

**Balancing the Requirements of the Market and the Ideology:  
The Mise-en-scene of CCTV's New Year's Gala 1984-2008**

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**Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) to**

**Royal Holloway**

**University of London**

**Oct 2013**

## *Declaration of Work*

I hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Pengpeng Xu

## *Abstract*

The thesis explores 25 years of the CCTV New Year's Gala (also known as CCTV Spring Festival Gala) as a rare example of the history of TV broadcasting in China. The evening gala, a production of the state television CCTV (China Central Television), is the biggest annual TV event in China. It aims to celebrate the Chinese New Year with a sequence of entertainment shows leading to the arrival of the New Year. However, it has gradually lost its attraction to the audience in recent years when the Chinese television market is becoming vibrant and competitive. By observing and analyzing the elements of NYG's mise-en-scene throughout its history, this thesis identifies the particular mise-en-scene of NYG and examines its development over the years. In addition, the commercial and the ideological influence in the production of New Year's Gala are discussed in relation to its mise-en-scene.

The research is carried out by a detailed study of each New Year's Gala in the past 25 years, interviews with its prominent production personnel, and an observation on the rehearsal of the 2010 New Year's Gala in CCTV studio. The mise-en-scene of NYG is discussed together with the historical development of New Year's Gala, the existing literatures on New Year's Gala, the organization of production, and theories of mise-en-scene. Based on the research data and its analysis, this thesis suggests that although the technical aspect of the production has progressed dramatically due to the technological and economic development in the Chinese television market over the years, the mise-en-scene of New Year's Gala has not changed much in the past two decades. The commercial and ideological influences and the difficult juggling relationship between the market, the ideology and the audience are shown in the unchanged mise-en-scene of New Year's Gala.

## *Acknowledgements*

First of all, I am sincerely grateful to my supervisor Prof. John Ellis, for his constant support, motivation and the countless invaluable discussions. He has been a great source of consistent intellectual inspiration, academic insight and emotional support.

Special thanks also to Mr. Chen Yan, Mr. Zhao Yuhui and Mr. Yang Bo for sparing time from their busy lives to give those exclusive and invaluable interviews.

Finally, heartfelt thanks to my mum Prof. Xiaozhen Xu and my husband Dr. Nicolas Spiegl for endless understanding, help and encouragement. Without their support in so many ways over the years, none of this would have been possible.

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## ***Chapter 1: Introduction***

### **(1) The Background:**

Over the past decades, China's economic reforms have transformed its media industry into one of the most competitive markets in the world. At present, there are 3,000 television stations across the country, providing TV services for 1/5 of the world population. As the biggest TV event in China, CCTV New Year's Gala (also known as CCTV Spring Festival Gala) is an entertainment variety show which aims to celebrate the Chinese New Year with a sequence of entertainment shows leading to the arrival of the New Year. It is held and broadcast live annually by the state television China Central Television (CCTV), which lives on both government subsidy and advertising revenue. Watched by the entire families, New Year's Gala (henceforth 'NYG') has become a special cultural phenomenon on the Chinese New Year's Eve since its launch. However, it has gradually lost its attraction to the audience in recent years when the Chinese television market is becoming vibrant and competitive.

### **(2) Audience Rating Decline:**

According to the China Television Audience Rating Yearbook, the term 'Audience Rating' in China refers to the ratio between the number of audiences watching a certain TV programme during a certain time slot at a certain area and the total number of television-owning households (China Television Audience Rating Yearbook, 2003: 156). The audience rating data in the China Television Audience Rating Yearbook is provided by CSM Media Research Company, which operates the world's largest TV & Radio audience measurement network, providing reliable and uninterrupted rating information for China and Hong Kong SAR (HK) (Xiao, 2003: 83).

In the process of collecting the audience rating data for the NYG, CSM Media Research Company carried out the survey in 53 sampled areas in China (Liang, Xiao & Zhang,

2005: 109). According to the data, there has been a constant decline in the audience rating of the CCTV NYG in recent years. Under the vibrant media environment in China, CCTV New Year's Gala, which used to be the most watched TV programme in China with an estimated 700 million viewers, has experienced a ratings decline of 22% since 1998. Collected from the China Television Audience Rating Yearbook, the chart below provides the audience ratings of the NYG from 1998 to 2008: (Xiao, 2003: 84); (W. Zhang, 2006: 141); (Zhou, 2007: 181).

<i>New Year's Gala</i>	<i>Audience Rating</i>
1998 NYG	62.2%
1999 NYG	56.4%
2000 NYG	52.9%
2001 NYG	45.8%
2002 NYG	42.3%
2003 NYG	38.6%
2004 NYG	41.6%
2005 NYG	36.7%
2006 NYG	34.7%
2007 NYG	29.74%
2008 NYG	29.24%

What's more, the trend of the NYG audience rating in recent six years has been very similar: The prime time slot for the NYG with steady audience rating is the period from 20:00PM when the NYG officially starts, to 0:00AM when the New Year midnight countdown takes place. Right after New Year bell rings, the NYG audience rating starts

to drop (Y. Wang, 2009: 199). While audience ratings are discussed as a key indicator of the programme's decline, they are also understood to be biased and problematic as figures released from different companies serve different purposes and audience interests. Issues lying in audience rating, the critical understanding about it and how it is used in this thesis are discussed in Chapter 3: (1 d) The Audience Rating Dispute.

Looking at the NYG audience rating data, three interviewees have very similar responses to the declining situation of the NYG in recent years—they all believe it is very normal and natural that NYG's audience rating has declined, as every TV programme has its own golden period. They suggest that we should not expect NYG to be in the same position as twenty years ago, for three main reasons:

1. They claim it is very hard to please everyone, as the audiences of NYG are too big and diverse. This view is represented by the statement of the leading TV director Yang Bo, *'The audience group which New Year's Gala looks after is huge. China has the population of more than 1.3 billion, from city to countryside, across all age groups, cultural backgrounds and professions, but they all need to find the part they like in this one single New Year's Gala'* (Appendix C).
2. The Chinese people are exposed to more types of information and life styles than twenty years ago. In the early times when the social economy was still under-developed, NYG used to be the spiritual food for the Chinese. Nowadays, there are more entertainment means to spend the Chinese New Year apart from watching NYG. People can go travelling, go skiing and surfing on the Internet, etc. As the former head of CCTV Overseas Centre Zhao Yuhui argues, *'Nowadays people mainly consider the New Year's Gala as the background music, and watch it in a very brief way. They may watch New Year's Gala while making dumplings, surfing on the Internet and chatting with friends. Unlike the situation twenty years ago, many people watch New Year's Gala from beginning*

*to end. Therefore, this makes significant differences on the audience rating'* (Appendix D). This new way of watching TV programmes nowadays has been discussed by Ellis (2000) in his book *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty*.

3. More TV programmes are offered to the audiences nowadays. As the New Year's Gala's staging director Chen Yan suggests, '*In addition to the CCTV New Year's Gala, local New Year's Gala is also produced everywhere by provincial TV stations and there are many other kinds of programmes about the Chinese New Year*' (Appendix E).

This thesis does not deny the above factors which may have affected the NYG audience rating. Indeed, the increasing demand of the audience nowadays is on a totally different level from the early years of NYG. As Ni, Ou & Shan comments, 'If today's NYG is broadcast in ten years' ago, the audience must love it. This shows the increasing demand of the audience moves much faster than the progress of NYG' (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 458). Besides, with the improvement of the life quality, many other ways to spend the Chinese New Year have been gradually introduced to Chinese people's lives: the New Year's Eve dinner feast at big hotels and restaurants, the late night opening hours in shopping malls, and many other interesting activities such as tourism and various New Year markets. This trend is getting more obvious in recent years. As Xiao summarises, eating New Year's dinner while watching NYG is not the only way to celebrate the Chinese New Year anymore. While these new ways of New Year celebration pull up the economic growth, they also direct the audience away from NYG (Xiao, 2003: 83-84). However, this thesis seeks to establish other possibilities that may lie behind the declining situation of the NYG in recent years. The problem may not be that simple. Some point out directly that 'hard to please everyone' theory is only an excuse, as it is not impossible to find a solution to satisfy the Chinese audience nowadays (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 433). The change of people's lifestyle under the

economical development does not necessarily take the audience away from the programme they like.

### **(3) The Originality of my Research:**

This thesis aims to examine the mise-en-scene of the NYG, which refers to the whole staging and everything that is explicitly shown in front of the camera. In short, it is the 'look' and 'feel' of the television programme, which is the very first thing that grabs the audience's attention and gradually shapes the audience's viewing experience of the programme. So far, current researches and publications on NYG are only staying at the level of pure criticism on its production quality, programme content and case studies on a particular year's evening gala, rather than seeing the problem from a broader context or trying to find out the reasons behind it (Liu & Wen, 2001; Wu, 2008; J. Zhang, 2008; etc). Therefore, this thesis examines what the mise-en-scene of the NYG is and how it has or has not changed over the years. The compromise between detail and high-level point of view in describing mise-en-scene is discussed in the Chapter 6.

Apart from observing and comparing NYG's mise-en-scene in detail on set design, presenter costumes, styles of speech, and technical codes, etc. for the period covering from 1984 to 2008, this thesis also offers insights from the fieldwork in CCTV to relate theory with practice, including interviews with CCTV senior staffs and participation in the 2010 NYG rehearsal experience. In addition, this research explores commercial and ideological influences on the mise-en-scene of NYG and the juggling relationship between the market, the ideology and the audience, taking a perspective that allows a deeper analysis than scholars hitherto in both China and abroad.

### **(4) The Arrangement of the Thesis:**

This new perspective is explored through the following chapters:

- Chapter 2 provides a brief history of New Year's Gala;
- Chapter 3 presents a discussion of the existing literatures written about New Year's Gala;
- Chapter 4 provides the underlying commercial and ideological influences and necessary background information;
- Chapter 5 discusses the theories of mise-en-scene in TV;
- Chapter 6 explains the research method including the design and organization of the comparative table based on the observation of the 25 years' of New Year's Gala, the interviews with three senior staffs from CCTV, and the experience in the rehearsal of the 2010 New Year's Gala;
- Chapters 7, Chapter 8 and Chapter 9 present a comprehensive mise-en-scene analysis by joining together the research data from the programme observation, the interviewees' statements, and the relevant literature in the critical discussion.

#### **(5) The Importance and Value of the Research:**

NYG provides a rare window to look at the development of the Chinese television over the past two decades. By exploring the mise-en-scene of the past 25 years' NYG, we can have a better understanding of the television in China. Guan suggests, 'To some extent, the Chinese television entertainment variety shows, represented by the CCTV New Year's Gala, have become an unavoidable topic in the Chinese television, even in the contemporary Chinese culture' (Guan, 2000: 139). The value and importance of this research also lies in the fact that it is dedicated to the observation of the NYG mise-en-scene throughout its history, which is an aspect that is usually ignored and under explored. The power of mise-en-scene in television programmes should not be under-estimated, especially in its influence in shaping the viewing experience of the audience. Hence, looking at the mise-en-scene perspective of the NYG can draw on the findings and conclusions that have not been discovered before.

## ***Chapter 2: CCTV New Year's Gala: A Mirror of the Chinese Television***

### **(1) Background Information:**

Before explaining what the CCTV New Year's Gala is, we have to explain the Chinese New Year. The custom of celebrating Chinese New Year was originated in the ancient Chinese Han Dynasty (206BC-220AD) and later widely popularized in Song Dynasty (960AD-1279), and has been carried on till today. Different from the international New Year's Day which falls on the first of January, the Chinese New Year is the first day of January based on the lunar calendar, which records the days according to the 24 Solar Terms invented by the ancient Chinese. Therefore, the Chinese New Year's Day is also known as the Spring Festival, representing the beginning of spring. For this reason, the Chinese New Year falls on the different days of the Gregorian calendar each year. Celebrating New Year's Eve has always been a family matter in China. From the ancient times, the Chinese people have been holding a solemn attitude towards the New Year by having dinners together with their families, worshiping the ancestors, leaving behind the old and entering the New Year wishing one another well. Before this holly festival starts, people are busy preparing everything to get ready for the celebration, including house cleaning, hair cutting, shopping for New Year presents, and making the feast, etc. All these customs have been reserved and passed on till today, with eating dumplings and setting off fireworks as the two most dominant habits. Until the launch of the first CCTV New Year's Gala on television in 1983, it brought a third New Year custom. The meaning of Chinese New Year is to welcome the New Year. Therefore, the CCTV New Year's Gala itself is a festival of celebration. As Ju concludes, the New Year's Gala is a ceremony (Ju, 2007).

CCTV New Year's Gala is the premier mainland Chinese television event of the year. It is an evening gala with the entertainment variety show format. The NYG is organised, produced and hosted by CCTV Cultural and Art Department and the NYG directors and production team are often employees from the Cultural and Art Department. The current director of the Cultural and Art Department is Zhang Xiaohai, who has directed NYG

several times, and the vice director is Zhou Tao, who is the long-term NYG presenter (Zhu, 2009). In order to target all demographic groups and specific intended audiences, the NYG is composed of song and dance, sketch and stand-up comedies, Chinese operas, and talent performances such as acrobatics and magic shows. It is broadcast on the eve of Chinese New Year, live on CCTV-1, by satellite on CCTV-4, CCTV-9, CCTV-English, CCTV-Spanish, CCTV-French, CCTV official website and more recently on CCTV-High Definition. Because it used to be viewed by an estimated 700 million people on New Year's Eve, the CCTV New Year's Gala became a cultural phenomenon in the early 1980s in mainland China, and since then has become a necessity of most people's New Year's nights (China Culture, 2009).

It was after thirty years of the establishment of CCTV that the first NYG started. The development of TV in China in its first thirty years had been slow. By 1983, however, television was beginning to develop as a popular medium. The decision to launch a programme to celebrate the New Year is an indication of this development in TV's status in society. In 1983, the first New Year's Gala was held, and for every year since then at the turn of the Chinese New Year, the programme begins at 8:00PM Beijing Time and lasts until around 1:00 AM the next day morning, which is the first day of the New Year. The programme has received extremely large audiences. According to China Culture, 'The CCTV New Year's Gala is the most watched annual Arts and Performance event anywhere in the world, and as such, its importance has reached over to political, economic, and ethical territory' (China Culture, 2009). As the Chinese New Year's Eve is a time where the family gathers, the typical situation involves a large 3-generation family gathered in front of their TV set while making dumplings for the first New Year's meal. The Gala adds a mood of celebration in the house as people laugh, discuss and enjoy the performance. It has become an ingrained tradition on Mainland China to watch the New Year's Gala on New Year's Eve. Emphasizing NYG as a topic worthy of attention in both Chinese cultural studies and media studies, Lu claims that whole families gather to watch it, making it a unique television event in China, and even, perhaps, a new folk custom (Lu, 2009).

The programme which can best show the ability of the Chinese television art performance has to be NYG, which gathers the most talent, finance and material from CCTV. As Liu concludes, since its launch, NYG has become the biggest in scale, longest in duration, widest in coverage among all the television art performance programmes in China (Liu, 2007: 231). Indeed, NYG is a cultural feast made for the millions of Chinese audience by CCTV. With the progress from the economic reform and opening-up policy (改革开放) in China, Chinese society has experienced fundamental changes with the improvement in people's lives. To some extent, NYG is a witness of the changes taking place in China during those thirty years. CCTV NYG programme has run throughout the very important period since the beginning of China's policy of economic reform and opening up. Hence, the evolution of the NYG, in many ways, reflects China's technological growth over the past decades. From the inexperienced production skills with simple settings to the spectacular staging with the most advanced facilities, the production cost of NYG has become increasingly expensive. According to Xu, the NYG production cost mainly comes from the technical investment, such as the expenses on set design, lighting and sound equipments, costumes, props, and technical facilities such as satellite transmission, which sometimes can take three quarters of the overall production cost. What's more, the production crew and technicians also need to be paid (Xu, 2007). NYG has become an irreplaceable cultural symbol of the New Year for most of the Chinese, as Wang claims, 'A Chinese New Year without the NYG is not a proper celebration' (Wang, 2006). In this way, watching NYG on the New Year's Eve has become a routine, a habit, and a custom.

Looking back its history, there are some general characteristics which exist throughout the history of New Year's Gala. According to Zou Youkai, the former director of the CCTV Cultural and Art Department, general characteristics of NYG can be summarized as follows: Firstly, CCTV senior staffs consider NYG as the most important work every year. Leaders and officials from all levels pay certain attention to the CCTV NYG:

directors from the Central Propaganda Department (中央宣传部) to the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (国家广播电影电视总局), all frequently instruct the making of NYG. Secondly, each year's NYG has clear requirements on its themes and instructive thoughts. By looking at each year's themes, unity and happiness have been the main tone of the NYG, as a thread leading through all the evening galas, which forms the general spirit and overall feature of the NYG. Thirdly, the total length (approximately four and a half hours), the amount of performance (around 38 performances on average), and the number of the performers and audiences have been fixed, which haven't changed much till today. Zou suggests that NYG must have new ideas, good content, smart format, and the programme should be aimed at 'Novelty, Surprise, and Delicacy' (Zou, 1993: 169). Since live broadcast was first introduced in NYG, it has become one of the traditions of NYG. Practice proves that live broadcast has the advantage of instantaneity, presence, and easy to be involved, which can shorten the distance with the audience. However, NYG has its own characteristics in each different period.

In order to depict the NYG history, this thesis divides the history of NYG into three periods: they are the Prosperous Early Period (1983-1989), the Period of Competition (1990-1997), and the Established Period (1998-2008). Geng (2003) divides the history of NYG into two periods: the beginning of 1980s to the beginning of 1990s, and from the middle of the 1990s to afterwards. This division is based on the shift taking place in NYG from taking a leadership role to a follower's role in the Chinese television, due to the changes in economic reform, commercial market and the Chinese society as a whole. Even though the Chinese economy and society has experienced fundamental changes in the early 1990s, this was not an especially great influence on the NYG. Therefore, this study of NYG will focus on the changes taking place in NYG itself, rather than the changes in the society as a whole.

Later, Wang (2006) also divides NYG history into ‘the starting period (1983-1986)’, ‘the grown-up period (1987-1990)’, ‘the golden period (1991-1994)’ and ‘the declining period (1995-2000)’. By pointing out the most popular and memorable moments and performances in each year’s NYG, she divides the history of NYG into different periods and named each NYG according to its characteristics. Her summary of each year’s NYG is mainly based on the most impressive performances and most popular stars appeared in each NYG, instead of pointing out each year’s most important landmarks and significance in the overall NYG history.

Therefore, the periodisation of the NYG history should be: from 1983 to 1989; from 1990 to 1997; and from 1998 to 2008. The early NYG during the 1980s was in its golden age with great popularity and public support. At that time, although the NYG appeared informal as a national TV event due to lack of production facilities and skills, NYG provided a space for the public sphere of Chinese society. The atmosphere of NYG changed to a more rigid environment between 1990 and 1997, but its audience rating was still dominating the television market, although it had already started to struggle with challenges posed by the competitive Chinese TV market.

## **(2) A Brief History of New Year’s Gala: Prosperous Early Period (1983-1989)**

*‘People reflect that they can still remember what was on in the 1980s NYG, yet they could not remember what was on in last year’s NYG’ (Wang, 2006).*

On the New Year’s Eve of 1983, CCTV broadcast NYG live to the national audience from the 600 square metre studio of its old location. The big success of the first NYG is owed to the innovative thinking of its director Huang Yihe. Many of his early experiments have become the fixed pattern in NYG nowadays. The major breakthroughs and establishments include: Firstly, the use of live broadcast in NYG fundamentally changed the TV viewing experience by simultaneously connecting the

nationwide audience through NYG. In this way, the idea of all the Chinese people celebrating the New Year together is realized through the shared experience of witnessing NYG. Live broadcast offers the audience a feeling of ‘being there’ in the NYG studio as if they are part of the event, although they are actually hundreds of miles away. However, broadcasting a big TV event live is also very risky, as many unexpected problems and situations will occur. Secondly, audience hotlines were set up to make the show more interactive and spontaneous. According to Liu, there were only six telephones in the whole CCTV at that time, and all of them were moved to the NYG studio on the New Year’s Eve to be used as audience hotlines, leaving only one telephone at the reception of the building (Liu, 2007: 232). Thirdly, celebrity presenters were adopted to host the show. As Jiang reveals, in the early NYG, Zhao Zhongxiang was the only male professional presenter in CCTV. Therefore, NYG had to invite actors, comedians and celebrities from outside to host NYG, and many amateur presenters joined NYG at that time, including film star Liu Xiaoqing and comedian Jiang Kun (Jiang, 2008). The way they linked the performances was fun and lively, which made the evening gala become an organic entity. The format of inviting the country’s leaders to the show and celebrating with the people was also introduced. These key developments are the first in Chinese TV at that time.

When we look back at those presenters dressed in Chinese tunic suits and the badly lit studio, the 1983 NYG seems to us a bit inexperienced and unprofessional. The most expected national event of the year at that time was more like a private party organized at the work place. Nevertheless, it made an important step in the history of Chinese television. As Liu suggests, ‘This NYG marked the beginning of the rapid development of Chinese television’ (Liu, 2007: 231). Indeed, it created a stir in the Chinese society right after its launch: through this evening gala, the Chinese people were brought together. This first NYG achieved great popularity among the TV audience overnight by its rich performance content and fresh performance format (Zou, 1993: 170). This has encouraged NYG to carry on producing every year, and eventually makes it an irreplaceable cultural feast for the Chinese people on the New Year’s Eve. It was so

influential at that time that what the presenters and performers wore in NYG was considered as the latest fashion in China. Since 1983, a new custom has been added to the established New Year traditions of eating dumplings and letting off fireworks: watching the New Year's Gala.

The 1984 NYG started to pay attention to setting up clear themes. As Zou explains, the theme of 'patriotic and united' was finalised based on the state's proposal of 'One Country, Two Systems' at that time (Zou, 1993: 170). The song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight' (难忘今宵) was especially made for NYG, which was first performed at the end of the 1984 NYG. Since then, it has been performed at the end of every year's NYG as a tradition in NYG. Special guests from all background were invited to NYG, including celebrities from HK and Taiwan, as well as the National Athlete representatives, and the model workers from all fields. Liu comments that the 1984 NYG was already relatively developed (Liu, 2007: 232).

Song and dance performances have always been the main part of NYG. It was the first time that stars from HK and Taiwan were invited to present and perform in NYG, which created enormous influence in the mainland. Not only the HK film star Chen Sisi and Taiwanese presenter Huang Ayuan joined the presenter's team, but also HK singer Zhang Mingmin and his song 'My Chinese Heart' were widely known and became all-time favorite. It is from this song that the mainland audience started to be exposed about the music from HK and Taiwan. The strong patriotic spirit with his Chinese tunic suit outfit made Zhang Mingmin very popular in the mainland. The possibility of such overnight fame made performers start to realise the attractions of the NYG stage. Since then, there are performances given by artists from HK and Taiwan in every year's NYG, and the main theme of 'Chinese people celebrating the New Year together' has been promoted in the evening gala. It was a breakthrough to bring the celebrities from HK and Taiwan in NYG, making the Chinese people closer.

The emergence of stand-up and sketch comedies brought new expectations to the Chinese audience. The 1984 NYG introduced a new title to the audience—comedian. Many of the stand-up and sketch comedies in the 1980s mentioned and discussed the social phenomenon and problems at that time. For example, the sketch comedy ‘Noodle Eating’ revealed the tough journey for one to get into the competitive show biz industry. As Ju argues, at that time, comedies were accepted as mainstream talks only during the special occasion of the New Year (Ju, 2007). The comedy has become a very popular performance even after two decades, and their performers, Ma Ji and Chen Peisi, have also become widely known by everyone in China. Since then, stand-up and sketch comedies have become the most popular and expected performance genres in NYG.

Huang Yihe was also the director of the 1985 NYG. He adventurously changed the location of NYG from the CCTV studio to Beijing Worker’s Gymnasium, as he wanted to expand the space and the audience of the evening gala out of the conventional studio. This thinking aimed to show the spectacular scene, but it ignored the limited amount and level of equipment and technique CCTV could provide at that time. Zou reveals, ‘Due to the lack of communication, the out-of-control of the floor management, and the wrong choice of the venue, the final outcome of this NYG was very disappointing’ (Zou, 1993: 171). As a result, this NYG did not achieve the expected effect although there were some very good performances. Instead, it gave the audience, as Liu describes, a ‘rough, redundant and tasteless feeling’ (Liu, 2007: 232). The 1985 NYG also created a big stir among the audience and many complaining letters were received only a few days after the evening gala. In response, CCTV made public apology to the national audience in the prime-time CCTV evening news ‘News Relay’ on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1985, by sincerely accepting the criticism from the audience (Liu, 2007: 232). This shows the important status of NYG in the Chinese society at that time. In the early times, NYG equaled to the New Year itself. It is no exaggeration for Wang to say that

refusing NYG equals to refusing the Chinese New Year, which means you also miss the common topic to discuss with your friends in the upcoming year (X. Wang, 2009).

Since 1986, other directors such as Deng Zaijun have also joined the production team to make NYG a perfect show. Huang Yihe was appointed again by CCTV to direct the 1986 NYG. Based on the lesson learnt from the past year, he brought the evening gala back into the CCTV studio with the same round table sitting plan. Established conventions were also kept in this NYG such as having clear themes, showing unity between the people, and promoting heroism. While it avoided adventurous action, it followed the successful pattern established in the first two years' NYG (Liu, 2007: 233). What's more, a real marriage between an army soldier and a military singer was put on the stage and witnessed by the national audience under the happy festival atmosphere. The live broadcast made this wedding ceremony public and exciting. As for the performances, Jiang Dawei's song 'In the Place of the Peach Blossoms' became very popular all over China, making him one of the old face performers in NYG. Comedians Chen Peisi and Zhu Shimao remained partners in their sketch comedy 'Lamb Barbecue'. Chen's portrait of the street vender was so vivid that many street vendors in China started to dress like him. Popular phrases emerged from the comedy were also heard in people's daily lives.

The success of the 1986 NYG proved the state's media policy was correct, feasible, and practical, which shows the Chinese television has a bright future. As Liu reports, this NYG received wide praise and the commissioner of the Central Politics Bureau Hu Qiaomu summarized it as 'a big success' and 'both the government and the Chinese people were satisfied' at the symposium on 22<sup>nd</sup> Feb 1986 (Liu, 2007: 233). Since then, many performance genres and formats in NYG have been carried on in the future as fixed patterns. As Wang states, 'The 1986 NYG has started to step into the stable period' (Wang, 2006). At the same time, a new rule was released by the SARFT (State Administration of Radio, Film and Television), making NYG even more exclusive in

the growing Chinese television market: CCTV NYG has been the only evening gala available on the New Year's Eve (Chen, 2011).

Having experienced the ups and downs in the previous years, the expectation of the Chinese TV audience had become higher and higher and it was harder and harder for NYG to meet their demand. After watching several year's NYG, the audience's passion towards NYG had already begun to drop. In this situation, more effort was made in the production of the 1987 NYG, as Zou reveals, by promoting the reforming and opening-up policy (改革开放), paying tribute to the ordinary people, portraying touching stories from the daily life, and enhancing the audiences' participation through studio games (Zou, 1993: 171). As a result, further progress was achieved. In terms of the performances, a great number of popular performances emerged in this NYG. The most popular performer in the 1987 NYG has to be Fei Xiang, who is a pop singer from Taiwan with multi-cultural background (born to Chinese mother and American father). He immediately became the centre of the attention in China after his song and dance performance 'The Cloud of Hometown' in NYG. The 1000-square-meter studio was equipped with advanced broadcasting facilities. Good facilities and equipments ensured the broadcasting quality of NYG, although some problems still remained in the engineering work, which brought many difficulties to the technicians and logistic staffs. The 1987 NYG received good feedbacks (Wang, 2006).

As the actual progress of NYG can hardly catch up with the increasing demand of the audiences, NYG received more and more criticism. Under this circumstance, CCTV started to seek help from the news media to bring down the audiences' expectations and to explain them the difficulties in NYG. Before the arrival of the 1988 Chinese New Year, CCTV released an article in the 'China TV News' newspaper under the headline of 'Trying our best to make NYG, while hoping for some understanding' (Liu, 2007: 233-234). As for the show itself, the 1988 NYG experimented a new way of managing time and space by setting up other subsidiary venues apart from the CCTV studio in

Beijing. By using live satellite link, the gala enabled the audience to enjoy the scene of winter swimming in Heilongjiang, flower exhibition in Guangdong, and spectacular illuminations in Sichuan together with the studio performances. Scholars believe this technique has effectively expanded the time and space of the NYG beyond the studio (Liu, 2007: 234). The regional performances provided by the provincial TV stations were also put in NYG. According to the Chinese zodiac, the year 1988 was the year of Dragon (the holy animal representing the royalty and the origin of the Chinese people). Therefore, the reunion theme of 'We are all Chinese' was expanded even further by broadcasting the live scenes of the overseas Chinese celebrating the New Year on the other side of the world.

The 1989 NYG emphasized the Chinese culture and the national spirit by bringing the principle of 'brief, clear and fast' (简, 明, 快) into the production. As Liu reveals, before the show, the production team published a piece of news on the 'China TV News' newspaper, in which they claimed to keep the principle of 'Talk less, Do more, and No boasting' in order to face the audience feedback rationally, whether it is praise or criticism (Liu, 2007: 234). Apart from the performances in the 1000 square meters studio, extra performances were taking place in China Grand Theatre. To have a better idea of what the audience wanted, these performances were collected from all over the country half a year before the NYG. Therefore, the number of performances was also increased. The themes in the NYG during the 1980s reflected the new time under China's economic reform and opening-up policy. The theme of the 1984 NYG was described in the patriotic song 'My Chinese Heart' performed by the HK singer Zhang Mingmin, the theme of the 1987 NYG was the heroism embedded in the song 'Red Elegance', the theme of the 1988 NYG and the 1989 NYG was 'we are all Chinese' promoted by the Taiwanese singer Pan Anbang who hugged and talked with the elderly 'homesick' Taiwanese men in tears. As Ju proposes, 'The pursuit of modernization marked by the reform and opening-up policy was the common pursuit of the Chinese people in the 1980s' (Ju, 2007). Indeed, this common shared value was effectively conformed the systematic culture to the folk culture, and eventually was shown in the

NYG. In this way, all the important events in the country have become the materials to develop the themes on this special occasion, such as the Olympic champions, the homesick feeling of the Chinese abroad, and the people who are working on the New Year, etc. The stand-up comedy experienced its golden times at the end of 1980s.

### **(3) A Brief History of New Year's Gala: The Period of Competition (1990-1997)**

*'After the classic period of the NYG in the 1990s, the set design is more and more spectacular, but the show is less and less interesting to watch' (Wang, 2006).*

The 1990 NYG tried to be different in its format. Its director brought the studio game show format into NYG where the performances were arranged in the form of competition among the three teams (Drama, Opera and Song and dance). The presenters were the leaders of each team while the studio audiences were divided into three groups for each team as supporters. In terms of the performance, it was obvious that the comedy became the dominant performance genre in this NYG: such as the sketch comedy, the Chinese Opera comedy, the song comedy, the stand-up comedy, and also the invitation of the famous Taiwanese comedian Ling Feng to the studio. In this year, comedian Zhao Benshan realized his dream of appearing in NYG with his sketch comedy 'Arranged Marriage'. This comedy enabled Zhao Benshan to become the most popular comedian in the country, and since then he has started his long-term domination in NYG as one of the old face performers for years.

