TV news programming are mainly reflected in the following aspects.

1. **The great increase of news items:** In 1958, CCTV broadcast its news program only twice or three times a week, with one or two items for each show. For the whole year of 1958, only 300 domestic news items were broadcast on CCTV. In 1982, the number of total domestic news items broadcast on CCTV went up to 11,000, 37 times as many as that in 1958 (Zhuang, C. 1985:6, 59).

2. **The establishment of China's TV news broadcasting network:** From the late 1970s to the early 1980s, all TV stations had their own news programming. Due to this evolution, China established its TV network. Before then, CCTV was just a nation-wide TV station. Its programs could be watched everywhere in the country, but did not have the function of connecting all other provincial TV stations, nor the viewers could see other TV stations' news programs. In 1976, CCTV opened a special program in its prime time, "News Broadcasting Network", aired from 7:00 to 7:30 every evening and consisting of news stories of its own and all other China's TV stations. Thus, the coverage of China's TV news programming was greatly expanded (Shu 1988:4).

3. The appearance of international news stories: For more than twenty years, there were no international items in TV news. Very seldom, if some international events were too important, TV stations would give brief oral reporting on these events sometimes with still photos. One reason was China had no resources to cover international events at that time. Another reason was the ultra-leftism, which did not allow the purchase of newsreels from its "enemy". International news stories focused on the revolutionary struggles in the Third World, corruption in capitalist countries and revisionist Soviet Union. However, although television emerged in China as early as in the 1950s, for more than twenty years China's TV viewers were not exposed to international TV news coverage by Western news agencies.

Because of the reforms, especially the open-door policy, international TV news reporting, mainly produced by the West, eventually appeared in China's TV news programming. Starting from August 1, 1980, CCTV began to broadcast international news stories by receiving these stories from Visnews (Britain) and UPTN (U.S. and Britain) through satellite (Zhuang 1985:57-58). Then, in March 1983, China joined the ABU (Asia Broadcasting Union), beginning to exchange its news items with other Asian countries (Ibid, pp. 221-222). Thus, the number of international news sources were further increased, and the coverage were further broadened. For example, by 1985, international news items in CCTV's "News Broadcasting Network" stably occupied 1/3 of the total news items. CCTV's "News Broadcasting Network" therefore became the most popular, authoritative and powerful TV program.

### 3.3 Evolution and Development of the Shanghai Television Station

Being the only TV station in Shanghai, the China's largest city with its population of 12 million people, the Shanghai Television Station is not only China's second earliest TV station, but also China's second largest TV station.

Generally speaking, the development of the Shanghai Television Station has kept pace with that of the nation's television. But because of Shanghai's unique position in China's economy, culture, education, science, as well as geography and international contact, very often, when China's political situation was stable, the development speed of the Shanghai Television Station was quicker than those of other TV stations, and when the political situation was unstable, damages which STV suffered were even more serious.

The Shanghai Television Station made its debut on October 1, 1958. In the beginning, STV had only one channel. By 1987, STV had four channels and became China's only TV station with more than three channels. These four channels respectively specialize in news, entertainment, and education programming, plus one channel used to relay CCTV's programs. Upon entering 1990, STV was preparing for opening its fifth channel. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, STV broadcast only 12 hours per week. By 1988, it broadcast 194 hours a week which is more than any other Chinese TV stations (Fang, S. and Zhang, L. 1988:44; "The Cultural Development in Shanghai" 1989:4).

The Shanghai television industry also occupies first place in China with its highest per capita ratio of TV set ownership. As early as 1980, 59 out of 100 families in Shanghai had one TV set. By 1983, 91 out of 100 families had one TV

set. By 1985, all families had at least one TV set. By 1987, 21% of the families had two TV sets. A year later, the figure jumped to 26% ("Statistics and Facts" 1989:19). In 1988, Shanghai manufactured nine TV sets per minute, thus becoming the most important TV industrial center in China ("Changes in Shanghai" 1989:8). Moreover, STV's programming are received not only by the audience in Shanghai, but also by those in three neighboring provinces --Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Anhui. Together they constitute the Shanghai Economic Zone with one hundred million potential viewers in this most prosperous area of China (Wu, X. 1986:18).

In the last decade, the Shanghai Television station has also undergone many remarkable changes. Among these changes, those occurring in STV's news programming are the most drastic and significant. These changes will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4. Besides the news, STV's entertainment, sports, TV plays and children's programs are also the favorites of the whole country. Almost half of China's television stations regularly broadcast STV's programs (Shanghai TV Information (ShanghaiDiansiXinxi), No. 12, 1987:1-2). The quality of STV's programs is also acknowledged by world standards. In 1987, "The Poor Street", a TV play produced by STV, won the third place in the World TV Festival held in Japan ("'Poor Street' Won Award" 1987:1). This was the first time a Chinese TV drama received an award in an international TV festival (Huang, G. 1987:31).

In the evolution of China's television within the past 30 years, the Shanghai Television Station is not only an important one, but also a pioneer one in many aspects. The following is a chronological table of the important events in STV's development.

1. In 1960, STV established the country's first "television university" -- the Shanghai TV University, which inaugurated China's TV education programming ("Facts about the Shanghai Television Station" 1988:6).

2. In 1972, on the occasion of the former U.S. president Nixon's visit to China, STV built China's first satellite ground transmission station, which started the connection between China's television and world TV networks (Zhou 1986:5).

3. In 1974, STV constructed China's highest TV tower (208 meters), which allowed the reception of its signals in three neighboring provinces ("Facts about the Shanghai Television Station" 1988:6).

4. In 1979, STV produced and showed China's first TV commercials, bravely and successfully leading advertising into China's TV screen. This is considered as "a bold and unprecedented action" which "turned over a new leaf in China's mass communication history" (Xu 1987:7). Though the revenue from commercials in that year was only several thousand Chinese dollars, by 1983, it rapidly rose to 3.6 million Chinese dollars (1.2 million Canadian dollars) accounting for 40% of the total budget of STV. By 1987, the commercial revenue amounted to the equivalent of two million Canadian dollars which was equal to half of the annual budget of STV (Xu 1987:9). STV has therefore had two financial resources -- funding from the government and revenue from advertising. Based on this change, STV has been able to do more of what it wants to do: producing more top quality TV serials, holding various national and international TV activities, accepting foreign TV experts to improve its operations and buying more foreign TV programs (Shi 1986:24).

5. In 1979, STV published China's first TV magazine -- "Shanghai Television", which provides information on its programs. This event should not be neglected. It means, to a certain degree, China's television is no longer a propaganda machine, and its task has become not only to convey the Party's intention. It began to become a kind of service of the public. More or less, it started to be audience-oriented ("Facts about the Shanghai Television Station" 1988:8).

6. In 1982, STV became China's first TV station which used VHF to transmit its programs (Zhou 1986:14). Thus STV was the first station to catch up with advanced technology.

7. In 1986, STV held China's first international TV festival -- The First Shanghai International Festival. TV organizations and companies from thirty countries participated in the festival. This festival is regarded as a hallmark in China's television history since it showed that China's television could be noticed by the outside world (Hwang, G. 1987:31). In 1988, STV held the second TV festival.

8. In 1987, STV became China's first local TV station to export its own programs. In that year, STV exported 150 hours of programs to the world TV program market. In 1988, through various channels and in different forms, STV exported 377 hours of programs into the international arena, which topped all of other Chinese local TV stations. STV's programs have been shown in nearly thirty countries and areas. One TV station in New York and one in San Francisco both of which broadcast to Chinese-Americans now regularly show STV's programs, and two Japanese TV stations often broadcast STV's productions, while a French one

has opened a special program for STV's documentaries. Even in several major cities in Australia, people can rent videotapes of STV's programs (Information of Radio & TV (GuangboDiansiXinxi) 1988:1).

9. In 1987, STV held China's first foreign "TV Week" -- "Yugoslavia TV Week", systematically introducing Yugoslavia TV programs. This activity started a new kind of exchange program with foreign counterparts, enhancing the understanding between Chinese people and other peoples. Later, STV also held Japanese, East Germany, Soviet, Romanian, Polish and Pakistan TV weeks. Following STV, some other Chinese TV stations are now also holding this kind of activities ("China's Foreign TV Weeks" 1989:8).

10. In 1987, STV opened China's first English TV channel. Lasting two hours every day, this special program aims at serving foreigners both those residing in Shanghai such as diplomats, businessmen and experts, and those visiting Shanghai such as tourists. In a sense, this has made foreigners also able to get news information from Chinese television ("Facts about the Shanghai Television Station" 1988:8).

In summary, among China's media institutions, Chinese television developed most quickly and the Shanghai Television Station has changed the most; during the last decade, the Shanghai Television Station, as well as all China's media institutions, evolved most.

In this chapter, we have examined the historical evolution and development of China's television, China's TV news programming, and the Shanghai Television station and its news programming. In the next chapter, we will focus on China's

economic and political reforms as well as China's media reform.

## CHAPTER 4: CHINA'S ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND MEDIA REFORM

In chapter 3, we reviewed the historical evolution and development of China's television, TV news programming, and the Shanghai Television Station and its news programming. In this chapter, we will examine China's reforms -- the economic, political and media reforms.

### 4.1 China's Economic Reform and Political Reform

A decade has passed since China embarked on a course of reform that Deng Xiaoping, the retired Advisor of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party but still the most powerful person of China, called a "new revolution" (Barnett 1986:37) or "second revolution" (Wiedeman 1986:774). Because of these reforms, China's economy, politics, ideology and society have undergone remarkable changes. These changes have become more and more noticeable in the world since they happened in such a huge country, a socialist country which is playing an increasingly important role in international affairs.

Townsend and Womack observe: "The death of Mao Zedong was a turning point in Chinese politics, making the end of the revolutionary era and initiating a transition to a new modernization model" (1986:393). China's reform, also according to them, on one hand, "has reserved many Maoist policies, restored some features of the Soviet period", but on the other hand, it has taken "some fresh initiatives that

resemble the externally oriented development strategies adopted by many nonsocialist developing countries" (Ibid, p. 27).

The main reason for China to conduct its reforms has been, explained by Benedict Stavis: "China is at a historical crossroads. It must choose between blazing a new trail toward an as-yet undefined, radically reformed socialism, or attempting moderate adjustments in its traditional socialist system. If it fails to do either, it will stagnate dangerously" (1988:129). In other words, China had already realized by that time that it has to reform itself in many aspects if it did not want to lag behind more advanced countries of the world. However, it should be noted that "reform was not the idea of just one or two people at the top; rather, it reflected a widespread frustration with the slow pace of economic progress and improvements in the living standards of the Chinese people" (Perkins 1986:58). As more and more information about the outside world poured into China, it became increasingly difficult for Chinese people to ignore the fact that many other countries had done far better economically over the past two to three decades.

China's reform was initiated in economic fields in the late 1970s. "Of all the reforms that have swept China since the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, those in the economic realm have attracted the greatest attention abroad" (Harding 1986:13). According to some Western observers, the period of the Cultural Revolution is perceived as "one of uninterrupted disaster for Chinese society as a whole<sup>1</sup>, including the economy" (Perkins 1986:39). At the end of the Cultural Revolution,

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<sup>1</sup> This view is not shared by all Western observers of China. For an alternative, more favourable, evaluation of the Cultural Revolution see, among others, Hinton (1988) and Gittings (1986).

the economy was facing collapse. This view is also shared by the present rulers of China some of whom (e.g.) Deng Xiaoping, were dismissed from the Party as "capitalist roaders" during the Cultural Revolution. Therefore, in 1978, with the third "up" of Deng Xiaoping, the Party started its reforms. Deng Xiaoping clearly endorsed the basic concepts of reform saying "China is now carrying out a reform. I am all in favor of that. There is no other solution for us. After years of practice, it turned out that the old stuff didn't work...So in 1978,...we drew up a series of new principles and policies, the major ones being reform and the open policy" ("Deng Xiaoping on China's Reform" 1987:1) However, in 1978 the Chinese Communist Party shifted the focus of its work from class struggle to economic development and modernization, and declared that the major contradiction in China is the contradiction between the underdeveloped economy and the people's day-by-day increasing need for better life, no longer the class struggle (Gong 1988:5).

