

The changes in the Vietnamese Government's policies and Laws of Journalism and their affects to Journalism after the Economic Renovation 1986

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I. The Economic Renovation 1986 and its affects to the social-economy in Vietnam

1. The Centrally Planned Economy 1975-1985

After the war ended in 1975, the Vietnamese government applied a model of centrally planned economy, which generally speaking was not much different from the Soviet Union's model in terms of its internal mechanisms, although inferior in the level of development. The reasons for the lack of development of the plan were that after the war, Vietnam had to cope with innumerable difficulties, including the aftermath of war, social problems, conflict at the southwest border against the genocidal policies of Pol Pot's government in Cambodia, the dispute at the northern border. In addition, Vietnam had to cope with the mass flow of refugees, a political and economic embargo by the United States and a number of Western countries, plus continual natural calamities. Those difficulties became more severe due to subjective reasons such as the hastiness and impatience of the Government, and a desire to rebuild the country regardless of specific actual conditions.

During the first five years after the war, the government prioritised heavy industry and focused on the 'revolution of the relations of production', by extending the model of the centrally planned mechanism in the North to the whole country. This policy principally entailed the nationalisation and centralisation of the entire economy, and consequently the people's personal interests were not protected.

In the period from 1975 to 1980, the average GNP was half the rate of the population growth, and the national income grew by approximately one-fifth. Most economic targets set in the second five year plan (1976-1980) by the Fourth Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party were not met, and a number of economic indicators barely reached a third of their stated targets. From 1981 to 1985, the economic growth rate was slightly higher, however due to the serious national recession between 1976 and 1980,

the overall economic situation hardly changed (Bui 2000, p.22). Overspending of the state budget increased dramatically by 25% to 45% (of revenues) in the years after reunification (Bui 2000, p.22). In addition, because consumption was greater than the national income, the Vietnamese economy depended deeply on various kinds of foreign aids, and the country incurred significant debts that, by the early 1980s, equalled the annual national income (CPV 2005a, p.444; CPV 2005b, p. 47).

In short, in the 10 years after the war, the centrally planned development of the Vietnamese economy failed to develop in any meaningful way. Basically, the level of industrialisation remained the same, despite ten years of intense efforts to promote heavy industrial development.

It is worth noting that, at that stage, Vietnam was a 'backward' agricultural economy with 80% of the population living, working and depending on agriculture or related sectors (Bui 2000, p.22). However, even though Vietnam was an agricultural economy, annual agricultural production was not enough to feed the people and the average food per capita (measured in rice) reached only 300kg per year (Bui 2000, p.22). Vietnam suffered from persistent famines, despite the fact that the Government was compelled to import 5.6 million tons of food between 1976 and 1980 (Boothroyd and Pham 2000).

At that time, the errors in the general readjustment of prices and wages, and in monetary changes, in late 1985, gradually drove the whole socioeconomic situation into a national crisis. Industrial and agricultural production both stagnated, circulation stalled, inflation rocketed to three digit rates, with the peak at 777.47% in 1986 (CPV 2005a, p.444; CPV 2005b, p.47). The quality of life was poor and continued to decline. Daily necessities such as food, consumer goods, transport, and health and education facilities were seriously deficient, as a consequence, public confidence declined.

At this historical turning point, the most pressing demand on the Government was to find feasible and efficient measures to quickly escape the crisis. Nguyen Van Linh, the party general secretary elected at the Sixth Congress in December 1986, declared that escape from the "current chaotic situation created by inflation is our most urgent task between now and the end of 1987" (Nguyen 1986 cited Esterline 1988, p.97). Since that time, the people of Viet Nam have experienced major changes in most aspects of their lives as a result of the government's policy changes.