The 1991 NYG emphasised the ethnic diversity of different regions in China by widely encouraging provincial TV stations to provide performances with distinctive regional and cultural characteristics. In the end, 12 performances provided by 11 provincial TV stations were put onto the NYG stage. As Zou describes the performance arrangement, 'Internally, the young directors were working together in the NYG production team; externally, excellent performances were provided by many provincial TV stations'

(Zou, 1993: 172). The 1991 NYG was the evening gala that benefitted many singers from HK and Taiwan, as many of them promoted their fame and career in the mainland through this NYG. In terms of the presenters, Ni Ping and Zhao Zhongxiang began their long-term domination in NYG as the old face presenters for almost ten years. According to Wang, once CCTV had recruited enough professional presenters, NYG started to use CCTV's professional presenters to host the evening gala, and previous celebrities such as film stars and high-profiled comedians have since stopped presenting NYG (Wang, 2006).

The 1992 NYG made a feature of joining live broadcasts together with pre-recorded footage. Many pre-recorded pictures and scenes were inserted either as part of the NYG performances or combined together with the live performance in the NYG studio. As a result, although the performances in this NYG were not strictly live from beginning to end, some special effects and locations did make the performance more interesting and attractive. As Wang summaries, the television production techniques and skills were improved in this NYG such as the practiced application of the animated super-imposed captions (Wang, 2006). Also, more attention was paid to the costumes in NYG where both the variety and quantity of the costumes have increased.

A new performance format, a Song and Dance Combination, was also introduced in this NYG, in which presenters from all provincial TV stations in China, celebrities from mainland, HK and Taiwan, and performers from all ethnic regions were singing and dancing together on stage under the same music. This is a typical way of NYG to present the ideological picture of 'we are all Chinese' regarding the relationship with HK and Taiwan, and 'one big family' regarding the relationship with the ethnic minorities in China. Popular performances also included the sketch comedy 'New Year Greetings' which praised the heroes who saved people's lives in the flood that year. In this way, NYG is closely connected with the Chinese society by reflecting on the important events happened in the past year and expecting the upcoming events in the

New Year. Songs especially dedicated to the Chinese army soldiers are included in every year's NYG to show their selfless, patriotic and heroic spirit in protecting the country and the people. Army singer Yu Junjian and his song 'To Say Something from Heart' have become the classic of the military theme since this NYG. It was also from this year that the voting activity of 'My Favourite New Year's Gala Performance' was introduced to the Chinese audience, which not only generated public feedbacks to the performances through different awards, but also generated extra profit for the evening gala through commercial sponsorships. Before mobile phone texting and Internet online voting existed, the voting system was operated by either audiences calling the NYG hotline during the live show or filling in the voting questionnaire provided in the China Television Guide newspaper and mailing it to CCTV.

The 1993 NYG gave prominence to the festival atmosphere and audience participation by using advanced technology such as computer lighting and big screen wall for the first time, and generating the 'lucky audience' from random selection of their ID card number by celebrities. Presenters from HK, Taiwan and Singapore also joined in hosting the evening gala together with the mainland counterparts, and promoted the ideology of 'Chinese from all over the world are celebrating the New Year together'. Local performances from HK, Taiwan and Singapore were also transmitted live to the NYG studio through satellite technology. In order to improve the quality of the NYG, a competitive bidding system was introduced in 1993 in selecting each year's director for NYG. Since then, the directors have had to compete with each other with good plans and ideas to be in charge of the production of NYG rather than being appointed by the head of CCTV like in the early days. The competition is only open for the CCTV employees and the directors outside of CCTV cannot join.

In the whole history of NYG, only the 1994 NYG did not have any performance given by the celebrities from HK and Taiwan, maybe due to the personal preference of that year's director. By 1994, the song and dance performance had become very dominating

in NYG, especially the patriotic style which had spectacular staging with loud and busy scenes in portraying China's image as the success of the economic reform. The 1995 NYG can be seen as a typical example of the NYG of that period: Firstly, a number of popular songs were performed in NYG which had already been proven successful in the market previously; Secondly, under the new format of the song and dance combination, each song was abbreviated so that several songs can be performed within five to six minutes. As Wang states, the disadvantages of this practice were not seen yet at that time, as the audience enjoyed being provided with all the popular songs (Wang, 2006). However, this new format has been used too often in the future that NYG has not only gradually lost its special 'star-making' function in premiering new songs and artists, but has also been criticized as a sign of the declining quality in performance by repeating the old songs in uncompleted forms (Xue, 2009).

The innovation of the 1996 NYG was mainly in its emphasis on the format. As Geng describes, the live transmission of the performances taking place at three different venues in China not only enabled the audience to experience three different performances taking place at the same time, but also brought three different performances together under the same theme (Geng, 2003: 218). For example, with the help of the big TV screens in each venue, three stand-up comedies under the same title 'Is it any different' were performed and broadcast simultaneously in Shanghai, Xi'An and Beijing to portray the cultural differences in different regions of China. Similarly, the story of the sketch comedy 'A Wallet' and the song 'Continental Song Combination' were made complete by joining together the performances taking place at three venues one after another. In addition, since 1996, the NYG has passed on the work of audience survey to professional survey companies such as CTR Market Research Company. The survey has been conducted over the phone (Media China, 2009). In the 1997 NYG, when it was only a few months before HK was handed back over to China, this historical moment was made even more meaningful in NYG by arranging many performances given by the mainland artists together with the HK artists, such as the song 'Year 1997' which was especially written for this biggest event of the year

(performed by mainland singer Sun Guoqing and HK pop singer Peng Ling). As Wang reveals, the first mini-musical in NYG called 'Forever After' was performed in 1997, which has always also been considered as a big innovation by the NYG production team (Wang, 2006).

A steady growth of the sketch comedy has been witnessed in NYG during the first ten years of its history, with one sketch comedy in the 1984 NYG to seven sketch comedies (Geng, 2003: 66). While the popularity of the sketch comedy increased in the 1990s, the appeal of the stand-up comedy dramatically declined. Ju has an interpretation of this important shift of popularity between the stand-up comedy and the sketch comedy in NYG, as he explains: People's perspective changed in the 1990s from macro to micro, and thus the sketch comedy became the main part of NYG. Compared with the macro depiction in the stand-up comedy, the sketch comedy found its position by portraying the micro and individual perspective of life in the 1990s and hence became popular rapidly (Ju, 2007). Indeed, behind this important shift was the subtle change of the Chinese society, which has been transformed under the economic reform and opening-up policy.

The period from 1992 to 1997 was definitely the main body of the 1990s. Compared with the early period in the 1980s, people's mind in this period was more diverse and open, as the economy entered into the business pattern and the culture became more individual and commercial. The whole of China became a place full of desire, energy, opportunity and excitement. The popularity of the sketch comedy was based on this social change in China. It replaced the stand-up comedy by providing humour in a realistic setting in the festival celebration. As Ju reflects, 'If the stand-up comedy was the leader in the 1980s, the influence of the sketch comedy definitely overtook it in the 1990s, and became the main part of the NYG' (Ju, 2007). Successful sketch comedies in the 1994 NYG such as 'Dumpling Eating' performed by Zhao Lirong and 'Poker Card

Playing' given by Huang Hong were the classic pieces in portraying this change in the Chinese society at that time.

Over the years, the production standard of NYG grew, along with the expectations and demands of the audiences. However, the two grew at different speeds: the audience's increasing demands grew much quicker than the increasing production standard of NYG. Under this comparison, the progress of NYG seems to be relatively slow, and sometime even seems to be standing still. Geng states that this is the reason why many NYG directors complain that the audience's demand nowadays increases too fast for them to catch up with (Geng, 2003: 203). When the early NYG was first introduced in the 1980s, it was very exciting and fresh to the audiences who were desperate to enjoy some entertainment. Therefore, the production standard of the 1984 NYG was much higher than the audiences' expectations and demands at that time. Hence, it achieved great feedbacks as the leader of the Chinese television and created a big influence in the Chinese society during the 1980s.

#### **(4) A Brief History of New Year's Gala: The Established Period (1998-2008)**

*'When one is tired of eating luxurious shark's fin and bear's paw, he/she may want to have some corn flour for a change' (J. Zhang, 2008).*

In 1998, the audience rating of NYG began to decline. According to the Chinese Television Audience Rating Yearbook, from 1998 to 2003, the NYG audience rating had declined by around 22% (Xiao, 2003: 84). Nevertheless, a highlight was created for the 1998 NYG: A Canadian man called Mark Rowswell (widely known as 'Dashan' in China for his fluent Chinese) performed a sketch comedy in Chinese language, and became the first Westerner who performed on the NYG stage. It received good feedback. At that time, there were not many foreigners who can speak Chinese to the native level. In addition, the song 'Meeting in 1998' was performed by the mainland

singer Na Ying and HK pop star Faye Wong, which brought the HK star closer to her mainland fans. Apart from the beautiful melody of the song, the setting at the background made this performance even more spectacular on stage where two dancers were doing contemporary dance professionally in a huge transparent balloon, which moved around behind the singers.

In the 1999 NYG, based on the original format of the CCTV talk show programme 'Tell the Truth as It Is', the sketch comedy 'Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow' won a big applause from the audience. In the comedy, the popular comedians Zhao Benshan and Song Dandan played the role of two farmers who were interviewed by the iconic presenter of the talk show Cui Yongyuan to describe the big changes taking place in their countryside village. The exact studio setting, music, and logo of the talk show was put onto the NYG stage, as if the comedy is one of the episodes of the talk show. This comedy is very creative in combining the NYG comedy together with the popular talk show, both of which are CCTV products. Therefore, this arrangement not only makes the comedy more interesting to watch, but also promotes both programmes in front of the national audience.

By 2000, NYG had clearly demonstrated its policy of 'the high-profiled only' in selecting performers. Based on the popularity of the TV drama series 'Huanzhu Princess', its leading actresses Zhao Wei and Lin Xinru were selected to co-host the evening gala with professional presenters. What's more, the performances were given by either the international celebrities such as the Hollywood film star Zhang Ziyi, or the high-profiled stars in mainland, HK and Taiwan such as Zhao Benshan and Faye Wong. This situation leaves no room to introduce any new faces and talents to the audience, which inevitably brings a conventional and rigid feeling to NYG. At the same time, a new performance genre of combining song and dance, magic shows and acrobatics together was introduced in the 2000 NYG for the first time. Also, since 2000, the NYG ends with the song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight' after half-an-hour song and dance

performances following the New Year Countdown at the midnight. Hence, the total length of the evening gala has been kept around four and a half hours. To limit the time means to limit the performances. As Liu reveals, every year the NYG team is having a difficult time in deciding which performance to take off the stage if the time is overrunning (P. Liu, 2010).

As the Chinese New Year approaches, the Chinese media make big propaganda for the NYG and uncover all the latest news and gossip about NYG to attract the audience. Having attended the rehearsal of the 2001 NYG, journalists revealed that the presenters aimed to create a more relaxed atmosphere for the show (Lu, 2001). ‘New, Surprise, Happiness, Simplicity, and Beauty’ was the production guideline of the 2001 NYG. For instance, ‘New’ means bringing the performances from CCTV-2 ‘New Year Song and Dance Evening Gala’ and CCTV-3 ‘New Year Chinese Opera Evening Gala’ to the NYG stage; ‘Surprise’ refers to the appearance of many special performances in NYG, such as using musical comedy as the opening performance and mixing different kinds of art together by breaking the convention at the audio and visual level; and ‘Simplicity’ reveals the essential charms of art, which emphasize its beauty and quality. As far as the NYG production team is concerned, there were two innovations in the 2001 NYG: One is the appearance of the silent drama which was mainly performed with the body language, and the other is the costume comedy in which the comedian was carrying an artificial person which looked like a real person (Geng, 2003: 219). However, the final result was not as optimistic as what the directors claimed: According to Ju, the audience rating of the 2001 NYG dropped in the cities: In Beijing where the NYG was hosted, its audience rating was not more than 34.7%; In Shanghai, it dropped to 18.9%; the situation in Guangzhou was even worse, as NYG was not even among the top ten audience rating chart (Ju, 2007).

The 2002 NYG was held in both the NYG studio in Beijing and the open-air theme park in Shenzhen simultaneously. The satellite two-way transmission technology joined the

performances together taking place indoor and outdoor. It can be concluded that this arrangement not only avoided the problems of having the entire NYG outdoor like the 1985 NYG, but also added the outdoor excitement to the safe studio performance. What's more, almost all the provincial TV stations in China produced and broadcast their local evening galas during the New Year period, such as Hunan TV, Chongqing TV, Shanxi TV, Liaoning TV, Zhejiang TV, Shandong TV, Anhui TV, Shanghai TV, and Beijing TV. As the critics comment, 'Compared with the glamorous and official style of the CCTV NYG, the local evening galas offered by the provincial TV stations emphasized more on the regional styles and characteristics' (Xinhua News, 2009). However, according to the requirement released by SARFT back in the 1980s, all the local evening galas are arranged a day before or after the New Year's Eve to avoid broadcasting the evening gala at the same time as the CCTV NYG. This makes the reported decline in audience share of the CCTV NYG even more worrying, as the CCTV NYG cannot keep the audience even it is the only evening gala running on the New Year's Eve.

In the early NYG in the 1980s, although no scientific audience rating survey was available at that time, we can tell its big audience from the great reactions and influences it caused in the country. From 1994 to 2002, although the audience rating of NYG has declined, the audience rating of NYG was always on the top of other CCTV entertainment programmes (Geng, 2003: 8). But only being the top among the CCTV programmes cannot prove NYG's success in the country, as there are many popular programmes offered by provincial TV stations such as the popular entertainment variety show '*Happy Camp*' (快乐大本营) provided by Hunan TV station. Yet the NYG seems to fight against the declining audience rating by putting into more investment in making the show. According to Xu, 'The 2003 NYG invested 40 million yuan in making the programme: the stage was composed of 140 high-definition big screens and 21 groups of mechanical operating facilities. Although there were only 16 people installing and adjusting them, a professional team of computer design expert, modeling staffs, engineers, and dynamic experts was also behind these high-tech equipment' (Xu, 2007).

For the first time, the 2005 NYG was live broadcast on CCTV-1, CCTV-4, CCTV-9 and CCTV-18 simultaneously. This shows the NYG is introduced to the world in Chinese, English, Spanish, and French. Due to the difficulties in the spontaneous translation, the CCTV Overseas Centre has brought many language experts in English, Spanish and French to participate in the translating of its overseas version. Unlike the increasing advertising and sponsorship revenue, the NYG audience rating is declining year by year. The distinctive feature of the 2006 NYG was shown in the dramatic decline in the Chinese opera performance and other Chinese traditional art performances such as ballad and story-telling. This decline has been continued, leaving only few of them in recent years. What's more, the Chinese opera performance has been arranged after the midnight countdown since 2006, when a much lower audience attendance is expected. This change is probably the result of the fact that the Chinese opera is not a very popular performance genre among the audience, as its main target audience is the elderly audience, on the one hand, and that CCTV-3 broadcasts the Chinese Opera Evening Gala especially dedicated to the opera fans at the same time as the NYG, on the other hand (see Appendix C).

With its director's instruction, the 2007 NYG started to publicly recruit songs and comedies from the Chinese people all over the world in search for originality. There was no limit on subject, length and writing ability, but the subject must come from real life. The winners were rewarded with prizes, whether their work was used in NYG or not. This was the first time that CCTV NYG opened its door to the talents outside of CCTV. For the NYG production team, the selection of performance should be based on its quality in reflecting the real life, the personality, the culture, and the vivid portrait of the people. All applicants' works, after being selected, were uploaded on the official website of the CCTV NYG, where the public can vote for the top ten favorite songs and top ten comedies. In addition, CCTV's official website introduced live transmission of NYG on mobile phone, and wireless NYG in 2007. This was inspired by the fact that

many people cannot watch NYG on the New Year's Eve due to their work requirement or their far away reception in overseas (CCTV, 2006).

However, most of the credit gained from these new practices was erased by the chaos and embarrassment caused by the presenters' collective oral mistakes at the most crucial moment of the evening gala—the speech at the midnight New Year countdown. This chaotic situation lasted for three minutes and was criticized as the 'Dark Three Minutes' and 'the worst NYG in 20 years' by the audience as well as the critics (Peng, 2007). Although Zhang Zequn, one of the six presenters apologized to the public on his CCTV blog right after the NYG, it was not enough to cover other mismanagement in that year's NYG: the cued applause from the studio was made too obvious, as the cheers from the studio were cued with bad timing such as at the ceremonial moment, and therefore seemed very unnatural and awkward. What's more, several countries' names of the Chinese overseas embassies were miswritten on the big screen when the New Year greetings were given. Kong Qingdong, a nationalist media scholar from Beijing University commented that the 2007 NYG dropped to the lowest level of the past twenty years (Peng, 2007).

In the 2008 NYG, according to TV audience rating survey company Nielsen Media Research, the Southern Chinese audiences were not very passionate about NYG, compared with the Northern Chinese audiences. What's more, the audience rating in Guangdong province was the lowest among all--4.59%, with its city Dongguan the lowest--0.1%. As a matter of fact, the top three audience ratings in Dongguan region all went to the TV drama series from Hong Kong TVB channel (Nielsen Media Research, 2008). It seems that the rapidly growing provincial TV stations have taken a big share of the NYG audience rating. This poor situation of NYG in recent years, as Liu claims, marks the arrival of the 'Post-NYG' era (Liu, 2009). In the past two decades, the success of the economic reforms has brought the market economy to the Chinese society, which makes the Chinese television market become very vibrant and

competitive. However, the CCTV NYG has retained its conventional official format through this period.

### **(5) A Brief History of New Year's Gala: The Format of the New Year's Gala**

From the very beginning, the NYG is different from many other entertainment shows as it is a mixture of entertainment materials (such as song and dances, stand-up comedies, sketch comedies, Chinese operas, and magic tricks) and factual materials (such as studio interviews, presenters' speeches promoting ideological and educational messages, and live news reports, and leaders' visits). Therefore, its closest equivalent may be the fund-raising spectacles staged by TV in Western countries, from the charity Telethons once hosted by Jerry Lewis in the USA (Smit, 2003), to the BBC's Comic Relief events or RTE's People In Need analysed by Devereux (Devereux, 1996). Smit identifies a repetitive and limited format in the US telethons: There are two parts in each hour of the twenty-two hour telethon. The first part is the live coverage from Jerry Lewis's location, and the second part is the live broadcast from the local stations. Each part lasts about half an hour. (Smit, 2003: 689). As Smit explains in detail, 'Jerry's half of the hour consists of two performances from a variety of different entertainers, one patient profile, and one segment of corporate sponsorship pledges. The second half of the hour consists of live coverage from affiliate stations. The broadcasts from the local channels include local patient profiles of people living with muscular dystrophy in that specific area, and local pledges' (Smit, 2003: 689).

Smit points out the 'repetition of this format, and the recurrence of the same content in each of the segments'. However, the NYG presents a constant variety of different kinds of entertainment and factual forms. Compared with the Jerry Lewis telethons, the BBC's Comic Relief and Children in Need events are more varied, as their entertainment elements mainly rely on existing TV formats by staging 'special editions' of currently popular sitcoms and celebrity reality shows. Currently, there is no existing scholarly study of this format. However, the NYG is again different from the closest

British equivalent. The NYG presents new entertainment material and was used as a platform to establish new stars and performance styles, especially in its early years. NYG promote the ideologies and at the same time bringing all the peoples of China together to celebrate the Chinese New Year. To achieve these main goals, a mixture of factual and entertainment items are in place, which requires the careful planning of the NYG every year in juggling these two aims.

Guan (2000) has analysed the different components of NYG from 1984 to 2000 by examining the published performance lists rather than watching the actual programmes. She divides different kinds of performances in NYG into four categories: Song and Dance, Folk Art Forms (including sketch comedies and acrobatics, etc.), Chinese Opera, and Other Items. It can be said that the three categories of Song and Dance, Folk Art Forms, and Chinese Opera constitute the 'Entertainment Materials' of the NYG while the Other Items category and Presenters' speeches constitute the 'Factual Materials' of the NYG (Ofcom, 2010: 7; Hogarth, 2002: 15; Geraghty & Jancovich, 2008). According to Guan, the reason why the fourth category 'Other Items' is set up is because some unconventional stage art forms have been absorbed and adopted in NYG over the years, as a result of the compatibility nature of television. For example, the special talent shows such as 'Extraordinary Skills from Different Professions' in the 1991 NYG, and film clips played on the studio screen. Guan carries on defining the 'Other Items' category: 'Independent non-stage art items such as the beginning and end parts of the evening gala should also be put into the "Other Items" category, as they do not belong to other categories, but they are still important components. There are many "Other Items" such as Qi Gong, Martial Art, Studio Games, Sport Matches, and "emotion-touching items", etc.' (Guan, 2000: 148-157).

Judging from its time length and quantity, 'Other Items' category is not any less than the 'Chinese Opera' category. In fact, it has exceeded the time and amount of Chinese Opera performances in many years' New Year's Gala (Guan, 2000: 156). In terms of

the ratio between the entertainment materials and factual materials in NYG, the entertainment materials take up the majority of the broadcast time in the NYG: Song and Dance, Folk Art Forms, and Chinese Opera (Entertainment Materials) take 85 percent of the overall length of the evening gala; Other Items and Presenters' speeches (Factual Materials) take 15 percent of the overall length of the evening gala (Guan, 2000: 152). However, in terms of numbers of items, the balance is far more even: Song and Dance, Folk Art Forms, and Chinese Opera (Entertainment Materials) take 58 percent of the overall items of the evening gala; Other Items and Presenters' speeches (Factual Materials) take 42 percent of the overall items of the evening gala (Guan, 2000: 153).

Therefore, the NYG is a distinctive fusion of many different entertainment and factual elements into one show. The diverse characteristic of the 'Other Items' category is an important part to show the 'variety' feature of the NYG. Its factual materials in NYG impress the audience by the new content and format, which become the highlight of the entire evening gala. The factual materials connect the audience through the 'emotion-touching items' and the presenters' speeches, which define the aim of the programme as unifying the Chinese peoples. To a great extent, the factual materials of NYG constitute the crucial linking thread throughout the programmes. Hence, the NYG has a distinctive *mise-en-scene* which requires analysis. Before undertaking this analysis, three issues have to be clarified. The first issue is the criticisms and analyses that have been made by critics in both popular and academic publications. The second issue is the commercial and ideological environment in which the NYG now operates, and in particular the practical definition of 'ideology' which is used by the programme makers and their management. The third issue is the concept of *mise-en-scene* as it relates to the NYG.

### ***Chapter 3: Existing Critiques of the New Year's Gala***

#### **(1) Popular Chinese Sources:**

*Generally speaking, from the preparation to the end, NYG is talked about for months at least. As a result, a special 'New Year culture' phenomenon is formed (Liu, 2009).*

At present, there is hardly any published book especially dedicated to the discussion of NYG, except for few fan books written in Chinese. Most of the writing on NYG consists of newspaper comments, Internet columns or independent articles published in journals, written by media scholars, journalists and mass audiences in China. In addition, most of this current literature expresses opinions, rather than theoretical debates and discussions in an academic style. However, online blog comments and newspaper columns are independent from each other and scattered everywhere. Therefore, they lack consistency and it is hard to discuss any aspect of NYG on a deeper level. Background and a critical discussion about the use of online sources in research are provided in section (1g) of this chapter. Whether be published books, journals, online blogs, or newspaper columns, they are either the positive comments or the negative criticisms about NYG. Therefore, I will summaries the Chinese materials and organize them along these lines.

Since its first showing, the CCTV NYG has lasted more than 25 years. Being the representative of the Chinese television art, NYG promotes the development of the television entertainment variety show. From its development in the past two decades, NYG has achieved a wide social and international impact. As Zou suggests, NYG is not only a ritual for the festival celebration, but also full of artistic taste (Zou, 1993: 168). Guo also considers NYG as an 'extraordinary programme' in China due to its special meaning and status. This is because each year's NYG needs a long time to prepare (sometimes more than half a year), and it also costs lots of resources. It attracts the most audience by bringing the most popular celebrities and performances together on the

Chinese New Year. Therefore, eating dumplings, letting off fireworks and watching NYG on the New Year's Eve have become a cultural custom in China. Nothing is higher than the audience's expectations on NYG, who believe the New Year can be spoiled without a good NYG. The function of the NYG is also unique, as it has to unite the Chinese people by taking care of the people from all cultural background and geographic regions. It also has to consider all kinds of values and tastes, so that audiences from different age groups and professions can be satisfied from its entertainment (Guo, 1997: 44).

Although consumerism has increased and young people in urban areas are more likely to spend New Year's Eve outside of home, NYG has become an indispensable tradition in many Chinese families. As Professor Ge Jianxiong from Fudan University states, NYG has become a cultural symbol in China and it has shown its strong vitality till today no matter how much you criticize it (Zhai, 2009). Moreover, the chairman of Chinese Folk Cultural and Art Society Feng Jicai argues, 'People criticize NYG every year, but if NYG disappears one day, people will certainly feel disappointed, as watching NYG on the New Year's Eve has become part of the New Year itself' (Bai & Zhou, 2007). He believes NYG can bring the Chinese people together, whether you are in the countryside or in the city, you are connected through NYG at the same time. This thinking is coherent with the theory proposed by Dayan and Katz (1992) in their book *Media Events* on how media events connect the viewers no matter where they are. However, most of the Chinese sources are negative comments than positive ones, which reveals a lot about the production system and how the NYG evolved.

Despite of some admiration and praise, there seem to be lots of criticisms and complaints about NYG in recent years. Although the NYG directors claim 'the best show' every year, what is offered to the audience is the same (Ping, 2008). As the audience's expectations and demands rise, NYG directors have been struggling to please all kinds of tastes. The NYG is produced every year, and so are the complaints.

Deng Zaijun, who has directed three year's NYG in the 1980s believes that NYG has not got any fresher over the years, but simply remains loud and noisy. In the early NYG, a singer used to sing six songs on her own, whereas nowadays six people sing one song together. Therefore, individual singing has been changed into group chorus. It is not surprising that the audience cannot remember the songs. Moreover, she expresses the NYG nowadays has less and less interaction with its audience (Wang, Ling & Lao, 2003). As far as Ping is concerned, the essential problems of NYG are no more than:

- The programme makers' minds are not opened up which results in conventional production routine, superficial performance style, and educational lecturing;
- Too much emphasis on the grand stage and spectacular scenes, which leads to the overly busy and noisy studio;
- The editorial teams are too confident with themselves, which makes NYG stay far from what the audiences like (Ping, 2008).

The main criticisms and comments from the Chinese sources result from the following perspectives: the strict system, the old face presenters and performers, the declining quality of the performances, the audience rating dispute, the lip-syncing complaint, and income generation from product placement. I shall deal with each one in turn.

### **(1 a) The Strict System:**

To begin with, the NYG problem first starts from the system it lives in. Based on the public and media criticism, the systematic problems mainly show in the strict rules in NYG. It is widely argued that NYG lacks innovation (Deng, 2002; Ju, 2007; Jiang, 2008; J. Zhang, 2008; Fu, 2009; Meng, 2009; Li, 2009), and the strict system may have limited its innovate. As Qiao suggests, the CCTV has been looking for the reason behind NYG's declining popularity, so maybe the change should start from examining from its own system (Qiao, 2009).

Before the production of NYG, SARFT always hosts ‘CCTV NYG Work Assignment’ conference to set up some requirements and instructions to each year’s NYG. All the NYG directors are CCTV staff from the CCTV Cultural and Art Department. Jin Yue, who has directed the NYG for four times, is the director of the CCTV Cultural and Art Department. As an internal staff from CCTV revealed, each director leads his own team to compete in the bidding conference, where each team reports their bidding plan and overall idea in the form of document explanation, in the order of ballot. They are also required to do more detailed illustrations on the NYG theme design, structure, style, pattern and innovation methods, etc. The senior leaders of the conference then make overall comment on each team’s general plan and professional level. The final decision on the NYG director will be voted by all the members of the CCTV editorial board, and the result is normally announced at the CCTV internal standard meetings on 1<sup>st</sup> Sep each year (Yi, 2009). Scholars recommend the talented directors outside of CCTV such as the well-known Chinese film director Zhang Yimou who directed the Olympic Opening to direct the NYG (Deng, 2009). However, all NYG directors have to be selected among the internal staffs from CCTV according to the CCTV principles. Therefore, it is hard not to use up the ideas and talents over these years, which leads to its old conventional image. According to Ni, Ou and Shan, the strict system is also shown in the secrecy order carried out in the pre-NYG period. The CCTV NYG has adopted the confidential policy in not revealing the performance list or the performers before the NYG starts (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 363).

The NYG chief producer Qin Xinmin once stated that one performance has to be auditioned several times before it is finally put on the NYG stage. There are four levels in the assessment process, and he believes none of the good performance is being eliminated by the examiners (Liu, 2006). While Qin claims NYG is getting better year by year, the iconic NYG comedian Zhao Benshan complains about the NYG assessments in his interview, ‘The comedy makes the audience laughing hard, but the examiners look serious and always give suggestions that no one can understand. In the audition, a comedy becomes less and less funny in front of the judges, and finally

eliminated after being examined for ten times' (Sina Web, 2012). Zhao's comments became a newspaper headline.

In addition, the strict system in NYG is also a big pressure to the performers. Many NYG performers say that performing in NYG is too stressful, as it has to be a perfect show with no mistakes. From the minute when the performance is passed through the audition, the endless assessments and rehearsals have started. According to Luo, before finally selected by the NYG team, a comedy candidate normally spends five months in creating the comedy (Luo, 2009). The competition is very tough and all the effort you have paid into the performance will be wasted if the examiners have decided to take it off the stage. Under this strict environment, the examiners are also under pressure and have their own difficulties (Qiao, 2009). As the system is made under all kinds of criteria and requirements, the examiners are concerned whether the performance is good enough.

In terms of the presenters, the strict system also affects them considerably. Having been a NYG presenter for 16 years, Zhao Zhongxiang revealed in the interview that he has never added or cut one single word in the pre-arranged lines during his sixteen years' hosting experience. He is quoted as saying that hosting NYG is not as glamorous as you imagine, as all the NYG presenters are under stresses to make sure no oral mistakes are made. Normally the presenters' rehearsal starts fifteen to twenty days before the live broadcast of NYG. Presenter's role has to be finalized at least a month before NYG. But the pre-designed hosting lines have to be checked over and over again. The lines were especially written by writers and presenters were not allowed to change one single word from the original lines. It was not allowed to make mistakes or forget the lines when hosting the show. NYG presenters have to be perfect and never make mistakes. If you do, you will never have the chance to present NYG again (Jiang, 2008). On this matter, many observers agree that it is not necessary to magnify some small oral mistakes. It is more important for NYG to be an entertaining and attractive show to the audience, than

to be a boring show without any single mistakes. Adding or cutting some words or pronouncing slightly differently from the standard in the live show is acceptable. Actually some small mistakes can bring the audience closer to the show, as they are part of the natural and spontaneous communication. This is both the risk in the live broadcast, and also the charm of it.