The single most important change in China's economic reform is the introduction of the responsibility system for the peasants (Wang, J. 1988:253), together with the permission of free market (Perkins 1986:49). The contract responsibility system helped solve the problems of over-egalitarianism in income distribution and overcentralized management, thus spurring farmers' initiative. For instance, from 1980 to 1985 the amount of land for grain was reduced by 8 million hectares as part of the process of diversifying agriculture. Yet in the same period grain output grew by an average of 23 million tons annually (Niu 1987:6). With the success of the economic reform in the rural area, in the early 1980s, the Party expanded the economic reform to the urban area. "The real key to urban reform,

however, rests not in the informal or service sectors but in the state-owned enterprises that dominate the urban scene" (Perkins 1986:52). The main content of the economic reform in the urban area is the introduction of the industrial contract responsibility system for the state owned enterprises (Wang, J. 1988:261), together with the reintroduction of promotions, piece rates, and bonuses (Perkins 1986:43). The economic reform in urban area is also successful. "In industry, the new economic structural reform and bonus system increased workers' production enthusiasm. Income increased and the living standard was raised gradually" (Yu, J. 1986:22).

"Less noted, but equally significant, have been the changes in the political institutions that govern China's 1 billion people" (Harding 1986:13). However, the economic reform which was sweeping throughout the whole nation eventually involved the political realm and, in the mid-1980s, China's political reform became more prominent. The reason for China to conduct the political reform is two-fold. One is because the Party began to realize that "economic reform cannot succeed without political reform" (Rosario 1989:19), especially those problems such as bureaucratic corruption and a breakdown of central authority cannot be solved just by price or market reform but require a major overhaul of the power structure (Ibid, p. 19). Doak Barnett predicts: "Although their overriding goal was economic modernization, Beijing's new leaders knew that in order to reform China they had to start with political changes. They also recognized that economic and political reforms would inevitably be intertwined. Since the late 1970s, therefore, changes in both spheres have proceeded in conjunction, though not on identical paths or at the

same pace" (1986:42). This relationship between the economic reform and the political reform was also noted by Zhao Ziyang, former Secretary General of the CCP. He told other communist party leaders that without political reform, it is hard to overcome the difficulties appearing in economic reform ("Zhao Zhiyang on China's Political Reform" 1989:1).

The other reason stems from the Chinese political system. Harry Harding states: "The Chinese political system at the time of Mao's death had a dual character. It was, on the one hand, a totalitarian system with the capability to penetrate and at least partially control all areas of social, economic, and political life. And yet, on the other hand, it was also a system in serious decay. As a result of the Cultural Revolution, it had lost a large measure of its organizational vigor, its elite unity, and its popular support. This combination of totalitarianism and decay was so unstable that virtually compelled some kind of political reform immediately upon the death of Mao Zedong" (1986:14).

The content of China's political reform is not as simple as that of China's economic reform. James Wang points out: "The term political reform implies more than just personal management changes...the term political reform referred to concepts in policy science, democratization of the National People's Congress, the separation of power between the party and government, and the strengthening of the legal system" (1988:152). Simply, the central issue of China's political reform is the construction of democracy and legitimacy ("Zhao Ziyang on China's Political Reform" 1989:1).

Probably, the most well-known policy for China's reforms is the Party's open-door policy, which means China should open its door to the outside world -- not only economically, but politically and culturally as well. "China tightly closed its door to the outside world, especially the Western countries, when the Communists expelled the Nationalist Party and its army from the mainland in 1949" (Zhang, J. 1990:4). Accordingly, the open-door policy is really a breakthrough in the history of the Chinese Communist Party. If the open-door policy can be regarded as the representative policy of the Party for economic reform, then, the publicity policy, which means the Party should make the policy-making processing public to the people, is suitable to be the representative policy for China's political reform. "The publicity policy is the open-door policy in the political realm" (Wu, G. 1988:4).

The key to the publicity policy is the public supervision over the Party and the government. Louise do Rosario observes: "There is a broader consensus now than two years ago that such problems can only be solved by a more open, accountable government under public supervision" (1989:19). During the past several years, China's political reform has made progress -- "The reformers recognized that it was also imperative to loosen controls, liberalize politics and broaden mass participation" (Barnett 1986:41); "The channels of popular supervision which have been proved effective in practice are being promoted, such as dialogues between officials and people, reporting by the general public to special offices of any wrongdoing by any officials, and the publication by government offices of their work system and results" ("Honesty vs. Corruption", China Reconstructs, Vol. xxxviii, No. 11, 1989, p. 5).

Unlike the economic reform whose progress and problems are relatively clear and whose achievements have enjoyed popular agreement both at home and abroad, almost from the start, the progress and problems of the political reform have been a controversial issue both in China and overseas, particularly since the student democracy movement in June, 1989, and the drastic political changes in East Europe. No matter how one evaluates China's political reform, however, it should be admitted that many impressive changes have already occurred in China's political life; and because of these changes in the political realm, many other significant changes resulted. One of them is the change in China's mass media -- the mass media reform.

#### 4.2 China's Mass Media Reform

Since the late 1970s, along with the vigorous economic and political reforms and the growth of the economy, the mass communication system has also undergone drastic changes and transformation in practice (Ming 1987:3). For a long time, China's mass media were isolated from the outside world and they were "rigid"; that is why these changes are so noticeable in the world, and are regarded as media reform or are even called "media revolution" (Lent 1986:23).

Actually, the current media reform is not the first in the history of the Chinese Communist Party. In 1942, during the anti-Japanese war, the Party conducted its first media reform, aiming to make its media "genuinely fighting organ of the Party" with more focus on the practical issues of the Communist-controlled areas, the importance of the masses and the operation of the media by the whole Party (Starck

and Xu 1988:147). In the first media reform, however, Western journalistic views and practices were criticized.

Another major attempt at media reform came in 1956 after the founding of the People's Republic of China. At that time, the Chinese Communist Party had already taken the power, its mass media had experienced a rapid development, and the whole nation was focusing on the "socialist construction". The second media reform is different from the first one. It called for expansion of news reporting, free discussion and debate on the country's various issues. It asserted that "newspapers are opinion institutions of the whole society" and "the common weapon and property of the people" (*Ibid*, p. 147). Unfortunately, the second media reform only lasted several months. It ended prematurely with the anti-rightist campaign of 1957.

It might be difficult to determine the exact year of the beginning of the latest media reform -- the third reform. This is because the mass media in China are always an integral part of the political configuration, and the media reform is therefore a part or a kind of political reform, particularly the current one. The speed of media reform will be slow if the pace of political reform is slow, and it will be quick if the pace of political reform is quick (*Ibid*, p. 148). Nevertheless, even before the mass media started their reform in the 1980s, changes caused by political and economic reforms had begun to occur in China's mass media practice.

There are two sources for China's mass media reform -- one is external and the other is internal. First, the economic and political reforms called for media reform. With the economic and political reforms, many changes have happened in China's economy and politics. The newly-changed economy and politics need an

appropriate kind of mass media to match them. But China's mass media, both their system and practice, could no longer serve China's economy and politics very well. "It cannot match the development of commodity economy, it cannot match the development of democratic politics, and it cannot match the spiritual demand of the people" (Quan 1988:3). In order to change this situation, therefore, the media reform came. Kent Wiedeman points out: "In recent years China has demonstrated perhaps more than any other socialist state a bold willingness to reinterpret Marxism in an effort to break through systemic barriers to balance economic growth and modernization" (1986:779). Obviously, an open economic system cannot exist in a closed media system. Robert Terrell predicts: "Modernization cannot be achieved unless China's mass communications systems, the press included, are permitted to a broader range of decision-making authority" (1986:4). Therefore, "the need for changes is deeply felt" (Starck and Xu 1988:156). "In late 1987, however, the cry for mass media reform reached a climax. It is generally believed that the political reform.....cannot be carried out successfully unless it is accompanied by the mass media reform" (Wang, Z. 1989:20).

Another need for the media reform came from China's mass media themselves. The media system and practice prevented the media from serving China's present situation appropriately. On one hand, "a great majority of the Chinese press serve as organs of the Party committees and governments at different levels. This uniform nature is divorced from the needs of an audience from all walks of life" (Zhong 1988:4). On the other hand, "communist China's official media have generally focused on the communication of goals rather than reality" (Chu 1986:11). So, the

media reform is also an internal demand of the media themselves (Wang, C. 1988:1).

It is well known that in China politics affects everything. In the late 1970s, the media were "being utilized to sweep away both the ashes of the Cultural Revolution and the memories of Mao, and in the process the media themselves are being affected by these changes" (Robinson 1981:58). Likewise, China's mass media are today also being utilized to stimulate the economic and political reforms and in the process the mass media themselves are also being affected by those reforms. As Won Ho Chang points out: "The mass media promote the process of modernization, which in turn helps promote the growth of mass media" (1989:57). Clearly, it is the political reform that provided the possibility for the media reform. "It is impossible to transform fundamentally the mass communication system and to change the orthodox theory of mass media unless the political policy are changed first, for the mass media are a natural part of the political system" (Wang, Z. 1989:20). For example, one of the principles of the political reform is to separate government administration from the Party's control. Applied to the mass media, the power of the Party and the right of the mass media should also be separated.

Present efforts at media reform bear similarities to the efforts of 1956. But there appear to be significant differences. "The current movement is larger in scope and depth and, perhaps most importantly, in theoretical implications" (Starck and Xu 1988:147). Qian Xinpo, China's most prominent journalism scholar as well as a well-known experienced editor, called for reevaluation of several relationships: a) the relationship between transmitting information and propaganda; b) the relationship

between serving as the mouthpiece of the Party and serving the people; c) the relationship between the voice of harmony and the voice of diversity; d) the relationship between maintaining the Party's leadership and keeping the independence of the media (1986:3-7). Even Zhong Peizhang, former Minister of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, backed by the reformers of the Party's leadership, stressed that China should reinterpret the concepts of mass media. He insisted that mass media do not have only one concept -- instrument of the Party; instead, there are at least six concepts: a) instrument of the Party; b) instrument of the people; c) tool for information; d) tool for public supervision; e) service of the society; f) service for efficiency (1987:3).

However, during the past few years, numerous ideas and suggestions have sprung up to promote media reform. With conventional theory and policies facing serious challenges, these ideas and suggestions have, to different extents, changed media practice: conventional rules have been broken and forbidden areas have been opened (Wang, Z. 1989:20). Among these ideas and suggestions, one deserves particular attention. It claimed that not all capitalist theories and practice in mass communication as well as in other academic fields are "poisonous". Instead, China should accept the idea of taking over something valuable and helpful from the bourgeoisie (Zhong 1988:4).