2. The Economic Renovation and its impacts on Vietnamese society

At the 6th Congress Party in December 1986, the government launched the Economic Renovation, as a transition from the centrally planned economy to a market-oriented one with a socialist direction, engaging in the general global development trends adopted by developing countries, and the process of gradual globalisation and regionalisation. With the slogans “*face the facts, analyse exactly the truth, speak the truth*” and “*criticism and self-criticism*” (CPV 2005a, p.10), the Party strictly critiqued its mistakes in previous years, assessing carefully its achievements, analysing mistakes and drawbacks and setting forth an all-round renovation policy.

The aims of the Economic Renovation’s policy were fundamentally: to eliminate the central command, and the state subsidised mechanism, and transform this to a multi-sector economy with market mechanisms and state regulations; to enact policies for the integration of Vietnam into the world and regional economies and encourage foreign direct investment. The government also endeavoured to ensure that the economic development was accompanied by social and cultural development, environmental protection, and the democratisation of social life: building a legal state of the people, for the people, by the people. One of the most important guidelines for the renovation was the open policy of international cooperation with the stated ethos “*Vietnam wants to be the friend of all nations in the world for peace, independence, and development*” (CPV 2005a, p. 502).

The nature of these policies, resulted in the transformation from a planned to a market economy in Vietnam, this was significantly different from what took place in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries of Eastern Europe. It is worth noting that in Vietnam, an emphasis on social and political stability went hand-in-hand with macro-economic stabilisation and control of state resources.

In terms of rural developments, since 1986, many institutional reforms had been carried out, which had helped to create a vital dynamic that promoted a stable rate of improvement in agricultural and rural development over the previous 20 years (1986-2006).

One of the most important aspects of the economic reforms in Vietnam was the encouragement of domestic and foreign private investment. The passing of the Foreign Direct Investment Law (1987), which was regarded as the first concrete step towards economic renovation, in 1986, benefited domestic entrepreneurs, although indirectly. The Constitution officially recognised the role of the private sector in 1992; however,

the most important milestone for private sector development was the Enterprise Law of 2000, with its simplification of registration procedures, which led to the elimination of over one hundred business licences (WB 2006, p.6).

The national Congresses of the Communist Party, held in 1991, 1996, 2001, and the most recent one in 2006, continued to reaffirm its commitment to a socialist-oriented multi-sector economy, operating under both the market mechanism and state management. In 2006, the Tenth Party Congress admitted private sector entrepreneurs as Party members, thus stressing the equal status and legitimacy acquired by businesses of all sorts (WB 2006, p.1).

Together with the establishment and gradual improvement of the legal framework for FDI (Foreign Direct Investment), Vietnam also signed international bilateral and multilateral agreements on investment encouragement and protection. With commitments amounting to almost 10% of GDP between 1994 and 1997, during this period, Vietnam became the top recipient of FDI among all developing countries and transition economies (WB 2006, p.ii)¹.

With the renovation process, Vietnam, gradually, overcame many difficulties and hindrances, and achieved significant results. From a 'starving' country, where until 1988 there were still famines in a number of provinces - with the Government having to import more than half a million tons of rice for food aid (CPV 2005a, p.445) - Vietnam became one of the world largest rice-exporters in 1992 (CPV 2005a, p.228). Goods exports also grew by an average of nearly 20% annually from 1990 to 2000, approximately 2.6 times higher than the GDP growth rate. The annual export growth rate in 2004 and 2005 were 31.5% and 21.6%, respectively. The share of manufacturing exports also increased significantly, from around 8% in 1991 to 56% in 2004. The domestic private sector has also expanded rapidly. The number of private enterprises registered has increased. In 2005, the private sector, including FDI companies, contributed nearly 60% of the GDP (CPV 2005b, p.71).

During a ten-year period (1990 – 2000), the average economic growth rate (represented by the increase rate in GDP) reached 7.5% ²(CPV 2005c, p. 69). This strong performance has been accompanied by a continuation of Vietnam's remarkable success

¹ However, the East Asia crisis broke this trend, and after experiencing a sharp decline for almost a decade, the volume of FDI commitments is again approaching to 10% of the GDP.