### **(1 b) The Old Face Performers and Presenters:**

Upon the arrival of the 2010 NYG, an online survey was held by the Internet users to vote for the 'ten faces the audience does not want to see'. Surprisingly, all the voted faces are the NYG old face performers. These people are the most high-profiled celebrities and used to bring lots of laughter to the audience in the past. This indicates that the Internet users are tired of seeing those faces in NYG for so many years, no matter how good they are. For some singers and comedians, not only are they the old faces appearing in almost every year's NYG, but also they work together in the same partnerships. It is argued that these old face performers cannot satisfy the audience's expectations any more because their performing style do not progress with time and are not innovative enough (Yuan, 2010). Therefore, it is also not surprising that they are abandoned by the audience. While the audience has expressed their discontent towards the old face performers in this way, this voting also shows what the audience wants: some new faces with some fresh performances in NYG.

Even if their performances are not even good, the old face performers still appear on NYG stage. 'Not watching Zhao Benshan's comedy equals to not watching NYG at all' is the comment from the fans of Zhao Benshan. However, some scholars believe there is no need to have him in every year's NYG. It is said that his recent NYG comedy was disappointing as the humor was not closely linked to everyday life. Zhao Benshan is getting older and his performance is not as good as before. Although his comedies in recent years' NYG were voted the first, some of them are not worthy of the title (Q. Wang, 2009). In response, NYG has also carried out some adjustments. This is also

shown in the new partnership in comedy performances where old face comedians are working with new face comedians. However, the old face performers are not completely taken off the stage and replaced by the new talents. Usually, the old face performers still play the dominant roles. Many audiences complain why CCTV has not introduced new face presenters. Zhao Zhongxiang argued that frequently changing inexperienced new face presenters can easily cause oral mistakes (Jiang, 2008). Indeed, NYG is such a big TV event that the experience of the old face performances becomes very important to ensure the smooth running of the live show.

In contrast with the media's promotional reports before the NYG, audiences often feel disappointed after the show. Zhang concludes this situation in his article: The same group of people hosts the NYG, the same group of people performs in the NYG, and even the same group of people makes the NYG. Having used the same group of people in each area for decades, it is not very realistic to totally change NYG by still having these people produce it (J. Zhang, 2008). In recent years, the staging and set design is full of technical advances, but the people on the stage are still dominantly old face performers. Art, as an essential part of the cultural spirit, needs more innovation than any other things. Those old face performers should be kept in NYG to a certain extent, but new faces should also be encouraged and introduced.

### **(1 c) The Declining Quality of the Performances:**

As the media professional Yuan Juan proposes, 'The overall quality of the NYG performance is declining with those old faces dominating the stage which lack creativity and innovation' (Bai & Zhou, 2007).

Song and Dance performances are usually the main part of NYG. In order to emphasize the feeling of celebrating the New Year happily, the mise-en-scene often shows in a very loud and busy style with eye-catching colours. Whoever is singing on the stage,

they are all accompanied by dozens of background dancers who are dressed in colourful costumes. A solo song which is made for one person to sing has to be taken apart in pieces and shared among ten people. As a result, one person can only sing one sentence. Wang feels the NYG performances nowadays are very dull in content, despite of the mise-en-scene with grand staging and wonderful sound and lighting effects (Wang, 2006). The comedies are not funny enough to make the audience laugh nowadays, as Ju discloses that the comedy plays are mainly written behind the door without interacting with the ordinary people from the daily life. Gradually, the lack of humor has been covered and replaced by the dramatic performing style of the comedians such as shouting out loudly and making meaningless jokes (Ju, 2007). In this way, the comedies become very distant to the audience.

#### **(1 d) The Audience Rating Dispute:**

It is not up to the programme makers to decide whether a programme is good or not. Rather, we should hear the national audience's voice, as they are the best judges of a TV programme such as NYG. According to the China Television Audience Rating Yearbook, the term 'Audience Rating' in China refers to the ratio between the number of audiences watching a certain TV programme during a certain time slot at a certain area and the total number of television-owning households (China Television Audience Rating Yearbook, 2003: 156). In recent years, as there is a big difference between the NYG audience rating announced by CCTV and that reported by other sources, more and more people have started to doubt about the credibility of the NYG audience ratings. At present, almost all the media and advertisers in China only recognise the statistics provided by two survey companies: the American company Nielsen Media Research and CSM Media Research (Wang, Ling & Lao, 2003).

Nowadays, the TV audiences are diverted as there are more and more different ways to entertain. The time had passed when people had nothing else to do except watching NYG at home. The NYG director Jin Yue stated that the diversion of the NYG audience

has something to do with the various kinds of entertainment nowadays and the unstable audience rating is very normal (Xu, 2007). The NYG audience rating has continued to decline since 1998 (Y. Wang, 2009: 199). However, the audience rating figure announced by CCTV surprisingly shows an increase. Take the survey for the 2005 NYG as an example: The audience rating claimed by CCTV was as high as 97%, but the figure provided by Shanghai broadcast and telecom information consulting company was 36.7% in the same night right after the broadcast of NYG. The reason why such big difference occurred was because CCTV included everyone who had watched any part of the NYG. Those who only watched for one minute were counted as having watched the full programme. Hence, the statistics provided by the Shanghai broadcast and telecom information consulting company was calculated based on the viewing time, and watching NYG for one hour only counted for 25% of the full programme (Wang, Ling & Lao, 2003).

After the 2007 NYG was finished, research commissioned by China Television Research (CTR) in 2007 indicated that an estimated 93.6% of families watched the Gala on television, and among them, 83.6% of the surveyed audience was satisfied with the NYG. However, these ratings have been disputed: According to Nielsen Media Research, the NYG audience rating in Shanghai dropped from 23.8% in 2006 to 17.4% in 2007; as for Nanjing, it dropped from 22.6% in 2006 to 18.4% in 2007; and in Hangzhou, it also dropped from 19.71% in 2006 to 13.78% in 2007 (Wang, Ling & Lao, 2003). It is worth noting that the NYG's audience rating refers to the entire period from the beginning to the end of the programme (around 8pm to midnight). Therefore, the CTR's NYG audience rating of 93.6% was very likely to have included anyone who came across NYG by going up and down the channels that night.

The media has started to be skeptical about the reliability of the audience rating figure announced every year. In the case of the 2008 NYG, CCTV's market research CTR was the first one to announce the NYG audience rating by telephone survey, which claimed

that 96.5% of all the families in China watched CCTV NYG. However, according to the Nielsen Media Research, the NYG audience rating in Shanghai was only 17.4% and the audience rating in Hangzhou was 19.3%. Zhou noticed that different audience ratings occur when being carried out by different surveys, even if it is the same programme during the same period of time. This situation happens in many TV programmes, apart from NYG. Also, some of the interviewees look skeptical, worried and hesitating during the survey, which may also affect the reliability of the result (Zhou, 2008).

#### *Importance of Audience Rating:*

‘We are eager to compete with our fellow broadcasters, and with the ever-increasing number of networks vying for viewers’ attention over cable and satellite. But to do this we must have an honest report card. A trustworthy measurement of the size and composition of each competitor’s audience’ (Balnaves, O'Regan & Goldsmith, 2011: 241). Not only is audience rating the single most important information used by the media to compete, it also sets the price of programmes, rates for advertising and of course the salary and bonus of the management in the media industry (Beville, 1988: xi). The data from audience rating surveys are a key element of the structure and the business models in the media industry – audience ratings are used as ‘currency in media buying’ (Balnaves, O'Regan & Goldsmith, 2011: 16).

#### *Limitation of Audience Rating:*

Audience rating is part of the ‘effort to bring order and objective rationality to the highly complex and subjective process of audience interaction with media’ (Napoli, 2003: 82). The inherent difficulty of the task is described by Hartley, ‘Audiences are, literally, unknowable’ (Hartley, 1992: 110). It has led to an equally complex discussion about the limits of audience ratings. A comprehensive analysis of the critics around audience rating is provided by Balnaves, O'Regan & Goldsmith (2011). To support the

discussion in this thesis, the aspect of ‘information content of audience rating data’ and the aspect of the ‘accuracy of the audience data’ are explored in more detail.

Audience measuring heavily relies on statistical methods. The ‘lack of understanding of what they could and could not tell the researchers’ (Balnaves, O’Regan & Goldsmith, 2011: 229) results in the problem that ‘most of the people who deal with media research statistics were not analyzing them. Rather they were quoting them, whether to sell advertising or to justify their purchase of advertising to their clients or employers’ (Bogart, 1986: 286). This can be easily extend to the use of rating data for research: It is necessary to have a clear focus on scope - what conclusion are derived from the data - and a understanding of the limitation – is the information content of the available data sufficient to support the conclusion. The majority of the available audiences rating data are produced by commercial motivated research. Do to the nature of the research it ‘lacks much in-depth analysis of the background, psychology, and cultural orientation of viewers’ (Zhang, 2009: 177). Also this data do not provide any ‘information about why one program is tuned in and the other options are not’ (Abelman, 2013: 141).

Despite the inherent challenges of the accurate audience measurement, the economical effect of small changes in the numbers are very significant, as Abelman and Atkin explain, ‘Statistically, one rating point represents approximately 1 million people and can generate millions of dollars in additional advertising revenue’ (Abelman & Atkin, 2011: 136). They continue, ‘Yet it is not clear what those people are doing while the television set is activated in their homes or whether or not they are paying attention’. This on the one hand shows the direct implication of the accuracy of the number – changes are directly linked to advertising income – and on the other hand, as discussed before, the problem of information content: Even if the numbers are accurate, what do they mean? What information do they contain? Napoli explains the industry’s method of ‘coping with the inherent unreliability of the measured audience’ as ‘an almost irrational willingness to accept the data as accurate’ (Napoli, 2003: 81-82). The effect of

this can be seen ‘by the practice of reporting audience ratings down to the decimal point, even when the sampling tolerance ranged over several percentage points’ (Balnaves, O’Regan & Goldsmith, 2011: 230).

#### *Audience Rating in China:*

The development of the audience rating industry in China is directly linked to the development the media industry in China. Investors in the advertising market required rating data to support their business. With increasing capital from foreign investors, the industry adopted international rating systems (Zhang, 2009: 175). The key milestones in the developed are summarised by Zhang as follows:

- In 1982: An audience research project was initiated by the Institute of Journalism at the Chinese Academy of Social Science, together with several media companies and institutions;
- In 1986: CCTV established the first television ratings system in Beijing;
- In 1996: Nielsen Media Research entered the Chinese market – ranks second after CSM;
- In 1997: CSM (CVSC– Sofres Media) was set up by CCTV’s China Viewing Survey Center (CVSC) and the French company TN Sofres Inc. CSM has the largest audience measurement network in China and dominates the Chinese television rating industry (Zhang, 2009: 174-175).

#### *Use of Audience Rating in this thesis:*

‘It is widely understood that changes in the behavior or composition of the media audience... are likely to result in changes in media content, as media organizations attempt to account for – and capitalize up on – these changes in their content production decision’ (Napoli, 2003: 90). The capitalization of audience rating data in the case of the NYG is different from other TV programs. Not only is the audience rating used to support the selling of advertising during the gala – but also as used as a measure if the

ideological messages of the show are reaching its target audience: the Chinese people. The issues of ‘data accuracy’ and ‘data information content’ are vital to effectively support the above tasks.

However, the use of audience rating data in this thesis is limited to firstly establish a general trend: the audience rating of the NYG is declining. This trend can be seen in all available data and is confirmed by the three interviewees. Secondly, the declining audience rating data are used to support the claim that watching NYG is becoming less popular among the Chinese people. As discussed before, the audience rating data ‘lacks in-depth analysis’ (Zhang, 2009: 177) and also do not provide ‘information about why one program is tuned in and the other options are not’ (Abelman, 2013: 141). Nevertheless, audience ratings are the international industry standard of measuring changes in programme popularity and the observed trends of ratings for the NYG are significant enough to be considered as a ‘general trend’. This trend is well known in China and is much discussed. This thesis does not seek to explain the decline in ratings for NYG, however. It seeks instead to establish how the makers of the NYG have adjusted their programmes to take account of this decline in ratings, and in particular whether they have been able to change the mise-en-scene of the programmes in an attempt to appeal to a wide audience in a more competitive broadcasting environment.

### **(1 e) The Lip-Syncing Complaint:**

The lip-syncing in NYG singing performances is one of the most controversial topics being discussed among the mass audience. According to the old face NYG presenter Zhao Zhongxiang, lip-syncing has been adopted in NYG since its launch. In the early times during the 1980s, the facilities and the production techniques in NYG such as microphone, sound effects, music band, and editing could not reach the recording quality (Jiang, 2008). Under this circumstance, singing live may spoil the overall outcome of the performance in front of the audience. Due to many procedures, the NYG had to record the singing in advance to make sure the audience can enjoy the show. To

have better results, the custom of lip-syncing was thus formed. However, the lip-syncing has not been terminated in NYG nowadays even though the previous technical problems do not exist anymore. According to the NYG directors, the lip-syncing will still be adopted in song and dance performances. What's more, this practice was announced openly with the two reasons behind it: one reason is not to disappoint the high expectation of the national audience, as NYG has to be perfect; the other reason is that some singers cannot sing live on the stage as they would sing out of tune once they start (Zhan, 2001).

Earlier in 2008, the Ministry of Culture had introduced the 'Detailed Rules for the Implementation of the Regulation on the Administration of Commercial Performance', which regulates that lip-syncing is not allowed in commercial performances. In this case, CCTV NYG belongs to this category, as it is the biggest commercial performance in the country (Lin, 2008). Although the NYG is held by the state television CCTV and is financed by the state, it is full of commercial sponsorships and advertisements. In response, the NYG directors argued that lip-syncing should be allowed in the live broadcast of NYG. This is due to the bad experience in recent years when some singers sang out of tune while singing live. After all, the whole nation is watching the show, and it cannot be spoiled. Zhao Zhongxiang suggests that we should go back to the essence of art by stopping lip-syncing nowadays when the technical requirements are up to the standard. All the NYG presenters host the show live, and the singers should also sing live without any exceptions (Jiang, 2008).

#### **(1 f) Income Generation from Product Placement:**

In recent years, an increasing commercialism has been widely seen in NYG, which attracted many criticisms from the Chinese public. As the audiences start to complain about NYG, Lin believes the declining situation of the NYG is directly related to the poor artistic quality of the performances such as the lip-syncing and dull comedies, on the one hand; and too many commercial activities such as product placements and

sponsorships, on the other hand (Lin, 2008). The product placements and commercial sponsorships are made too obvious that they seriously affect the viewing experience of the audience, which essentially spoil the outcome of the NYG performances.

As Wu reveals, in November every year, CCTV hosts an official bidding conference for the nationwide enterprises to compete for the advertising opportunities at different time slots of the evening gala, including the few minutes before the official start of NYG at 8PM, the New Year Countdown at the midnight, and the voting activity of the ‘My Favorite New Year’s Gala Performance’, etc. In return, the enterprises who win the bidding will receive several special guest tickets for NYG (Wu, 2008). According to Xu, CCTV has been spending its own money in making NYG for more than two decades and the financial investment is increasing year by year. Xu explains that the expenses mainly come from the costs on staging, set design, lighting, stereo, costumes, props, and technical facilities such as satellite transmission, which sometimes can take three quarters of the overall production cost. In addition, dozens of production crew and technicians also need to be paid (Xu, 2007). A successful commercial model requires two conditions: a profitable market and sufficient financial investment. NYG has both of them.

In recent years, advertising revenue in NYG has been increasing: NYG earned 0.2 billion yuan in 2002, 0.4 billion yuan in 2006, and almost 0.5 billion yuan in 2009 (Chen, 2011). It is surprising to many that the standard price of appearing in NYG for wannabe-stars is 3 million yuan, and to have the presenters read out the New Year greetings costs 10 million yuan (D. Liu, 2010). Every year, commercial sponsorships and product placements are inserted everywhere in NYG, which brings enormous profit. Take the recent NYGs as an example: In 2007, the auction of the sponsorship at the midnight New Year countdown won the highest bid of 10 million yuan, and the bid for the advertising slot right before the start of NYG at 8PM reached 5.75 million yuan (Yang, 2007). As for the 2008 NYG, the sponsor of the ‘My Favorite New Year’s Gala

Performance' voting activity paid 56 million yuan and the few seconds' advertisement at the Midnight Countdown cost 42.81 million yuan. The 2009 NYG was expected to earn more than 110 Million Yuan from the sales of advertising on one single night (K. Zhang, 2008).

It is reported that many advertisers make the commercial decisions according to the appearance of the high-profiled celebrities in NYG such as Zhao Benshan's sketch comedy (D. Liu, 2010). Higher viewership can be expected by putting the celebrities on the stage, and hence making the show more valuable to the advertisers. Therefore, inviting high-profiled celebrities to the show is the easiest way to bring in advertising revenue for NYG. This may be able to explain the reason why high-profiled celebrities from both mainland and Taiwan and HK are invited in almost every year's NYG. What's more, especially in recent years, NYG has been more popular among the audiences in Northern China than those in Southern China, and the highest audience rating of NYG has been mostly in the North China, Northwest China, and Northeast China (W. Zhang, 2006: 143; Zhou, 2007: 183). Another reason why Zhao Benshan is included in almost every year's NYG may be because the audiences in Northern China like to see Zhao Benshan performance with his distinctive Northern styles and dialects. In other words, NYG needs Zhao Benshan to attract big viewership from Northern China and essentially attract commercial profits from the advertisers.

### **(1 g) Background and Critical Discussion about the Use of Online Sources in Research:**

Online news articles and other forms of online information such as blogs and online discussion forums are not academic literature. Therefore, a critical discussion is required when they are used as sources for research. The starting point of the discussion is the Internet as a source of data, followed by a brief analysis of online news in the context of production, readership, commercial aspects, the situation in China and blogs

as a form of distributing news online. Based on the information, the advantages and limitations of online news and online blogs used in research are discussed.

Internet as a source of data can be described as ‘vast cornucopia of data riches simply there to be consumed’ (Lee, Fielding & Blank, 2008: 8). The role of the Internet as a source of data became especially important roughly after 1993, as ‘any event which attracted public interest’ can be found online from a number of different sources (Dochartaigh, 2002: 15). Since 2005, the internet has been commonly accepted as a well established news medium (Franklin, 2008: 22). Today its function ‘to serve the public’ and the influence of new technologies on this function is still developing (Li, 2006: 2-3).

New technologies allow everybody, professionals like freelance journalists and camera teams, and non-media people to publish their ‘news material’ directly on the Internet. ‘The rise of the Internet and other technologies radically changes how news is produced and diffused. It enables the entry of new intermediaries that create and distribute news, including online news aggregators, online news publishers, mobile news actors, citizen journalism and many others.’ Digital tools allow the production of content in different formats and the production process is ‘more interactive and multi-directional, rather than linear’ (OECD, 2010: 14). Compared with offline news, key advantages of the online news production process are unlimited space and the possibility to report and update anytime (Salwen, 2005: 49): ‘News is constantly updated, with journalists and other news contributors monitoring, distilling and repackaging information’ (OECD, 2010: 14).

Together with the fast development of new technologies and tools for collecting, producing, distributing and accessing online news, the concept of online news still raises the question of a sustainable business model to support it (Greer & Mensing,

2006: 17). ‘Many newspapers with web sites have not found the right online model’ (Dibean & Garrison, 2005: 259) and ‘the anticipated gold rush never came (Garrison, 2005: 6). In addition, Salwen points out, the trails with ‘subscription-based news sites have largely failed’ (Salwen, 2005: 48).

Studies of U.S. readership of online news showed that ‘Younger consumers have traditionally had lower readership rates than older consumers...even though young Americans are spending more time online’ (Kirchhoff, 2009: 12) and ‘Internet newspaper users were more likely to be those who read print newspapers quite often as well’ (Cao & Li, 2006: 133). A similar overlap between online news readership and paper news readership in China is discussed by Stockmann (Stockmann, 2011: 187-188). Critics say that skimming and surfing the news without capturing the full extent is very common for online news readers (OECD, 2010: 79-80). The frequency of online news reading seems to be ‘more ad hoc, irregular and sporadic’ (OECD, 2010: 4). Compared with paper news, readers of online news seem to spend less time reading them (Kirchhoff, 2009: 11). Also, it is much easier for online readers to access a ‘variety of news from different sources, allowing them to mix and compile their own personalized information’ (OECD, 2010: 4). ‘The facts that the Internet allows access to a far wider range of material of much more variable quality... makes that attitude of skepticism more important than ever before’ (Dochartaigh, 2002: 12). Apart from offering the readership a bigger ‘variety of news from different sources’ and posing new challenges, a very important feature is the new way of interaction: The Internet allows ‘two-way communication’ (Greer & Mensing, 2006: 16) between the reader and the news provider via commenting on particular articles, engaging in discussion with fellow readers from all over the world.

Access to online news is the ‘second most frequently used online service’ in China (Stockmann, 2011: 187) and new forms of news distribution like blogs and online bulletin boards for direct exchange between individual surfers rather than between the

news providers and the surfers are becoming more important (Lagerkvist, 2006: 39). It seems that two main types of providers of online news exist in China: Web sites like Xinhua Net which are part of official news providers (in this case People's Daily) and Web sites operated by non-news agencies like Sina.com. According to Stockman, the news content of both groups is very similar as the non-news agencies are mainly publishing from other newspapers. Compared with paper news, the online news seems to be very similar to non-official paper news (Stockmann, 2011: 187-188). This trend of news production is considered as a 'difficulty in managing Chinese news portals on the Internet' (Lagerkvist, 2006: 38).

While online news was originally a way to make the content of paper news available on the Internet, 'the weblog or blog is a format that emerged from within Internet culture, outside any formal research context. Blogs offer a straightforward interface for publishing multimedia content on the Internet' (Wakeford & Cohen, 2008: 307). A blog is simply a posting or a number of postings on the Internet. It can contain embedded links to other content on the Internet and the possibility to add comments by the readers. News blogs 'aim to replace or supplement traditional media' (Wakeford & Cohen, 2008: 311) and therefore news organizations can perceive blogs as a threat. As everybody with access to the internet can open a blog and post any kind of information, it is necessary to distinguish between the blogger who 'have a large readership, work for organizations rather than on their own, are primarily in the business of news gathering and reporting' and others 'who write primarily for family and friends' (Davis, 2009: 115).

Arguably, the two big advantages of the Internet based news used for research are: the fact that they contain information unavailable elsewhere (Salwen, 2005: 48) and the possibility to access them by powerful new search tools to collect the data (Rasmussen, 2008: 79). However, using the data also requires much more emphasis on understanding the limitations and dangers associated with online data reliability, objectivity and

information content: 'The fact that the Internet allows access to a far wider range of material of much more variable quality than that found in a university library makes that attitude of skepticism more important than ever before' (Dochartaigh, 2002: 12). In addition, information published online can 'simply disappear if a webmaster deletes a file' (Dochartaigh, 2002: 12) and it might not be possible to review the material used before. This can be especially problematic if the research and/or the research findings are challenged at a later stage.

## **(2) Academic Articles on New Year's Gala:**

Most of the academic literature on NYG is in Chinese rather than in English, except for articles by Zhao Bin (1998) and Lu Xinyu (2009). This shows the international awareness of NYG is very low, compared to its huge reputation and important status in China. The Chinese television medium nowadays has the biggest audience in the world; and NYG, as one of the most influential TV event in China.

Being the first academic essay writing about NYG in English, Zhao Bin's article *Popular Family Television and Party Ideology: the Spring Festival Eve happy gathering* de-codes NYG by reading the ideologies from the NYG performances (song lyrics and comedy themes) (Zhao, 1998: 43-58). It uses the 1997 NYG as a case study to show how NYG embedded the mass education in the mass entertainment. This article analyses the CCTV NYG on 6th February 1997 to illustrate the way in which popular entertainment on television is tied in with ideological messages in the full-blown market era of the mid-1990s. As the year's most popular programme, attention has been paid to its content and social impact. Traditional family gatherings on New Year's Eve, with the advent of television and this special programme, have been turned into a national reunion. This, in effect, has been doing a good service to sustain ideological promotion in contemporary China. Mainly relying on textual analysis, Zhao teases out the relationship between state and family from the perspective of the nationalist 'main

melody' themes. She believes the programme thoroughly shows 'the classical Confucian notion of the state as an enlarged family' (Zhao, 1998: 43).

Zhao sees that the ideologies (such as patriotism and nationalism) are embedded deeply in NYG—to educate the masses through entertaining them. The article expresses its comprehensive understanding of the NYG and the current Chinese society as a whole. However, Zhao limits her discussion to a detailed analysis of the 1997 NYG as a case study. Her concern is with the significant status of the HK's handover in the Chinese history, so she relates the historical background discusses the important issues. Nevertheless, she does not explore the consistent characteristics and fundamental shifts by looking at the entire NYG history. Also, she examines the ways in which officially sanctioned ideologies are inserted into popular entertainment, and illustrates how the means and strategies of promoting ideologies have changed in NYG with the change of society and values in the new era, by carrying out detailed content analysis of the performances in the 1997 NYG, including the song lyrics, presenters' speeches, and sketch comedy themes. However, the focus is on analysing the content, rather than the mise-en-scene, which can also reveal the market and ideological influences existing in the NYG.

Similarly, Lu Xinyu's article *Ritual, Television, and State Ideology: Reading CCTV's 2006 Spring Festival Gala* in the recently published book *TV China* (edited by Ying Zhu and Chris Berry) explains the relationship between ritual, television and ideology in China, by rereading the 2006 NYG as well as referring to the new broadcasting environment and phenomenon taking place in China. Both Lu's article and Zhao's essay analyze the content rather than the mise-en-scene of NYG. Before illustrating her views, she begins the article by discussing Zhao Bin's article. Lu believes that Zhao 'ignores the integration of capital and power that follows cooperation between market and state. Together, they shape the Spring Festival Gala, which is based on borrowing from tradition. Furthermore, the ideology of the state governed like one family that she sees

as a peculiarly Chinese combination of tradition and the party-state might be better seen as a wider link between television, media, and the nation-state' (Lu, 2009: 112).

Like Zhao Bin's article, Lu also emphasizes the significance of 'Beijing time' for the NYG, and suggests 'what Beijing time essentially embodies is the consciousness of national territorial sovereignty' (Lu, 2009: 115). Beijing time is considered as a structuring element of the NYG. But Lu points out that what is even more significant is that 'Beijing time is clearly becoming the most valuable time for advertising' (Lu, 2009: 115). It is good that Lu also analyses some small features of NYG which have not been noticed by scholars. For example, using dialect-accented Mandarin rather than replacing Mandarin directly with dialect. As Lu explains, 'In this way, it confirmed the dominance of Mandarin, into the environment of which it brought dialects... The link between dialects and Mandarin today is a reflection of the link between the state and localities' (Lu, 2009: 116). Lu sees this situation as a result of marketization, because local television stations need to develop their own dialect audiences to compete with CCTV.

Lu then moves on to a deeper level by using NYG to illustrate the subtle and complicated relationship between the central CCTV and provincial TV stations: on the one hand, the CCTV is the one and only state television. Since 2000, the local evening galas have started to be produced by provincial TV stations. But they are not broadcast on the Chinese New Year's Eve, which is the same time as the CCTV NYG. This is because the provincial TV stations do not have the symbolic sources of the state ideology. As Lu points out, 'They cannot attain the aura of national ritual that goes with this programme, and therefore most of them yield and carry CCTV's Spring Festival Gala' (Lu, 2009: 118). On the other hand, CCTV is in competition with the provincial TV stations in grabbing the market share. The successful global format of the reality contest show in its Chinese version '*Super Girl*' (*超级女声*) from Hunan TV station is seen as a challenge to the NYG. Hence, Lu argues that 'marketization has created

increasing tension between CCTV's monopoly position and the interests of the local television stations' (Lu, 2009: 118).

As Lu suggests, 'In China today, the market is the source of the nation's new identity but also drives it to tear itself apart. The developments and difficulties of the CCTV NYG over the last twenty years epitomize this society's economic and ideological contradictions and conflicts' (Lu, 2009: 122). To summarise her view, Lu states that 'the entertainment industry developed under "depoliticized" marketization is increasingly the core of "socialist spiritual civilization"' (Lu, 2009: 122). Lu's article looks at the ideology aspect of NYG in the commercialised Chinese market nowadays, by taking the 2006 NYG as an example. Unlike Zhao Bin's article, Lu includes a comparison between NYG and the Chinese idol programme *Super Girl*, as well as the challenges posed by the municipal TV stations through their local NYG. Controversial issues such as the NYG's enormous financial benefit are also discussed. Lu explores the relationship between the state, the people, and the market in the current China by using the 2006 NYG as a case study, but again does not examine the whole history of NYG. In addition, she analyses the ideologies from the perspectives from the media market and the NYG programme content, rather than from the *mise-en-scene* perspective.

As the only academic theoretical writing about NYG in Chinese, Geng Wenting's book *New Year's Gala—the Chinese Carnival* is developed on the basis of her doctoral thesis. The book discusses NYG by referring to many theories from aesthetic, performing art, historian, and cultural studies, both from China and from abroad. Each year's list of HK and Taiwan stars' participation, NYG hosts and directors, as well as staging design are provided at the end of the book. This book offers the whole phenomenon of the Chinese New Year and NYG. The book explains the whole historical development of NYG and discusses its related issues from various broad perspectives, including cultural, social, aesthetic, performing art, philosophical, historical and Confucian studies, by referencing relevant theories from both China and abroad. She starts her doctoral thesis by first

introducing the historical background of the NYG in the age of the television domination, and then she moves onto explaining how the technology of live broadcast has fundamentally transformed this old Chinese traditional festival into a media event through the management of time and space. After the detailed analysis of the external environment of the NYG, she focuses on the NYG programme itself by describing the characteristics, development and changes of the two historical periods, followed by a detailed study on each kind performances in NYG, including song and dance, stand-up and sketch comedy, and Chinese opera, and therefore summarises the rules in making a successful performance which can last over time. Having discussed the NYG programme specifically, she looks at the NYG phenomenon at a deeper level by comparing the NYG with popular entertainment game shows in China internally and with the famous international Vienna New Year Concert externally. This shows the unique characteristics of NYG in terms of its spiritual culture and its traditional folk Chinese-localised features. In the end, she explores the related issues of NYG by investigating its decline further from both internal and external perspectives, and gives strategies and suggestions on how to solve the problem.