Since the mass media reform, however, the phrase of "anti-imperialist united front", a Maoist conception of global alignment of forces to topple the capitalist world-economy, has virtually ceased to appear in Chinese media. Also, a major

effort has been made to reduce the direct intervention of the Party into specialized fields such as different styles of performance and to separate the organizational and ideological activities of Party functionaries from the specialized tasks of directing and administering the country's economy and other non-party institutions, including the mass media (Barnett 1986:46). Nevertheless, since the beginning of the 1980s, the Chinese Communist Party "has normally announced that class struggle and political campaigns will not be the driving force of the country's political life" (Bishop 1989:90), and "the results are clear from the media. Periodicals, including the general media, often publicize disagreements rather than the dominant Party line"<sup>2</sup> (*Ibid.*, p. 90). So, to a great degree, "the mass media have moved away from issues of political and class struggle and turned their attention to the development of the economy and culture, and to the promotion of democracy" (Wang, Z. 1989:20). "Even though politics remains both the force behind journalism as well as the number one news topics in China, the focus is no longer on Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong thought" (Won 1989:269).

With these changes, a new phenomenon has appeared in China's mass media: "The trend toward great toleration of diversity and pluralism has created a political and social climate very different from that in the Maoist era" (Barnett 1986:50-51). As a result of the toleration of diversity, for a period of several years, even the

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<sup>2</sup> Critical researchers reject these assumptions about the relationship between political power and the media. According to Eaman (1987:52), some researchers argue that (in the West) "journalists would serve the interests of the ruling class even in the absence of news-room controls". See Breed (1955) for an early study of "social control in the news-room". See, also Hall (1970).

demand for "press freedom" was allowed to appear in China's newspapers. Some people argued that press freedom is not the factor which may cause chaos in society, instead, it is the essential factor which can guarantee the society's stability (Hu, J. 1989:1). Some others emphasized that without press freedom, the public supervision can be only "a sentence in a document" (Zhong 1989:1). However, these influential figures seriously criticized the Party's previous view, saying "we should not deem the concept of freedom the patented article of capitalism. On the contrary, we must bring the concept into full play, raising the banner of press freedom on the way to our country's modernization" (Zhong 1988:4). To achieve real press freedom, some people called for private media institutions (Yu, H. 1988:4), and press law (Xie 1989:1). As a result, with the permission of the Party, the Research Center for China's Media Reform, the first of its kind in China's history, was established in April, 1989, which consists of a number of well-known scholars, journalists and even high ranking officials ("China Built up a Center for Media Reform", Journalism Bulletin, No.4, 1989, p. 21).

Like the political reform, China's latest media reform is also a controversial issue. While some people argued that media reform had gone too far and too fast, some others contended that media reform had been too slow and too narrow; while some people worried that media reform was endangering the nature of China's mass media, some others complained that the nature of the mass media had remained basically intact (Starck and Xu 1988:149). No matter how one evaluates the media reform, no one can avoid admitting that since the media reform many extraordinary changes have occurred in media practice. Television is one of those media which

has experienced the most drastic changes. Among the country's television stations, the Shanghai Television Station is one of those which has changed most quickly and significantly. Within STV, its news programming is one which can reflect China's media reform best.

#### 4.3 A Comparison between Media Reform in China and Other Countries

China is not the only country which has conducted media reform recently. In the past several decades, media reform has been a tendency in mass media development in the world. Not only some Western industrial nations, but also some socialist and Third World countries have experienced media reform. Wave after wave of these media reforms have changed those countries' mass media in different ways and to different extents (Communication Research Trends, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1980, p. 1). But there has been some differences among these media reforms in different countries.

The goals of media reform in different countries are different. For instance, in the U.S., media reform in the 1970s was concerned with a variety of issues but especially with minority rights (the issues of the portrayal of blacks or women on TV, minority employment in broadcasting, etc.), children's TV, violence and sexual exploitation (Ibid, p. 4). Denis McQuail points out: "Ethnic minorities, especially black minorities in white society, are often highlighted as problematic for society even when they are actually reported as victims" (1987:195). However, because of media reform, a number of significant successes have been achieved: better

treatment of minorities in the media; increased minority employment; breaking up of media concentration; much more in-depth and critical news and public affairs broadcasting; elimination of some of the worst abuses in Children's TV advertising and in TV violence; general trends toward better quality programming; and the most important result is the more critical, selective use of the media by the American public ("Broadcasting Policy and Media Reform", Communication Research Trends, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1980, p. 5). From the 1970s to 1980s, some socialist countries, mainly the East bloc countries, whose media models were based on Marxism and Soviet standards, also experienced media reform. Although the foci of media reform in these countries were different, some on media theory and system and some only on media service and technology, these reforms brought various changes in mass media of these countries (Tao 1987:51). The previous single Marxist-Soviet media model in these socialist countries has been to a large extent abandoned. After media reform, mass media in these countries can be divided into four types, though all of these four types are more or less still based on the tenets of Marxist media theory: the open-type, such as that in Yugoslavia which was the first nation in the East bloc to establish a press law; the semi-open-type, such as those in Poland and Hungary, which have allowed non-official newspaper to exist and criticize the government ("China's Reform Contributes Various Changes", Reference Information, July 20, 1987, p. 4); the close-to-open-type, such as that in Romania (Tao 1987:57); and the begin-to-open-type, such as that in the Soviet Union (Wan 1988:1). The Soviet mass media, though still regarded as a close-type at present, has changed in some aspects since its reform. Although the Party still stresses that "socialist

construction and patriotism" should be the main issues of the media reform in the Soviet Union ("On the Importance of Socialist Press", People's Daily, Aug. 15, 1989, p. 4), many new phenomena have already appeared, such as emphasizing the public supervision, reporting the "dark-side" of the society, and discussing controversial issues regarding the reevaluation of Soviet Union history and the Party and government policies. Some issues even involved the most sensitive topics -- socialist system and Marxist model ("The New Images of the Soviet Mass Media", World Economy Herald, Feb. 20, 1989, p. 6). Moreover, Kravchenko, first deputy chairman of Soviet State Broadcaster Gosteleradio, acknowledged past imperfection in the Soviet media: "It is part of the very nature of the medium of television that it should possess a perfect ear for the truth, but it was very often the case in the recent past that the ears of our television were hard to hearing and the eyes of our television were hard of seeing" (1988:25). However, some improvement has been achieved recently. For instance, Soviet TV and radio have begun to provide a critical forum for improved East-West relations (Ibid), and even Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet President and the Party Secretary in General of the Soviet Union, expressed the necessity of establishing a press law in order to implement the media reform (1989:5).

In Third World countries, the problems in mass media are different from those either in the U.S. or in the Soviet Union, so the goals of media reform are also different. For instance, mass media in Latin American countries have had the following common phenomena: wholesale use of the media as instruments to serve commercial advertising interests; depressingly poor quality of radio and television;

duplication of services attractive for advertising and total neglect of other services, such as education and development; neglect of the country's best artistic talents; mass dependence on foreign imports; and concentration of the media services in the cities, leaving the rural areas unserved (Communication Research Trends, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1980, p. 3). Therefore, the aim of media reform in these countries has tended to mount alternative media forms to serve peasant and urban laboring groups, and to help the poor, minorities, or other disadvantaged sectors to be better organized, to gain access to the media and establish their own internal, horizontal communication system (Ibid, p. 1).

Compared to media reform in other countries in the world, media reform in China has a number of unique features.

First, reformers for media reform are different. For instance, in the U.S. and Britain, reformers are mainly social organizations, mass organizations, professional organizations, or volunteers (Ibid, p. 5). In Latin America, it is the Church that initiated and led the media reform (Ibid, p. 4). In most of the East bloc countries, it is the ordinary people who forced their leadership to reform the media (Tao 1987:56). But in China, media reform is both initiated and led by the regime.

Second, media reform in other countries is usually a single-goal-oriented movement and it does not involve changing the whole political system of that nation. But in China media reform is closely related to political reform. China has demonstrated a bold willingness to reinterpret Marxism in an effort to achieve the goals of modernization. In China, media reform is part of political reform; it is caused by political reform and also serves political reform; it is both promoted and

restricted by political reform. Although the goals of China's media reform are multi-purposed, they are more political than economic, ethical, professional or technical.

Third, China is the country whose media have the largest audience in the world. Accordingly, in China "for both continuity and change, communication has always had, and will have, a decisive influence" ("China's Short March to Modernization", Media Development, No. 1, 1986, p.1). Also, China is the country whose media have been known for their closed nature for decades. Therefore, the regime is very cautious when undertaking media reform. As a matter of fact, very often progressive action and repressive action are taken simultaneously by the regime. Consequently, media reform in China, at least, is not so smooth and straightforward.

Finally but most importantly, China's media reform has not only contributed many drastic changes to media practice, but has also provoked many serious debates on the media theory and model of China. As a socialist country, China owes much to the Soviet model, which is built on the Marxist-Leninist theories, for its present mass media system, its ideology, structure and management (Starck and Xu 1988:150). But as a country which only allows one political party to exist, China's media model is also like the authoritarian theory -- one of the most closely controlled systems in history (Altschull 1984:108), since "authoritarian theory justifies advance censorship and punishment for deviation from externally set guidelines which are especially likely to apply to political matters or any with clear ideological implications" (McQuail 1987:111). Still, being one of the Third World countries, some aspects of China's media model are also similar to the development

media theory. For instance, mass media in China have been also used "in a planned way to bring about changes by applying them in a large-scale programmes of development" (Ibid, p. 97). Besides these, for a long time, China's media theory has also included aspects of the social responsibility theory. In recent years, even the typical Western market theory has found support in China's mass media theory. Which one of these theories should play the leading role in China's combined mass media theory has been a debatable topic since the media reform.

However, no single media theory or model can fit China's exactly. Therefore, China's media reform may be more complex than those in other countries. And consequently, China's media reform can be reviewed as a special case of the media reform movement in the world, and studies and research on China's media reform can be of unique significance.

In this chapter, we have examined China's economic, political and media reforms, and also compared China's media reform with media reform in other countries. In the next chapter, we will discuss the changes in STV's news programming in detail.

## CHAPTER 5: CHANGES IN STV'S NEWS PROGRAMMING

In chapter 4, we examined China's economic, political and media reforms, and compared China's media reform with media reforms in other countries. In this chapter, we will survey the changes in STV's news programming.

During the last decade, like the situation in Western countries, the broadcast media in China have also begun to dominate the lives of human beings more than any other medium of communication (Altschull 1984:135). Moreover, between radio and television, the latter has become the dominant broadcasting medium in China (Chen, J. 1989:66). From 1978 to 1988, China's television has experienced an explosion (Barnett 1986:50). These ten years were a fertile period for China's television development (Chen, J. 1989:66). Not only TV sets, stations, production and broadcasting have considerably increased, but also TV news, entertainment, education and commercial programming have all remarkably expanded. In addition, technology for television, which often represents a certain type of ideology (Altschull 1984:172), has been tremendously improved and advanced.

However, among the changes in China's mass media, changes in television are more drastic; among the changes in television stations, changes in the Shanghai Television Station (STV) are more prominent; and among the changes in STV, changes in its news programming are more impressive. Principally, the changes which have occurred in STV's news programming have involved three aspects: status, function and effect. Specifically, these changes can be discussed in the following.

### 5.1. Changes in News Programming Content

Though the Shanghai Television Station started to broadcast its news program as early as 1958, the year of its establishment, the development of the news programming still remained quite sluggish until the 1980s. For years, people bought TV sets for anything but news (Yu, J. 1986:21). The main reason for the ineptness of television news is the non-informative content of news programs, the incomplete coverage, and lack of objectivity. Some viewers even complained that STV's news programming by no means deserved to be called "news", because it was like a "political course" (Zhang, Y. 1986:14). One university teacher commented that "the news programming provides me with little information which I want, instead, it forces me to accept lots of the Party's instructions which I am tired of" (Dong, M. 1987:5). It was, therefore, no surprise that many families, whose TV sets cost their years of savings, regarded the TV screen as a mini-film screen or a mini-stage for theater performances. A young worker stated that "whenever the news programming starts, I think it is the best time for me to go to the washroom and then to prepare for the entertainment show" (Zhang, Y. 1986:15). Obviously, news programming at STV, even after the Cultural Revolution, was still far behind the expectation of the audience.