² In 1999 the economy was seriously affected by the economic crisis in the region and natural calamities; it GDP growth was only 4.5 %.

in reducing poverty, which has declined from 57% in 1992 to under 20% in 2004 (McCarty 2005, p. 5). Inflation decreased from 67.1% (in 1991) to 6% (in 2000) and the exchange rate with the US dollar has remained relatively stable. Budget revenue rose from 15.2% of the GDP in 1990 to approximately 25% in 2005, of which the share contributed by the private sector continues to increase.

Vietnam has also achieved significant success in human development, including education, health care, public media, and other social activities. The poverty incidence, based on the GSO/World Bank overall poverty line, dropped from over 70% in the mid-1980s to approximately 58% in 1993³ and further to 27.5% in 2004⁴ (National Centre for Social Sciences & Humanities 2001, p.27; CPV 2005c, p. 79). In addition, the literacy rate is 95%, while life expectancy is over 70 (CPV 2005c, p. 80-81).

The Economic Renovation had great impacts on Vietnamese society in general and journalism in particular. It was the renovation of thinking and the success of economic renovation that infused a new spirit into Vietnamese journalism, created new characteristics, and provided new ways for journalism to develop. Generally speaking, there are four characteristics of journalism in the open-market economy (albeit with a socialist orientation) in Vietnam, which are: the booming of various kinds of mass media, the democratising trend, the competitive environment and Government-controlled journalism. These characteristics created a model different from any other model of journalism in the world, as they are affected by an open-market economy, which is mediated by a Government-driven socialist orientation.

II. The changes in the journalism landscape in Vietnam after the Economic Renovation

1. The journalism boom

During the subsidised period from 1975 to 1986, the Vietnamese Government operated systems of total control of society, including mass media. Due to a serious economic crisis at this time, journalism faced innumerable difficulties. Many newspapers had to reduce the frequency or circulation of publication. In 1984, a number of newspapers were compelled to reduce their circulations by 25%, compared to their circulations in 1976 (MCI 2006). Due to the limited circulations, and the Government's policies during

³ According to the previous standard of poverty line (1 USD/day/person) (CPV 2005c, p.79).

⁴ According to the previous standard of poverty line (2 USD/day/person) (CPV 2005c, p.79).

the subsidised period, it was not easy for ordinary people to subscribe to a newspaper. It should be noted that in Vietnam, television was first broadcast experimentally in 1971, and officially launched on 16th June 1976 (Tran 1995, p131-137). The number of television sets, and consequently their availability in Vietnam, was very limited at that time. According to Ngo (2006), during 1970s, there were approximately 100 television sets in Hanoi, which were distributed, initially, to governmental institutions. For the majority of Vietnamese people at that time, radio remained the main medium of information and entertainment.

It is worth noting that, regarding the framework of organisation for radio and television stations, during the period 1977 – 1993, there were several changes which affected strongly the development of radio and television in Vietnam. In 1977, The Committee of Radio and Television was set up as the result of a Government Decree, which incorporated The National Radio Station and The National Television Station. The Committee of Local Radio and Television controlled local radio and television stations. In 1984, according to the decision of The Central Committee of Propaganda and Training, The National Radio Station and The National Television Station were detached from the Committee of Radio and Television (Tran 1995, p.153-154; MCI 2006). This decision had significantly adverse effects on the development of broadcasting in Vietnam. As Tran Lam, the First General Director of the VOV, commented:

Due to the decision (of The Central Committee of Propaganda and Training) which was not in accordance with the Government's structure, the relationship between The National Television Station and the Committee of Radio and Station became contentious.

(Tran 1995, p. 153)

Three years later (in 1987), the then President decided to reform a number of organisations, including dissolving the Committee of Radio and Television, to form the Ministry of Information (Tran 1995, p. 154) The National Radio Station, The National Television Station and The News Agency were set up as three separate organisations, directly under the central Government.