Geng's doctoral thesis portrays a clear picture of the historical development of NYG and its traditional cultural background. Based on this detailed introduction, the thesis also moves to a deeper level by comparing NYG with its similar counterparts and explores the reasons to the NYG declining problems by offering suggestions and strategies. It discusses and analyses the NYG from all angles and perspectives: cultural, social, aesthetic, performing art, philosophical, historical and Confucian studies, and therefore offers a comprehensive understanding of this culture-based phenomenon. Having provided a thorough explanation of NYG and its background, Geng ends with views and suggestions to counter the decline of NYG. Like most of the NYG studies, the author's identification only reaches one side of the problem—the commercial market, and leaves the other side of the problem—the ideological promotion, unexamined. As Geng points out that the competitive commercial market is one of the reasons leading to NYG's decline, she also raises the issue of emphasizing too much on

the format in NYG. Moreover, as Lu and Zhao propose, the ideologies are embedded in a more subtle way in the NYG nowadays. Due to this situation, even the beautiful staging seems to be dull and rigid, because there is no sign of profound inspirations and thoughts from the artists. Hence, the NYG has to rely on the noisy and busy scene to cover all the missing elements. NYG studies in China have not discussed its relation with the embedding of the ideologies; the NYG studies published outside China have not explored the mise-en-scene perspective.

### **(3) The Gap in the Existing Literature on New Year's Gala:**

None of the existing literature is dedicated to study the whole history of NYG, as they mainly pick a particular year's NYG and do a case study. Moreover, none of the current literature on NYG explores the mise-en-scene of NYG, as their topics are mostly criticizing NYG's content, its advertising sponsorship, its production background, the behind-the-scene gossips, and one single aspect of the mise-en-scene such as the NYG presenter, or simply criticizing NYG's production and its over-commercialised phenomenon, etc. Since the audience decline in towards the end of the 1990s, NYG has received criticisms from both newspapers comments by Chinese audience, and from academic discussions by Chinese media scholars. However, their attentions are seldom focused on the ideological and commercial relationship in NYG. That is to say, they look at NYG only as a pure artistic performance, a TV entertainment show, or a national TV event, rather than seeing it at a deeper level in terms of commercial and ideological influences. Relating commercial and ideological influences in the discussion of NYG's mise-en-scene can add additional value and provide a different point of view.

NYG juggles three balls at once: the commercial market, ideological promotion, and the demands of the entertainment. By investigating these juggling relationships from the mise-en-scene perspective we can explore many new things that cannot be discovered through programme content analysis or audience research. To summarise, none of the existing literature examines the mise-en-scene of NYG throughout its history, which

can reveal the juggling relationship. By examining the mise-en-scene of NYG, this thesis explores the relationship between the NYG mise-en-scene and the ideologies, the market, the state and the Chinese people, and therefore provides an insight into the development of Chinese television.

## ***Chapter 4: The Commercial and Ideological Influence in the Production of New Year's Gala***

This chapter discusses the underlying commercial and ideological influences and provides necessary background information. The detailed analysis of how these influences are reflected in the actual NYG programme is carried out in Chapter 7, 8, and 9.

The production of NYG is undoubtedly a gigantic and complex project. NYG is different from all other entertainment variety shows in the world, as the former head of CCTV Overseas Centre Zhao Yuhui explains,

*'The production scale and difficulty is unique in the world, as the live broadcast of this big scale evening gala lasts for more than 4 hours, which makes it very difficult to manage without any mistakes. Also, CCTV only has three months' time to work and prepare for this project every year. It is the result of the non-stop day and night hard work of several hundred staffs in CCTV'* (Appendix D).

What's more, NYG almost involves every part of art, culture and literature, which becomes the second reason why NYG is different from all other entertainment variety shows in the world. As the NYG's staging director Chen Yan reflects,

*'Unlike the situation abroad, there is no pure entertainment, pure art, or pure culture in Chinese television. In China, these three elements are closely connected and inseparable. New Year's Gala is a combination of entertainment, culture and art. The perception of aesthetics in China is different from that in any other country in the world, as it inherits the tradition and culture passed down from several thousand years ago'* (Appendix E).

This chapter discusses the juggling relationship between the commercial market and the ideological promotion in the particular case of NYG. It is necessary first to define the term 'ideology' as it is used within the production context of the NYG.

### **(1) Ideology and the New Year's Gala:**

The term 'ideology' is commonly used to indicate the combination of thinking and behaviour which underlies a society and represents its 'normal' way of thinking and acting. The concept of ideology has been much debated in Marxist theory (Gramsci 1975, Althusser 2008, Eagleton 1991 etc). Gramsci developed the idea of 'hegemony' to describe the process by which a ruling class ensures that its preferred ideas become the natural way of thinking and behaving. Once hegemony is established, it becomes difficult for the ordinary citizen to see beyond its limits and to conceive how life could be different.

Like all the political parties in the world, the ideological work is also important to the Chinese communist party. The party has to establish a new set of ideas and behaviours which banish the old ways. 'Ideology' soon became a matter of ideas spread through the use of slogans and examples of good behavior which were shown in the media. There is a close relationship between the Chinese media and the government. This is the golden principle of the Chinese media system (Pan, 2000: 70). Pan explains theoretical argument for this principle: 'In the struggle against bourgeois ideology, to enlighten the proletariat and the mass public, and to achieve the proletariat's intellectual, moral and philosophical leadership. In other words, the mass media are the key instruments with which the proletariat can seek to replace the bourgeois hegemony with its own hegemony and subsequently maintain it' (Pan, 2000: 70). Pan goes on to describe how this project has shaped the organisation of the media, 'At the structural level, the state subsidizes the media, and the committees at various levels of the Communist Party hierarchy appoint key personnel' (Pan, 2000: 71).

However, since the economic reform and opening-up policy, the situation in the Chinese media has become more complicated. State subsidies for the media have been largely withdrawn. While the media have been opened up to market forces, the supervision of news and key entertainment programmes still remains in place. Under

this circumstance, this power is implemented in a different way. As Zhou comments, ‘The Chinese people have been undergoing a progressive de-emphasis of ideology... This changed reality has propelled the party press to descend from an ideological highland to a pragmatic publicity plateau, and has made such a move possible’ (Zhou, 2000: 144-5).

Other observers take a more cautious view. They point out that although the party has redefined, the communication of ideas is still an important function. While agreeing that the party has become pragmatic in terms of ideology, Pieke believes that it has developed a new approach where ‘any ideological construction that justifies continued party rule would be just as good as any other’ because the aim is no longer to change society in a revolutionary way: ‘The Chinese Communist Party invested considerable resources in ideologically redefining its place in Chinese society... recent elaborations such as the ‘harmonious society’ (hexie shehui) or ‘taking the people as the basis’ (yi ren wei ben) signalled important policy shifts... ideology is treated not as the objective of rule but as an inseparable aspect of practical governance’ (Pieke, 2009: 11).

In this situation, the party justifies its continuing leadership role in the country by promoting itself as the force which provides stability and prosperity to the Chinese people. So it uses ideas of the ‘one united China’ or the ‘harmonious society’ to promote social stability. In promoting this new ideology, television still has an important role, especially in key programmes like NYG. In the 1980s, the development of television contributed to China’s economic growth. Since the mid-1990s, the government has brought fundamental changes to the domestic structure of the Chinese television industry. As Weber explains, ‘While retaining control of television by regulating foreign ownership, the government encouraged development of the industry by implementing a “competitive” domestic structure through selective importation of western management processes, concepts, technology and programming (both western and other foreign), along with generating revenue through advertising and encouraging

foreign investment' (Weber, 2003: 278). The 'ideologies' promoted in this new era reflect how the party is thinking. They are 'goals' that have to be 'communicated' to the huge population of China. The party does not seek to construct hegemony or consent in the way that Marxist theories have described. Zhao describes how this operates in the media: The party is 'incorporating the market mechanism in its media operations, and consolidating media capital through top-down administrative orders' (Zhao, 2004: 205). As a result, the Chinese media system has been transformed into a profit-maker who promotes ideologies.

In the current context of China, the term 'ideology' means the series of ideas and themes that the party promotes among the people. To avoid confusion, this is the way that the term 'ideology' is used in this thesis. Like in any other countries, the aim of promoting the ideological themes in big national TV events such as NYG every year is to encourage the country to become more prosperous. NYG promotes some of the most important themes such as the 'harmonious society' and 'one united China' because: Firstly, New Year is the occasion of reunion for both individual families and a country as a whole, based on the traditional Confucian concept of the country as an enlarged family. Secondly, to have a united country is the hope of every country and culture. Thirdly, NYG's emphasis on the national unity is to find a way to celebrate the New Year with the whole China. The NYG stages these ideas and themes in its *mise-en-scene*, which is ideological work as it is defined in the Marxist theories of Gramsci and Althusser. By studying one year's NYG, Sun discovers the innovative ways that the Chinese state influences and educates the nation through evening gala's success in fully taking advantage of the television technology. As Sun states, the NYG communicates messages of patriotism and national unity by embedding them in entertainment (Sun, 2007: 191). NYG was one of state media's first successful experiments in producing 'indoctrin-tainment', which delivers indoctrination through entertainment (Sun, 2002). Since then, NYG has been carrying out ideological messages such as patriotism in the era of economic reform to influence the Chinese people around the world with television's power in connecting people.

## **(2) Common Themes that have not been changed:**

Maybe the special status of CCTV determined the special fate of NYG, making it different from all other TV entertainment variety shows. The close relationship between CCTV and the state is unarguable. Compared with all other TV entertainment variety shows, NYG is of a different kind: it has to bear the responsibility of ‘educating through entertaining’, just like its parent institution CCTV. In the particular case of NYG, this philosophy can be translated into ‘fulfilling the ideologies in the New Year celebration’. Hence, there is always a topic, a motif, a philosophy, and even a story behind each performance on stage, as they all try to tell the audience something. In this way, all the performances in the NYG are made more meaningful and organically linked with each other as one entity. As Chen Yan comments, *‘I think, whether it is style or content, in the case of television programmes such as New Year’s Gala, what is important is to express its opinions and themes’* (Appendix E). Like in any other countries, the aim of promoting the ideological themes in big national TV events such as NYG every year is to encourage the country to become more prosperous.

In terms of the common themes, they are extensively discussed throughout the NYG history: the Chinese New Year, the changes taking place in China, the motherland China, the improvement of the farmers’ lives in the countryside, the selfless spirit of the army soldiers, and the ‘we are all Chinese’ theme applying to both the ethnic minorities in the mainland and the Chinese in HK, Taiwan, Macau and Overseas. As a matter of fact, there are links and relationship between these common themes. All the themes are extended and developed from the basic topic of the ‘Chinese New Year’, which is expressed through the mise-en-scene of the spring festival and its related ideologies. As Chinese New Year is also known as the ‘Spring Festival’, spring has been an important theme for every NYG to welcome the arrival of the New Year, where the colour (green), the symbol (trees and flowers) and the spirit (a new beginning, full of life and hope) of the spring are highly celebrated in the studio set designs (the Chinese paper-cut and couplet with the word ‘spring’), the costumes (green and floral), the performances

and their titles (especially song and dance portraying the beauty and spirit of spring), and presenters' speeches (rhetorical poems expressing the excitement of the arrival of the spring). Together with the spring theme, the Chinese traditional culture is very much celebrated in every NYG, expressed through its mise-en-scene: The opening song and dance with Chinese folk style, the comedy with traditional props, the Chinese opera as the Chinese traditional art, the New Year greetings from the presenters, and the decors with New Year symbols, etc. Nevertheless, they all aim at bringing one effect, that is, to describe the happiness of celebrating the Chinese New Year with its traditional activities and customs.

Based on the topic of the 'New Year', further themes are closely connected—the great changes taking place in Chinese people's lives and the motherland China. Over the past two decades, a rapid economic growth has been witnessed in China and fundamental changes have been experienced in Chinese people's lives. This is mainly shown in the improved living quality of the Chinese society as a whole, which has been constantly reflected on the NYG stage. Throughout the NYG, the great changes in Chinese people's lives have been praised in the performances as well as the presenters' speeches. Showing the big achievements in the Chinese countryside has been an important part of the NYG comedy, as we shall see the specific examples given in the Analysis Chapters. Usually, it is in the form of one comedian listing out the changes taking place in his surroundings in proud and happy manner to another comedian. Also, the typical line of 'the breeze of the reform blows everywhere in the Chinese society' is often used by the comedians and the presenters to show the big changes in peoples' lives. If the NYG is considered as a reflection of the Chinese society, this theme certainly contributes to this effect.

Having discussed the changes taking place in China, it seems natural for NYG to be linked with another related theme: the motherland China. This theme is mainly shown in song and dance performances, praising the natural beauty of China as a country and

how proud to be Chinese with the country's vast history and fascinating culture. This thesis also notices that this theme has been especially promoted since the mid 1990s. These patriotic song and dance performances are scattered throughout the NYG, at the beginning, the middle and the end of the show. After presenting the new look of today's China, nation-building and patriotic education is carried out. In this way, the 'New Year' theme is connected with the 'Changes in China' theme and the 'Motherland China' theme.

Chinese farmers and army soldiers are addressed in almost every NYG, especially since the middle of the 1990s. There are comedies and songs especially dedicated to portray the farmers' lives (usually to show the big changes taking place in the Chinese countryside) and to praise the spirit of the army soldiers (in terms of their dedicative and selfless contribution in safeguarding the country and the people). Chinese farmers have been the main characters of the NYG comedies. Their traditional lifestyles and values, which are very different from those of the city dwellers, are vividly performed in NYG. These portraits may draw the farmer audience close to the NYG, but the city audience who live among the skylines hundreds of miles away from the countryside may feel distant. This indicates that the farmers are considered as an important audience group by NYG, which form more than half of the overall Chinese population. Hence, these themes demonstrate how the ideology is embedded in the NYG performances.

In terms of the subject of the Chinese army soldiers, there are performances especially dedicated to them, apart from presenters' special greetings to them in every NYG. The set phrase of 'special greetings to all the officers and soldiers of the People's Liberation Army, the armed police and the public security police who are still working at their positions on the New Year to safeguard our country' has been a fixed line for the NYG presenters. Songs and comedies featuring the Chinese army soldiers to praise their dedicative and selfless spirit to the country are also included in every NYG, as we shall see the specific examples from NYG in the Analysis Chapters. All the songs are

patriotic in expressing how proud the army soldiers are to safe-guard the country and the people. Sketch comedy is another common form of the army soldier theme. They are usually a combination of the funny stories taking place in the army soldiers' daily lives and the touching emotions of their selfless dedication to the country. To develop the army theme further, army-themed songs are usually arranged right after to promote this theme.

According to my interviewees, the reason why the army theme is included in every NYG is because the army soldiers safeguard the country all year round and many of them are not able to go home and spend this biggest festival with their families like others. Hence it is common sense to address them in NYG with respect by giving them special greetings. Addressing them with credit in NYG is not only to show the army soldiers that they are respected in the country, but also to show the Chinese people that the army will always be there to protect them. In this way, the ideology of stabilizing the Chinese society is enhanced. In addition, the soldier theme has been expanded in the NYG since the middle of the 1990s in terms of the increasing number of performances dedicated to the army soldiers.

By looking at the themes of each year's NYG throughout its history, the word 'united' appears most frequent. As Ni, Ou and Shan explain, 'Based on the fact that China consists of many different ethnicities, and many Chinese living abroad, enhancing the ideology of "getting united" on this shared traditional festival--Chinese New Year, becomes very natural and sensible' (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 122). This thesis notices that the 'we are all Chinese' theme is mainly expressed in the ethnic song and dance performances and the pop music from HK and Taiwan. As far as the ethnic minority song and dances are concerned, they widely exist throughout the NYG history. As Chen Yan points out, '*Our biggest wish is to hope people from all ethnic backgrounds celebrate the New Year together and have great fun on the New Year's Eve. This is a theme that we want to express greatly in New Year's Gala*' (Appendix E). In terms of

the performances given by high-profiled stars from HK and Taiwan, they are also limited within song and dance performances. Nowadays, the participation from HK and Taiwan in NYG is shown in their pop music. Moreover, this thesis notices that there are fewer and fewer representatives from HK and Taiwan in NYG over the years. The NYG in 1984, 1985 and 1993 are the ones that were most involved by the representatives from HK and Taiwan.

Indeed, Chinese New Year is a common traditional custom that is shared among the Chinese people in mainland, HK, Taiwan, Macau, Singapore and elsewhere in the world. It is not surprising that the Chinese New Year creates a perfect occasion for NYG to bring the Chinese people around the world closer by celebrating this traditional festival together, on the one hand, and to promote the 'One United China' theme under the ideology, on the other hand. One united China is promoted in NYG because: Firstly, New Year is the occasion of reunion for both individual families and a country as a whole, based on the traditional Confucian concept of the country as an enlarged family. Secondly, to have a united country is the hope of every country and culture. Thirdly, NYG's emphasis on the national unity is to find a way to celebrate the New Year with the whole China.

Along with the development of the TV production skills, more things are added to NYG: the studio activity especially arranged to mix the soil from mainland, HK and Taiwan together, the live interaction with the presenters from HK and Taiwan through satellite transmission, and the video taken from the space displayed on the big screen, etc. That is to say, the frequency and level of the ideological work is actually enhanced in NYG. What's more, these common themes are also portrayed in a certain pattern throughout the history of NYG. Normally, the topic is mentioned in a sketch comedy, and then the presenters appear on stage and promote the ideology in an emotional and poetic way, which are followed by a patriotic song and dance expressing the same theme with the videos played on the big screen as background. As illustrated above,

these common themes are the main places where the ideological work is realized in NYG. The format and design of each year's gala may vary due to different directors, but one thing that has not been changed is the common themes that are promoted in the same manner every year. As a leading television director in China who participated in the New Year's Gala production, Yang Bo explains it as, '*bringing a positive touch to the New Year's Gala performances and the topics*' (Appendix C). It is important to give hope to the people through positive thinking, so that we can overcome the difficulties together. Like in every country in the world, it is understandable not to be pessimistic on the happiest New Year's Day, and 'sending positive messages' can make the people feel positive about their life.

Last but not least, to be qualified as the NYG chief director, one has to have political awareness, apart from the necessary experience in directing big-scale evening galas and entertainment programmes. As Ni, Ou and Shan reveal, 'The chief director of NYG is neither the designer nor the instructor of the evening gala. He/she can design, but their designs must be permitted by the CCTV leaders before they can be carried out. He/she can instruct, but there are always other directors behind them to instruct them. In other words, to be a NYG chief director, one should not only have the talent in designing and directing, but also the personality and tolerance in obeying the instructions (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 5). As an experienced media professional working as a panel judge in SARFT, Zhao Yuhui concludes this relationship in a more explicit way: '*The Chinese media policy on television accords with the messages from the state. The media policy will not go against the state ideology. It is the same in every country. The basic policy goes together with the national policy*' (Appendix D). Based on the above analysis, this thesis suggests the reason why NYG is considered as rigid and old-fashioned may be because the ideological themes have always been in the programme over the years. But if the NYG is too perfect and educational, the evening gala will appear very rigid and serious. This shows in its vivid juggling between the market, the ideology and the audience.

### **(3) The Portrait of the Crucial Moments:**

By observing the NYG of the past two decades, this thesis discovers that particular time-slots, studio activities, and even performances are especially made to carry out the mass education. Hence, we refer these special allocated arrangements as the ‘crucial moments’ in this thesis. As crucial as these moments are, they have transformed the evening gala dedicated to the New Year celebration with the whole nation into a special TV event with Chinese characteristics. The crucial moments are mainly: the opening scene, the closure scene, the New Year countdown, and the theme slots especially dedicated to the promotion of the ideological tasks. They are considered as the key part of each year’s evening gala, by the NYG production team, the audiences and the critics, because it is during these crucial moments that the required ideologies are promoted in NYG. Moreover, this thesis suggests that each type of crucial moment has its own fixed pattern, format and mise-en-scene, which has not changed much throughout the history of NYG.

In terms of the opening scene of NYG, it is considered as one of the crucial moments to implement the ideologies because it is the official beginning of the evening gala when the audiences are waiting anxiously for the start of the show. Therefore, the opening scene of every NYG also expects higher viewership. The NYG often starts with opening song and dance featuring the Chinese folk style. Its mise-en-scene is characterized by the loud and busy look and feel with additional use of traditional signs and symbols. The presenters usually make their first appearance on stage together during or right after the opening song and dance, by standing in a line at the centre of the stage surrounded by many performers, and making exciting opening speeches to announce the official start of the evening gala. This solemn, ceremonious, and media ritual studio atmosphere is thus created, which provides a good environment for the implementation the ideologies. The common ideologies that are usually promoted during the opening scene of the NYG are: the ‘We Are All Chinese’ ideology and the ‘Country China’ ideology.

These ideologies may not seem to fit into the New Year occasion at the first glance. Nevertheless, the NYG manages to promote them in a natural way supported by the specific mise-en-scene of the crucial moments. The Chinese New Year, as the common festival shared among the Chinese people, no matter where you come from (mainland, HK, Taiwan, Macau, or Overseas), gives the perfect opportunity for the NYG presenters to stress ‘We are all Chinese and we have the same root in history’:

- The celebration of the vast history and fascinating traditional culture is what makes the Chinese people proud of themselves;
- Special arrangements are made to put all the ethnic minority dancers dressed in their various traditional costumes at the front of the stage to present the picture of ‘one big family’;
- Special New Year greetings are given to particular groups—the audience, Chinese from all over the world, all the ethnicities in China, the Chinese army soldiers and those who are still at work during the New Year;
- The report of the news about the recent economical and social achievements;

The closure scene of the NYG is considered as one of the crucial moments to implement the ideologies because it is when everybody in NYG gathers together at the end of the show: the presenters, the performers, and the studio audiences. The arrangement of the closure scene is similar to that of the opening scene, as we shall see in Chapter 7, 8 and 9. Hence, similar ideologies are reinforced during the closure scene and even in the same way. As far as the midnight New Year countdown is concerned, it is considered as one of the crucial moments to implement the ideologies because it is the most exciting part of the evening gala. If New Year’s Eve is considered as the most special night of the year, connecting the old year about to pass and the new year about to come, then the midnight countdown is the most special occasion of the year, as it is the moment transforming the old year into the new year. Therefore, high viewership is also expected at this time-slot. The New Year countdown usually takes place five minutes before the midnight. Similar to the arrangement and mise-en-scene of the opening and the closure

scenes, the presenters appear together to make the speech with rhetorical words in poetic style, surrounded by all the NYG performers. Hence, similar ideologies are promoted in the presenters' speeches at the New Year countdown by using similar elements of mise-en-scene.

Certain theme slots are especially allocated to continue fulfilling the ideological tasks. This thesis also notices that these crucial moments are handled in a systematic way. Usually, the theme slot is either in the form of studio interviews/activities, or embedded in the NYG performances. The studio interviews /activities often handle ideology in a fixed pattern through its mise-en-scene: over the expressive background music, the presenter makes a speech on a touching story happened in our ordinary daily life with emotional and poetic manner. When the audiences are provided with enough background information about the story, the presenter then introduces the real people from the story on stage and interviews are conducted to create the sense of 'intimacy'. During the interview, the studio audiences are frequently filmed wiping their tears under close-up shots. At the end, the presenter promotes the ideology explicitly based on the touching story. To develop the ideological theme further, a theme-related patriotic song and dance performance is followed right after the studio interview. When compared with the British evening gala dedicated to the Red Nose Day, it is clear that, although both programmes aim to touch and encourage the audience with positive messages, the British programme makers do not make emotional and poetic speeches like the Chinese counterparts. Rather, they stand from an objective point and let the story itself to touch or influence the audience.

In addition, in handling all the crucial moments mentioned above, NYG has a particular system and mise-en-scene in portraying crucial moments to promote the ideologies, which has not changed over the years. All the crucial moments in NYG are surrounded by many NYG performers dressed in different colorful costumes with the ethnic minority dancers standing at the front to project the image of the 'one big family'. Also,

the big applause from the studio audience is a must, clearly instructed by the warm-up man, and the presenter's lines are considered most important during these moments. Based on the interview with Yang Bo, this may be due to two reasons: on the one hand, all the NYG directors are CCTV staffs, who may share very similar values and styles; on the other hand, the NYG directors are encouraged to keep some good practices and experiences gathered from previous years' NYG. The role of directors is decisive in the making of the NYG. If they all come from CCTV background, it is easy to fall into the same conventions, especially when they are asked to follow these conventions. This situation may lead to the unchanging image of the NYG in the past two decades, which may have restricted the innovation in NYG. As a result, it is not surprising that innovative changes have not taken place in NYG, and the evening appears rigid and old-fashioned in style nowadays mainly because the core production crews, priority concerns, the principles of the show have not changed in these years. Indeed, including and promoting these certain ideological themes in special designated times throughout the evening gala is an important task for NYG. As Chen Yan concludes, *'Every country's cultural industry is closely connected with the country's social system and religion. The interest of the country is always bigger than the interest of the artist. As long as there is no change in the country's social system, New Year's Gala will stay the same'* (Appendix E).

#### **(4) Over-Commercialization VS Programme Quality:**

'Television shares most of the problems and difficulties faced by the media industry in general. However, its most formidable task for the future is to coordinate the double life of 'mouthpiece' and 'money-spinner' into an organic whole based on a more coherent principle of public responsibility on the one hand and a more mature and better regulated market economy on the other' (Zhao, 1999: 303).

Since the voting activity 'My Favorite New Year's Gala Performance' was introduced in 1992, the NYG is getting more and more commercialized by carrying commercial sponsorships in the voting activity and product placements in the show. The commercial

activities have been invented in one way or another to make business through this biggest TV event of the year: the commercial sponsorship at the New Year countdown, the New Year greetings from the embassies and enterprises, and the products used in the performances as well as placed on the tables of the studio audience. Some use the phrase ‘One second in NYG is worth millions’ to describe the incredibly high price for the advertisements in NYG. It is said that the advertising revenue in the 2005 NYG and the advertising packages during the New Year period would increase around 400 million yuan for CCTV (W. Zhang, 2006: 145). Due to the enormous influence that NYG can bring, many enterprises have participated in the advertising bidding competition held by CCTV. In this way, NYG has become the best opportunity for the enterprises to promote their businesses. However, it is not clear that this increase in commercial profit also leads to an increase in audience enjoyment. While the NYG is getting more and more business-oriented, its audience rating has dropped.

Constant complaints have been heard from the public about the too-much-too obvious commercial activities in the NYG in the form of product placements and sponsor messages: For several years’ NYG, ‘Hui Yuan’ Fruit Juice has been given frequent close-up shots both on the studio audiences’ tables and as the prop for the magic shows and sketch comedies. In the 2002 NYG, many songs performed by HK and Taiwan stars were actually the soundtracks for the TV advertisements (such as the coca cola commercial song ‘Give Me Feeling’ by Taiwanese pop star Zhang Huimei), which had been widely known by the audience already. Before the arrival of the 2002 NYG, Lu revealed various business trades between the NYG and its commercial sponsors: commercial sponsorship worth 500 thousand yuan can buy a ticket to the live NYG; a commercial sponsorship worth of 9 million yuan can have a place at the front row audience seats as special guests (Lu, 2002). In the 2002 NYG, a 2.6 million yuan deal was made with the advertiser to sponsor the 8PM time announcement at the beginning of the NYG. The most expensive advertising slot was the 10 seconds at the midnight countdown: the base price was 3.8 million yuan, and an enterprise won the bid at 4.8 million yuan (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 418-419).

In the 2005 NYG, as a way to promote its commercial sponsor, certain speeches were especially arranged for the presenters to introduce the beautiful flowers placed in the NYG studio, which were provided by Kunming World Expo Garden. In the 2006 NYG, 16 commercial sponsors were credited at the end of the evening gala, and the CEOs of those companies were filmed sitting among the studio audiences. In addition, the logo of the sponsor 'China Ping An Insurance' has been printed on the hotline presenters' desks and laptops for several years, and the audiences are already used to the New Year greetings from the commercial sponsors at the New Year countdown occasion every year.

Since its launch in 1997 by Hunan Provincial TV station, '*Happy Camp*' (快乐大本营) has been frequently voted as the most popular entertainment variety show in China with many TV awards: the winner of the China Starlight Awards and the China TV Golden Eagle Award in 1998; rated one of the most influential Chinese TV programmes of the past 15 years by 'New Weekly' in 2005; voted the most popular entertainment variety show of the year in China in 2007 and 2010; awarded the best entertainment variety show of the year in China by the Asia TV Festival in 2008; and the most watched TV entertainment variety show of the year in China by the China World Records Association in 2009 (Hunan TV, 2010). The success of '*Happy Camp*' proves that the commercial activities (product placements, commercial breaks and sponsor messages) do not drive the audiences away. So a perception that NYG is overly-commercialized may not be the only reason that leads to its decline. Other changes in the programme could be contributing to the decline as well. Apart from the lip-syncing phenomenon that has widely existed in NYG for decades, the new format of several singers sharing one song together has been introduced since 1997. As Li reveals, 45 songs were performed in the 2000 NYG in total but only 21 of them were sung in full length (J. Li & Q. Li, 2006: 121). This new format was invented as a strategy to include more singers in the limited number of songs in NYG. However, it makes the stage appear crowded,

busy and even chaotic. In addition, this arrangement is not pleasant for the directors, singers or the audiences: it is difficult for the directors to include all the singers and songs within this four-hour evening gala; it is not appealing for the singers to share the song with many others; and it is hard for the audience to accept when a good solo song has to be taken apart in pieces (Deng, 2002; Wang, 2006). Hence, high-profiled singers such as Teng Ge'Er and Na Ying have declined performing in NYG once they knew that they had to share the song with several other singers, which left only one minute for each to sing (J. Li & Q. Li, 2006: 126).

What's more, the new invention of putting several old songs together in one performance has been adopted since the 1998 NYG. Most of the old songs used to be the popular soundtracks from films and TV series. Over the years, there are less and less popular songs generated from NYG. As it is revealed, the NYG has not introduced any popular songs since 1995. There were hardly any songs in NYG that impress the audience since 2000 (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 216). Good songs have become less and less in NYG. As it is revealed previously, it only takes a few days to compose a new song for the overly commercialized TV industry nowadays. For example, some new songs such as (2006:\*2) and (2006:\*14) were so badly composed that they do not have any rhythm. Therefore, repeating old songs has become a common practice in NYG when it is running out of good performances. Gradually, this situation has also expanded to the Chinese opera performances. The 1990s and 2000s NYG also saw a dramatic decrease in the number of Chinese opera performances in NYG, in the attempt to attract young audiences who consider the Chinese opera are made for the older people. There are obviously more Chinese opera performances in early NYG than nowadays: from five Chinese operas in 1984 NYG down to only one Chinese opera since 2005 NYG. Also, the duration of each Chinese opera performance has been cut down year by year: from the completed version in full length to the condensed version broken down into pieces. This new shift took place in 1997 when the opera performance (1997:\*17) was introduced as a collection of the classic Chinese operas to satisfy the opera fans. However, this new format can hardly satisfy any opera fan by putting

several sections of different operas in one single performance. Compared with the Chinese opera in the early period such as (1991:\*31), the Chinese opera performance nowadays lasts much shorter under the abbreviated form.

At the same time, the NYG comedies are also losing their attractiveness in recent years. Unlike the popular and successful comedies in the early days which were achieved through lots of hard work by both the comedians and the creators, little effort has been put in the making of the NYG performances nowadays. The time has passed when the performance creators spent years in accomplishing the artistic work for NYG. As the old face comedian Zhao Benshan explains, the quality of the NYG comedy is declining is not only because the progress of the performance cannot catch up with the increasing demand of the audience nowadays, but also because the style of the comedies in recent years have discouraged the confidence of the performers as well as the interest of the audience' (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 269).