During the past ten years, however, this situation as well as the audience's attitude towards television news have changed somewhat. This should be attributed first to the changes in news content which mainly occurred in the following ways.

### 5.1.1 Expansion of News Coverage

For a long time, news programming at STV was similar to that of institutions in the Soviet Union. The news coverage was narrow and limited. The Party's activities and instructions, agricultural harvest and industrial output provided a steady diet of never-changing news items. Because the Party put "emphasis on the supremacy of politics in all things" (MacFarquhar 1966:vii), the major part of news programming was the "simulcasts" of the Party's instructions and government policies. The rest introduced the work habit and accomplishments of advanced workers and peasants. These were broadcast in order to inspire the viewers to follow these examples in the "socialist revolution and construction". The images monopolizing news programming were primarily of two kinds: speaking people at various meetings and working people with different machines.

From 1978 to 1988, the coverage of news content in STV was much expanded. It has involved politics, economy, culture and education, sports and family life, and even crime reportage and international affairs (Si 1987:17-18). The expansion of news coverage enabled the news programming to be more informative and complete, making STV less like an instructional tool of the Party and government but more like a bridge connecting the people with the world they live in.

In the decade from 1978 to 1988, the scale of news coverage was also very much broadened. Besides relaying domestic news from CCTV, the Shanghai Television Station established its own exchange programs with several major cities and important provinces. Using microwave, STV and these provincial and municipal TV stations transmit news items to each other everyday. In November of 1983, with

the economic reform getting deeper and broader, STV initiated a "TV News Network of the Yangzi River Delta", a program produced jointly by STV and several nearby provincial television stations (Yu, J. 1986:21). The Yangzi River Delta is a newly established special economic zone, including Shanghai and six of the most prosperous provinces in Eastern China. This is the country's first regional and co-operative TV network (Zhou 1986:14). News items within the economic zone are exchanged daily and Shanghai's position in this network has allowed it to become the news center of East China (Zhuang 1984:230).

### 5.1.2 Change of the "Guidance" of the News Programming

As a mouthpiece of the Party, for decades, the major tasks assigned to TV news programming by the Party were: a) mobilizing the population for socialist construction; b) encouraging the masses to fight against imperialism, capitalism and revisionism (Dong, S. 1987:6). Therefore, the only criterion for selecting and broadcasting news items was whether the topics showed support for "socialist revolution and construction". Serving audience, for instance, and providing them with information, were not the chief purpose of news programming. Instead, educating people was the major initiative. Consumer service could not find its place in news programming. Although there were a number of news items concerning economic events, the emphasis was placed upon the nation's achievements. Therefore, it is not strange that the audience complained that those news items were "very dull and dry".

This kind of "guidance" of news programming, to a certain degree, has been changed in the last decade. "More programs are geared to the interests, tastes, and styles of specific audiences" (Won 1989:208). For example, in 1980 STV, for the first time in China, launched a program entitled "A Glimpse at the Market" and specializing in economic activities. Twice a week, each segment lasted five minutes with the objective of providing viewers with various market information (Zhuang 1984:65). This program immediately became a hit, and considerably shortened the distance between the viewers and the media. Although such program is common in the West, it was a new and bold initiative in China at that time. As well, news items regarding cultural affairs, people's daily lives and human interest substantially entered STV's news programming.

### 5.1.3 Emergence of International News Reportage

For nearly twenty years, STV aired infrequently international news items, especially those regarding the West, which was described to the people by the Party as the darkest, most decadent and moribund places of human society<sup>1</sup>. Beyond this political doctrine, there were other reasons for infrequent international news stories. One was the lack of resources for producing international news reportage, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Content analyses of Western media's coverage of socialist countries show a similar negative, one-sided bias. U.S. media, for exaple, have depicted the Soviet Union as an "evil empire". In his analysis of three major Canadian newspapers, Zwicker (1983:15) has found a similar trend: "It can fairly be said as a blanket statement that coverage of the Soviet Union is anti-Soviet...The charge made by Soviets from time to time that the Western press 'prints only anti-Soviet lies and slanders' is true" (quoted in Desbarats 1990:148-49).

other was the "self-reliance" policy set by Mao Zedong which prevented China from "importing" news programs from the West.

Beginning in 1980, international news items acquired from foreign sources gradually entered the news programming at STV. Angela Newsome stated: "Most popular of all is the news which has been revamped considerably in recent years with brighter presentation and foreign news coverage" (1986:34). Since April 1, 1980, China started to receive international news items from Visnews and UPITN through satellite (Howkins 1982:33). Then, since March 1, 1983, China joined the ABU (Asia Broadcasting Union), beginning to exchange its news items with other Asian countries (*Ibid.*, p. 34). Although at first only one or two international news stories were broadcast in each news show, for the first time the audience had access to the outside world via their TV screen, particularly with respect to the Western countries. In the late 1980s, STV tapped its own resources to get more international news items. By 1988, STV established regular news exchanges with a number of television companies in Japan, Hongkong, Singapore, U.S., West Germany and several East European countries (Wang, G. 1988:26). In the past ten years, STV has also sent its own teams to more than ten countries to produce documentaries, making itself the first of its kind among Chinese local TV stations. As a brave initiative, STV even broadcast international items taped by private persons when they were visiting or staying abroad. Topics covered ranged from people's living styles in various countries to the situation of overseas Chinese and Chinese students studying abroad. As a result, during the reform period, international news reportage has become an indispensable part of the everyday news program menu, and the

number of international news stories broadcast in every show has greatly increased. By 1987, 30% of the total news items broadcast at STV were international news (Kuang 1987:10). This means that in every STV's news show there are 8-10 international news items. Usually, included are all the important daily events of the world.

#### 5.1.4 Breakthrough in "Taboos" -- the Advent of "Social News"

According to the Party's media theory, social news, such as disaster coverage and crime reporting, was considered not only an expression of bourgeois journalism for sensationalism (Yu, J. 1986:22), but also a kind of criticism of the socialist society (Zhuang 1984:67). For years, disasters and crimes were seldom covered as they were seen in the daily life. Reporting of social news was forbidden. However, for decades ordinary people in China had no channel to get so-called negative news stories. This kind of information was the exclusive prerogative of high ranking officials. "Chinese media seldom report such stories except for a few carefully selected ones that serve to educate the people and warn the would-be criminals" (Won 1989:258). Even traffic accidents, fires, the collapsing of buildings or bridges, floods, typhoons, earthquakes and pestilence, all of which were closely tied to everyone's lives, were prohibited from being broadcast.

Although social news stories usually occupy a large portion of TV news programming in the West, they were absent in China's TV news for decades. For instance, in Shanghai, where more than three million people ride bicycles to work every day, dozens of traffic accidents were occurring, claiming the lives of at least

two people a day (He 1988:25). Even so, STV had never broadcast a single news story concerning this matter until 1981. However, in 1981 STV broadcast a traffic accident news story, the first of its kind in China (Dong, M. 1988:15). Laszlo Ladany points out: "It was an innovation when in the last few years floods and other disasters were published promptly" (1986:30).

Although all kinds of crimes are committed in China, they were rarely reported publicly before the media reform. One foreign diplomat in Beijing commented that "if you watch China's TV, you will feel that the whole society seems to consist of only good things" (Yang, S. 1985:22). Certainly, this is not China's real situation; it is an intentionally-produced false image designed to prove that "socialist societies are superior to capitalist ones". With the replacement of the Party policies by legislation, one of the most important issues of the political reform, crime reporting also entered STV's news programming. From 1978 to 1988, not only crimes such as murder, robbery, rape and smuggling, but also bombing, prostitution and kidnapping, all of which were excluded from China's audience and the outside world for three decades, have finally appeared on STV's screen (Yin and Er 1988:40-52). In 1982, STV even broadcast a political case -- a news story regarding five young people hijacking an aeroplane and forcing it to fly to Taiwan controlled by the KuoMingTang (KMT), the rival party of the Chinese Communist Party.

Overall, during the last decade, the coverage of social news has considerably broadened. As well, the percentage of social news items in STV's news programming has also greatly increased. At the beginning of the 1980s, there were only one or two such items per week. By 1988, there were three or four such items

daily. The advent of social news -- "especially stories about crime and corruption in government,...is a marked change from their original role as the mouthpiece of the Party or government" (Won 1989:x). However, the significance is that the gap in the record was at last broken by the media reform.

### 5.1.5 Appearance of Critical Reporting

Precisely speaking, critical reporting is not a new phenomenon in China's mass media. As early as the 1920s when the Party's mass media was established, critical reporting began to appear in the Party's newspapers, and later on its radio and TV. But the aim of critical reporting, for several decades, was just to encourage people to eliminate bad habits, correct mistakes, not to supervise the Party officials and the governmental work. "The Chinese mass media are never willing to publish any news items that might embarrass the Communist Party and government" (Won 1989:258). Although sometimes it was also used to rectify certain officials' work styles (Yu, J. 1986:22), these officials are only low level. The role of China's critical reporting is accurately reflected in a joke among Chinese journalists that you can only beat "flies" but not "tigers". However, before the media reform, reportage criticizing the current Party's guideline, the government policies, and high ranking officials' work has rarely appeared in China's mass media, although the media often criticized, with the permission of the current Party leadership, the guideline and policies of former leadership. One reason is that critical reporting was treated as a kind of viewpoint of bourgeois journalism<sup>2</sup> (Si 1987:69). Another reason is more understandable: no

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<sup>2</sup> Critical students of the media downplay the "watchdog" role of the media in Western democracies. Writing about American

controller of media likes his/her media to criticize him/herself -- it is not only true in socialist countries, but also true in the West, as no advertizer wants to sponsor the media for criticizing his/her products.

With the progress of the economic and political reforms, it is more and more obvious that as a medium, being informative and objective is necessary but not sufficient. Many problems, such as the Party's shortcomings, the government bureaucracy and the corruption amongst party and government officials, cannot be solved only through internal party reform, but require a kind of powerful public supervision. Therefore, media must assume, at least in part, this responsibility. Since the middle of 1980s, critical reporting, in different format, began to appear on STV's screen. This kind of reporting immediately became the most prominent changing-face of STV's news programming. In 1989, the Shanghai Television Station even broadcast a news story criticizing some high ranking officials for using governmental cars to serve their families. This exposure of high ranking officials abusing their power received support not only from the ordinary people, but the Party leadership as well. The People's Daily (Renmingribao), the most authoritative

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media, Herman and Chomsky (1988:301) noted that: "Contrary to the usual image of an 'adversary press' boldly attacking a pitiful executive giant, the media's lack of interest, investigative zeal, and basic news reporting on the accumulating illegalities of the executive branch have regularly permitted and even encouraged ever larger violations of law, whose ultimate exposure when elite interests were threatened is offered as a demonstration of media service 'on behalf of the polity'". Also, Dahlgren (1981:291) cites literature which demonstrates that TV news is an organizational production that is "structured in dominance" vis-a-vis the state. According to these studies, "the view of the world which emanates nightly from the evening news on TV has been shown to reflect decided class interests."

Chinese newspaper published by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, reprinted the story together with its editorial on the front page ("Shanghai TV's Special Programs", Radio & TV Rating Report, No. 3, 1989, p. 2). In contrast, the same kind of news story produced ten years ago, was suppressed during the preview. However, although critical reporting in STV and in other TV stations is still limited and the content is previewed, it is significant that it eventually appeared and the social supervision -- one of the most important functions of media -- has been instituted in the media.