During the same year (1987), the Government decided to hand over the transmission system and frequencies from VOV to the General Post Office (GPO), resulting in the Radio Station becoming a subscriber of GPO. Due to these ill thought through changes, the coverage areas of radio were narrowed, so that even people in Thai Binh province

(109 km from Hanoi) could not receive radio signals (MCI 2006). Until 1992, only 31% of the population in Vietnam could listen to radio (Huu 1992, p. 71 & p. 96).

After the Economic Renovation, journalistic organisations were flourishing. In February 1995, there were 375 journalistic organisations, with a total of over 360 million publications. At the end of 1996, the number of newspapers increased to 449. Nearly ten years later, in 2005, there were 553 journalistic organisations with a total annual circulation of 600 millions issues (Resolution No 219/2005/QD-TTg). The radio network is comprised of hundreds of radio stations, of which VOV controls directly 11 stations, with a total capacity of 8000KW. In addition, there are 64 provincial radio stations and 606 district radio stations, amongst which there are 288 FM radio stations (MCI 2006).

In 1987, VOV broadcast only 28 hours per day (via 2 channels), within 10 years broadcast hours per day increased to 100 hours via four channels (Tran 2001, p. 73). The number of radio programmes broadcast increased from 21,000 hours per year in 1991 to 33,358 hours per year in 1995 and 51,465 hours per year in 2000 (equivalent to 245% the number of radio programmes broadcast in the previous ten year). The number of radio channels also increased from only two radio channels (for domestic and external services) before 1986, to three channels in 1993 and 6 channels in 1998. The capacity of radio transmission rose from 3370kw in 1995 to 8450kw in 2000 (Vu 2001).

In terms of television, at the present time, the national television station (VTV) has five channels. Apart from VTV, there are 4 regional television stations and 64 provincial television stations. There are 10 million television sets nationwide. Approximately 85% of households in Vietnam are able to watch television (MCI 2006). In addition, Internet development in Vietnam has resulted in the country being amongst the top countries in ASEAN,⁵ for development, with an increase of 32.5% per year (Resolution No 219/2005/QD-TTg; Communist Journal 2005). Currently, there are six Internet suppliers (IXP), hundreds of online newspapers and approximately 2500 websites with millions logs on per day (MCI 2006).

However, even though journalism in Vietnam enjoyed a significant development in quantity, compared with other developed countries or other advanced developing

⁵ ASEAN is short for Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which include Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar. The ASEAN region has a population of approximately 500 million, a total area of 4.5 million square kilometers, a combined gross domestic product of almost US\$ 700 billion, and a total trade of about US\$ 850 billion.

countries in Asia, opportunities to access information via mass media for Vietnamese people is still modest. According to the latest data (Resolution No 219/2005/QĐ-TTg 2005), currently, the number of newspapers (daily and non-daily) and magazines per 1000 habitants in Vietnam is 7.4. According to UNESCO (2005), the average circulation of daily newspapers per 1000 habitants in 2000 in Japan, Sweden and UK were 565,409 and 326, respectively (significantly, this figure does not include journals, magazines or other print media). Having compared Vietnam with other countries in ASEAN, it was found that the average numbers of newspapers per 1000 habitants in Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand⁶ in 2000 (which were 272, 95 and 196, respectively), according to UNESCO (2005), are much higher than those of Vietnam. In other words, there is still a long way for Vietnamese journalism to develop in order to provide a higher standard of accessing information for the general population.

Having considered the inner development of journalism in Vietnam, it should be noted that the increase of journalistic organisations and productions in quantities at least provides greater opportunities for people to access public information. Moreover, it was no longer the situation of “selling as handing out and buying as asking for alms”⁷. In addition, for the first time, audiences became consumers and could choose from a wider range of media products. The needs of audiences were being paid attention to, and for the first time mass media had to compete with each other and develop. The important features of journalism in the renovation are the democratising trend, and the competitive environment - albeit under the Government control, which will be explained in later sections.