Indeed, we do see the results of the commercial profit in the show, as the quality does improve in terms of the high-tech multi-function stage, the most advanced lighting and sound-recording facilities, the well-equipped props, and the shiny colorful carnival costumes, etc. In the past two decades, the NYG has grown bigger and bigger. It has changed from a simple entertainment activity to a complex set of various social relationships. As Zhang comments, 'Along with the two decades of economic reform and opening-up in China, the two decades of NYG is walking closer and closer towards commercialization' (W. Zhang, 2006: 145). These more technical improvements however do not have a significant impact on the content and style of the performance.

#### **(5) Self-promotion and Branding VS State-owned Broadcasting:**

As a result of the economic reform and opening-up policy, the commercialization procedure has been more and more enforced in the Chinese television like other

industries. The past two decades have witnessed a constant rise of various self-promotions and branding strategies in the making of NYG, along with the vigorous approaches of the commercial sponsorships and product placements. The conduct of self-promotion and branding strategy mainly serves two objects: the NYG itself, and the CCTV as a whole.

In terms of promoting NYG, various strategies have been used skillfully in the show throughout the history of NYG. Sometimes it is the form of self-praise: the performer in the story-telling performance (1988:\*2) described how great the NYG was in its leading position in the TV production industry and its power in gathering the high-profiled celebrities together. Sometimes it is in the form of inserting scrolling text at the bottom of the screen: By 2005, the NYG had already known how to attract the audience by providing the names of the high-profiled celebrities and old face performers expected in the upcoming performances. Sometimes it is in the form of inter-related series: Based on the success of the sketch comedy ‘Selling the Walking Stick’ (2001:\*24), sketch comedy ‘Selling the Wheel Chair’ (2006:\*16) was introduced as its follow-up serial comedy under the same topic and storyline, which was even performed by the same group of comedians such as Zhao Benshan. This self-promotion strategy is a good way to attract the audience by borrowing the fame and popularity of the last successful comedy. To some extent, this tactic is very similar to the selling of a new commercial product by mentioning the previous best-sellers from the same company in the business world. Apart from the self-promotion in the evening gala, there is also media’s promotion on NYG. During the pre-NYG period every year, all the media (newspaper, television and online media) are chasing up the latest news about the upcoming NYG like paparazzi chasing up the celebrity stars. The media propaganda includes: the exposures on the potential chief director, performers, and performance lists, etc. Usually, the general structure and main content of the evening gala do not have major changes, but it is very common to adjust the performance list and the performers until the last minute. This non-stop alteration makes the journalists create lots of latest news to entertain the audience.

As for the promotion of the CCTV as a whole, the NYG has always had a close relationship with its parent institution. Since 2005, not only the NYG has been broadcast live on CCTV-1, China National Radio and China Radio International, other four CCTV channels (CCTV-English International, CCTV-Spanish, and CCTV-French) also simultaneously transmit the evening gala to the world. TV branding is seen everywhere in the NYG studio: the CCTV logo printed on the wall, projected on the stage, and covered on the laptops of the hotline presenters. What's more, in each year's NYG, the presenters have to announce several times throughout the show to emphasize that it is the CCTV's NYG that the audience are watching and it is live broadcast. Taking the opportunity of the biggest annual TV event in the country, other CCTV programmes are also promoted in NYG in one way or another: The sketch comedy (2000:\*2) was based on the content and format of the CCTV News and Current Affairs programme '*Focus Interview*' (焦点访谈). With its familiar soundtrack playing at the background, its iconic presenter Bai Yansong appeared on the stage right after the comedy. While giving New Year greetings to the audience, Bai took this opportunity in promoting the new features coming up in his programme '*Focus Interview*'. Needless to say, mentioning other CCTV programmes and their presenters in NYG is another effective way to do the promotion and branding work for CCTV.

The NYG now faces competition from the provincial TV stations. The competitive provincial TV stations hold their own local NYGs almost every year such as Hunan TV station, Anhui TV station, Oriental TV station, and Jiangsu TV station, etc. But most of the local NYGs held by provincial TV stations are broadcast before or after the New Year's Eve to avoid the direct competition with the CCTV NYG. According to Wang, there were more than 30 local NYGs held by provincial TV stations in 2007, which reached the national audience through their satellite channels (Li, 2008: 196). 'It's hard to please the huge and diverse audience groups across the country' has been one of the major concerns of CCTV, which is expressed by all the three interviewees as a possible

explanation to the NYG's declining audience rating in recent years. As Zhao Yuhui states,

*'The target audience for the provincial TV station such as Hunan TV station is the young people, while the target audience for New Year's Gala is male, female, the old, and the young. If New Year's Gala borrows the same style and content from Hunan TV station, the young people will like it but the elderly and the middle-aged people may find it hard to accept, as it can be too noisy and inappropriate for them. Different age groups have different tastes, values and preferences. New Year's Gala has to find a neutral style which is acceptable and appealing to the audience from all different age groups, cultural and regional backgrounds'* (Appendix D).

Although it is a bit risky to compete with the NYG provided by the state television, provincial TV stations know better in what to offer to the local audience. It is said that audiences in Shanghai area has been more attracted to their local NYG held by Oriental TV than the CCTV NYG (Li, 2008: 197).

Compared with the conventional CCTV NYG, the local NYGs show more innovation in various programme styles and content. For example, in 2008, Oriental TV station provided celebrity fund raising campaigns and a series of exciting and challenging studio games in its local NYG, while Liaoning TV station presented its local NYG by gathering the most high-profiled A-list celebrities to make the show more lively, fashionable and exclusive (Y. Wang, 2009: 199-200). In addition, some provincial TV stations also co-produce the local NYGs together. In this way, not only human resources and financial costs are shared among the provincial TV stations, the joint evening gala is also made more attractive and influential from a more powerful media promotion. For example, in 2007, a local NYG was held by Shandong TV, Shanghai TV, Jiangsu TV, Anhui TV, Zhejiang TV, Fujian TV and Jiangxi TV. Henan TV was also jointly hosting the local evening gala with Phoenix TV from HK and Aoya TV from Macau (Li, 2008: 203). Based on their popularity that has already been established among the national audience, it is found that some provincial TV stations can also increase their audience

ratings by simultaneously retransmitting the CCTV NYG (Li, 2008: 202). According to Wang, on the New Year's Eve of 2008, there were 16 provincial TV stations which rebroadcasted the CCTV NYG simultaneously (Y. Wang, 2009: 199). With the expanding influence from the provincial TV stations and their far-reaching satellite channels, the retransmission of the live CCTV NYG has driven away the national audience from CCTV, which brings down CCTV's audience rating in recent years. While the local NYGs from provincial TV stations are getting more influential and popular among the audience, all the three interviewees deny that the local NYGs can pose any challenge or threat to the CCTV NYG. They believe CCTV NYG is the very first New Year's Gala and therefore it has a unique status which makes it stand out from the rest. As Zhao Yuhui argues,

*'CCTV is very difficult to be replaced. There is still a gap between the CCTV New Year's Gala and other local New Year's Gala produced by provincial TV stations. If you compare the local New Year's Galas with the CCTV New Year's Gala, none of them are on the same level as the CCTV New Year's Gala, in terms of content, style, lighting, costumes, and set design, etc. This is something to do with the investment. CCTV New Year's Gala may invest several times or even ten times more in the production than provincial TV stations. No provincial TV stations can achieve this'* (Appendix D).

NYG is the biggest TV event held by the state television CCTV. Naturally, the state-owned broadcasting system is shown in the production of the NYG. The NYG has been solely organized by CCTV since its launch, from planning the programme to selecting the performer, from providing staffs with lunch boxes to handling the souvenirs. The CCTV decision-making system is formed in this way: from department to the centre, and then to the CCTV leaders. Hence, the order is from the department meeting, to the final decision made by the leaders of the TV station. By closely observing the NYG of the past two decades, this thesis notices that in almost every year's NYG, CCTV leaders and senior staff are filmed frequently sitting at the

‘Instruction Desk’ (指挥台) among the audience seats while watching the show during its live coverage. As part of the procedure in making this perfect show which is highly expected by the national audience, a strict system has been applied to the NYG production team. It is revealed that strict regulations were created for the production team of the 2002 NYG:

- strictly work with the team without making personal benefits;
- strictly carry out all requirements from the production;
- strictly obey the professional ethics;
- strictly keep the secrets by not revealing any internal information and not taking any interviews;
- anyone who breaks the rules will have their contract terminated (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 363).

NYG has been financed by the state. According to Li, the budget for the 1998 NYG was around 15 million yuan, and the same amount for the 1999 NYG (J. Li & Q. Li, 2006: 147). As a sign of the communist legacy that everybody eating from the same big pot, the performers and the production teams are paid equally—around 2000 yuan per person, regardless of the different outcomes of different performances (J. Li & Q. Li, 2006: 192). In addition to this standard payment, a bonus is also shared among the performers and the whole production team, based on the voting results from ‘My Favorite New Year’s Gala Performance’ by the audience. Take the 2004 NYG for example, the first prize was awarded with 50 thousand yuan in cash, the second prize was 30 thousand yuan, and the third prize was 20 thousand yuan (J. Li & Q. Li, 2006: 214). This rate is quite low for the high-profiled celebrities, and even the first prize bonus is far less than their incomes from a standard commercial performance. However, performing in NYG has its own unique advantage: instantly promote one’s popularity in front of the national audience on one night. Due to this very advantage, a performance

that will be put in NYG cannot be shown on provincial TV stations; otherwise, it will be taken off from the NYG performance list.

The production procedure of the NYG is complicated. As the NYG staging director Chen Yan reveals, it has become a routine to start making New Year's Gala three months ahead of every Chinese New Year, from planning to producing to rehearsal. Compared with other big live TV event held in other countries, this preparation time is fairly short. Chen Yan explains, *'This is not easy for us, as New Year's Gala is not a commercial entity yet. We are not a private company specializing in making television programmes. We have many other tasks to do everyday'* (Appendix E). According to the interviewees, CCTV starts to prepare for the upcoming NYG in August every year, from the bidding competition to selecting the chief director, to the setting up of the production team, to the latest follow-up exposures by all media. The bidding competition for the chief director usually takes place in July every year. In the bidding procedure, every candidate director explains their own plans and strategies of the NYG to the CCTV leaders, followed by the discussions among the CCTV leaders. The elimination is carried out based on a complex assessment on the candidate's actual ability and the bidding plan. In this way, the NYG chief director is selected and informed to the SARFT. Once the chief director is finalized, he/she is responsible in forming the production team who are in charge of different performance genres such as song and dance, stand-up comedy, sketch comedy, and acrobatics, etc. (J. Li & Q. Li, 2006: 65; P. Liu, 2010). As Yang Bo discloses, the people chosen for the production team are usually the most experienced professionals from various performing art academy groups in the country. Over the years, the chief director is entitled to establish his/her own production team. After this procedure, the chief director and the production team set to collect potential performances across the country, which are made by local artists (Appendix C).

As Ni, Ou & Shan reveal, after the potential performances are gathered enough, they have to be examined to see if they are good enough to be put in NYG. There are usually five to seven formal assessments, which aim to examine the theme and concept of each performance. Comedy performances are the main objects of assessment to check if they deliver the positive messages. Before the NYG officially enters into the programme preparation period, a formal overall plan of the upcoming NYG is handed in to the SARFT and Central Propaganda Department right after it has passed through assessment. In the report, the following bullet points are usually included:

- the theme of the evening gala,
- the general structure of the evening gala,
- the design of the touching moments (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 104).

For the performances which have passed the strict assessments, they are put through to the next step: rehearsal. The NYG often has five to seven rehearsals, in which studio audiences are arranged to give reactions and feedbacks to the performance, and hence further adjustments and changes are made accordingly. Another purpose of the rehearsal is to test the lighting, props, make-up and the co-ordination between each department. A regulation has been formed that each performance has to be timed with the accuracy to seconds during rehearsal, so that the time and order of each performance can be finalized. Also, as Li reveals, relevant leaders will join the last few rehearsals, which are recorded on the tapes to make sure the show will go on even if there are some unexpected accidents happening on the night of the live broadcast (J. Li & Q. Li, 2006: 205). At the end, a formal work summary by the production team is handed in to the SARFT and Central Propaganda Department again after the broadcast of evening gala. This report usually includes an assessment of the success and the disadvantages in the evening gala, and an assessment of the possible reasons behind the outcomes. Credit is given first to the Central Propaganda Department, SARFT and CCTV leaders for their attention, care and instructions, then to the support from the society and related

departments, and to the production team for their hard work (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 105).

The role of the chief director is very crucial in NYG, not just because they are the ‘soul’ of the evening gala, but also because they are the ‘coordinators’ in dealing with all kinds of complex relationship involved in the production of the NYG: to implement the leaders’ intentions from the Art department, the CCTV, and even from the central government, to consider the needs and preferences of the mass audience, and to adapt the thoughts of the performers and creators into a form that is acceptable to the organizer. As the critics conclude, ‘It is not abnormal for the NYG chief director to play the role of ‘coordinator’, because everything has to follow the country’s value orientation, and art is one of them’ (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 11). The chief directors of the first 10 years’ NYG were appointed by the CCTV leaders, and they all came from CCTV’s Cultural and Art Department. In 1989, when the art and cultural work was most vibrant in China, CCTV promoted a group of young and talented directors to work on NYG (J. Li & Q. Li, 2006: 60). Due to the increasing demand of the audience, the system of selecting NYG chief director has shifted from the ‘planning period’ to the ‘competition period’. Since 1993, the bidding system in selecting each year’s chief director in the form of competition has been introduced in NYG, and that only CCTV employees can participate in this bidding competition (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 20).

As Zhao Yuhui explains the bidding procedure in detail:

*‘The production team whose proposal is accepted by the panel judges, will undertake the job of the New Year’s Gala. However, only the directors from CCTV can participate in the bidding competition, rather than collecting ideas and proposals from the nationwide scale. This is because CCTV is the organizer of the New Year’s Gala, and it encourages creative ideas and proposals from its own employees’ (Appendix D).*

Since the NYG chief directors eventually all come from CCTV (its Cultural and Art department, to be specific), this new bidding system is essentially more or less the same as the planning system (J. Li & Q. Li, 2006: 65-66).

There are many things involved in making this evening gala, including the country's interest, the international relations, and social phenomenon. Therefore making the NYG has to be very careful and cautious. This relationship is especially shown in the strict assessment procedure in which the NYG performances are finalized. As Ni, Ou and Shan record, on the evening of 19<sup>th</sup> November 2003, the second assessment of the NYG was held at the CCTV studio. The leaders from SARFT, CCTV, the NYG production team and several hundred audience members all participated in the assessment. There were eight comedies in total to be examined. However, six of them were eliminated and two of them needed 'serious amendment' (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 471). It is said that assessments can prevent 'low taste performances' from appearing in NYG. In this way, it is very common that a performance has to pass several assessments every year before they are finally put onto the NYG stage (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 436).

#### **(6) Summary:**

The last several decades have witnessed many significant changes in the Chinese media system. However, one thing that remains the same since the economic reform in the 1980s is the dual nature of the Chinese media system, which combines the features of both state-owned media and commercial enterprises. In other words, the Chinese television is a co-existence of the government body and the commercial market. In this special context, the Chinese media system is like no other in the world: First and foremost, it is single ownership, with dual system. China's media are currently still state-owned. All media in China are state property, but some areas such as content production and advertising, are open to private capital. The aim of this operation is to implement the state's tasks, on the one hand, and to make financial profit from the market, on the other hand.

Secondly, the media in China are neither companies nor corporations, but government organisations. Although private investment is allowed, the government always has the final say. We cannot deny that media commercialisation under the market socialism model also makes the government to adopt a more flexible media policy, as Huang and Zhao suggest (Huang, 2001; Zhao, 1998). For instance, market competition has increased, and some Western communication codes, formats and practices have been adopted as a result of commercialisation. Despite of the fact that it is mostly financed by advertising, the Chinese television has a close relationship with the government.

Thirdly, CCTV has gradually grown into enterprises that enjoy substantial advertising revenues. Berry points out that Chinese television ‘has been transformed from a medium owned and funded entirely by the state to one owned by the state but funded by advertising. This is part of the general “marketization” (shichanghua) of the economy of the People’s Republic’ (Berry, 2009: 73). However, the network’s reliance on advertising revenues has resulted in marketing pressures which are in potential conflict with the foundations of television policies in theory. In this way, the Chinese media have contradictory roles in society. Indeed, it is not easy to put the Chinese television into any established media systems, nor could we find any similar kinds in other countries around the world. Every country’s media system has its own special situation, as it is shaped by the country’s history, culture, politics and economy, etc, and every characteristic of a media system has its own reason and background to become as it is now.

## *Chapter 5: Mise-en-scene*

Without even realising it, we unconsciously see television programmes by what content they are offering rather than how they are offered—we choose to watch a celebrity talk show over a game show by reading the TV guide or channel zapping; we talk about the characters and events happened in a popular drama series with friends; and we analyse the prime-time news bulletins again and again in the academic discussion. ‘What’ and ‘How’ are closely related and depend on each other. ‘How’ is not obvious, but important. ‘How’ is invisible, thus more important than ‘What’. In this study, ‘What’ is not the centre of investigation, it is ‘How’ and the relationship between ‘What’ and ‘How’. ‘How’, can be translated into *mise-en-scène*, which means the whole staging, and refers to everything that appears before the camera—sets, props, (the positioning and movement of) actors, costumes, and lighting (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004: 176). In short, *mise-en-scene* emphasizes the design aspects of a television production, as Gibbs defines it from within film theory, ‘*Mise-en-scene* therefore encompasses both what the audience can see, and the way in which we are invited to see it’ (Gibbs, 2002: 5). *Mise-en-scene* is considered as the ‘look’ and ‘feel’ of the television programme, therefore, the subject of my research will focus on both the behaviour and discourse of the people and the staging set, that is, everything which is shown explicitly on television screen, and how specific content/themes are expressed through specific *mise-en-scene*.

Certainly, it does not make much sense if we do not consume television based on its content. This thesis does not suggest that content is not important, but that *mise-en-scene* and its function in expressing content may be equally important, but is often overlooked both in daily life and in academic research. *Mise-en-scene* is something so fundamental to television that it is easy to overlook its significance. *Mise-en-scene* is often talked in film theory, but not much in television theory. Little attention has been given to the *mise-en-scene* of non-fiction TV programmes in theoretical discussions. The topic is either briefly mentioned as one of the many features identified in the process of building a particular programme genre, together with other

factors—the talk show format in *Ordinary Television* (Bonner, 2003: 45-97), the construction of live-broadcast national event in *Media Events* (Dayan & Katz, 1992: 78-118); or the subject is discussed among a wide range of programme genres but concentrated on only one of the elements in mise-en-scene—the liveness in *Live Television* (Marriott, 2007: 39-103), ritual in *Media Rituals* (Couldry, 2003: 37-115), realism in *Staging the Real* (Kilborn, 2003: 51-186), and the speech style in *Broadcast Talk* (Corner, 1991: 31-47) and *Media Talk* (Tolson, 2006: 57-183).

The mise-en-scene of non-fiction TV is often studied but seldom in a context that links to entertainment TV. Even when all its elements are discussed together, they are in the form of case studies, which limit the debate within a specific genre, and hence fail to see its mise-en-scene from a wider angle. New Year's Gala is an example to see mise-en-scene from a bigger context, as it mixes factual and entertainment mise-en-scenes together. There are relatively richer literatures on entertainment mise-en-scene in cinematic and film studies, yet they are not always helpful, due to some fundamental differences between film and television illustrated by Ellis (Ellis, 1992).

As it has been discussed previously, the NYG is a unique programme. It combines many different forms of television into one show. This programme has a set purpose to unite the peoples of China at this special time of year, and to promote the current ideas ('ideology'). These aims are reflected in the composition of each show. As discussed previously, the balance between entertainment and factual items is crucial. In terms of numbers of items, there is almost an equal number. Factual items are 42% of the total number and entertainment items are 58% of the total number. However, factual items are shorter. In terms of length, factual items are just 15% of the programmes (Guan, 2000: 152-153). So it is clear that the pattern of the programmes consists of long performances linked by short but frequent presentations and factual items in between. But many of the entertainment items also carry ideological messages. Guan included

sketch comedies in the category of 'Folk Art'. Sketch comedies are an important part of the NYG, which often reflect and discuss the everyday realities of life. For example, the lyrics of the song and dance often contain and respond directly to the ideological messages. As Sun states, the NYG communicates messages of patriotism and national unity by embedding them in entertainment (Sun, 2007: 191). In this way, the mise-en-scene of NYG uses the values and characteristics of entertainment to realize the messages proposed in the factual elements, while the factual parts of the programmes keep the audience and the programme along the ideological messages to ensure they work out together.

The theory of mise-en-scene of factual programmes in television shows how they contribute in constructing the sense of liveness, ritual, ordinariness, intimacy, dramatisation, and entertainment. These constructions are the major results and effects of mise-en-scene. These different effects of mise-en-scene influence one another in a dynamic way in order to support the naturalised ideology that the TV medium is the access to the centre of the society which everybody has to rely on to get connected with the outside world (Couldry, 2003). This shows how the mise-en-scene of the NYG constructs the idea of the 'one nation of China' in which every member of the audience is a part. I will illustrate my point by looking at the ways in which those major effects of the mise-en-scene are constructed in non-fiction TV programmes, their relationships with one another, and how they work together to serve the ideology that lies behind mise-en-scene.

### **(1) Mise-en-scene from the film theories:**

Mise-en-scene is originally a theatre term meaning 'staging'. According to Hayward, it was a means for the Hollywood directors who had no control over the script in the early times but 'they could stage their shots and so be deemed to have a discernible style' (Hayward, 2000: 231). Critics have used the term to refer to 'the sum of all the elements making up a film, and at other times to the placement of the actors within a setting, but

none of us can agree on what the most common or accurate usage is' (Keathley, 2006: 12). The conventional understanding of mise-en-scene refers to 'the formal means by which the director expresses himself'. This definition of mise-en-scene was later articulated by one of the Cahiers critics, Fereydoun Hoveyda, as he claims, 'The originality of the auteur lies not in the subject matter he chooses, but in the technique he employs, i.e. the mise-en-scene, through which everything on the screen is expressed on the screen' (Keathley, 2006: 87).

Generally speaking, it is widely accepted that mise-en-scene is 'the style of the sets, of the make-up, and, up to a point, even of the performance, to which we naturally add the lighting and, finally, the framing of the shot which gives us its composition' (Bazin, 2005: 24). In other words, they indicate a director's style and worldview. That is the reason why the *Movie* critics such as Ian Cameron and Mark Shivas paid careful attention to a film's mise-en-scene, as they claim, 'Mise-en-scene was the vehicle by which themes were expressed, the visual representation of character, theme, and ultimately, the director's attitude to his subject' (Keathley, 2006: 90). However, William Routt believes mise-en-scene is more than a belief that directors express 'a consistent worldview through the visual and thematic particulars of their films'. Instead, he expands the term by suggesting that mise-en-scene is 'a particular director's particular way of looking' (Keathley, 2006: 94-95).

Bazin believes that excessive mise-en-scene spoils cinema's potential by distorting reality, as he argues that 'the highest level of cinematic art coincides with the lowest level of mise en scene' (Bazin, 1997: 4). However, even the highest level of cinematic art requires mise-en-scene to construct that best realism effect. Mise-en-scene works like a tool to join all the elements together to make a film, just like the cement that joins all the bricks together to build a house. It is simply something that cannot be missed; otherwise a film would not be called a film. In recent years, the term has been further developed, as Bordwell and Thompson define mise-en-scene in *Film Art*, that

Mise-en-scene includes ‘setting, lighting, costume, and the behaviour of the figures. In controlling the mise-en-scene, the director stages the event for the camera’ (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004: 176). By including certain cinematographic elements in the definition of mise-en-scene, such as framing, focus, and shot duration, Louis Giannetti states in *Understanding Movies*, that ‘cinematic mise en scene encompasses both the staging of the action and the way that it’s photographed’ (Giannetti, 2002: 538).

Sartre once said, ‘One is not a writer for having chosen to say certain things, but for having chosen to say them in a certain way’ (Sartre, 1988: 39). Equally, one isn’t a film director for having chosen to show certain things on the screen, but for having chosen to show them in a certain way, namely, the mise-en-scene. Mise-en-scene is the language of the director. In short, as Keathley concludes, ‘It is the intellectual operation which has put an initial emotion and a general idea to work’ (Keathley, 2006: 87). Indeed, mise-en-scene is the expressive tool which requires close observation (Rutherford, 2002: 68). This is exactly the work carried out in this research: to identify and analyse the particular mise-en-scene of New Year’s Gala both as a cultural phenomenon and as a reflection of the ideology carrier and the gradually commercialised entertainment programme.

## **(2) Mise-en-scene in TV programmes:**

Life experience and common sense tell us that the appearance-based first impression is a very decisive factor on many things. Mise-en-scene is about how a certain product is represented in its publicity and packaging. Dovey sees the packaging of the product serve as the primary environment in which the product is appropriated, as he claims, ‘Ultimately the aesthetic attractiveness of the product consists solely in its packaging’ (Dovey, 2000: 92). Just as the value of the jewellery is very much affected by its outside package, a candidate’s dressing code is strictly judged in the job interview, mise-en-scene of a TV programme has the power of deciding what we watch: whether to stay with the channel to look into the programme content, or to switch to another

channel until we find a programme whose mise-en-scene can attract us. This is all because we see the mise-en-scene first before we can have the chance to experience the programme content.

The mise-en-scene works in such an obscure way that in the end, viewers only remember the content of a programme and forget about its mise-en-scene that influences us in the first place. In this way, if given the situation that an audience is looking for a news and current affairs programme to watch among different channels, the one that has the interesting and attractive mise-en-scene will catch the attention to win the audience over the one with dull and plain mise-en-scene. Similarly, in film theories, it is argued that the mise-en-scene is more crucial than the story script itself in delivering the director's work (Gibbs, 2002). Therefore, this thesis suggests that mise-en-scene can be as significant as programme content.

In addition, mise-en-scene, to a further level, can also construct meanings through its use of visual codes and conventions. It is said that 'A media text is not only constructed using a media language, but the codes which are chosen to also convey certain information' (Selby & Cowdery, 1995: 4). This area of communications and media studies is often described as semiotic analysis (Martin & Ringham, 2006: 10). It states that any sign can be considered to be composed of two parts: the signifier, which is the physical thing that is perceived through the senses, and the signified, which refers to the conceptual meaning that this has for us (Chandler, 2007: 16). This is because we all take a certain cultural knowledge to a visual image and our reading of it will be affected by the type of cultural knowledge we possess (Chandler, 2007: 102) (Martin & Ringham, 2006: 58).

Therefore, when we see Paris, we will immediately relate it to romance, and when we see T-shirt and jeans, we will think of young and free students. But these elements have

different meanings in different context. For instance, Paris does not always mean romance, as it can refer to fashion in another context; and as for T-shirt and jeans, they can also stand for working class labour in other circumstance (Bignell, 2002: 11). In other words, certain meanings are only produced in certain context and we cannot separate them from the overall picture. They make sense only when they are considered together with other elements. It is concluded by Gibbs, 'But it is worth remembering from the outset that these elements are most productively thought of in terms of their interaction rather than individually—in practice, it is the interplay of elements that is significant' (Gibbs, 2002: 26).

Technical codes, such as shot size, camera angle, and lighting, etc., should also be taken into account, as they are extremely important in creating the meaning of the image as a whole, since they have been used in a creative, rather than simply a technical way, to create an overall meaning (Bignell, 2002: 191). The decision over these is all very important because it affects our response to the subject. For instance, we are told that close-up shot creates intimacy and long shot creates context and public distance (Selby & Cowdery, 1995: 58). That is why the long shot is not very often used in contemporary non-fiction TV programmes, as the directors want to emphasize the intimacy between the programme and the audience. However, Lury argues that conventions exist only to be broken (Lury, 2005: 29). For example, some documentaries achieve success by deliberately applying wide long shots to show the overall picture of the story and also to encourage the audience to admire the qualities rather than just the content of the television image. Therefore, there are no fixed rules for *mise-en-scene*, as it depends on the context and the whole system of the programme. While it establishes certain conventions and rules for us to follow, it develops new findings and codes with diversity and variety.

Like many other features, although originated in film cinemas, television has developed its unique *mise-en-scene* based on its own particular characteristics along these years.

Television programmes are made for domestic consumption. Compared with the paying experience in the movie theatre which only lasts for few hours, people tend to give less attention to the TV programmes which are available at home whenever the TV is switched on. This different institutional setting makes television harder to catch viewer's attention. To cope with that, TV programmes tend to be segmented. Since it is easy to skip the television image by closing our eyes or looking away, as Lury explains, 'we cannot (without mechanical intervention in the shape of earplugs) close our ears or "listen away"' (Lury 2005: 58). Therefore, sound is very important to catch the attention of the audience. Ellis believes that 'many of TV's characteristic broadcast forms rely upon sound as the major carrier of information and the major means of ensuring continuity of attention', as he states, 'The news broadcast, the documentary with voice-over commentary, the bulk of TV comedy shows, all display a greater reliance on sound than any form that cinema has developed for itself' (Ellis, 1992: 129).

Based on the previous discussion, we are aware that mise-en-scene can act even more significantly than the programme content in certain circumstances, by suggesting that mise-en-scene not only can form various aesthetical effects to the programme, but also can construct meanings through its technical codes and conventions in semiotic studies. Mise-en-scene affects our viewing both unconsciously (the overall impression of a programme) and consciously (the spectacular costume, setting, and close-up shots, etc.), and thus shapes our experience to a programme as a whole. Certain details such as the colours of the costumes and the soundtrack will remain in mind, even though you cannot say why they are so effective. NYG is a programme that combines both entertainment and factual mise-en-scene within the one programme. The theories of each mise-en-scene and their characteristics will now be examined.

### **(3) Entertainment mise-en-scene:**

The opinion still prevails that television is used to provide ‘entertainment’ to ‘the masses’. Richard Dyer analyses statements from the British television industry, ‘the careful distinction of entertainment from art and information, and...the rather patronising tone of the man who provides entertainment for “a great mass of people”’ (Dyer, 2002: 14).

Entertainment is considered as a distraction or a consolation. Entertainment takes the mass audience away from the ‘drabness’ of the everyday. Entertainment provides a consolation in our difficult times. Hence, entertainment is associated with happiness and ‘sparkle’ and the mise-en-scene of entertainment offers both laughter and spectacle. The basic definition has been developed by critics in several ways: Dyer discusses entertainment in terms of the idea of ‘utopia’ (Dyer, 2003); Kellner and others take an opposite position, as they see entertainment as part of a ‘society of the spectacle’ which has negative implications (Kellner, 2002); Others writers examine the areas where the mise-en-scene of entertainment extends beyond its ‘message’ by using the concept of ‘excess’ in the discussion (Feuer, 1984). The emphasis of the physical enjoyment of entertainment as ‘bodies in space’ is also related to this approach (Martin, 1992).