## 5.2 Changes in News Programming Structure

The changes in news content and the increase of news quantity made STV's news programming, compared to previous periods, more timely, informative and complete. But the news programming still needs other changes to make itself "deeper", or in other words, more impressive. This task has been fulfilled by a series of "News Features Service" programs, which were gradually opened by the Shanghai Television Station since 1982. These programs were set up for in-depth reporting and broad news coverage of various subjects (Yu, J. 1986:21). Mainly, there are four influential special programs in STV's news programming, respectively focusing on international affairs, audience's views, Party and government policies and serving the foreigners.

### 5.2.1 "From Our Viewers"

This program was set up in 1982, broadcast once a week for five minutes. It was a direct product of the political reform --the ordinary people want to have their opinions communicated to each other. Though this program was just a kind of trial when it first appeared, it immediately became a hit. From 1985, the length of the program was increased to 20 minutes per show (Ibid, p. 22). Reporters and editors give much attention to phone calls and letters from the viewers. Using a critical perspective, the host and hostess reveal weekly the audience's opinions by interviewing audience members on-camera or by reading their letters in the studio. Sometimes investigative reporting will be conducted on the clues provided by the viewers to expose a case further and bring public opinions to bear upon the problem involved. When a problem is solved, a follow-up story and responses will be shown. Because of this program, the audience, made up mostly of ordinary people, has, at last as well at least, had a place to make their complaints known publicly on topics ranging from TV programs to housing problems, from children's school problems to transportation concerns (Dong, M. 1988:16). Though it is hard to estimate precisely the effectiveness of broadcasting these complaints, it does appear to be effective and is believed to have bright prospects. Since the emergence of "From Our Viewers", letters and calls from the audience have increased substantially and people's concerns have promptly transferred from the television programs per se to their practical problems, social problems, and even the Party's and governmental policies. According to statistics, since the opening of this program, nearly 80% of the calls and letters from the audience every month concern "problems and policies" rather

than the television programs (*ibid.*, p. 16).

### 5.2.2 "World Outlook"

This program was opened in 1983, the first of its kind in China. It is a half-hour program broadcast in prime time every Saturday, featuring the hottest news events in the world and stories on various countries' historical and present politics, economies, cultures, religions and customs. From 1983 to 1988, about eighty VIPs in the world -- presidents, premiers and high ranking UN officials -- have appeared on this program, facing and speaking to millions of people and becoming "stars" during their stay in Shanghai (Cheng 1988:5). For several years, among the total 35 feature programs at the Shanghai Television Station, "World Outlook" has always enjoyed the highest rating (Pan 1986:18). People called it "a window to the outside world" and "a textbook for international affairs". In the past a few years, this program has also been used as a model by 15 other Chinese television stations -- half the total number of China's large television stations.

### 5.2.3 "News Analyses"

This program was established in 1987, also the first of its kind in China. This weekly program lasts 30 minutes in every show. Though "News Analyses" appeared much later than "From Our Viewers" and "World Outlook", as soon as it made its debut on the screen, it immediately beat all other feature programs (Sheng 1987:12). The reason is that this program consists mainly an up-to-the minute account of various kinds of major events in the country and in-depth analyses of the nation's

policies and problems. Its format is similar to "60 Minutes" on the American CBS Network. This program is regarded as the first Chinese TV commentary program. Also, this program is counted as the most "dangerous" program, since it usually contains a number of sensitive topics. The host and hostess are critics, and the Party's policies and the governmental work are usually the targets. The leadership of the city are often interviewed on screen. Though it is common in the West, it is really new in China. In 1988, another program, similar to this one and called "Evening Talks", also appeared in STV's news programming (Chen 1988:16). Although the former tends to be serious and the latter tends to be light, both of them tend to be critical. However, this pair of analytical programs have substantially expanded the scale and enhanced the depth of STV's news programming.

#### 5.2.4 "English News Service"

By 1987, the number of foreign residents in Shanghai was up to 2,000, representing several hundred business companies and organizations. Partly in response to the open-door policy and partly because of the demand of foreign residents, in 1987 the Shanghai Television Station started its "English News Service" program. This is the first of its kind in China (By 1990, there are still only two TV stations which have English news service --CCTV and STV; CCTV began its English news service in 1988, one year later than STV) (Huang, Y. 1989:21-22). Twice a day, STV broadcasts the same agenda received by the Chinese, but in English. In other words, regardless of whether the news stories are positive or passive according to the Party's stand, they are broadcast to foreign viewers. The

Party does not require the media to produce two editions of the news program -- one for Chinese audience and one for foreigners, as it did before in newspapers. On the contrary, in order to make the "English News Service" more appealing, the municipal authority gave this program more freedom, such as using more interviews and spot-reporting, which are relatively more difficult to censor.

### 5.3 Changes in News Format

Before 1980, almost all the news items at STV were broadcast in a never-changing format: every news item was prerecorded and connected together, and then was put on the air like a documentary. This format not only delayed the timeliness of news broadcasting, but also produced a gap between the medium and the audience. Since 1980, the format of STV's news programming also began to change. Changes in format are mainly reflected in the following two aspects.

#### 5.3.1 Appearance of News Host and Hostess

There were no hosts and hostesses in the news program at STV before 1980. All the news items were prerecorded and broadcast in the format of footage with dubbing. There were no headlines, no comments, and no introduction and connection words between news stories. In all, there was no "face to face communication" between the medium and the audience (Si 1987:191).

In 1980, STV selected its first news host and hostess from university students (Zhuang 1984:61). Although all the news items were still prerecorded, they were brought to the audiences by hosts and hostesses with brief introductions. At the

beginning of every news show, the host and hostess greeted the audience and outlined the main news stories. During the program, they also gave some comments (prepared before and authorized). This change has not only made the presentation of news programming more lively, but made the whole program consisting of different news items systematic. Moreover, this kind of "face to face communication" has shortened the distance between the medium and the viewers, and increased both the attraction and the credibility of the news programming (Si 1987:197). The news hosts and hostesses at STV are loved by millions in the audience. In a contest held in 1987, among the five "Best Host and Hostess of China", two originated from the Shanghai Television Station.

### 5.3.2 Emergence of Oral Presentation

Although oral presentation in television news programming has been very popular in most countries, it did not emerge in China until 1980. For the reason mentioned above, all the news items were broadcast in the format of footage with oral reporting. The reasons for this phenomenon was strange: one is to avoid individualism -- the "star system" was criticized as a manifestation of bourgeois journalism; the other is to avoid the mistakes made by the host and hostess in oral presentation which the Party think might affect its image (Zhuang 1984:60). This conception prevented the improvement of STV's news programming for a long time. However, it was finally abandoned under the media reform.

Starting from June 1, 1980, STV began oral presentation in its news programming (Yu, J. 1986:22). Some news items were broadcast in the format of

footage, but some were presented by oral reporting. It is not only a supplement to photographed news items, because sometimes the station fails to televise emergent news due to time pressure or lack of up-to-date facilities, but also a practice aimed at beating newspaper news, by putting the latest stories into the program in the final minute. Most of these items are not received from the national news agency but rather, from STV's stringers. In 1980, STV established its network of stringers, the first of its kind in China. These stringers work at different levels in different circles of the city and its suburbs, serving as the eyes and ears of STV for news in all walks of life (Ibid, p. 22) By 1988, the number of STV's stringers increased to 1500. They are not only spotted in Shanghai, but also in other provinces and cities in East China area as well. These changes have both increased the timeliness and broadened the coverage of events reported by STV.

#### 5.4 Changes in Technology for News Broadcasting

During the past 10 years, changes at STV's news programming not only occurred in its "software", but also in its "hardware". In other words, not only the content and format of the news have changed remarkably, but the technology for news broadcasting has advanced significantly. For several decades, because China excessively implemented Mao Zedong's "self-reliance" policy, it became isolated from the outside world not only economically and politically, but also technologically. Consequently, China's television also suffered a lot from the ultra-leftist implementation of the "self-reliance" policy. For example, only TV equipment and facilities which were made in China were allowed to be used by Chinese TV

stations, yet little advanced TV equipment and facilities could be made in China at that time, resulting in poor and limited TV broadcasting capability and quality. Therefore, the changes in technology for news broadcasting are very significant, since without them further development in news programming content and format cannot be achieved.

Changes in technology for news broadcasting include the importation of the most up-to-date cameras, microwave-equipped remote news gathering and broadcasting vehicles, and ground receiving and transmission stations for communication satellite. All these changes have assisted STV's news production to catch up with those in the developed countries -- at least in terms of broadcasting technology.

#### 5.4.1 Use of Electronic News Gathering (ENG)

Before 1980, all the news items were shot on film. The processing of film took time and prevented the timeliness of news stories. Also, because of lack of advanced facilities for processing film, the quality of footage was poor (Yu, J. 1986:21). Since 1980, the Shanghai Television Station began to use ENG equipment for news gathering (Zhuang 1984:230). By 1984, all the news items at STV were gathered by ENG. This change has not only increased the timeliness and improved the quality, but also facilitated the format of on-camera interviews. By 1988, the news gathering equipment used by STV were the most advanced in the world. They were imported from Japan, much the same as used by ABC, NBC, CBS and BBC.

#### 5.4.2 Use of Outside Broadcasting Transmission Vehicle (OV)

During the last decade, China has not only opened its door politically, but economically and technologically as well. Due to this open-door policy, since 1980, STV began to use "OV" -- outside broadcasting transmission vehicles imported from Japan -- to broadcast live important news events (Huang, Y. 1989:22). In the past ten years, dozens of foreign statesmen visited Shanghai, and a number of important domestic events also happened in Shanghai. STV broadcast these events live by using OV and other advanced facilities and equipment. On a few occasions, STV has also cooperated with the world-wide leading TV companies, or sometimes even competed with its counterparts.

#### 5.4.3 Use of Communication Satellites

In the 1980s, two ground receiving and transmission stations for communication satellites were built in Shanghai (Zhuang 1984:230). These ground stations connect the Pacific and Indian ocean satellites. Through them, STV can exchange its programming with dozens of countries in Asia, Africa, Europe, North America and Australian area (Ibid). Not only can STV select news items from foreign networks, but also its news programming can be received by other countries. For instance, in 1984, Zao Ziyang, the ex-Chinese Premier and the Party Secretary General, visited the U.S. He was the first person of this rank to visit the U.S., which heretofore had been regarded as the headquarters of capitalist countries, and his visit was closely watched by the whole world. The night when Zhao's plane landed at Shanghai Airport, STV interrupted its normal broadcasting to simultaneously telecast the event

to the whole nation. In addition, via satellite, STV also transmitted this news event to a number of other countries, who are on record as saying that the live broadcasting of this event reflected China's positive attitude towards Zhao's visit to U.S., and more importantly, showed China's determination to further implement its open-door policy. Meanwhile, this action also demonstrated great changes in China's media policy and practice (Wang, G. 1988:26). However, "the introduction of advanced technology in the reporting, editing, and transmitting of information, as well as advanced management methods borrowed from other countries, would allow China's journalism to reach the highest level in the world in content, in form, and in technology" (Won 1989:58).

### 5.5 Changes in News Programming Quantity

When the Shanghai Television Station broadcast its first news program at its initial period in the late 1950s, it had only one film camera, which was bought from a used-things store (Zhuang 1984:56). There was no scheduled broadcasting time for news programming. Sometimes news was broadcast twice a week, sometimes three; anywhere from three to five news items were televised in one show. During that period, STV had only one channel. Among the total broadcasting hours, 72.5% were for entertainment programming, 19% were for education programming, and less than 10% were for news programming (Si 1987:17).