2. Democratising trends in journalism in Vietnam

It is worth noting that the subsidised period in Vietnam (between 1975-1985) was the high point of the Cold War, which was a period of East-West competition, tension, and conflict, characterised by mutual perceptions of hostile intention between two military-political alliances or blocs, led by the Soviet Union and the USA. Vietnam regarded the Soviet Union and other Communist countries as ‘a stone foundation’ for its international relationships. When informing about the Soviet Union and other Communist countries, Vietnamese journalism often concentrated on the positive aspects, achievements, and successes of these countries and ignored their failures or negative aspects. Conversely, when informing about Western countries, journalism focused on political and social

⁶ For Thailand, the statistic related to 1999.

⁷ An idiom used in the subsidised period in Vietnam, which expressed the scarcity of commodities.

problems, and other negative aspects, and did not mention their successes in technology, economics, or social welfare developments (Tran 1995, p. 151). Vietnamese journalism also tried to conceal the difficulties and poverties of Vietnam at that time, regardless of the serious economic crisis previously discussed (Dang 2001).

During the subsidised period, information broadcast on radio, television or published in newspapers mostly was one-way communication, which was generated by the central government, directed to local authorities, and from the Party and Government to the general population (Tran 1995, p.150). Even when reporting the realities of life, journalists continued to use exemplars that would illustrate and support the Government's policies. Because of the one-sided, preconceived and subjective information broadcast, Vietnamese journalism at that time did not reflect everyday conditions accurately; consequently, news broadcasting lacked veracity and failed to persuade or influence audiences (Tran 1995, p.151). This deficiency, in conjunction with a general inefficiency in journalism, dating from the subsidised period, had significant negative impacts on public opinion. Generally speaking, people were not interested in the information provided by mass media at that time. This point is illustrated in the following extract from a reader's letter sent to '*The Youth Newspaper*' in the early years of the renovation:

...I thought that it would be better to send this comment to our newspapers in order to make it move faster. This thought was considered for ages, especially after 1986. I still keep all of *The Youth* newspapers copies since Vietnamese journalism entered into the economic renovation during 1986, 1987 and 1988. *Before these years, it did not matter if there was a newspaper or not*⁸.

([no date] cited Tran 2001, p.84)

The transformation from a monopoly of the state sector economy to a multi-sector one had changed the practice of journalism. However, it was not until May-June 1987 that Vietnamese journalism reached its turning point, with a series of articles namely "Things That Must Be Done Immediately", which carried the by-line N.V.L ('Nhan Dan' 1987). The abbreviation was found later to be a shortened version of the name, Nguyen Van Linh, the then General Secretary of the Communist Party, and the person who revitalised Vietnam's economy by lessening state control and introducing elements of a free market system.

⁸ I italicised this sentence as an emphasis.

“Things That Must Be Done Immediately” cited various improprieties of state agencies, especially “acts of bullying the masses and violating the people’s rights” (Esterline 1998, p.90, Hai 2005). Demanding that such wrongdoing be exposed and corrected, N.V.L exhorted the citizenry to “inspect and examine”. In addition to the previous year’s ‘*criticism and self-criticism*’ campaigns, N.V.L was encouraging the general population to engage in a new campaign against bureaucratic centralism. After three months, the N.V.L. articles generated approximately 600 letters denouncing various agencies and bureaucrats (Esterline 1998, p.90).

According to Huu (28 June 2005 cited Hai 2005), the ex-Head of the Central Ideology and Culture Committee and the then Editor-in-Chief of ‘Nhan Dan’, it was N.V.L who set up a new function for Vietnamese journalism – a people’s forum - which was later institutionalised by Laws and Instructions, including the Journalism Law (1989). According to Huu’s (*ibid*) reminiscence, he did ask the then General Secretary Nguyen Van Linh why Nguyen wrote under the name N.V.L and Nguyen Van Linh replied that, as a General Secretary of the Communist Party he could instruct various levels to take precautions against bureaucrats, however, when writing a newspaper article he wanted to create a popular opinion in fighting bureaucratic conservatism (Hai 2005). In other words, the then General Secretary highly appreciated the role of journalism and public opinion in fighting the negative aspects of the transition of society towards a socialist model. Three years after ‘Things Must Be Done Immediately’ was published, the Law of Journalism (1989) stated:

Journalism in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam is essential mass media in the society, organs of Party, Governmental and other social organisations as well as public forums’.