Dyer defines entertainment as ‘utopianism’. He suggests that the centre of the two common descriptions of entertainment (‘escape’ and ‘wish-fulfilment’) is utopianism, as entertainment usually provides the picture of either somewhere better to escape into, or something we want but does not exist in our daily life (Dyer, 2002: 18). Dyer continues, ‘Alternatives, hopes, wishes –these are the stuff of utopia, the sense that things could be better, that something other than what is can be imagined and maybe realised...Utopianism is contained in the feelings that entertainment embodies. It presents head-on as it were, what utopia would feel like rather than how it will be organised’ (Dyer, 2002: 18).

Dyer clarifies that entertainment is not showing how the world could be a different place. It is not a revolutionary form which shows a different world. Rather, it is about feelings. Entertainment *mise-en-scene* is uplifting: cheerful music melodies, spectacular sets and costumes, and graceful movements of dancers, not only make us feel better, but also offer ideal visions of how human individuals could be. They give us the image of more perfect bodies and more perfect voices in a more perfect world. Similarly, Barry K. Grant holds a modest attitude towards the idea of entertainment as ‘utopianism’ in the discussion of the Hollywood musical. Grant indicates that it is the activity of singing and dancing itself that brings these good feelings to the characters, as he claims, ‘movie musicals thus offer a social utopia, but they also depict a utopian sense of plenitude and fulfillment... in movie musicals, characters are able to satisfy their desire or at least to feel better by dancing or singing’ (Grant, 2012: 46).

Nevertheless, Dyer believes that entertainment is deeply contradictory: ‘In *Variety*, the essential contradiction is between comedy and music turns; in musicals it is between the narrative and the numbers. Both these contradictions can be rendered as one between the heavily representational and verisimilitudinous (pointing to the way the world is, drawing on the audience’s concrete experience of the world) and the heavily non-representational and “unreal” (pointing to how things could be better)’ (Dyer, 2002: 25). This applies directly to the NYG. Like *variety*, the NYG includes both comedy and singing and dancing. The comedy, on the one hand, depicts the daily life experiences of the audience; the singing and dancing, on the other hand, brings the better feelings on how a better world could be. Dyer claims, ‘to be effective, the utopian sensibility has to take off from the real experiences of the audience. Yet to do this, to draw attention to the gap between what is and what could be, is, ideologically speaking, playing with fire’ (Dyer, 2002: 25). As far as the NYG is concerned, this results in the difficult juggling between the market, the ideology and the audience.

In his book *Media Spectacle*, Douglas Kellner offers another interpretation of entertainment. Following the view of the French critic Guy Debord, Kellner considers entertainment as a passive form by discussing a wide range of entertainment and media forms. Kellner proposes, 'the concept of the spectacle is integrally connected to the concept of separation and passivity, for in submissively consuming spectacles one is estranged from actively producing one's life...the correlate of the spectacle, for Debord, is thus the spectator, the reactive viewer...The concept of the spectacle therefore involves a distinction between passivity and activity, consumption and production' (Kellner, 2002: 3).

Unlike Dyer who believes the utopian feelings are provoked by entertainment, Debord and Kellner think the audience's role is passive, as the impressive and distant entertainment spectacle is unattainable and even intimidating for the audience. For Debord and Kellner, entertainment reinforces the audience's role as passive consumers by taking them away from political activity. In terms of television, Kellner considers television is the home of sports, political and entertainment spectacles, breaking news and media events (Kellner, 2002: 6-7). He describes the *mise-en-scene* of television entertainment, 'Following the logic of spectacle entertainment, contemporary television exhibits more hi-tech glitter, faster and glitzier editing, computer simulations, and, with cable and satellite television, a diverse array of every conceivable type of show and genre' (Kellner, 2002: 6-7).

Apart from entertainment, Kellner also includes news and even elections as the spectacle. In each kind of spectacle, he suggests *mise-en-scene* keeps the audience in the passive position as a consumer. The fast cutting and impressive visual effects of the modern TV *mise-en-scene* transform the world into a spectacle that can only be enjoyed passively as a consumer. Furthermore, Kellner claims that entertainment is now concerned with celebrating itself, just as much as anything else: 'the Oscar awards are a spectacle of Hollywood itself and of its importance in the production and reproduction

of a culture of spectacle, on that is now global in its import. Combining television performance, musical numbers, film clips and other forms of entertainment, the evening provides an opportunity for the spectacle to promote its myriad forms values and significance' (Kellner, 2002: 27). While Dyer identifies subversion and optimistic feelings about a better future, Kellner believes that entertainment keeps people in their existing place as consumers, as he states, 'business and fun are fused' (Kellner, 2002: 4).

Other critics follow Dyer's view in seeing entertainment as contradictory due to its *mise-en-scene*. They see positive influences in the entertainment spectacles. David Marc proposes that comedy let audiences forget what they see is artifice and contrivance. Therefore, he considers comedy as a form of safe escape where the harsh realities of life are 'experienced through cushions' (Marc, 1989: 11-12). Marc comments, 'In return for the sacrifice of its better judgment, the audience is promised psychic transportation to a dimension of consciousness where terror, chaos, insecurity, and other fearful states are always experienced through the cushions of identification and sympathy and where laughter and other expressions of pleasure are relatively safe from humiliation and guilt' (Marc, 1989: 11-12).

Jane Feuer and other critics discuss melodrama as a form of entertainment. They suggest that acting in melodramas 'appears excessive in comparison to the more naturalistic mode currently employed in other forms of television and in the cinema, just as the overblown "bad acting" in Sirk's films did for its time. Yet both forms of melodramatic acting are in keeping with related conventions for distilling and intensifying emotion' (Feuer, 1984: 4-16). They consider melodrama as 'excessive' in its *mise-en-scene* and in what it offers as a result, as it is able to distill emotion and intensify it. John Gibbs borrows Laura Mulvey's idea that the formal devices of melodrama give spectacular form to abstract emotion. In this way, some critics even

think that melodrama can offer a more critical view of the world due to its mise-en-scene (Gibbs, 2002: 75).

Nevertheless, the view that entertainment presents something that escapes definition is more widely accepted. The enjoyment of the physical aspects of being can be found in the comedy which emphasizes on physical awkwardness, and also in the physical grace of dancers from the elegant choreography. Adrian Martin explains, 'If there is a way to truly redeem the idea of mise en scene by bringing together Ophuls and Sturges, Scorsese and Cassavetes, I think it would be around what Murnau referred to as "the fluid architecture of bodies... moving through mobile space". Bodies in space: this is the primal, mythical image of what mise en scene does, what it shows us' (Martin, 1992: 97). Therefore, the pleasure of seeing bodies in moving space lies beyond ideology.

In the NYG, entertainment forms are mixed with factual forms. The effort of promoting ideological messages is mainly shown in the factual forms and in the entertainment forms which depict everyday life such as in the sketch comedies and song lyrics. These interventions have the result of tying down the utopian or excessive aspects of the mise-en-scene even where they are allowed to express themselves fully, as in the occasional dance sequences. Indeed, the NYG is a mixture of many different entertainment and factual forms. The common mise-en-scene components that bring them together are: the use of dramatisation; the construction of the sense of the ordinariness that unifies the people; the idea of the liveness of the event; and the construction of a media ritual around the Chinese New Year itself. Each of these will be examined in turn.

#### **(4) Construction of Dramatisation through mise-en-scene:**

Forms of dramatic presentation also appear into non-fiction TV productions. Much of the boundary-crossing has involved the employment of the mise-en-scene commonly

used in popular drama. Programme makers make sure that the audiences do not miss any of the excitement in non-fiction TV programmes by exaggerating the action with slow-motion and examining character emotion with close-ups. To be more appealing to the audience, techniques of fast editing and mood music from film and TV drama are often used and viewers are drawn into them as if they were watching a TV fiction. In other words, non-fiction TV producers create dramatic entertainment by applying some cliff-hangers or tease devices familiar from TV serial drama at the end of the programme to attract the audience. In the editing process, techniques derived from fictional programmes are used to introduce more variety to replace the conventional sequence (Kilborn, 2003).

Documentary's claim to capture events as they happen rather than construct for the camera seem vulnerable in practice nowadays. Examined by the critics, documentary production has had a hard time, as it has had to deal with controversial issues such as reconstruction, performance, and fakery, etc. Ellis proposes, 'Documentary tends to trade across the boundary between fact and fiction on an everyday basis, adopting, tactically, some of the habits of fiction in order to bring structure to the sometimes intractable indexicality of its imaginary, and to complexify its portrayal of a multi-faceted reality' (Ellis, 2005: 352). And during this borrowing process, problems easily occur when material claimed as fact contains more fictional characteristics beyond generic definition nowadays.

The quotation marks of the term 'Reality TV' may be a good indication to its questioned status. For instance, the reality show *Big Brother* has been described by critics as: 'a soapie where the characters get to write the script as they go along' (Roscoe, 2001: 480); the house where the contestants live is 'effectively a starkly lit theatrical set dressed with props' (Tincknell & Raghuram, 2005: 259); the performative aspects drive the basic daily tasks to a much more important level than in real life; and 'groups of people desperate for fame' are placed 'in the most contrived and artificial

situations' (Dunkley, 2001: 24). In addition, under closer examination, not only the contestants have not been unrehearsed as they seem, but also they are encouraged to perform to increase the dramatic effects (Kilborn, 2003: 153). And above all, the pressure and excitement from eviction in the competition is similar to drama series. This effect is achieved by the *mise-en-scene* from the drama series, as they 'typically use a great deal of close-ups, reverse shots, the slow motion editing and background music, which emphasizes individual's inside world around the characters of people' (Abercrombie, 1999: 42).

The drama look has been an important part in news programmes nowadays. News is all about presenting truth and fact, which is listed on the top of the non-fiction TV production. However, news can be dramatised to some extent, to increase the feel of sensation and realism. With the influence of tabloidisation, TV news is also looking for sensational content as well as *mise-en-scene* to catch the eyes of the audience: Breaking news text scrolls at the bottom of the screen, the serious-looking news presenters emphasizes specific words in a rising tone, and the big screen behind them shows the footage of the event with extreme close-up. All these combination indicate something important is taking place and draws people attention quickly. In addition, news presenters nowadays are more than just the talking head who read out the news on the autocue, as they also perform a personality based on their role as mediators between news stories and the viewer. Morse considers news as a kind of performance, as she proposes that 'the anchor is a special kind of star supported by subdued sartorial and acting codes that convey "sincerity"' (Morse, 1998: 42). Indeed, this personality requires specific characteristics: the wise knowledgeable person who knows everything. Of course, this person does not exist but it is a stereotype constructed for the news presenter.

Furthermore, there is also a close relationship between realism and dramatisation. If you want to create a dramatic moment on TV, people first have to believe the moment is

true and real before they can take the scenario serious enough to feel the dramatic effect. However, creating maximum dramatic effect in documentary production may distort the reality that it claims to represent. Critics have started to complain that producers 'will blend fact and fiction in such a way that makes it impossible for the viewer to decide how much is based on factual evidence and how much is...imaginative fabrication' (Kilborn, 2003: 71). It is true that documentary and other non-fiction TV programming apply a wide range of techniques from fiction to claim as 'the real world'. But there are limits on the use of dramatisation, reconstruction and performance which should be applied under strict occasions. The boundary may be blurred, but it is necessary to have this boundary. Therefore, trust has to be established between audience and programme makers.

#### **(5) Construction of ordinariness and intimacy through mise-en-scene:**

The construction of the intimacy and ordinariness in television are closely related. Television is so widely spread nowadays in our society that it is 'nothing special' in audience's daily life. And it is also this 'nothing special' that deeply roots in people's life and culture. TV, as one of the major media forms consumed by the world-wide audience on the daily basis, has to be presented as ordinary and intimate. To some extent, media brings an enormous influence on our perception of an 'ordinary life'. Television schedules somehow shape our arrangement for the daily routines—we begin our day by listening to the weather forecast and traffic news in the morning, watching news and current affairs around the dinner time after coming home from work, and sharing the special occasion of the national event with others, for example, new year's celebration on TV. Scannell sees how everyday media connect us from hour to hour, day to day, and year to year to a broader historical process. He believes that the media is able to speak from institutional settings to the people in the contexts of their everyday lives (Scannell, 1996). This is how the media represents our ordinary life on TV.

Because TV programmes are usually consumed in the domestic settings, they become personalized and intimate even while opening to the public, as Dovey demonstrates, ‘The world in broadcasting appears as ordinary, mundane, accessible, knowable, familiar, recognisable, intelligible, sharable, and communicable for whole populations’ (Dovey, 2000: 158). Showing intimacy is one of the most common ways to get close to the audience. If you want to show ordinariness on the actually ‘attention focused’ TV, one has to establish a friendly intimate friendship with the viewer, as if they were acquaintance; if you want to step closer to the audience, one has to present the TV world as the world of ordinariness, nothing special just like the world that the audience lives in. To be closely intertwined with people’s daily life, the broadcasters have put creating ordinariness and intimacy on the top of the agenda through mise-en-scene to bring the TV medium close to the people. Here are some common practices TV often uses to achieve this sense of ordinariness and intimacy:

1. Audience involvement has been a crucial means for TV to show its ordinariness and intimacy, whether it is phone-in, text message, voting, Internet chat room or various kinds of interaction and participation. By doing so, the audience can interact with the programme while it is running—their votes determine who leaves the *Big Brother* house within a matter of few minutes; their answers to the quiz show through the phone-in can bring a new game in with the old one answered; and their voices can be heard by millions of viewers in their conversation with the host on TV. The key to the success of the reality format is the type of relationship they seek to establish with their audience by encouraging their interactive involvement. By doing so, for the first time, watching TV is not the only way audience can engage with the TV medium, as now they can be part of the programme that makes a change. In the case of New Year’s Gala, voting for the favourite performance in each year’s show has been introduced since 1992, and awards are given to the performances which win the most votes.
2. Members of public can also have the chance to be on TV. The stage is not only the privilege for the celebrities and elites any more. Studio audience

participation has been widely adopted by different genres, from sit-coms to talk shows. This practice has two functions: on the one hand, the audience are given the chance to experience what it is like to be 'on TV', face to face with the TV host; on the other hand; on the other hand, audience at home can also feel this closeness by seeing studio audience on TV, as studio audience are like their representatives, who are also ordinary people just like them. Viewers see the ordinary people on the screen as if seeing the reflection of themselves, and intimacy is therefore used to bond the audience and the people in the media.

3. Presenters also help to create this sense of ordinariness and intimacy. Ellis states, 'Television had an intimacy with the national audience, and was able to address people as individuals amongst many other individuals' (Ellis, 2000: 50). This ability is fully shown in presenters' way of speech, which has been widely adopted in TV programmes at present. The most common techniques is the personal address to the audience, whether it is the direct 'one-to-one' interaction in the phone-in of the live game show, or the default mode called 'for-anyone-as-someone' structure in the breakfast news. Scannell defines 'for-anyone-as-someone' structure as an address that is 'always, at one and the same time, for me and for anyone. Thus it is an intermediary structure that mediates between the impersonal for-anyone structure and the personal for-someone structure' (Scannell, 2000: 9). In order to establish the 'knowing' relationship with the audience, broadcasters ditched the old way of addressing with the rigid and educational tone in the early years. Instead, they have adopted a more light-hearted, personal and conversational style. This works quite well in establishing an intimate bond with the millions of viewers on the other side of the screen.

Although ordinary people are now more widely seen on TV than before, it does not mean that this has changed the relations between the TV medium and the ordinary

people. Occasionally, ordinary people might be invited on TV as contestants in the quiz show or making vox pop contributions to the news and current affairs programme. However, opportunities for ordinary individuals to appear on any form of programme are still limited. Regarding the active audience, while it is widely recognised that audience have their own way of understanding and interpreting of TV text, it is worthwhile to mention that audience cannot intervene in the TV production process. In the case of reality TV, audience can only intervene in certain limited ways, as Tincknell and Raghuram propose, ‘To “choose” between one contestant and another was itself a fairly prescribed activity—an option of potential narrative “paths” pre-selected by the dynamics of the text itself’ (Tincknell & Raghuram, 2005: 265).

Indeed, it is essential to bear in mind that TV medium do not give us the absolute intimacy and ordinariness. TV creates the illusion of an intimate bond with the audience, but only under special occasions. That is to say, the intimacy and ordinariness constructed on TV is carried out and emphasized by the special television moment. While watching more ‘ordinary’ people appearing on television, we also witness them being transformed into the ‘extraordinary’ by the media. Through this process, TV’s power is enhanced by the fact that it can transform ordinary people into celebrity (Couldry, 2003: 121). It seems that there is a certain distance that the TV medium wants to keep with the audience. In order not to be too ordinary and intimate which will lose the charisma and attraction of the TV to the audience, the media does not present the absolute ordinariness. For example, the TV medium does not use random people from the street to host the programme in the ordinary way. Instead, they use celebrity hosts to act intimately with the audience while still enjoying the special status as being ‘celebrity’. Although ordinary people are invited to the programme, what they offer on TV is not ordinary—they are either with special talent that makes them stand out, or their personal stories are quite extraordinary and dramatic (Couldry, 2003: 121). Programme makers know how to balance the ordinariness well—on the one hand, they bring the audience closer, and on the other hand, keep them at a distance to maintain the specialness of the TV world.

## **(6) Construction of Liveness through mise-en-scene:**

The construction of liveness is often accompanied with ritual. On the one hand, liveness needs ritual to enhance the ceremonious and solemn mood to the simultaneity; on the other hand, ritual needs liveness to inject the spice of excitement to the special occasion.

Sharing the same moment together without physically being there, television offers a special form of witness—live broadcast. This technology enables every household to watch the same footage with millions of others at the same time. Live broadcast delivers the sense of ‘now’ to a remote audience. It contains the kind of uncertainty and mystery that nobody knows beforehand and the audience is attracted to find out what happens next. In this way, television allows its audience to witness the event to unfold without being there. Though separated from other fellow audience, the live broadcast gives its viewer a sense of togetherness and connectedness. The power of real time makes liveness important and special. The word ‘live’ has been such a selling point of a programme that it has been widely used in programme titles such as *Saturday Night Live*. We can only claim the status as a witness by seeing and hearing the event live, as Peters explains, ‘Why should liveness matter? It does matter...because events only happen in the present...’ (Peters, 2009: 36).

The live broadcast, as it is defined by Ellis, means ‘transmitted and received in the same moment that it is produced’ (Ellis, 1992: 132). In practice, what looks live is not really live. Bourdon reveals that we experience less the regime of ‘fully live’ than that of ‘continuity’ in daily life as viewers, as he suggests, ‘We are in a televised world where a lot looks (and sounds) live but is not necessarily so’ (Bourdon, 2004: 184). Indeed, nowadays it is rare for any TV programmes to be virtually live except news. As a matter of fact, most of the programmes which appear to be live are filmed or recorded beforehand. But they still claim the live status, because the transmission is live, which has the same effect of making a direct link with its audience. This technical possibility later is translated into a constructed style.

The concept of live broadcast is everywhere, although few of them are live in its real sense. Marriott emphasizes that ‘fully live’ does not exist in real life at all because that few seconds delay in transmitting live event actually makes a significant difference (Marriott, 2007: 49). However, fully live does exist in real life and hourly updated news broadcast such as *Sky News* is one good example. Few seconds delay should be allowed, as there is nothing much can be done to alter anything during such a short time. Therefore, it is not necessary to be as overly anxious about that few seconds in the live broadcast, as long as it is not the case described by Ellis, who discovered that Estonian TV under Soviet control taped the entire news bulletin 90 minutes before broadcast to avoid the slightest critical inflection (Ellis, 2000: 50). The reason behind this few seconds delay in transmission is due to the technical risk and the attempt to make the media output under control, in case anything goes wrong. By doing this, broadcasters can still have the chance to fix things and viewers would hardly notice this delay. Hence, this minor delay can be ignored. Marriott may push it a bit, but after all, there is always the mediation, and it is never the same as ‘being there’. As Dayan and Katz explain, ‘When there is no way of “being there”, a ceremony is created to encapsulate the experience of “not being there”. Rather than an impoverished and deviant experience, it is an altogether different experience’ (Dayan & Katz, 1992: 146). For example, in the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, the live Computer Generated Imagery was used to create the gigantic footprint firework, which was only available to the TV audiences and the people on spot could not see it (Stone, 2008).

In order to maintain the same charisma, TV programmes applies some conventions to make them appear to be live, that is, ‘as live’, the sense of liveness achieved through *mise-en-scene*. The construction of ‘as live’ effect makes non-fiction TV look nothing like a pre-recorded medium. Direct address is a common practice of television. It has an effective function to produce the sense of liveness on TV, where the audience can hear

and see things as they happen. The presenters look directly into the camera and talk in a causal and personal way, just as if they are standing in front of you. Phrases like ‘good morning’ and ‘we have here now in the studio’ also invite the viewer to this shared moment. Events are described in present tense and exciting ways of speaking are used to stress the shared moment with the audience (Bourdon, 2004).

Broadcasters leave no stone unturned to emphasize the special status of liveness throughout the programme: from the trailers weeks before the live programme starts, to presenters’ repeated reference to the live status during the programme, and to the famous two-ways cut between the live studio and the remote locations. The word ‘live’ is inserted on the screen and the editing is fluid. In this way, the effect of live broadcasting is maintained. That is why Bourdon emphasizes in his argument on liveness, that ‘live really is not only about the technical performance, but also about the spectatorial belief—these, as we have seen, do not completely overlap’ (Bourdon, 2004: 184).

Other techniques in creating vivid liveness such as the seemingly out-of-control scenarios, the clock in the studio showing the same time as ours at home, and the camera shots in one continuous take are also widely applied to create the sense of liveness. Nevertheless, they do not only belong to the ‘live’ broadcast, as we can also find all these features in pre-recorded programmes through performance, editing, and pre-recording the material before transmitting them to the audience. Therefore, as Marriott states, ‘Taken jointly, however, in the larger context of the overall aesthetic or stylization (Caldwell, 1995) overlaying the programmes, each of these elements played a role in marking the material as live’ (Marriott, 2007: 43). This shows liveness works in the programme without requiring it being literally live. Instead, it is pre-arranged and carefully learned by the programme makers. The important status of liveness is thoroughly shown in the coverage of media events. A media event, according to Dayan and Katz, means an event that is: a real event occurring at society’s ‘centre’, broadcast

'live', and 'remote' from its audiences (Dayan & Katz, 1992: 3-7). Therefore, the liveness accomplishes the sense of shared bond and connection in media event.

Compared with the eyewitness on the spot of the event, witness through the media certainly brings us advantages: it enables the mass audience to witness the event together at the same time without physically being there, offers you the view that you cannot see in the crowd, gives you the narration to help you follow the event, and presents you the event with the best picture, sound, order, and effect, etc. However, at the same time, we miss the physical experience from attending the event and we also lose the unmediated event and the freedom in choosing what we want to experience. The commentaries transform the event itself into media's interpretation of the event, not to mention the limited footages and camera angles provided by the subjective human involvement in the production process (Dayan & Katz, 1992).

Experience the event on TV is different from seeing and hearing the event yourself. Firstly, it is not possible to have a full picture of the event through media witness. Our interpretation of the event is always limited by the visual field of the camera which cannot cover the full picture of the event. What television images offer us is not the same as being on the spot as an eyewitness. In the analysis of the media witness, Ellis states, 'The viewer can see the interviewees but knows that the circumstances of the interview are usually unclear. Many of the elements of being in a shared place are necessarily absent' (Ellis, 2009: 76). It is the lack of full knowledge and background information about the event that distinguishes the media witness from the eyewitness on the scene.

Secondly, the media process the pure event into a media witnessing. Media witnessing needs to make sense of the things as the story teller to help the audience understand what is going on based on the footage provided. The event needs to be quickly put into

narrative order to make the audience easier to follow. Also, the interviewees included in the media event may be influenced and directed by what the programme makers want them to say. In this way, media witness is already processed beforehand and this mediation reduces the feeling of participation. That is why Ellis demonstrates that, 'It is witnessing from a privileged position; what we know is the discursive construction of a totality of an event. We know that a certain event is taking place or has taken place, but not what it is like to be a part of it' (Ellis, 2009: 79). Unarguably, the media event is not the same as the event itself, as the media event stands for seeing the event through the eyes of the media. The live coverage presented to the audience on the television screen is actually the media processed television event. Media witnessing is mundane because audiences see people on TV everyday (Ellis, 2009). It is this ordinary and everyday experience that keeps us informed and updated as members of the society, and hence brings a sense of connection with the wider world.

#### **(7) Construction of media rituals through mise-en-scene:**

What brings liveness and media rituals together is the fact that both of them are involved in the process of making large-scale public events as media events, where social collectivity is reinforced. In other words, the liveness of media events shares the same value as Durkheim's reading of media rituals, which is 'the affirmation of the social bond through the media process' (Couldry, 2003: 60).

The surrounding celebrity, the live coverage of the national event shared by millions of viewers, and all the formal and glamorous moments make us take the media more than just a time-killing machine. Rituals make people feel that there is something more significant lying below what they just see and hear. Therefore, media rituals, according to Couldry, 'are formalised actions organised around key media-related categories and boundaries, whose performance frames, or suggests a connection with, wider media-related values' (Couldry, 2003: 29). There are many ways to make the media action become formalised and ritualised: the presence of the camera, the television

studio that brings us to the media world and the celebrity whom we can hardly encounter in real life, etc. They all work together to transform an event into media rituals. In addition, media rituals are also implicitly embedded in everyday media, which are shown in small details such as the common address of ‘good evening and welcome to the show’. Hence, media rituals do not simply exist in live media events.

As for the link between liveness and media rituals: On the one hand, liveness is one of the ways to construct media rituals. As discussed earlier, liveness can also belong to a ritual category. If liveness can offer the viewer a sense of shared connection to the society and outside world, this shared connection will contribute to creating the ritual space of the TV medium. It is based on this understanding that Couldry suggests the term called ‘the ritual meaning of “liveness”’ (Couldry, 2003: 97). On the other hand, media rituals make the live media event a special experience that maximizes the experience of spectacle. Couldry explains, “‘Media events’ do not just relay what would have gone on without them, but rearticulate the elements and sites of an existing ritual process into a fully mediated event whose form was unimaginable before electronic media (Dayan & Katz, 1992: 17)’ (Couldry, 2003: 61). In this sense, media rituals are so much more than just the live transmission of real events. What is missing in the event itself is the media ritual—the background music that matches with the theme, the exclusive interviews with related experts, people’s reactions in the crowds, and so on. Therefore, media rituals are closely connected with power. The idea of ‘media rituals’ addresses some of the concerns of Kellner’s ‘media spectacle’ idea without indicating that all audiences are passive (Kellner, 2002).

Through passing on various kinds of information from everywhere, television somehow represents a centre of attention and all the audience who wants to be connected to the outside world should pay attention to it. This idea puts television at a unique and irreplaceable position. Media rituals are therefore used to naturalise TV medium’s concentration of power, and to make people believe television naturally represents the

society's centre. Couldry takes a critical view of media rituals in this power enhancing process, as he argues, 'Media rituals are the actions where such discourses take their most condensed and naturalised form; as such, they are a principal means through which the misrecognition of media power is reproduced' (Couldry, 2003: 46). In this way, while watching programmes which contain media rituals, we are unconsciously convinced that society has a centre and we need the TV medium to represent it.

Ritualised processes such as media events make differences and boundaries seem natural. Couldry sees the ritual basis of self-disclosure on television, as he suggests, 'the talk show is assumed to be a valued place, because it is a media place: to enter it is to cross a category boundary from "ordinary world" to "media world", marked by the phrase "to step into"' (Couldry, 2003: 120). Since the talk show 'stage' is the media's version of 'everyday life', Dovey's comments that on reality television 'everyday life has become the stage upon which the new rituals of celebrity are performed' (Dovey, 2000: 104). It is in this way that media rituals reinforce the boundary between the 'ordinary world' and the 'media world'. In reality TV such as *Big Brother*, media rituals make the gap between 'media people' and 'ordinary people' bigger and clearer by transforming an individual from a member of public to a celebrity on screen, witnessed by all of us in this shared experience.

Lying behind liveness and media rituals is the sense of connection among the audience, and behind this sense of connection is the power of the TV medium. The potential of broadcasting works as a unifying force, pulling together individuals, families and groups into a national whole. Television becomes another tool in the construction of the nation state. That is why New Year's Gala, apart from just being an entertainment show to celebrate the Chinese New Year, also works as an important institution where national identity, social moral standards and public education are established and enhanced. To express this idea, TV naturalises it through liveness and media rituals, so that the audience are unconsciously influenced to believe television is the irreplaceable

authority giving access for anyone who wants to be connected to the society (Couldry, 2003). It is based on this analysis that Jane Feuer raises her theory that liveness is an ideology (Feuer, 1983). Feuer uses the term 'ideology' to refer to the taken-for-granted way of seeing, which is different from the 'ideology' promoted in China meaning 'ideas', 'messages', or 'themes'. In this sense, there is an ideology of mise-en-scene.

#### **(8) The dynamic relationships among the effects of mise-en-scene:**

All the different effects of mise-en-scene discussed above affect one another. The construction of intimacy and ordinariness is there to prepare the ground work for the realistic and the dramatic presentation, and the sense of realism and the dramatisation is there to reinforce the power of liveness and media rituals. All these elements work together in a circle under the chain reaction. They are in close relationships, one influencing another, and work together to present an overall mise-en-scene by mixing different constructions and styles in a dynamic way. What's more, we can also find dynamic relationships among these individual effects of mise-en-scene.

Liveness enhances realism. Direct address effectively increases both the sense of liveness and the sense of real. That is the reason why direct address is so widely used in TV programmes nowadays. The 'really real', is 'the moment when something "genuinely" uncontrolled happens in the highly controlled setting of the studio' (Couldry, 2003: 125). Therefore, what gives a stronger impression of 'something genuinely uncontrolled' than the live coverage, even though they are constructed 'live' performances? If it is broadcast live, then it must be 'really real', and vice versa. To some extent, the 'reality' claim depends on liveness itself, as Bondebjerg suggests, television's live presence seemed to present the 'real' life behind the celebrity image (Bondebjerg, 1996: 37). Probably nothing is more convincing for a breaking news story to show the reality by presenting the live footage of an unfolding event. In this way, these two effects of mise-en-scene are intervened as one, as their significance depends on each other.

It is the media ritual that makes the realism more 'real', the liveness more 'live'. With the wide usage of camcorder in our daily life, media professionals are not the only people who can film news stories and live footages. Any body now, whether an elderly lady in the wheelchair or a seven-year-old school boy, can capture the moments from real life around us by pressing the button of the camcorder. However, not any piece of these real life footages can be put on TV and become a media product, even though they contain certain media value. The camcorder footages would remain just a private footage until they are being packaged and tailored by the media professionals with the discourse of television (Couldry, 2003: 105). What these private videos miss, according to Caldwell, is the ritual which television creates (Caldwell, 1996: 283). Private videos may share the same characteristics of shaky frame, out of focus, and noisy background sound, etc., in indicating the real and liveness, but they are not 'the privileged form of "TV truth-telling"' (Dovey, 2000: 55). By applying some magic coating, television can make the original footage more convincing, believable and attractive to the viewer: the emotions of the interviewees look more 'real' by close-ups and background music to match the mood, and the tracking shot of the media event feels more 'live' by inter-cutting to the crowd and other places simultaneously. That is the reason why Couldry proposes that 'Television's claim to "reality" is not just a feature of this or that video clip, but a much broader construction' (Couldry, 2003: 105). Without the ritual of the medium itself, the audience may not actually believe what they see and hear are truly 'real' and 'live', even though they are. In this way, the wide usage of camcorders does not undermine or replace the power of television.