This state of news programming at STV did not change until 1978 -- two years after the end of the Cultural Revolution. Although the content of news programming at STV changed slightly after the Cultural Revolution, its coverage was still not as

timely or in depth as that in newspapers because it lacked advanced facilities and equipment. All its news items were shot on film and the processing of film took time (Yu, J. 1986:21). The total weekly broadcasting hours for news programming at that time was limited to 10 or 15 minutes, and the total number of news items broadcast per week was less than 15. Until 1980, STV did not begin to set its fixed schedule for its news programming -- five minutes per day (Si 1987:17).

Since then, media reform contributed many changes to the media practice. The reorganization of news structure, the expansion of news coverage, and the improvement in news broadcasting format enabled STV's news programming to develop rapidly in terms of quantity. By 1988, each day the Shanghai Television Station has broadcast more news programming than any other Chinese TV station. This can be measured either in terms of news broadcasting hours or the number of news items broadcast. In 1988, using four channels, STV broadcast its news programming 14 times a day -- seven times for its own news programming, twice in English and five times to relay China Central Television Station's (CCTV) news programs (Radio & TV Information, No. 4, 1988, p. 2). The following table is the schedule of 1988 for STV's own news programming:

Table 4: Local News Programming Schedule

<u>Time</u>	<u>Program</u>	<u>Minutes</u>
9:30 am.	Morning News Service	20
12:30 am.	Noon News Service	15
2:00 pm.	Afternoon News Service	10
6:30 pm.	Evening News Service	30
8:00 pm.	Evening News Service	30
9:30 pm.	Night News Service	15
11:00 pm.	Night News Service	30

Source: Shanghai Radio & TV Weekly, Aug. 8, 1988, p. 4.

Besides the above daily news shows, every Sunday STV also broadcasts a 30-minute program "News Events Weekly Review", which consists of the most important news events in that week. However, by 1988, the total daily broadcasting hours for news at STV was 150 minutes. On the contrary, usually other Chinese local TV stations broadcast news no more than one hour per day. This one hour also includes the time dedicated to relaying CCTV's news. Table 5 shows the great increase of STV's news items.

Table 5: Increase of STV's News Items

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. of News Items</u>
1958	100
1968	500
1978	1,000
1982	5,000
1988	15,000

Source: TV Information, No.6, 1989, p. 16.

During this period, the broadcasting hours for entertainment programming at STV dropped to 40.5% of the total broadcasting hours, the percentage of the hours for education programming went up to 38%, and news occupied more than 20% of the whole broadcasting hours (Gao, M. 1987:15-16). According to available statistics, in leading TV stations all over the world, usually around a quarter of the total broadcasting hours is for news programming (Si 1987:64). Obviously, STV has become one of those TV stations.

### 5.6 Changes in Effect of News Programming

Although television news programming has more priorities than other news media because of its synthesis of image and sound, for a long time, most TV viewers in China did not like it, since "the Chinese press has been taking grave note of the lack of truthfulness in news" (Won 1989:47). According to a survey held in the late 1970s, 80% of Chinese TV viewers thought that the news stories were not trustworthy (Dong, M. 1987:4). This attitude was also prevalent among Shanghai's TV viewers. From the 1950s to the 1970s, film shows and local operas always obtained the highest rating among STV's programs.

Due to the changes in news production, the highest ratings have gradually shifted from film shows and local operas to news programming (Wu, W. 1986:37). A poll which was conducted in 1986 and asked audience to rank ten main TV programming formats shows that 40.8% of the interviewees chose news programming as the top ranking format ("CCTV Rating Report" 1987:70). In Shanghai, the audience's ranking of news programming was even more noticeable.

In the early 1980s, only 15.1% of the audience in Shanghai chose TV news program as their first source of information, while 65.7% of them chose newspaper and 19.2% of them chose radio (Fang, W. 1987:5). By 1987, the number of viewers choosing TV news as their main information source went to 32.6%, while the number of those preferring radio increased to 31.1% and those favoring newspaper decreased to 33.3% (Ibid).

Another survey of 1987 shows more details about TV viewers' preference. Among the TV viewers in Shanghai, 34.3% of the people surveyed stated that their first purpose when watching TV is to get information, while 24.8% of them seek entertainment and 10.9 of them for expansion of knowledge (Dong, M. 1987:8). This clearly reflects a change in the audience's purpose of watching TV. Likewise, another statistics of 1987 also shows the credibility of STV's news programming. According to that statistics, 53% of TV viewers thought that television news was basically believable and 24% of the audience thought it was totally believable (Ibid, p.4). In Shanghai, a poll conducted as early as 1986 revealed that news was among the most appealing (Yu, J. 1986:22), and the first choice of 59% of the audience is news programming (Gao, M. 1986:12). However, the effect of TV news programming in Shanghai and all over China has become more and more prominent. The history of the past ten years verified that "television has become a major source of information and entertainment in China, a window on the outside world and an important tool for education" (Zhang, S. 1986:6).

In this chapter, we have reviewed the changes in STV's news programming. In the next chapter, we will examine the relationship between these programming



## CHAPTER 6: FACTORS GENERATING THE CHANGES, PROBLEMS FACING THE CHANGES, AND TRENDS OF THE CHANGES IN THE 1990S

In chapter 5, we reviewed the main changes in STV's news programming. In this chapter, we will examine the relationship between the programming changes and China's economic, political and media reform, and try to find out the factors generating the changes, the problems facing the changes, and the trends of the changes in the 1990s.

### 6.1 Factors Generating the Changes

Any change is attributed to one or more causes. This is also true in the case of changes in Shanghai Television Station's news programming, television in China, and China's mass media. "There seems to be little doubt that there is some determinate relationship between a society and its system of communications" (Bauer and Bauer 1966:429). James D. Halloran further points out: "The innovations and changes do not occur in isolation; they need to be examined within the wider social context, and in the light of current social trends" (1986:47). Accordingly, causes contributing the changes in media should be explored by "an holistic, sociological, contextual standpoint which saw the media not in isolation, but in relation to other institutions and processes" (*Ibid*, p. 47). Denis McQuail underlines four major factors: "In the history of mass media we deal with four main elements: a technology; the political, social, economic and cultural situation of a society; a set

of activities, functions or needs; people -- especially as formed into groups, classes or interests" (1987:8-9).

Obviously, changes having occurred in China's mass media in the past few years are caused by changes in China's economy and politics. Gordon White observes: "Certainly, political factors are a crucial determinant of change" (1982:7). However, changes in mass media are in response to and reinforced by new economic and political priorities. In other words, these changes are only part of the "dramatic changes taking place in society" (Chen, J. 1989:66). Therefore, generally speaking, China's economic and political reforms have generated media reform, and media reform has caused many significant changes in various aspects of the media. But to be more specific, the following factors, economic and political, social and functional, internal and external, are the main ones which contributed the changes in the Shanghai Television Station's news programming in the period from 1978 to 1988.

### 6.1.1 Changes in the Party's Policies

In China, politics affects everything (Howkins 1982:xi). Politics in China are usually shaped by the Party's policies. Without changes in the Party's policies, other changes are very unlikely to occur. Greg O'Leary and Andrew Watson state: "There has been, therefore, a significant re-conceptualization of politics, substantially re-defining the overall political agenda, re-designing much of the political framework, and changing the scope of political activities" (1985:7).

Among the changes in the Party's policies, three are the most prominent. One is the open-door policy. This policy "bring China out of its self-imposed isolation and towards a rapprochement with industrialized countries in the West. A dramatic expansion of cultural and economic transactions between China and these countries followed" (Wu, F. 1985:242-243). Because of this open-door policy, many news items concerning other countries have entered STV's news programming, and much of the up-to-date technology for news broadcasting have been adapted by the Shanghai Television Station.

The second change is the decentralization policy. Local television stations were only repeating the Central TV station's programming. This restriction seriously limited the development of local TV stations, including STV. However, because of this decentralization policy, during the reform period, the Shanghai Television Station has enjoyed more flexibility. Also, this decentralization policy has quickened the pace of the development of STV, such as the increase of news broadcasting hours, the formation of TV network of Young-Zi River Delta, and the launching of an English news service.

The third change is the pluralism policy. Doak Barnett points out that in the last decade the Chinese Communist Party and the government "have allowed -- within limits -- increased diversity and pluralism, and have permitted a greater circulation of information and ideas. They have stressed 'socialist legality' and have tried to broaden grass-roots participation in political life. The state's penetration of society has been substantially reduced and many areas of life have been depoliticized" (1986:50). Because of this pluralism policy, programs like "From Our

Viewers" and "News Analysis" as well as critical reporting have been able to appear in STV's news programming.

### 6.1.2 Changes in the Party's Control over the Media

All television stations, central and local, are totally, tightly and directly controlled by the Chinese Communist Party. "Television in China, like radio and the print media, is directly supervised by the Chinese Communist Party's Central Committee" (Merrill 1983:149). In TV news programming, the control by the Party has been implemented by the compulsory preview system. For decades, all STV's news items were previewed by the Party's municipal minister in charge of propaganda affairs. Often, if a news story was considered more important or sensitive, it would be reviewed by the highest municipal officials, such as the Party's municipal secretary in charge of ideological affairs. Although the Party and government still maintain their total control over China's mass media (O'Leary and Watson 1985:7), the control has been somewhat loosened and become somewhat indirect. For instance, during the past ten years, most of STV's news items have no longer been previewed by the authorities. This change has enabled many "brave" and controversial news items to go on the air.

### 6.1.3 Changes in the Foci of News Programming

During the last decade, the Chinese Communist Party has shifted the focus of its work from class struggle to modernization of China's economy and two socialist civilization (Ming 1987:4-5). Accordingly, the foci of STV's news programming

have also been shifted. It is no longer a pure tool of class struggle, power struggle or political education, but rather, a multi-purpose instrument. Because of this change, the news coverage has been able to be much more broadened, and "inform-educate-entertain the people", the three main purposes of news service, could begin to be realized. However, as Bradley S. Greenberg and Tuen-Yu Lau conclude: "This effort is to make the media more reader-oriented rather than leader-oriented" (1990:23).

#### 6.1.4 Emergence of Competition

The concept of competition to Chinese people is not new, but it is new in China's practice, especially in China's mass media practice. In the past ten years, competition has been facing every Chinese media institution. Marlene Cuthbert predicts: "Communication and cultural sovereignty can no longer be protected by borders" (1987:30). It is undeniable that "Western cultural pressure on the evolving societies of the developing world would increase" ("The New World Information and Communication Order: A Failure to Communicate?" 1986:3). Because of the Party's open-door policy, a great deal of outside information has poured into China. Lawrence Eagleburger, a U.S. diplomat in Beijing gives his observation: "China, under Deng Xiaoping's modernization program, opened itself to foreign news media -- and it largely remains open today" (1990:1). However, inevitably, competition between China's mass media and foreign media institutions has begun. Likewise, because of the quick development of China's media and the Party's decentralization policy, competition has also been brought about among China's

mass media institutions (Si 1987:62). These competitions, both internal and external, have greatly stimulated STV's news programming to keep moving forward. The increase of news broadcasting hours, expansion of news coverage, and innovation of facilities and equipment are all partly attributed to the emergence of competition.