(The 1st Article of the Journalism Law 1989)

The functions of journalism are also clarified in the 6th article of this Legislation as follows:

...3. Reflect and instruct public opinion; be a public forum for people to implement their freedom of speech.

4. Discover, praise good people and good factors; fight illegal activities and negative phenomena in society...

Soon after journalism was regarded as a public forum, audience’s opinions, suggestions, and comments towards Government policies were gradually published. The slogan ‘*People [have a right to] know, discuss, inspect and examine*’ was placed in a prominent

position in a number of newspapers, including 'Nhan Dan'. A number of new columns for people's opinions emerged in newspapers such as 'The People's forum', 'People's Opinion' and 'People's Talk'.

In addition, the content of journalism became more diversified, investigating pressing issues in the society in order to satisfy its audience. After 1986, 'The Youth Newspaper' ('Bao Tuoi tre'), 'The Saigon Liberation Newspaper' (Sai Gon Giai phong) and a number of newspapers in HoChiMinh city pioneered the renovation of journalism content. It should be noted that HoChiMinh City was in the vanguard of the economic renovation and gained significant benefits after the renovation policy was applied.

According to Tran (2001, p.81), changing the way of delivering information by 'The Youth Newspapers' and other newspapers in HoChiMinh City has broken through the limitations of the conservative thinking which previously blocked journalism in the bureaucratic, administrative and rigid system that was then operated. Journalists explored, investigated and broadcast urgent issues which occurred in the transitional period, for which there was no existing model. Amongst these pressing issues, corruption, social problems, bureaucratic conservatism, and negative aspects of an open-market society were the issues that most concerned the general population (Tran 2001, p. 81)

According to an incomplete statistic of the Vietnamese Journalistic Organisation (2000), one third of the exposed corruptions were discovered and published by journalists. Recently, a number of corruptions and delinquency cases, including the Nam Cam criminal gang and PU 18 - which related to hundreds of officers, amongst them Vice Ministers, General Directors and Government officers – had been exposed in the mass media. As a consequence of the journalistic endeavour, all these cases were brought to court for judgement.

The journalistic function of investigating and discovering corruption was institutionalised in the Laws of Anti-corruption 2005 (No 55/2005/QH11). Regulations relating to the rights of journalists had established a concrete foundation for Vietnamese journalism in fighting bureaucrats, corruption and social problems. In addition, as soon as journalism reflected more pressing issues in the society, it attracted great attentions from audience. It should be noted that, in this period, the Government began to cease the subsidisation, and allowed journalistic organisations to attract other financial resources, including those from advertisers and subscribers. As a result, the commercial

competition emerged amongst journalistic organisations. This is a new characteristic which did not appear in the Vietnamese journalism during the subsidised period.

3. Competitive environment

During the subsidised period, journalism was operated according to the guidelines and plans of the Propaganda and Training Committee without any concern for revenues or benefits or losses in commercial journalism. The Government controlled the entire process of journalistic productions, from the inputs, including salaries for journalists, papers and printing utilised, to the outputs, including distribution. Journalistic productions were published without regard for the audiences' interests or needs (Tran 1992, p.112). As a result, journalistic organisations did not have to compete with each other to increase their audience and advertisers to gain additional financial resources.

However, in an open-market economy, where the costs of input and outputs were subject to market condition, journalistic organisations were required to become commercially aware and operate according to a different economic model. At this time, individual journalists' incomes, including royalties and benefits, began to be paid by, not only governing bodies, but also advertisers and subscribers.