Ordinariness and media rituals appear to be separated, as media rituals make things look and feel 'extraordinary', which is opposite to the 'ordinariness'. Nevertheless, the 'ordinariness' has its significance in terms of media rituals. 'Ordinariness' confirms the 'reality', as one of the best ways to show 'reality' is to stage the 'ordinary' things around us from everyday life on TV. It can either be inviting ordinary people to

participate in the game show, or transforming the TV studio into an ordinary home setting with sofas, coffee tables, and book shelves in the talk show. If it is real, it is also likely to be ordinary, as most of our daily lives are mainly composed of plain ordinary things rather than special surprises. If it is ordinary, it is easier to be accepted as real, too. Besides, media rituals can only be felt under the comparison with ordinariness. An ordinary person is not ordinary any more after being seen on TV as a celebrity. What transforms this person from an ordinary citizen to an on-screen celebrity is the media ritual. Similarly, an event is merely an ordinary event that no one knows apart from those who participate in it, until it is portrayed by media rituals on TV to make it into a special media event that everybody talks about. Therefore, Couldry considers the effect of self-disclosure on talk show as the effect of the media ritual to transform ‘from something merely personal into something special, something representative’ (Couldry, 2003: 122). In addition, nowadays participation in the media process seems to matter more and more, which is described by Robins as ‘the era of “karaoke television”’ (Robins, 1996: 139-40). This phenomenon shows an increasing tendency of people’s desire to connect with others through television. To respond to this need, reality TV applies many ways to make this happen, by mobile text, by digital TV voting, by online forum, and by audience studio discussion, etc. In the meanwhile, this audience interactivity also reinforces television’s place as an access to the society’s centre. Instead of being undermined by new media platforms such as the Internet, television uses the new media to reassert its place in the centre (Couldry, 2003).

Because each of these effects of *mise-en-scene* is closely related, they are seldom seen alone in one programme. Instead, they work together to influence each other. Therefore, we can find all these effects of *mise-en-scene* in any programme. It is just a matter of which particular effect of *mise-en-scene* dominates the rest, depending on the certain requirement of different genres. For example, ‘ordinariness’ is the dominant effect of *mise-en-scene* in talk shows, but it is also accompanied with ‘media rituals’ of celebrity host and ‘dramatisation’ of confessional ‘real’ story-telling under the ‘live’ coverage; ‘liveness’ is the major effect of *mise-en-scene* in media events, while ‘media rituals’ are

also there to maximize the effect in the process of representing the 'real' world; 'realism' is most emphasized in news and current affairs programme, however they never ignore the effect of 'dramatisation' to sensationalize the news report, the effect of 'ordinariness' to choose the news story that concerns the audience's everyday life, and the effect of 'liveness' to show the efficiency and speed of the news broadcast, which are all under the effect of 'media rituals' to connect us to the centre of the society.

### **(9) Ideology of Mise-en-scene & Power of TV:**

What are the purposes behind these constructed effects of mise-en-scene? Essentially, it is the media power that all these effects of mise-en-scene serve. All the effects of mise-en-scene analysed above are a kind of ideology that reinforces television's authority as the representative of the social centre. And they are used as tools to naturalise this idea by making it less apparent in television programmes (Couldry, 2003).

Collins discovers that television's claim to present 'reality' and 'liveness' is part of an 'ideology of naturalism' (Collins, 1986). As a matter of fact, all other effects of mise-en-scene are also connected with media power, in one way or another. They may not be as formalised as media rituals, but they make media power seem unchallengeable. When analysing media events, Dayan and Katz always relate them with symbolic power, because without it, television would not make the sense of social togetherness (Dayan & Katz, 1992: 17). 'Ordinariness' is also directly related to the power, as Grindstaff comments, 'appearing on national television is not part of the daily routine for ordinary people. This is in part what makes them ordinary' (Grindstaff, 1997: 177). Social practice is thus organised around the media access where public and private life are intertwined.

In short, all the effects of mise-en-scene work together to enhance the TV's role and power in providing a central access to connect members of public with the society's centre. This is the ideology behind these different effects of mise-en-scene. TV's claims to present the 'reality', 'liveness', and 'ordinariness', etc. are actually there to serve TV's power in representing the centre of the society (Couldry, 2003). Nevertheless, while media events bring people together, it is important to note that not all the audiences feel the same as the media event portrays. Different people have different feelings, which may be different from the collective emotion that media event presents. Just because lots of people share the same event, it does not mean everybody feels in the same way.

Are these effects of mise-en-scene building an overall sense of connection with a wider social world, or reinforcing people's sense of disconnection? As far as the ideology of the mise-en-scene is concerned, the gaps between private/public and ordinary/media are made even wider. It is true that the boundary between private and the public is bridged by the audience involvement in TV programmes such as the phone-in participation in the game show and the voting interaction in reality TV show. Henry Giroux suggests, 'the bridges between private and public life are dismantled' (Giroux, 2001: 4). Other scholars have also raised questions about the nature of 'mediated interaction' (Corner, 1999: 13; Thompson, 1995: 81-118) and the role played by the contemporary television in contributing to our notions of what is 'public' and what is 'private'. It is also true that the effects of mise-en-scene also bring ordinary people closer to the media world to some extent. Through 'liveness', people can share the same experience at the same time with millions of other people; by creating the 'real', the media enables ordinary people to see what they cannot see without participating in the real event; and the 'ordinariness' makes it possible for the ordinary people to experience what it is like to be on TV. That is why Bourdon claims, 'Media technological history at least partly reflects an effort to reduce the gap between events and media users' (Bourdon, 2004: 192). In addition, Dayan and Katz conclude that media events turn the home into a public space (Dayan & Katz, 1992: 22), actually connecting centre and periphery (Dayan & Katz,

1992: 196). Their theory has confirmed Durkheim's view on the media's integrative social function.

However, media rituals create the sense of power by emphasizing the boundary between private/public and ordinary/media. Things in the media world seem to be more important than things outside of the media world. For example, celebrities and their stories are often portrayed by the media as if they have greater values. Even if the same story happens to an ordinary person in private life, it is not as significant as the celebrity's version under the public eye. The ordinary people who watch TV have a different status from the media people who are on TV. Also, ordinary people have to do extraordinary things to be on TV. Gamson quoted this statement from a TV producer, 'if you behave the way I'm asking, you're more likely to be on TV' (Gamson, 1998: 87). This boundary reinforces the special status of the TV medium. Couldry believes that this boundary suggests an underlying value—media somehow 'stand in' for, or represent, the social world as a whole (Couldry, 2003: 27). Through setting up the private/public and ordinary/media boundaries, the TV medium becomes the central platform for social integration. That is to say, the effects of *mise-en-scene* make the private/public and ordinary/media gaps bigger, and these gaps make people rely on the TV medium as the society's centre for social integration. By emphasizing these boundaries, television's status appears to be special, important and irreplaceable. Therefore, the function of these different effects of *mise-en-scene* are not just to give certain look and feel to demonstrate certain genres or to give some special effects, but essentially, they are constructed to reassert TV medium's irreplaceable power in connecting people with the society as a whole (Couldry, 2003).

To conclude, all the different effects of *mise-en-scene* (entertainment, dramatisation, liveness, ritual, intimacy and ordinariness) exist in every programme and every genre, as they are closely related to one another, and interact and influence one another in a dynamic way, although some is shown more dominant than others depending on the

requirement of different programmes. All these mise-en-scene elements working together are ideologies that reinforce the TV medium's power as the point of connection between the people and the centre of the society, by making the private/public and ordinary/media boundaries more obvious (Couldry, 2003).

## ***Chapter 6: Methodology***

### **(1) The Comparative Observation Table:**

In order to compare and contrast the mise-en-scene of New Year's Gala in detail for the period covering from 1984 to 2008, a systematic table was designed and organised for the observation of the mise-en-scene of 25 years' New Year's Gala, featuring its set design, presenter's costumes, styles of speech, and technical codes, etc. The New Year's Gala is mainly composed of song and dances, stand-up and sketch comedies and acrobatics. Each separate performance in each NYG was identified by a code, showing the year of the NYG and the number of the performance according to its chronological order in the NYG. For example, (1984:\*1) refers to the first performance in the 1984 NYG. Notes were taken based on the observation of the mise-en-scene and the features of each NYG. The objective of the research is to characterize the NYG's mise-en-scene over a period of 25 years. For the systematic investigation, it was therefore necessary to establish a list of performance features and key elements of the mise-en-scene in order to be able to track their development over time. It is clear that the objective to characterise a TV programme over a period of 25 years, which has an approximate total duration of 100 hours, requires a careful balance: On the one hand, a detailed analysis and description of mise-en-scene is required to capture the specific 'look' and 'feel' of the various moments in NYG. On the other hand, a high-level point of view in describing is required to find out if there is a particular mise-en-scene of NYG that can be used to characterise the entire show and to track its possible development over time.

Performance features and key elements of mise-en-scene:

- Total Length,
- Presenters,
- Director(s),
- Number of Items/Performances,
- Common Themes,

- Special Greetings to,
- Ethnic Minority Features,
- Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau & Overseas Features,
- Chinese Zodiac Feature,
- Beginning of the NYG,
- New Year Midnight Countdown,
- Ending of the NYG,
- Studio Audience,
- TV Audience,
- Audience's Favourite Performance,
- Pre-Recorded Material,
- Presenters' Costumes,
- Presenters' Speeches,
- Other Features of Presenters,
- Performers' Features,
- Old Faces in Show,
- Celebrities in Show,
- Presenters in Show,
- Kids in Show,
- Background Dancers,
- Regional Performance/Chinese folk,
- Performance Genres & Quantity Each,
- Set Design,
- TV Production,
- Significant Absence.

In this way, the above categories in the observation table show and represent different aspects of the NYG's mise-en-scene. The data were collected in one spread sheet to allow the direct comparison of the different aspects in different years. To make the data easier to access for the reader, the information are presented on a year-by-year basis in

Appendix A. In order to establish initial trends and to provide guidance for the detailed analysis, I sampled every fifth year's programme in the first round (1984, 1989, 1994, 1999, and 2004). This was followed by the second, third, fourth and fifth round until the analysis of all the NYGs is complete. With this working system, I watched all the NYG programmes of the past 25 years which lasts around four and a half hours each and made detailed notes on each programme's mise-en-scene and features based on careful observations and critical reflections.

As the result of the observation of the mise-en-scene and the performance features, the categories which have changed in the past two decades are:

- Total Length,
- Presenters,
- Director(s),
- Number of Items/Performances,
- Chinese Zodiac Feature,
- Studio Audience,
- TV Audience,
- Audience's Favourite Performance,
- Pre-Recorded Material,
- Regional Performance/Chinese folk
- Performance Genres & Quantity Each,
- Set Design,
- TV Production,
- Significant Absence.

This thesis will suggest that these changed aspects are the result of the improved production skills and techniques derived from the competitive media market in China. As it was also discovered, the categories which have not changed in the past two decades are:

- Old Faces in Show,

- Presenters' Costumes,
- Presenters' Speeches,
- Other Features of Presenters,
- Performers' Features,
- Background Dancers,
- Common Themes,
- Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau & Overseas Features
- Ethnic Minority Features
- Special Greetings to,
- Beginning of the NYG,
- New Year Midnight Countdown,
- Ending of the NYG,
- Celebrities in Show,
- Presenters in Show,
- Kids in Show.

This thesis will suggest that these unchanged aspects are the result of the commercial influence and the attempts to embed ideologies in the New Year's Gala. The key results from the observation can be summarised as: The technical aspect of the production has progressed dramatically due to the technological and economic development in the Chinese television market over the years. The mise-en-scene of New Year's Gala has not changed much in the past two decades. How the ideologies are embedded in the common themes is discussed in section 'Ideology and the New Year's Gala' and section 'Common Themes that have not been changed' in Chapter 4.

## **(2) The Interviews:**

As the other part of the methodology, fieldwork in China Central Television (CCTV) was carried out, including conducting interviews with high-profiled TV professionals in CCTV (see Appendix C, D, E). This not only offers valuable insights to the Chinese television industry, but also relates the theory with practice.

As for the interviews, the interview questions are conducted from three aspects: the artistic aspect, the ideology aspect and the market aspect. The artistic aspect aims to find out the particular mise-en-scene of New Year's Gala. Therefore, the questions include:

- How important is mise-en-scene considered in the NYG audience survey?
- What has changed in NYG mise-en-scene and what has not?
- Why does NYG keep the same old mise-en-scene despite of the audience complaint?

The ideology aspect aims to find out how the ideology is embedded in the NYG mise-en-scene. Therefore, the questions include:

- What instructions and frameworks does the state give to NYG?
- How is the Chinese media policy reflected in NYG?
- Why certain themes are included in every year's NYG?

The market aspect aims to find out how NYG positions itself in the competitive market and what the commercial influences are in the programme. Therefore, the questions include:

- What actions has CCTV taken to prevent the viewership from declining?

Individual face-to-face interviews were undertaken and the interviews are semi-structured (see Appendix C, D, E). A series of questions was prepared in a logical sequence to make the interviewee's task easy, and also to collect the information efficiently. There were pre-set questions as well as open questions, which encouraged the interviewees to talk more. Hence, additional information can be gained from the semi-structured interview. To gather as much information as possible, the interviews were recorded on the tape, and also notes were taken during the interviews. The principal data produced by the interviewees were verbal responses, statements, opinions, and arguments. Additional data may include observational accounts of their facial expressions, gestures, and body language. The three interviewees were Mr. Yang Bo, the television producer who participated in the production of NYG; Mr. Zhao

Yuhui, the senior staff from the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television; and Mr. Chen Yan, the staging director of NYG.

**Yang Bo (杨博)** is a leading television director in China who participated in the New Year's Gala production. As a busy director, he finally squeezed sometime for the interview in the hotel where I stayed in Beijing. Having studied abroad, Yang Bo knows what makes the Chinese New Year's Gala different from the TV entertainment event in other countries.

**Zhao Yuhui (赵宇辉)** is an experienced media professional who worked as the head of CCTV Overseas Centre and witnessed many significant events in the Chinese television history including signing business contract with Rupert Murdoch. After retirement, he works as a panel judge in the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) which regulates the media policy in China. The interview was taken during his lunch break at the restaurant nearby his office in SARFT. The restaurant manager was nice enough to switch off the background music for the interview.

**Chen Yan (陈岩)** has been in charge of the staging and set design of New Year's Gala since 1992 and was also responsible for the Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony in 2008. Before the interview, I also prepared myself by watching his recent interview in the magazine programme 'People' on CCTV-10. His main achievements also include in finding the balance between the tradition and the innovation. We started the interview at the Foreign Ambassadors' Café at Beijing International Trading Building right after he finished the evaluation meeting on the 2010 New Year's Gala. I highly appreciate that Chen Yan would do the interview as a person who is often too busy to have his dinner on time. To begin the interview, we had some informal chats which also gave me a lot of valuable information: Chen Yan used to live and work in Sweden before he started his career in CCTV. He said CCTV is very open-minded in hiring fresh new talents, as

CCTV was willing to provide a stage for him to show his talent even though he had long hair when he just joined CCTV, which was still prejudiced by many employers at that time. But CCTV has never given him any restrictions.

### **(3) The Rehearsal:**

Exclusive data has also been collected from the observation experience of the 2010 NYG rehearsal in the CCTV studio. As Yang Bo reveals in his interview, '*In the rehearsal of the New Year's Gala, the procedure involves selecting performances, producing the individual performances, and finally putting all the performances on the stage*' (Appendix C). Like every year, the rehearsal of the 2010 NYG took place in the No.1 Studio on the ground floor of the CCTV building. I was given the precious ticket to observe the first rehearsal, followed by other six rehearsals before the final live broadcast of the evening gala on the New Year's Eve. The rehearsal was on the 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2010, which started at 12:30PM and finished at 6:30PM. When entering the CCTV building, my ticket was scanned by the security guards to check if it was authentic. There were three security checks in front of the No.1 Studio where the rehearsal and the actual NYG takes place. No food or water was allowed to bring into the studio and all bags had to be put at the designated lockers outside of the studio. Warning signs were put up to forbid cameras are in the studio. There were inspectors in the studio to make sure that nobody was taking pictures or videos of the rehearsal, to prevent from leaking the latest NYG news to the entertainment journalists who try to expose the first-hand information of the upcoming NYG to the public before its live broadcast on the New Year's Eve. Therefore, I only managed to take some pictures from outside of the CCTV building.

My seat was at the front row of the audience seats, right next to the group of panel judges who assessed the performances and gave suggestions. Therefore, each of them was given a pad and a pen to take notes. The purpose of the rehearsal also lies in these assessment procedures when the panel judges decides whether to put the performances

in the final evening gala according to the reactions of the audience in the live studio. Most of the high-profiled celebrities do not attend the rehearsals due to their busy schedules. Therefore, to run the smooth order of the show, some random people or even production crews were used to play the roles of the celebrities in the performances during the rehearsal procedure. For the performers who attend in the rehearsal, they were dressed in their own casual outfits rather than the actual costumes for the evening gala. Like in the actual live broadcast of the show, the warm-up man was also there in the rehearsal to lead the studio audience to applaud and cheer to stir up the studio atmosphere.

There were twelve rows of audience seats in the NYG studio, and several platforms on the stage which can move up and down automatically. To keep the tradition, round tables were placed at the front row of the audience seats for the special studio guests. In recent years, the round tables have also been used as another filming location especially for studio games such as magic tricks. On the left corner of the stage, there was an audience hotline area, which was only filmed during performance breaks. Two hotline presenters were usually in charge of explaining the voting procedure of 'My Favorite New Year's Gala Performance' activity, and announcing the New Year greetings from the foreign embassies and the commercial sponsors. There were ten cameras operated from different angles and positions in the studio, and some of them were upstairs. There were also hooks on the studio ceiling to hold the strings for the 'flying in the sky' effect. At the end of each performance, production crews ran to the stage to remove the props, tidy up the floor and prepare for the next performance. As the performances were arranged tightly, the crews had to get the stage ready in the most well-organised and efficient way. For the big props that were difficult to remove, the crews were hiding behind the props all the time during the performance, so that they can remove the props conveniently and quickly.

Due to the various filming techniques and special effects, the studio looks bigger and spectacular to the audience on the screen. This was mainly achieved through the digital technology device called Datation which projected computer generated imagery and lighting on the multi-layered plain boards on the stage. In this way, many lively backgrounds and rich effects were created, which transformed the NYG studio, appearing to be different in each year to the audience. As a matter of fact, almost all the NYG in the past two decades were held in this studio. But the major components such as the stage and the gallery have not changed. In short, the spectacular and flexible stage design plays an important part in NYG, especially in recent years.

#### **(4) Limitation of the Research:**

To provide an objective account, there are things that this thesis has not noticed while observing the 25 years' NYG. The observation is only based on the things presented on the screen, thus this thesis is unable to cover or discuss the things that are not shown on screen, which could contribute important research findings. In other words, this research can only study the available footages captured by camera, rather than getting the whole picture of what is everything like in the NYG studio that night, things that are not shown on the screen. It is not easy to figure out the whole setting and general arrangement of the studio based on piecing together the interrupted shots from different places of the programme. Although lots of behind-the-scene information can be obtained from the interviews and the rehearsal experience to improve this restriction, the given information is still limited.

## ***Chapter 7: New Year's Gala—The Show***

Mise-en-scene can act even more significantly than the programme content in certain circumstances, as it not only can form various aesthetical effects to the programme, but also can construct meanings through its technical codes and conventions. Relating the discussion of mise-en-scene to the content of NYG in this thesis has generated an insight into NYG and its history. This situation can be best described by a statement from Yang Bo, *'The mise-en-scene needs the support of the content. A programme must have both the mise-en-scene and the content. Only by combining the two together can a programme win the popularity among the audience'* (Appendix C). Therefore, mise-en-scene is the expressive tool which requires close observation (Rutherford, 2002: 68). In the case of NYG, it is a unique programme by combining many different forms of television into one show. That is to say, NYG mixes factual and entertainment mise-en-scene together, which offers an example to see mise-en-scene from a bigger context. The two elements (factual and entertainment mise-en-scene) work together in NYG. To avoid confusion, the term 'ideology' used in this thesis means the series of ideas and themes that the party promotes among the people in the current context of China. By closely observing both factual and entertainment mise-en-scene in NYG, this thesis aims to identify and analyse the particular mise-en-scene of NYG both as a cultural phenomenon and as a reflection of the ideology carrier and the gradually commercialised entertainment programme.

### **(1) Fixed Patterns VS Innovations in NYG:**

Careful observation of the NYG has revealed fixed patterns in terms of the performance arrangement in NYG which have not changed much over the years. All the NYGs have:

- Live broadcast;
- Busy and loud scenes;
- New Year countdown at the midnight;

- The audience hotlines;
- Performances made for the young and the old;
- Common ideological themes promoted in performances;
- Presenters' speeches;
- Appearance of the old face performers;
- The three main performance genres dominated by song and dance, (sketch and stand-up) comedy and Chinese opera.

The entire evening gala is hosted by several presenters who link the performances in between. What's more, there is a fixed pattern in portraying the themes—the presenter's promotional speech with studio interviews/activities, followed by a performance (usually a comedy or a song and dance) to develop the theme further. Performances are often related with each other under the same theme or topic. Take the 2008 NYG as an example: the comedy (2008:\*10) and the song (2008:\*11) praised the spirit of the army soldiers, while the poem reading (2008:\*13) and the song (2008:\*14) were dedicated to the victims of the heavy snow that year. Normally the later performance is used to promote the theme of the preceding performance even further. Last but not least, almost every year's NYG takes place in CCTV's No.1 studio in the CCTV building. Even in the case of the 2002 NYG when subsidiary venue in Shenzhen was used to hold part of the performances, most of the performances took place in the CCTV main venue in Beijing. The above structure has been fixed in NYG for the past two decades.

In terms of the performance genres in NYG, the majority of the performances are song and dances and comedies, with Chinese operas and other talent shows such as acrobatics inserted in between. Among the dominating performance genres, the common order is: one comedy is arranged after several song and dances. Since the launch of the NYG, different performance genres have been designed to target different

audience groups: the song and dances are for the young adults (especially the pop music), the Chinese operas are for the elderly people, the performances given by kids are for the children and the comedies are for everyone. It is necessary to contain all kinds of performances in this evening gala, as the leading TV director Yang Bo explains in the interview, *'The audience group which New Year's Gala looks after is huge. China has the population of more than 1.3 billion, from city to countryside, across all age groups, cultural backgrounds and professions, but they all need to find the part they like in this one single New Year's Gala. Therefore the New Year's Gala has its own ways to achieve this'* (Appendix C).

In addition, the whole evening gala is divided into three crucial moments: the beginning of NYG with spectacular opening song and dance and the presenters' opening speeches, the New Year countdown at midnight with the national audience, and the end of the NYG under the closure song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight' (难忘今宵) with the presenters' speeches and the grand gathering of all performers. Therefore, it is worth paying attention to the performances around these moments: the official beginning of the NYG usually starts with loud and busy song and dance featuring Chinese folk music. As a classic style of its mise-en-scene, at the beginning of the opening song and dance, the camera always gives a wide pan across the studio from the back of the auditorium to show the general environment of the evening gala to the audience, like in the case of the 2003 NYG. The New Year countdown moment at the midnight is most exciting, as it is the highlight of the entire evening gala when the whole nation is counting down the clock at the same time with the presenters on TV to witness the arrival of the New Year. The mise-en-scene of the occasion is made more ceremonious on TV when the colorful glitters and balloons are falling from the sky on the performers and studio audiences with a mixture of all kinds of sounds from the bell ringing, the crowd's cheering, the presenter's poetic speeches, and the background music. The performances before and after the New Year countdown are often grand song and dances expressing happy feelings in welcoming the arrival of the New Year. Normally the performances arranged after the New Year midnight countdown are considered less

important and less attractive without the participation by high-profiled celebrities, as less audiences are expected to stay this late for the last part of the NYG. Together with the presenters' official speeches, the closing song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight' (难忘今宵) is often played as a typical sign announcing the end of the NYG. Usually, a bird's eye view shot is made above the stage to cover the performers who are gathering together, waving, cheering and jumping happily in front of the camera. As balloons and glitter fall, the NYG studio becomes a utopia. Dyer defines entertainment as 'utopianism', as entertainment usually provides the picture of either somewhere better to escape into, or something we want but does not exist in our daily life (Dyer, 2002: 18).

Interestingly, today's NYG still has many components of the first NYG with its patterns and routines remaining the same over the years: the round table seating plan for the studio audiences; inviting high-profiled celebrities from mainland, HK, and Taiwan to perform; studio games participated by the audiences; and the launch of the NYG theme song 'I Will Never Tonight' (难忘今宵). According to Ni, Ou and Shan, the chief director of the first NYG was Huang Yihe, who worked as an experienced director in the CCTV's Cultural and Art Department at that time and was appointed by the head of CCTV to be in charge of the NYG. Huang finalized four important measures to launch the programme: Firstly, introducing live broadcast to replace the pre-recorded broadcast; Secondly, using programme hosts to provide information communication between the performers and the viewers; Thirdly, setting up hotline telephones in the live studio; and Fourthly, inviting the country's senior leaders to the evening gala to celebrate the New Year with the people. These new daring plans, especially the live broadcast, were granted by the CCTV leaders immediately at that time (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 6). It was an important decision, as these initial plans set up the general structure of the NYG which has been continued over two decades.

Although the general structure and arrangement have been fixed in NYG, some shifts did take place in different period of time. First of all, some performances were creatively made in the early NYG. For example, a love story was added into the folk song and dance (1988:\*19). The key elements of the mise-en-scene in this performance were: The singers were dressed in the traditional folk costumes, singing and performing a love story with expressive body languages and dramatic facial expressions to the folk music. The performers were frequently filmed in close-ups to show the emotional ups and downs of the romantic plot of the song. Close-up shots create intimacy and long shots create context and public distance (Selby & Cowdery, 1995: 58). No props were used in the song on the very small stage which was simply decorated by several big posts on the side and colourful lights along the staircases. The zooming-in/out camerawork and fast/slow motion editing technique were operated not so skillfully and smoothly. On the New Year's Eve of 1989, with the foreign performers' participation, pop music from HK and Western operas on stage, NYG was made diverse, trendy, and lively. Many performances in the 1992 NYG such as (1992:\*1\*16\*17\*21) were pre-recorded instead of broadcast live, as their backgrounds and settings were obviously not the NYG studio. As the performance titles indicated, they were provided by different TV stations from Taiwan, Shanghai and CCTV and recorded before the broadcast NYG. This situation is commented by Marriott that 'what was on offer was just precisely the continuous ebb and flow of the live and the recorded, the now and the then, the raw and the cooked' (Marriott, 2007: 45). Furthermore, there is a significant shift in the popularity of the stand-up comedy and the sketch comedy. The NYG in the 1980s witnessed the golden time of the stand-up comedy, although its prosperity has been replaced by the sketch comedy later in the 1990s. For instance, there was hardly any sketch comedy in the 1988 NYG, as stand-up comedy was more popular at that time (Ju, 2007).

Secondly, due to the technological development and the overall progress in the television industry, some new changes have also been identified in NYG. Pre-recorded footages are used less and less in the NYG performances, as effort has been made in

broadcasting everything live. In the 1993 NYG, the latest video wall was used as the background of the stage with computer-controlled lighting. In addition, a new format has been established in the NYG since the late 1990s by having the hotline presenters reading out the New Year greetings from the commercial sponsors and the Chinese embassies abroad. As for its mise-en-scene: with the hotline presenters' announcements at the background, the greetings are also shown full screen in scrolling texts on an animated card decorated with the Chinese traditional symbols such as red lanterns, Chinese couplets and dragons. This telegram-reading activity is inserted several times throughout the NYG between the performances. Also, the performances are handled in a more detailed way, as more effort has been made in the NYG staging to match with the theme of the performance, on the one hand, and to enhance the effect of the entertainment performance, on the other hand. As discussed previous, entertainment is associated with happiness and 'sparkle' and the mise-en-scene of entertainment offers both laughter and spectacle. Take the mise-en-scene of the acrobatic performance (2002:\*15) as an example: Two award-winning acrobats on the round platform rising up and down automatically at the centre of the studio which was decorated by many surrounding red lanterns and Chinese paper-cuts as traditional Chinese New Year symbols. An underground fountain was revealed in front of the acrobats during the performance when the front part of the stage floor splits apart automatically. With the studio lighting turned dark, the performance was made even more exciting under the dramatic background music and the constantly changing computer generated images displayed on the huge video wall. Fading in/out effect was used frequently when cutting between the shots to give more artistic feeling to the performance. Many stage effects were applied such as flying bubbles, fake snowflakes, and smoke to dress up the mise-en-scene. A song in the 1984 NYG was simply a song, but a song in the 1999 NYG was added with something extra by having the dumpling-making scene and acrobatic performance as background. By the 1998 NYG, the spectacular staging of the recent NYG had been established, represented by the high-tech multi-functional stage and the ceremonious costumes. Nevertheless, there were more performance genres in the early NYG during the 1980s than those in the NYG nowadays. Performance genres such as Chinese opera comedy, pre-recorded cartoons, animal acrobatics, studio

table-tennis match, story-telling, and musical comedy are hardly seen in today's NYG. There is especially a decline in the traditional art forms such as story-telling and ballad in recent years' NYG. This reflects the fact that Chinese traditional culture is being diluted under the international popular culture in the age of globalization and the increasing competition in the Chinese television market makes NYG change with the global trend.

Thirdly, different chief directors and production teams are in charge of each year's NYG, and hence their individual ideas and preferences may also influence the production of NYG. For example, the 1993 NYG had most participants from HK, Taiwan, and Singapore, which was shown in the presenters' team as well as the big amount of performances given by the high-profiled celebrities from HK and Taiwan. This may be related with its new chief director Zhang Ziyang. Moreover, the shift in the performance arrangement is also shown in the different number of performances in each year's NYG. Having more performances in the show does not mean the whole evening gala lasts longer, as the length of each performance may be tailored accordingly, in order to fit into the total length of the show—around four and a half hours. For instance, there were more performances included in the 1988 NYG, but most of the performances lasted shorter. On the contrary, the number of performances in the 1994 NYG was less than other years' NYG, but the duration of each performance lasted longer. Similarly, compared with the NYG in the 1990s, the recent NYG since 2000 have less amount of performances in total but each performance lasts longer.