### 6.1.5 New Demands of the Public

China's current economic and political reforms have exerted a powerful influence on the public's communication behavior. The Chinese are showing an increasing interest in information and knowledge (Zhang and Shi 1985:2). According to a survey conducted in Shanghai in 1986, 59% of the interviewees said that news programming is one of their favorite programs. This was the first time that more than half of the interviewees made such a choice. In 1986, the number went up to 63%, and by 1987 it rose to 66% (Kuang 1987:10). The changes in the audience's attitude towards TV news promoted the development of STV's programming. Another research study concerning the components of the audience of STV's news shows that most of STV's news audience are intellectuals, officials, high school and university students. In other words, the higher the audience's education degree is, the more likely they are to watch news (Gao, M. 1987:20). This change in the component of audience has required more quality news programming, which has also inspired the improvement of STV's news programming. However, in the past ten years, the Shanghai Television Station has provided more information about audience expectation at a time China has embarked on a modernization program for the purpose of satisfying the demands of the public in the new era (Zhang and Shi

1985:2).

#### 6.1.6 Changes in STV's News Personnel

Until the early 1980s, there were no academic and vocational institutions for training television personnel. Most television staff came from newspapers, radio and film studios, and for historical and political reasons, few of them received academic training. According to Bradley S. Greenberg and Tuen-Yu Lau, there "were a quarter-million Chinese working in communication activities and professions. But virtually none of them were trained in journalism and communication programs" (1990:22). Precisely speaking, this is not true. It is true that among Chinese reporters and editors, only few graduated from Western-standard journalism or communication programs. Most of them were trained in Chinese literature and language, political science (Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought), history or business programs. For example, before 1980 among the 21 reporters and editors of the News Department at STV, only two of them or less than 10% of the total personnel graduated from journalism programs (Zhuang 1984:253). This situation certainly prevented both the development and improvement of STV's news programming. During the 1980s, a number of new graduates from journalism programs have joined STV's news staff. By 1986, there were a total of 39 reporters and editors in STV's News Department. Among them, 19 are graduates of China's first class journalism program, occupying more than 49% of the total (Yu, J. 1986:21). Undoubtedly, this transition has not only provided the possibility but also advanced the pace for the various changes in STV's news programming.

## 6.2 Problems Facing the Changes

Progress and problems always go hand in hand. During the last decade, although many remarkable changes have happened in STV's news programming, there are also a number of problems facing the changes. The following four are the most evident problems of STV's news programming.

### 6.2.1 One-way Communication

Basically, the Shanghai Television Station's news reporting is still a one-way flow of content, namely from the Party and government to the public. The emphasis of the news programming is still mainly placed upon the needs of the Party and of politics. Once again, the Party stresses that "journalism should reflect what the party and government say, and espouse the party line and government policy.....Freedom or rights cannot be separated from responsibilities and obligations. There is no freedom without responsibilities or rights without obligations" (Bishop 1989:152). Therefore, the news stories broadcast on the screen are still somewhat strictly selected, though in a more indirect way. However, news is still like a political education program, and very often, propaganda still manipulates the news to serve the interest of a certain ideology<sup>1</sup>. This situation certainly does not satisfy the

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<sup>1</sup> According to a growing body of critical research, processes of news production and presentation are highly subjective. Examining news values and structure of news, McQuail (1987:208) has supported Gerbner's (1964) conclusion that "there is no fundamentally non-ideologically, apolitically, non-partisan, news-gathering and reporting system". In fact, some researchers use the concept "news ideology". For example, Jensen (1987:8) has traced "news ideology" in U.S. TV news: "Television network news in the United States is constructed by a particular ideological vision of the U.S. economic system in which a small

audience (Gao, L. 1987:12-20). In early 1988, a survey conducted among 500 prominent personalities in Beijing (by the Public Opinion Research Institute of the People's University of China) shows a great demand for further mass media reform. 63.2% of the people marked the present mass media performance as "unsatisfactory" or "not very satisfactory". Moreover, 91.1% criticized the mass media for their inability to supervise the performance of the Party and the government, for their insufficient presentation of the people's voice, and for paying too much attention to the authorities (Wang 1989:21).

### 6.2.2 Preview System

Although the preview system has been considerably relaxed in the reform period, it still exists. Very often, if the news story is regarded very important or sensitive, it will still be previewed by those party officials in charge of propaganda affairs. After the preview, the story may be or may not be able to appear on the screen. Although the Chinese press is now encouraged to criticize the daily workings of the government and the wrong doings of the Party officials, since there is no press law and the judicial system has just begun the process of reconstruction (Chen and Chu 1982:224), more reporting that criticizes or exposes the corruption of high ranking officials cannot be expected. "Traditionally China has been a nation governed by people instead of laws. This applies to journalism" (Starck and Xu 1988:150). Therefore, a press law for China should be enacted and it should

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set of explanation is offered to account for economic developments and political interventions into the economy."

"protect socialist freedom, combining protection and limitations, rights and obligations" (Ibid).

### 6.2.3 Other Restrictions

Although the control of the Party over the media has been loosened a great deal, and the Party's policies on the media have undergone some changes, there still are many restrictions on media practice. In other words, the Party initiated the media reform, but at the same time constrained the scope of this reform (this situation is also true in economic and political reforms). For example, the Party lifted the prohibition for social news reporting, but required that 80% of the total reporting must be devoted to "positive reporting" (Lent 1986:23). In other words, all social news and critical reporting must be limited within 20% of the total. Also, though the Party has encouraged the supervision function of the mass media, it does not want the mass media to go too far<sup>2</sup>. The Party often warns the media that the purpose of playing supervision function is to help the Party's leadership, not to overthrow the Party (Jiang, Z. 1989:1).

### 6.2.4 Uneven Development of International News Programming

It is true that the international communication environment, in some aspects,

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<sup>2</sup> In Western countries, too, ruling political parties have complained about news media's going too far. The conflict between news media and U.S. presidents L.B. Johnson, R.M. Nixon and R. Reagan is well-known. According to Desbarats (1990:46), in Canada in the 1980s, Cabinet ministers frequently complained about antigovernment bias in the media and 'left/liberal' bias in the CBC in particular."

has actively shaped the role of STV's news programming, but this process has also brought some problems. Since STV, as well as other Chinese stations, still lack their own sources for international news stories, they have to rely on foreign agencies. In this field, however, the situation can hardly be effectively managed. Inevitably, STV's international news stories seem excessive in some aspects and insufficient in other ways ("The Debate about TV Program Import", TV Information, No. 8, 1987, p. 3). For instance, the coverage allocations of international news events are uneven: those about the Western countries, particularly about the U.S., are much more prevalent than those about Third World countries. Also, Western civilization, including the contributions made by the Western countries to the world, have often been over-emphasized, while the disasters and problems occurring in Third World countries are often the focus of news events about those countries (Yang 1987:39)<sup>3</sup>.

### 6.3 Trends of Changes in the 1990s

Precisely predicting the trends of the current changes in China may be difficult, but drawing a rough sketch for them is not only possible, but also necessary. As a matter of fact, the changes in news programming, on one hand, are part of the changes in China's mass media, economy, politics (the Party's guideline and policies), and society (its tradition, ideology, structure and system). On the other hand, the former changes are also a reflection of the latter changes. Therefore, the

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<sup>3</sup> This situation, one-way flow of news from the West to the Third World and its distorted nature, is one of the main features of Western news reporting (see, for example, Many Voices, One World (the MacBride Report)), Abridged Edition, UNESCO [Publications], 1984, pp. 113-121).

trends of the changes in STV's news programming will also be part of the trends of China's mass media reform as well as economic and political reforms. Accordingly, the trends of changes in STV's news programming and China's mass media very much depend on the trends of the further changes in China's economy and politics. That is the reason why the researcher chose this topic to study as he mentioned earlier in this thesis.

Roughly, four trends of change in Shanghai Television Station's news programming as well as in China's mass media reform can be illustrated.

### 6.3.1 China's Mass Media Reform Will Continue, but at a Slower Pace

During the past decade, a great many changes have taken place in China's economy, politics and society. The economic and political reforms have not only led to mass media reform, but media reform has also enhanced economic and political reforms. China's mass media reform has been on a road which is parallel to the roads of the economic and political reforms ("China's Mass Media is on the Reform Road", Reference Information, Jan. 23, 1988, p.1). The media reform has not only considerably changed media practice, but also greatly changed the people's conception and life, particularly in the political and cultural realms ("China's Reform Contributes Various Changes", Reference Information, Jul. 20, 1987, p.4). Media reform, like economic and political reforms, has met the needs of both the Party leadership and Chinese people. The Party leadership has found that the reform is the only way to improve their leadership and maintain their rule. In the

meantime, the people have demanded deeper and wider reforms. Based on this situation, current reforms including media reform have become a kind of tendency of the modern history of China, and no one can turn it back (Wang, Z. 1989:22). But the Party is now also afraid of the daily increasing "passive effects of the reforms". "Like the reform policies, the opening to the outside world has brought an invigorating air. International trade, investment and cultural cooperation have increased dynamically, and in the main soundly, and China is determined to continue along this path in the 1990s. But, as with an unscreened window, 'flies and mosquitoes', as people here call them, can come in along with the fresh air" (Epstein 1990:15). Out of this fear, the Party tends to check both the speed and scope of the reforms while operating those reforms. Nevertheless, it is true that the student democracy movement and the Tiananmen Square event happening in the middle of 1989 have already seriously affected China's current reforms -- economic, political, mass media, education, etc. -- in different aspects and to different degrees. However, those events cannot prevent these reforms from continuing. Bruce Burton indicates: "I don't think there will be a total turning inward; I don't think that is feasible or possible, despite the desire by some party bureaucrats to go back to the 'good old days' of the 1950s. Too much has happened since 1978. The opening up of China cannot be stopped, but rather, reduced" (1989:1). Therefore, instead of stopping the historic transaction in China's contemporary history, "the Chinese government will likely adhere to a 'go slow' set of policies for a number of years" (Ibid).

This trend can also be reflected through the recent changes -- both forward and backward -- in Shanghai Television Station. Since the student democracy movement, the municipal Party committee of Shanghai has tightened its control over STV by means of previewing more programs and issuing more restrictions to the reporters and editors, such as reducing critical reporting, limiting the discussion programs on the Party's policies, and broadcasting more international news stories concerning the problems in the West. But in the meantime, the Party still allows STV to open its door to the outside world, and even more widely. For instance, the Shanghai International Television Festival, which was initiated by STV in 1986 and was the first of its kind in China, has been approved by the Chinese central government as a representative Chinese TV festival. In 1986, TV companies and organizations from 20 countries attended the first festival. At the second one in 1988, the number of countries went up to 35. For the third one in October, 1990, more than 50 countries will send their delegates to the festival ("The Coming-up 3rd Shanghai International TV Festival", People's Daily, May 2, 1990, p. 1). These festivals not only offer good opportunities for worldwide professionals throughout the world to communicate, but also promote changes in China's mass media. Obviously, on one hand the mass media reform is still continuing, but on the other hand the pace of the reform is slowing down.

### 6.3.2 The Mass Media Reform Will be Implemented in a Fixed Track and Pursue a Planned Goal

Although media reform as well as economic and political reforms will continue, they will be implemented in a more strictly fixed rather than random track, and pursue a more clearly planned rather than a vague goal. Specifically, a) China's mass media reform will be conducted based on the Party's four cardinal principles; and b) the purpose of the mass media reform is to build a Chinese style of media system and practice, not the Western standard, nor the Soviet model.