It is worth noting that, during the monopoly of the state sector economy, the living standards of journalists were relatively low. It was a number of newspapers in HoChiMinh city which took the initiative in exploring new ways to improve newspaper revenue in the mid 1980s. According to Tran (2000, p.81), 'Sai Gon Liberty Daily' was one of the first Vietnamese newspapers to accept advertisements on July 1st 1981.

By 1989, in the Journalism Law, it was stipulated for the first time that journalism should be allowed to advertise or broadcast advertisements and obtain revenue from advertising (Article 25 op. cit.). The Decree No 133 – HDBT of the Council of Ministers (1992) stated that the size of advertisements must not exceed 10% of the total printed area and broadcast advertising must not exceed 5% of the total hours broadcast (Article 17 op. cit.).

Ten years later, in the Amended Journalism Law (1999), the regulations for advertising were amended. In addition, a number of financial incomes for a journalistic organisation also were clarified:

Journalistic organisations are allowed to receive and use effectively for proper purposes any financial aids volunteered by any person or organisations, according to Government regulations.

Journalistic organisations are allowed to operate business activities and services which are appropriate with their professions according to Government regulations and rules in order to create further sources of revenue to invest to the development of journalism.

(The Amended Journalism Law 1999, Article 17c)

According to the Government (Resolution No 219/2005/QĐ-TTg 2005), it has become common in Vietnamese journalism nowadays that journalistic organisations have more than one publication and provide more than one service, whereas during the subsidised period this was not the case.

Gradually, revenue from advertising became more important and at the present time, it represents a proportion of between 40 and 60% of newspaper revenue (Tran 2000, p.81). Particularly, a number of newspapers rely totally on advertising revenue, including Vnexpress, one of the largest Vietnamese online.

However, it is worth noting that the competition between mass media in Vietnam is affected by the fact that Government controls the media activities, consequently, competition between mass media in Vietnam differs from that in Western countries.

To-date, the operation of journalistic organisations relies on not only advertisers and subscribers but also its governing body. The Amended Journalism Law (1999) stated:

Governing bodies have a responsibility to provide initial financial support, endow office and professional facilities, and supply financial support for journalistic organisations, if the journalistic organisation undertakes the [Government] propaganda mission and has to sell lower than cost price, or provide expenses for journalistic organisations if it is a radio or television station.

(Article 6)

In the Article 17 of The Amended Law of Journalism (*ibid*), it is also stated that:

A governing body of a journalistic organisation has a responsibility to arrange required financial resources for the operation of the journalistic organisation.

At the present time, the Government continues to offer financial support for a number of journalistic organisations, including VOV, VTV and Vietnamese News Agency (VNA). For example, according to the decisions No 197, 198 and 199, the Government would

provide 132,000; 173,570 and 126,373 million Vietnamese Dongs in 2004 for the VNA, VOV and VTV, respectively.

Currently, amongst 553 journalistic organisations in Vietnam, approximately 100 (less than one fifth) organisations are able to balance their accounts, and approximately 50 (less than one tenth) organisations are highly profitable (The Resolution No 219/2005/QD-TTg 2005). More than 80% of journalistic organisations continue to rely on financial support from Governing bodies.

Generally speaking, journalistic productions are subject to an open-market economy. In other words, journalistic organisations have to operate commercially in order to improve the quality of their services, reduce the price of journalist products and improve the working and living standards of journalists, as Do Muoi, the then General Secretary stated at the National Journalism Meeting in January 1992 (Do 1992, p. 26). On the other hand, political and educational missions are regarded as the most important duties of Vietnamese journalism. Huu (1992, p.86-87), the then Head of the Central Ideology and Culture Committee stated “Vietnamese journalism was not allowed to run after just profits but had to be a fundamental tool for thought, politics and culture”. Political attributes are required characteristics of Vietnamese journalism as stated in a number of Party and Government’s instructions or decrees. This characteristic will be discussed further in the following section.

4. Journalism under the Government control

In Vietnam, even though the first Vietnamese newspaper was published on the 1st April 1865 (Huynh 1995, Do 1995), The Vietnamese Journalism Day (21st June) was the date when the ‘*Young People Newspaper*’, an official organ of the Association of Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth Comrade (which later became The Communist Party of Vietnam) was first débuted. It should be noted that Ho Chi Minh was the one who founded and managed the ‘*Young People Newspaper*’. Since the inception of this newspaper, Vietnamese journalism was entrusted the task of educating the population about Communist policies, promulgating Government propaganda and encouraging Vietnamese people to fight their enemies. Ho Chi Minh’s recommendation that “Journalists are revolutionary fighters, their pens and papers are sharp weapons” is cited in a large number of reports, conferences and books about journalism as a guideline for Vietnamese journalism.

Later, in the 1st Article of The Journalism Law (1989), it was stated that:

Journalism of The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is essential mass media for society, an official organ of Party, Government and Social Organisations, a People's Forum.

It is a hard and fast rule that 'Journalistic operation is under the Party direction and Government control', this is stated in a number of decrees, instructions and decisions of the Vietnamese Party and the Government, including Instruction No 08/CT-TW (1992), Instruction No 22/CT-TW (1997) and The Resolution No 219/2005/QĐ-TTg (2005). In Vietnam, not only is private journalism not allowed, but also private journalism training. Journalism is trained only by Public Universities.

One of the most important missions of Vietnamese journalism is

To propagandise, inform, construct and protect the Party policies and Government Laws.... Construct and improve the socialist democratic, enhance the great national unity, construct and protect the Fatherland of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

(Article 6, The Amended Journalism Law 1999)

At the present, Vietnamese journalism are assigned two important missions, which are providing information for internal and external services. In terms of internal service, journalism has to broadcast, propagandise and contribute to construct and defend the Party lines and policies, Government laws as well as the achievements of the nation, according to the principle and purpose of the journalistic organisation in order to enhance the politic stability, improve the intellectual standards of the general population.... Construct and uphold the socialist democratic, strengthen the national unity and construct and defend the Fatherland of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (Article 6, the Amended Journalism Law 1999)

In terms of external service, journalism has to inform for people worldwide the Vietnamese Party and Government policies - especially the foreign policy that Vietnam wants to be a friend of all nations for peace, independence and development – the achievements Vietnam has gained and its great potential ability in co-operation with other nations. Secondly, journalism has to criticise and reject any wrong information about Vietnamese situation, especially about democratic and human rights. Thirdly, journalism has to inform about Vietnamese people and nation, its age-old diversified culture (Instruction No 10/2000/CT-TTg 2000, Instruction 11-CT/TW 1992). With a special strong point which is the ability to cover areas beyond national borders, radio and the Internet are assigned as a front line in the external information service.

However, it should be noted that the Party and Government guideline and control journalism are becoming inadequate in the transformation. In The Resolution No 219/2005/QD-TTg (2005), it is admitted that:

...The Government control and the role of governing bodies to the journalistic organisations are not upheld... Journalism policies especially economic measures towards journalism have not been researched sufficiently...

Those issues had been raised in a number of meetings and reports many years ago, but continued to be serious problems for journalism and journalism control in Vietnam, especially in terms of economic aspect.

Conclusion

The Vietnamese journalism has experienced a big change since Vietnam transferred from a monopoly of the state sector economy to a multi-sectional one. Along with the changes in economic policies and mechanism, it is the renovation in the thoughts about journalism functions and operations that revolutionised Vietnamese journalism in terms of quality and quantity. As a consequence, for the first time, Vietnamese journalism has to compete with each other to capture more subscribers and advertisers. In addition, journalism is not only Party and Government's organs but also people's forums. Consequently, it infused a new spirit into the democratisation in Vietnam.

It is the economic renovation and innovative thinking which shaped the form for the contemporary Vietnamese journalism. A number of characteristics of journalism emerged, including democratising trend and competitive environment. However, the traditional feature of Vietnamese journalism which is operating under Party guideline and Government control continues to play a key role in the journalism development in this country.

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