In the past few years, because of the drastic changes in almost every aspect of Chinese society, some people thought that China has defected from Marxist-Leninist doctrine and the socialist road. According to Kent M. Wiedeman, a "few Western journalists have gone so far as to declare that China has taken the capitalist road" (1986:774). This is not the real situation. When exploring the trends of the changes, we should avoid this misunderstanding. "In considering the prospects for press reforms in China, there is the danger of overreacting in one direction or the other" (Starck and Xu 1988:157). The Party has emphasized many times that all China's reforms, economic, political, media and the reforms in all other contexts, should be operated under the Party's four cardinal principles -- adherence to the leadership of the Chinese communist Party, the people's democratic dictatorship, the socialist road, and Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought. "The four basic principles remain the avowed bedrock upon which the reform campaign must rest, however uncomfortably" (Wiedeman 1986:778). Talking about the future of the Chinese communication systems, Robert Bishop observes that "we may well see more

restrictions placed on the media" (1989:176). Among those restrictions, what the Party emphasizes the most is that only the four basic principles can guarantee the correct direction of China's reforms. "Upholding the Party's four basic principles will not prevent the reforms from continuing or constraining them; on the contrary, it will benefit the reforms" (Li 1989:1). Therefore, the Party insists that in any time and in any circumstances the four basic principles should always be put on the top of any issue. In addition, based on the lessons learned from the student democracy movement, the Party has made a clearer goal for China's reforms -- to build a Chinese style of socialism, or in other words, to establish a socialism with Chinese characteristics. Building up a Chinese style of socialism has a two-fold meaning. On one hand, it means China will continue its reforms. On the other hand, it also means that China will never change its fundamental principles. So, this idea can be defined as "integrating the basic tenets of Marxism with actual conditions in China" (Townsend and Momack 1986:395). In other words, "socialism with Chinese characteristics" is above all an assertion of Chinese independence within the Marxist-Leninist tradition, and also an insistence that China must follow its own socialist road that integrates Marxism with Chinese conditions (Ibid, p. 397).

This trend has also been very evident since the student democracy movement. For instance, the mass media reform, although it is still continuing, has tended to be conducted in minor aspects, such as those involving media performance through changes in content and improvement of news writing and presentation, rather than major issues, such as the media theory and system (Starck and Xu 1988:149). Clearly, if there is something in the reforms which may damage the Party's

leadership or socialism, it will definitely not be allowed to occur. "China still has what is essentially a one-party system" (Barnett 1986:51). Although the "socialism with Chinese characteristics" somewhat symbolizes the break with the Maoist period, the "four basic principles" still symbolize the link (Townsend and Momack 1986:396). However, as said by Li Peng, the present Chinese Prime Minister, "We intend to retain the better part of our experience while benefiting from the better part of the experience of the industrialized countries" (Elmandjra 1989:19). Li Peng stresses that a change of the socialist system is "out of the question" (*Ibid*). Despite that the Party has accepted the Western expression of "creative freedom", they also declare that "our creative freedom is socialist creative freedom" (Ladany 1986:31).

As for Shanghai Television Station's news programming as well as for the Chinese television, although they have already absorbed something from the West, they will not be totally westernized; and although they will still keep something from the Marxist model, they will not be totally unchangeable. For instance, you can neither expect the "totally free reporting of problems" to appear in China's mass media, nor you can expect the "pure instrument of propaganda" to come back. However, the ratio of "positive reporting" and "negative reporting" set by the Chinese Communist Party -- 80% positive and only 20% negative -- might be counted as a typical example of the Chinese style of socialist mass media ("On the Direction of China's Media Reform", Wenhui Daily, Sept. 3, 1989, p.1)<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Critical students of the media argue that "totally free reporting" does not exist anywhere (see, for example, Altschull 1984). According to Chomsky (1987-88:14), despotic states rule primarily through coercion; in democratic societies, however, "the state is much more limited in its capacity to control behavior by force..."; the state controls what people think and

### 6.3.3 The Mass Media Reform Will Concentrate More on Practice than System and Policies

The third trend of media reform is tightly bound to the first and second trends. Since mass media reform, just as the economic and political reforms, will still continue in the 1990s but at a slow pace, and since the reforms will be conducted in a more strictly fixed track -- for the purpose of improving socialism, the reform has to be operated in a more cautious way and in a "safer" field (Elmandjra 1989:19). Doing something technological and technical is much safer than changing something involving society. In a speech Hu Yaobang, former CCP general secretary, said "we should earnestly learn the advanced techniques of the mass media in capitalist countries in writing, editing, and communicating and their advanced management; but we should not learn the basic principles of their bourgeois journalist work because our social system is different from theirs" (Won 1989:259). According to the blueprint for Shanghai Television Station's development strategies for the 1990s, much of the attention will be placed upon the "hardware" rather than the "software". For instance, aiming to become the largest local television station among the Asian countries along the West coast in the Pacific, STV will expand its broadcasting channels from the present four to seven. In

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this process of thought control or "manufacturing of consent" is conducted, in part, through the media. In their study of the political economy of the mass media, Herman and Chomsky (1988:306) conclude that "the mass media of the United States are effective and powerful ideological institutions that carry out a system-supportive propaganda function by reliance on market forces, internalized assumptions, and self-censorship, and without significant overt coercion."

addition, it will open a full-day English service program to foreigners (Fang and Zhang 1988:52). Further, the broadcasting hours of STV will be increased to as many as five or seven times the present situation and even some all-night service channels may appear. A 400-meter-high transmission tower is being constructed and it will be the highest TV transmission tower in Asia (Ibid). Also, more advanced facilities and equipment will replace the present ones. When STV's programs will more actively enter the global arena, playing a conspicuous role in the world market, there will also be more emphasis on commercial development. Selling air time has already been put onto its agenda (Ibid, pp. 48-49).

While Shanghai Television Station will be more open in the above-mentioned aspects in the 1990s, it will be tightened in some other aspects in the next decade. For example, several of the high rating news feature programs, such as "News Analysis", "From Our Viewers" and "World Outlook", have already been placed under some restrictions concerning the selection of topics. This change is because of political considerations. Because of the student democracy movement, the leadership always fears that an inappropriate news item may cause a big "fire". Although "freedom of speech and publication is the basic condition for political democracy" (Stavis 1988:59), and "modernization without democratization was not enough" (Mazrul 1989:6), the Chinese Communist Party will never be willing to sacrifice its leadership for democracy. Instead, China's leadership is "resisting a liberalizing trend in the communist world" ("China Scolds Party Cadres for Corruption", Windsor Star, Mar. 13, 1990, p. A12). Therefore, if there is a conflict between the Party's leadership and democracy, the Party will never choose the latter. For

instance, during the student democracy movement in 1989, the World Economic Herald (ShijieJingjiDaobao), the only major newspaper in China not under direct party or government control which regularly prints news and opinion on domestic and foreign topics not appearing elsewhere in China, was seized by the Shanghai Communist Party "after it charged that former party chief Hu Yaobang was illegally fired and that the party is undemocratic" ("Shanghai Communist Party Seizes Only Independent Paper in China", The Globe and Mail, May 1, 1989, p. A21). Obviously, as Benedict Stavis states, although "a new 'Cultural Revolution' in China is as unlikely as a new Hitler in Germany or a new Japanese military attack on Pearl Harbor, however, certain aspects of the 'Cultural Revolution', such as its anti-capitalism, anti-bourgeoisie and nativistic strands, might reappear in some new form and at some level" (1988:137-138). As a matter of fact, while China is still conducting its reforms at present, the "anti-bourgeoisie" movement is also sweeping across China's every circle and corner ("Artists on the Bourgeois Liberalization", People's Daily, Jul. 13, 1989, p.1).

"The future of the mass media system in China cannot be predicted without knowing what kind of political development might occur in that country. A nation's press or mass media system is closely related to its political system. The media is largely determined by its politico-social context, and in turn its functions are compatible with its national political ideology" (Won 1989:272).

Therefore, although we may know the directions of the future changes in STV's news programming, in mass media, in economic and political reforms in the 1990s, we might not be sure to what extent they will be undertaken, since there are

still many uncertainties and even contradictions in the reforms (yang, S. 1985:21). It is exactly as Zhixing Wang observes: "Changing practice and orthodox theory are in obvious contradiction" (1989:21). Further, this dilemma is even more apparent with regard to society as a whole. The Chinese leadership has realized that a degree of democracy is both desirable to promote modernization and inevitable given the proposed rapid transition changes in Chinese society; the Party has found itself unable to impose stringent controls on the expression of opinion and has thus found itself in an ambiguous position of wishing to promote democracy yet at the same time "guide" it.

#### 6.4 Conclusion

Based on the above analysis, the following may be appropriate to conclude this study.

From 1978 to 1988, broadcasting media have become the dominant media in China. The past ten years, especially, have been a fertile period for China's television development. Along with the explosion in terms of TV sets, production capacity, broadcasting hours and equipment improvement, many changes have also occurred in other aspects, such as programming policies, the Party's control, and status and functions of TV stations. However, among the changes in China's mass media, changes in television are more drastic; among the changes in television stations, changes in Shanghai Television Station are more prominent; and among the changes in STV, changes in its news programming are more impressive. These changes have mainly involved: a) news programming content; b) news programming

structure; c) news format; d) technology for news broadcasting; e) news programming quantity; and f) effect of news programming.

Obviously, changes in STV's news programming, in China's television, as well as in the country's mass media, are not isolated social events; they are caused by changes in the country's economy and politics. The changes in STV's news programming from 1978 to 1988 are very much related to the changes in media policies as well as to the changes in economy, politics, ideology and social systems. Overall, the changes in mass media are both a cause and a result of societal changes. The programming changes and the changes in the Party's policies, the people's ideology and the societal structure and social systems, are tightly bound together and are strongly influencing each other. In other words, the changes in China's mass media are the results of the media reform; and the media reform is the result of China's current economic and political reforms. Principally there are six factors which have generated the changes in China's mass media: 1. changes in the Party's policies; 2. changes in the Party's control over the media; 3. changes in the foci of news programming; 4. emergence of competition; 5. new demands of the public; and 6. changes in China's media personnel.

Although changes in China's mass media, which have been examined in this study through the case study of STV's news programming may seem, by Western standards, only technological and even trivial, they have three-fold significance: politically, historically, and globally. First, fundamentally speaking, changes in China's mass media were contributed by the country's political changes, and they have also been promoting the political change. Because of the change in mass

media, the scope and pace of China's political reform have been widened and expanded. It has been a very important step in the process of developing, promoting and enhancing the country's openness, publicity and democracy. Second, changes in the media showed that they have entered a new period of their history. In a sense, during the past few years, the country's media have experienced a revolution which is different from any other changes in its history. Third, China's previous situation both in terms of media policies and political and social systems is not unique. Similar situations and problems also exist in other Third World countries and socialist countries. "The Chinese discussions of reform are taking place in the context of a broader reform movement in the world socialist movement" (Stavis 1988:6). Therefore, China's experience, both positive and negative, may provide those countries with something useful, thus making her changes of global significance.

However, generally speaking, the future of China's mass media is bright, although some obstacles are inevitable. Roughly, three trends of change in China's mass media during the 1990s can be illustrated; 1. media reform will be continuing, but at a slow pace; 2. media reform will be implemented in a more strictly fixed track and pursue a planned goal; 3. mass media reform will concentrate more on practice than system and policies. In other words, the changes which are occurring in China's different domains will not stop in the 1990s, but the pace will be slow; the extent and the scope of the changes will be uncertain, mainly depending on the internal struggle within the Chinese Communist Party; the future changes will be focused on the "technology" rather than "ideology". Overall, China and her

communication system must and will change, just as streams give way to mountains and mountains to streams, but China and her communication system will remain socialist and authoritarian. A violent change, either toward Maoism or capitalism, is unlikely (Bishop 1989:171). Hu Yaobang, former Secretary in General of the CCP, said several times that "no matter how many reforms are introduced, the nature of the Party's journalism cannot be changed" (Won 1989:56). For these reasons, we can anticipate that China's mass media in the 1990s will continue to be reformed, but in a much more cautious way.

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