Nevertheless, there are no innovations with major break-through in NYG over the past two decades. Whatever the shifts are, they are all created under the general fixed patterns and conventions: the unchanged performance genres, the round table sitting plan of the auditorium, the presenters' linking between the performances, the appearance of the high-profiled celebrities, the New Year telegrams from the enterprises, and the domination of the old face performers, etc. Liang Ping explains that

these conventions are formed because the CCTV's requirements on NYG have not changed: it has to be artistic, entertaining, informative, folk culture, inspiring, interesting, formal, and talented. While the chief directors are busy with achieving these goals, it is difficult to create innovations (Liang, 2003). The NYG's staging director Chen Yan argues,

*'The reason why the style of New Year's Gala has hardly changed over the years is because we want to cover every aspect. In order to cover everything, each performance is made to target one certain audience group. New Year's Gala is a dish designed for the New Year feast and all the Chinese people with different backgrounds and preferences are expecting it. Therefore, we have to prepare the performances that attract each age group. On the New Year's Eve, there is no such evening gala that covers almost every aspect. Trying to cover every artistic form disturbs the order of evening gala, but it establishes its own style'* (Appendix E).

Similarly, the iconic NYG presenter Zhao Zhongxiang also claims, 'As long as the NYG aims to show tradition and celebration at the same time, the only way is to provide new content in the traditional pattern' (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 243). He suggests the chief director should not spend too much time in changing the old pattern in order to be innovative. Chinese New Year is the time of tradition, so it would not be suitable to substitute the Chinese dumplings with the Western hamburgers. In this way, it may seem natural that NYG becomes formatted, as the Chinese New Year itself is a festival with fixed traditions and customs (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 243).

However, this is not to say that there has not been any innovation in NYG. Some innovations did emerge over the years inside the general fixed pattern. It was quite a unique idea to put on a real marriage (1986:\*15) between an army soldier and a military singer on the NYG stage which was witnessed live by the national audience. The key elements of its mise-en-scene were: Appearing shy and innocent, the groom was dressed in standard military uniform and the bride was in white wedding dress. The marriage ceremony was organized by the presenters and a government official was invited to

accredit and congratulate their wedding by handing over the marriage certificate to the couple who were seen as national heroes due to their contributions to the country. The loud and exciting cheering and applause from the studio overrode the voices of the couple. The camera was shaky and unsteady when trying to capture and document this exciting event from different angles on stage. Live broadcast delivers the sense of 'now' to a remote audience. In this way, television allows its audience to witness the event to unfold without being there. Though separated from other fellow audience, the live broadcast gives its viewer a sense of togetherness and connectedness.

Compared with that, everything seems to be a pre-arranged performance in recent NYG, which misses a sense of 'liveness'. Another innovation was made when the competition format of the studio game show was borrowed in the 1990 NYG. The performances were divided into three different teams according to the genres (song and dance, comedy, and Chinese opera) which were led by three team leaders (presenters) and the old face performers who gave performances on behalf of their teams. The studio audiences were also divided into those three teams as the supporters. Not only were the performances put in the form of competition among the three teams, but also the performances were arranged under the same subject to be smartly linked with each other. In this way, the studio atmosphere was made more lively in NYG. Innovation has been widely encouraged in NYG to compete in the rapidly growing television market in China. This is best expressed in the presenters' lines at the beginning of the 2000 NYG: 'Innovation is considered very important in this year's NYG'. Yet the only thing that was different in that year was categorizing the performances into five chapters under different titles and the arrangement of having 10 celebrities to host rather than professional presenters. Two years later, the 2002 NYG was made more fashionable by holding part of the evening gala outdoor in the subsidiary venue in Shenzhen. Live performances in Beijing CCTV studio and in Shenzhen outdoor square were joined simultaneously on big digital screens. More innovations have been seen in the linking of the performance in the 2007 NYG: Apart from the specially designed linking lines for the presenters, the performances were also connected under related titles. For example,

the song and dance performances were made more consistent by having the same kind of structure in their titles: 'Happy Harmony-Ethnic Love', 'Happy Harmony-Pop Music Group', 'Happy Harmony-Beautiful Hometown', 'Happy Harmony-Army Soldier Spirit', and 'Happy Harmony-Loud New Year'.

It seems that innovation in NYG only stretches as far as the above examples. As Guan suggests, the innovation of NYG often shows in the new techniques (Guan, 2000: 145). However, the NYG chief directors think that it is impossible to break the fixed pattern of NYG in the near future. When being interviewed, Yuan Dewang, the chief director of the 2004 NYG explained the reason why the evening cannot have break-through innovations, 'New Year's Gala formed its main artistic style of "festive, happy, united and harmonious" in the past twenty years. This is recognized by leaders and folks. Therefore, no one dares to treat it as an experiment by carrying out risky changes. The innovation has to be realized in the ordinary TV programmes, not in New Year's Gala' (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 18-19). This view point is also agreed among the three interviewees. Yang Bo explains from the audience's perspective: *'The audiences of the New Year's Gala come from different cultural backgrounds. What we have now in New Year's Gala is to carry on the experience gathered from the past decades, to make sure most of the audiences can accept the programme'* (Appendix C).

Currently working as a panel judge in SARFT, the experienced media professional Zhao Yuhui illustrates from the director's perspective:

*'In the production process, I think the new directors will consult the style and experience from the previous years, and carry on the must-have parts. In the case of the old directors who have produced New Year's Gala for many times, such as Lang Kun and Jing Yue in recent years, they are very familiar with the whole thing, which makes them even more likely to follow these fixed patterns'* (Appendix D).

Finally, Chen Yan confirms,

*‘Television programmes do not require for the best or the worst style, but they require for the most suitable and accurate style for the content. Everything has to be based on its content. The style has to greatly promote the visuality of the television programme. This is enough...I personally do not think in a ‘should be’ way that there is only one style for each certain content. In other words, the reason why there is one certain format is because this format can at least accomplish the task when a medium is very difficult to operate. When this certain format becomes a routine and the live show can be delivered safely and smoothly, then we can try to be creative by breaking this certain format and style. However, breaking this certain format can be controversial. But we have to bear in mind that expressing the theme accurately is most important...There is no need to break this set of patterns and routines. The past two decades have already enabled New Year’s Gala to form its own tradition’ (Appendix E).*

Whether it is to secure the audience without dramatic changes, or to keep the experience and routines established in the early times, following these fixed patterns has become a common practice for the NYG over the years. However, it is clear that this common practice may restrict the innovation of NYG. New time calls for new thinking, and what attracted the audience twenty years ago may not work today. While Yang Bo gave an example of the NYG’s innovative experiment in bringing rap music style into the traditional Chinese folk songs, he also realized that the NYG’s innovation may not be able to catch up with the rapid development in the Chinese television industry as a whole. As a result, the rigid programme pattern with little variation has slowed down the progress of NYG, and the declining popularity of NYG in recent years may have shown that the innovations created by NYG so far cannot satisfy the increasing demand of the Chinese audience in the era of the market competition. Lury suggests, ‘One of the ironies of light entertainment is that, despite its need to present itself a special, it is fundamentally routine—the same things happen week after week; the fantasy is precisely not fantastic, but anticipated’ (Lury, 2005: 182). This is the reason why NYG especially needs more innovation to remain competitive in today’s television market.

## **(2) The Progress in the TV Production Skill:**

Any changes taking place in a country's economy, industry, and technology are experienced in the daily of the Chinese people in the past two decades, and have an influence on TV programmes, which is shown in its mise-en-scene. Butler states, 'style exists at the intersection of economics, technology, industry standards, and semiotic/aesthetic codes; and each of these elements has their own, semi-independent history' (Butler, 2009: 19). It is noticeable that the production skill in NYG has improved. Overall TV production skill has two aspects: the human operation of the production and facilities available to the production. Both aspects have been improved with significant progresses due to the rapid development of the TV industry in China in the past two decades. In terms of the human operation of the production, it is getting more experienced and professional. Looking back at the early NYG, we can get an impression of the beginning of the Chinese TV industry from the mise-en-scene perspective: The camerawork was shaky and out-of-focus, the sound quality was bad with too much background noise, the editing was full of jump-cuts, and the lighting was too dark to show the performers on stage. Everything from that time may seem a little bit 'unprofessional' to us nowadays. All these indicate the under-developed and inexperienced condition of making a live TV show in China at the early stage, which is also experienced in many other countries. Nevertheless, the production was also more adventurous and creative in the early period. Take an element of the mise-en-scene of the 1986 NYG as an example: although the flaws were shown in the out-of-focus shots and jerky camera movements, it was an interesting way to start the performance by filming the singer's image reflection in the fountain. This practice has been carried on in the following years' NYG since then.

Nevertheless, improvements have been seen year by year, along with the experience accumulated by the NYG production crew. As for part of the mise-en-scene of the 1990 NYG, despite of the shaky camera movement and the unstable lighting, special editing

effects such as fast forward and slow motion were added to the coverage of the performance. This kind of temporal transformation such as fast/slow motion takes shorter/longer than the original interval in which it unfolded in the world. Marriott argues, 'Processes of recording, of montage and replay mean that there is now a disjuncture between the moment of capture and the moment of transmission, such that the moment is no longer live' (Marriott, 2007: 75). Therefore, like many 'live' programmes, NYG is not strictly live as it claims. Later on, many news things were also experimented by the production team: in the 1993 NYG, some performers' images were blurred with the white background to make the picture appear softer, which was a popular element of mise-en-scene at that time. With further implementation of the economic reform and opening-up policy, the Chinese TV industry has been under global influence to be 'geared to international standards' (与国际接轨). There are conventional production styles in creating the mise-en-scene of NYG: the bird's eye view and 180-degree panning shot of the studio were widely used in the 1999 NYG; In the 2001 NYG, almost all the performances started with the camera giving a shot directly upwards of the studio ceiling showing its rich decoration, or a close-up shot on the stage props and decors (such as the lamp post, the red lantern and the bench), before filming the performers on stage. These techniques and skills are more sophisticated, mature and experienced than that in twenty years ago.

In addition, the mechanisms of production are made less and less visible in NYG over the years: in the 1986 NYG, the production crews were filmed doing the preparation work by the side of the stage while the singer was still performing on stage. Twenty years later, in the 2006 NYG, each performance had a totally new set of background, props and design, but it was hard to notice when and how these things were prepared and moved onto the stage during the few minutes break between the performances. Compared with the early NYG, which showed more 'behind-the scene' details, recent NYG is more careful and professional in handling the situation. It is also important to analyze the different reasons behind these details in different period of time. For example, it is the inexperienced production skill in the early NYG that caused the

filming of the presenters sorting out the messy cables lying on the floor by the side of the singer performing on stage, as there was no attempt or effort in avoiding it at that time. While the production skill is getting more experienced and professional, some mechanisms of production were still made very visible in the 1990s and 2000s, such as filming the cameraman working with his camera, and the production crews monitoring the show with the headphones. These mechanisms were deliberately left in NYG to be part of the *mise-en-scene*, perhaps as a way of simulating the involvement of the audience at home in the show on screen. These mechanisms may also indicate the message that everyone in the studio is making the best effort to achieve a successful celebration. Hence, certain conventional production styles like this in the NYG *mise-en-scene* have been remained.

The production facilities have become more advanced over the years. The latest advanced technology is immediately devoted by CCTV to the NYG production. According to Ni, Ou and Shan, the sound equipment in NYG was the most advanced system borrowed from HK during the early period (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 437). A new attempt was carried out in the 1985 NYG when the evening gala was held outdoor for the first time in Beijing Workers' Stadium which could hold more than 10,000 audiences. However, problems occurred such as the dark lighting, poor and noisy stereo effects, inefficient communication between the production crews, and low indoor temperature for the performers and the audience. Since then, as Li reveals, most of the NYG have been held in the CCTV No. 1 studio, with its stage 10 meters in height, 20 meters in width, and 20 meters in length (J. Li & Q. Li, 2006: 98). At the beginning of the 1986 NYG, presenters informed the audience that the NYG would be simultaneously translated into English and broadcast live by Radio Beijing. In the 1988 NYG, Studio/OB live interactions were carried out between three different locations, as shown in its *mise-en-scene*: The pre-recorded Fire Dragon Dance (1988:\*18) was given as a regional performance before a reporter was showing a crowded flower market in Guangdong as their New Year custom to the NYG studio; After a reporter's on-location live introduction at Heilongjiang ice sculpture exhibition, the pre-recorded music video

(1988:\*23) featuring the various winter activities in the very cold Heilongjiang was played as their way of celebrating the New Year; Live interviews with people enjoying all kinds of regional food on a Sichuan food street on the New Year was followed by the pre-recorded music video (1988:\*37) describing the delicious street food from Sichuan which was sung in Sichuan regional dialect with lyrics provided at the bottom of the screen. In this way, satellite technology offered the two-way communication between the reporter at the subsidiary venue and the presenter at the NYG studio, enabling them to speak to each other 'live'. Broadcasters leave no stone unturned to emphasise the special status of liveness throughout the programme: presenters' repeated reference to the live status during the programme, the presence of the live audience in the studio, and the famous two-ways cut between the live studio and the remote locations. The word 'live' is inserted on the screen, editing is supposed to be fluid.

The adventurous application of new technologies continued in the production of the NYG since the 1990s: Artificial smoke was created on stage as a special effect for song and dance performances *mise-en-scene* in the 1990 NYG. Live satellite transmission was the highlight of the 1993 NYG, when presenters from mainland, HK, Taiwan and Singapore can communicate over the big TV screen, and their local performances from different locations were shared simultaneously for the first time. In the 1999 NYG, the audience was able to watch the live broadcast of NYG on the Internet for the first time (J. Li & Q. Li, 2006: 98). In the 2002 NYG, the participation of the TV audience in the evening gala was enhanced by sending their viewing comments through CCTV website and mobile phone messages, and the subsidiary venue in Shenzhen extended the indoor studio performance to the outdoor celebration. With twenty years' experience and the help of the technology nowadays, the joint performance from Beijing studio and Shenzhen outdoor theme park was successfully achieved in the 2002 NYG. The 2005 NYG was broadcast live on four CCTV channels simultaneously for the first time: on CCTV-1 (the general main channel), CCTV-4 (the international channel in Chinese), CCTV-9 (the international channel in English), and CCTV-16 (the international channel in French and Spanish), so that the CCTV NYG can be received around the world. In

recent years, the NYG is very well equipped such as the 10 studio cameras in different positions ready to capture anything from any angle. However, all the new technological facilities and equipments must be tested elsewhere before they are used in NYG. As Chen Yan reasserts in his interview, *'Again, New Year's Gala is not a place for experiments. For most of the new technology facilities, we always try it elsewhere first before using it in New Year's Gala, to make sure nothing goes wrong during this national live show'* (Appendix E). This attitude can be best shown in the absence of the real fireworks in all the NYGs, which is considered causing safety issues to the live show. Therefore, even though setting off fireworks is one of the most important New Year traditions, it can only be shown in the *mise-en-scene* of every year's NYG: the sound of the firework played at the background, the animated image of the firework displayed on the big screen, and the fake firework props used in the NYG performance.

Although heavily influenced by the global trend of programme making, it is worth noting that the production style of NYG is different from its international counterparts. With the wide application of the new technology in the production, building spectacular scenes and complex staging effect have become a very important part of the evening gala. For example, lots of efforts have been put into the creation of the beautiful staging in the 1996 NYG: special lighting effects, automatic stage and artificial smoke were used to decorate the stage. To match with the theme of the song and dance 'Spring Rain' (2003:\*32), its *mise-en-scene* was shown as follows: the background dancers danced with umbrellas in hands behind the water curtain created at the front of the stage as if they were covered in the rain. The computer generated image of a small town (with ancient bridges, stone roads, and trees) was projected on the wall behind the dancers as if they were dancing in that beautiful small town rather than the CCTV studio. Then, a gigantic plastic lotus flower rose up from the underground to reveal the dancers dancing inside the flower when it was opening up slowly. In this way, entertainment *mise-en-scene* is considered uplifting and making us feel better: cheerful music melodies, spectacular sets and costumes, graceful movements of dancers—They give us the image of more perfect bodies and more perfect voices in a more perfect world. Dyer

explains, ‘Alternatives, hopes, wishes—these are the stuff of utopia, the sense that things could be better, that something other than what is can be imagined and maybe realised...Utopianism is contained in the feelings that entertainment embodies. It presents head-on as it were, what utopia would feel like rather than how it will be organised’ (Dyer, 2002: 18). In sketch comedy (2007:\*19), the image of the night city scenery was projected on the back of the stage behind the comedians to create the evening environment for the comedy story. It is a common practice for NYG to create spectacular images by applying CGI (Computer Generated Imagery) to decorate the studio electronically. As Lury suggests, ‘This creates an environment which is frequently referred to as a “virtual” space, although we actually identify with it as a particular place...News producers employ CGI to generate a flexible, vibrant place for their programme, which can then serve as a familiar, albeit dynamic, environment for viewers’ (Lury, 2005: 153). By projecting various computer generated images onto the big board on the back of the stage, which enables NYG to present various images effectively, creating different background setting and environment for different performances. The result is not only saving in props and sets, but also more effective and ambitious scene changes. As Zhao Yuhui comments, *‘Due to the big amount of human, material and financial resources that CCTV put in, the staging and set design have made big technical progresses, from the simple tea table setting in the early times to the big-scale multi-media studio which can contain several hundred people nowadays’* (Appendix D).

### **(3) Inexperienced Amateur VS Perfect Made-for-TV:**

Study of the 25 years of NYG has found that while the NYG is getting more professional and experienced in making a live evening gala, its distance from the audience is also getting bigger. In other words, although inexperienced and immature in the production, the lively atmosphere in the early NYG brings the audience closer to the show; whereas the professionally polished ‘made-for TV’ NYG nowadays appears somehow distant to the viewer. In terms of the distance to the audience, the NYG can be

divided into three periods: the lively and inexperienced period (1984-1988); the professional period (1989-1996); the perfect-show period (1997-2008).

First of all, the inexperienced amateur production of NYG was lively in the first period. The early stage of the under-developed Chinese TV industry was a learning process for the NYG to gather experience and knowledge in TV production techniques and skills. Hence, many practices in the early NYG would be considered as ‘unprofessional’ nowadays. For instance, before the start of the Chinese opera performance (1984:\*16), the opera singer had to return back to his audience seat from the stage when he forgot to bring the props. This moment was not cut out, which would not be shown in NYG nowadays. Similarly, in the 1985 NYG, the singer was too excited to speak properly on stage and oral mistakes occurred very often among the performers as well as the presenters. In the 1986 NYG, the presenter was often filmed talking with others among the audience seats during the performance, the production crews were passing across the camera, and performances were usually interrupted by the exciting cheering from the studio audience.

By giving an example of how celebrities performing ordinariness through a display of apparent incompetence, Bonner proposes, ‘Performance in this mode, like an assumed ignorance of the world, operates as another device to diminish distance, making presenters more like us the viewers and less like them—the actual celebrities who do not become clumsy or self-conscious’ (Bonner, 2003: 70). In fact, it is the small gestures and details that bring the audience closer to the show: in the 1984 NYG, presenter warmly reminded the audience not to forget drinking and eating while watching the performances, which makes the atmosphere cozy and comfortable. Also, when the HK star (1985:\*29) was shaking hands with the front row studio audience during her song, many other audiences walked to the front from their seats to shake hands with her. During the midnight New Year countdown, the studio celebration was very lively: the performers are giving each other New Year greetings with hugs and

toasts, while the studio audiences are taking pictures with them as souvenirs. As a matter of fact, the small gestures and details in the early NYG are very powerful in bonding the audiences. These activities and arrangements in the early years may cause a little bit chaos in the studio, but it can best show the NYG theme of ‘all the Chinese people celebrating this biggest festival together happily’. This not only shows the TV production personnel did not have much experience at that time, but also indicates the atmosphere of making the live show in the early period was more lively. Although the NYG in the first period lacked experience and professionalism, the intimate and lively feeling it created was indispensable, which is the key factor to bring the audience emotionally closer to the show.

In the second period, the show was made more professionally. For example, during the presenter's link to the song (1991:\*44), the performers from the last performance were filmed passing behind the presenter on the stage and some of them were soon stopped by the production crew. This ‘behind-the-scene’ interaction was captured by the camera. This shows that by then the NYG had started to be aware of the unexpected situations by trying to avoid them at least. Compared with the unawareness of the similar situations happened in the first period, this is a significant shift. Hence, the studio atmosphere appeared more distant. Some ‘unpolished imperfections’ considered can still be found in the second period: The production crews in the 1990 NYG were still filmed carrying chairs, desks and other props to the stage to prepare for the setting of the next performance, the comedian was still filmed getting ready for the performance on the way to the stage in the 1992 NYG, and the singer was still captured when talking to the presenter during the performance in the 1996 NYG.

As for the third period, the NYG aims to put on a perfect show on the New Year’s Eve. Having gathered professional experience in TV production in the past two decades, the NYG team aims to put on a polished four-hour live show with no mistakes. Delivering the show safely is one of the priorities of the NYG. As Chen Yan explains in his

interview, *'The most important thing is to guarantee a safe broadcast. If I have to choose between innovation and security, I will not choose innovation no matter how creative I am'* (Appendix E). Zhao Yuhui also agrees, *'If something goes wrong in a live programme, then it shows the director does not make a good preparation.... For the production team, they should not ignore the preparation work, and let the show develop on its own freely'* (Appendix D). Many tactics and rules are introduced to prevent the unexpected situation from happening like in the previous periods. For example, the behind-the-scene preparation work should not be captured by camera, the presenters should not make any oral mistakes, and the performers have to perform according to the script, etc. As it is not an easy job at all to transform a four-hour live show into a perfect polished programme, everyone in the NYG studio is under stress. As it is revealed, there are very few performers who can remain calm under the enormous pressure from performing in NYG. Although being very popular, the comedian Chen Peisi has never attended any NYG since his last performance in the 1999 NYG, as he explained, *'I cannot afford that much stress and effort every year'* (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 320). Hence, it is not surprising that the studio atmosphere is distant.

In this way, the 'made-for-TV' characteristics have been developed in NYG. As a matter of fact, this happened not only in China with NYG, but also elsewhere in the world. With these 'made-for-TV' features, the NYG nowadays is not simply a record of a live show anymore, as it recreates the live show. Compared with other media, specific things are put with televisual form on TV to fill and match with the special requirement and purpose of the television medium. This is shown in some key elements the mise-en-scene: the 'shiny floor' show filled with background dancers are especially made for the television production purpose. Background dancers are also filmed in the same detailed way as the lead performers. In order to substitute the sense of 'being there', close-up shots are often used in the live transmission to offer the emotional excitement. Close-up shots bring a personal and emotional response from the audience, as Lury states, *'The frequent proximity of the face and the emotions displayed means that the close-up on television is both sensational and, oddly perhaps, mundane'* (Lury,

2005: 30). In addition, random things were put on TV in the early NYG such as table tennis and tea cups on the table, but filming any object in today's NYG has further meanings and indications of something else. These examples are not just the outcomes of the development of technology, but also the progresses in making things more televisual over the years.

The professionalism has been emphasized more and more in recent year's NYG, which puts a barrier between the audience and their participation in the programme. This can be linked to Kellner's theory that *mise-en-scene* in each kind of spectacle keeps the audience in the passive position as a consumer, as the impressive and distant entertainment spectacle is unattainable and even intimidating for the audience. Kellner suggests that the *mise-en-scene* of television entertainment transforms the world into a spectacle that can only be enjoyed passively as a consumer, as he describes, 'Following the logic of spectacle entertainment, contemporary television exhibits more hi-tech glitter, faster and glitzier editing, computer simulations, and, with cable and satellite television, a diverse array of every conceivable type of show and genre' (Kellner, 2002: 6-7). As it is confirmed both by the critics and the interviewees, nothing should go wrong in the evening gala, as NYG holds the highest expectation from the people. But if the NYG is too perfect, the evening gala will appear distant.

#### **(4) 'Star-making Factory' VS 'Star Follower':**

A shift has been noticed in NYG's role from being the 'Star-making Factory' to becoming a 'Star Follower' over the years. In the early years during the 1980s when the NYG used to be the one and only exclusive live entertainment variety show in China, it is no exaggeration to say that NYG can transform an ordinary person to a popular celebrity overnight if they are given the chance to perform on the NYG stage. In other words, the NYG used to be compared to the star-making factory in granting the dreams of the stars-to-be. This is especially the case with the singers whose songs are first premiered in NYG before they become widely known in the market, although some

comedians also become widely-known overnight such as the old face comedian Zhao Benshan. This powerful effect of NYG is mainly caused by its huge viewership across the country concentrated on one single evening: the New Year's Eve.

Take the *mise-en-scene* of pop song (1987:\*30) as an example: Fei Xiang became the biggest super star in China overnight. This handsome young man with blue eyes and big curly hair (he was born to an American father and a Chinese mother) was dressed in tight trousers and red biker's jacket and did 80s fashionable dance moves while singing his first hit song 'A Fire in Winter' under the colorful disco ball lighting, which suddenly transformed the NYG studio into a fashionable night club. The colourful and changeable lighting matched very well with the melody and the dance move of the singer, which created a powerful and lively atmosphere in the live studio. At the beginning of the opening-up and economic reform era, the practice of stage setting and performer working closely together was very new and exciting to the Chinese audience. Fast cutting and zooming were used to match the fast pace of this pop song. Before carrying on his second hit song 'The Cloud of Hometown', Fei Xiang made a short speech to express his home-sick emotion for the mainland, as it was the first time he returned to his motherland mainland China after moving to Taiwan. Nothing was on stage except the singer and his microphone to focus on him and his performance alone. Under the slow paced rhythm and patriotic lyrics, close-up shots on the singer's face, especially his eyes, were used frequently to not only enhance his home-sick emotion while singing this patriotic song at the personal level, but also reassert the ideological message of reunion with the motherland at the national level. As Butler suggests, the close-up of the performer's face at the end offers the audience to experience the performer's mental and emotional expression and activity at a close level (Butler, 2009: 48). In this way, the theme of the song also fits very well with the theme—the reunion between Taiwan and mainland. This is how the NYG combines the popular culture with the ideology through its *mise-en-scene*. Soon after that year's NYG, his songs were played everywhere in the country, his dance moves were imitated by the young people, and his dressing style was considered as the leading fashion at that time.

Only through ordinariness can media ritual be felt. An ordinary person is not ordinary any more after being seen on TV as a celebrity. What transforms this person from an ordinary citizen to an on-screen celebrity is the media ritual. Right after the 1987 NYG, Fei Xiang's singing career launched, and he experienced the magical transformation from a nobody to a high-profiled celebrity by NYG. This phenomenon is considered by Couldry as the effect of the media ritual to transform 'from something merely personal into something special, something representative' (Couldry, 2003: 122). Through this process, TV's power is enhanced by the fact that it can 'magically' transform ordinary people into celebrity. Hence, media rituals seem to affirm the shared experience of witnessing an individual's transformation from a member of public to a celebrity on screen, but only makes the gap between 'media people' and 'ordinary people' bigger and clearer.

Similarly, Zhang Mingmin, the first HK singer who performed in NYG as early as 1984 has also gained national influence with his song 'My Chinese Heart'. As indicated by its name, this song expresses his never changing love for his motherland China, no matter where he is. The key elements of its mise-en-scene were shown as follows: Dressed in the Chinese tunic suit and long scarf, the singer expressed the strong affection for the motherland China and his proud Chinese identity through the patriotic lyrics, the expressive body languages, and attentive facial expression. To concentrate on capturing and dramatizing this emotion, there were no background dancers, no props and no images on the video wall on the stage, except the singer himself. The image of the performer was slowed down and the rhythm of the editing roughly coincided with the beat of the music. The mechanics of the production such as the cameras, the wires, and autocue were made evident in the performance, to include the TV audience to witness the evening gala as well as its production. This is another patriotic song that won the national popularity at that time which not only promoted the singer but also the ideological influence.

It is widely known that new face performers have the chance to become famous right after their exposure on the NYG stage. For this very reason, it is harder and harder for the NYG directors to decide which new face performers will be put on stage every year. According to Ni, Ou and Shan, many new face performers are queuing for a place in NYG nowadays, not knowing whether they will be selected or not. It is common that the performers have to queue for half a year and some have been on the waiting list several years in advance (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 338). In this intensive competition, while all the stars-to-be are desperate to show their faces in NYG, the directors are also having a difficult time in deciding the new stars every year due to the very limited space in this four-hour show. New face performers are still introduced in every NYG, but for some reason, it is harder and harder to create new stars in recent years. This may be because all the chief directors in NYG know one thing: NYG can create new stars, but NYG needs the old stars even more to promote the show by attracting the audiences. New stars may come and go depending on their luck and talent, but including the old high-profiled stars such as Zhao Benshan, Feng Gong, and Yin Xiumei has been a 'must' in every NYG to guarantee its highlights. It is obvious in the 1991 NYG that the already established celebrities and repeated old songs dominated the performance schedule. Later on, many songs and their singers such as (1995:\*21) were the winners of the best sold pop music of the past year (1994), with the title '94 New Generation' shown at the corner of the screen during the performance.

In recent years, not only does the NYG prefer the established celebrities to the new stars, but also it prioritizes popular songs which are already successful in the market over the new songs which are not heard by the public before its premiere in NYG. Compared with the successful situation in the 1980s when several hit songs emerged from one single NYG, only one children's song (1996:\*4) became popular among the audience after its premiere in NYG. By 1997, the amount of the repeated old songs had already exceeded far more than the amount of the newly created songs. For example, the

soundtrack of a very popular TV drama ‘Shui Hu Zhuan’ (水浒传) was performed in the 1998 NYG (1998:\*32). As for its mise-en-scene, wide shots were mainly used to include both the singer at the front and the footage from the TV drama played on the video wall at the back. Together with the drama footage, the mise-en-scene was made busier with the lyrics scrolling on the screen, the NYG hotline for the audience to vote for their favorite performance at the bottom of the screen, the insert of the text ‘live broadcast’ and ‘the 1998 NYG’ on the side of the screen, next to the animated red lantern (Chinese New Year symbol) and tiger (according to the Chinese zodiacs, 1998 was the Year of Tiger) at the corner of the screen. This shows that NYG is closely connected with the popular culture in the Chinese society. Some songs can still achieve success after its performance in the NYG, such as the song (1998:\*14). However, they are normally performed by the established celebrities such as Faye Wong and Na Ying (the singers of 1998:\*14) rather than by the new stars. Gradually, the role of NYG at that time had already shifted from a star-making factory in establishing new artists and classic songs, to a celebrity-follower in repeating the popular songs that have already been proven successful before. This significant shift may have been caused by the increasing competition in the Chinese TV market after the further reform and opening-up policy (改革开放) under the vibrant market economy in the ever globalised world.

This situation satisfies neither the new stars-to-be or the established celebrities. In terms of the new stars-to-be, they rarely have the overnight-fame experience like in the 1980s. Since the end of 1990s, most of them are put onto the NYG stage by sharing one performance together with many others, and they have to leave the stage before the audience can remember their faces. Also, their performances cannot impress the audience either due to the fact that the songs and comedies nowadays are produced in a highly commercial environment. However, this discouraging climate does not seem to stop the new stars-to-be from trying. Despite of showing their faces only for few minutes in front of the national audience, they still do not want to give up this great opportunity. After all, the NYG is still the biggest annual TV event in China dedicated

to the biggest Chinese festival. In the perspective of the established celebrities, they cannot sing the songs they like anymore in NYG and it is harder and harder for them to sing on their own without sharing a song with the many stars-to-be. Most singers do not like to share a song with many others, as this new arrangement of NYG tends to drive away the interest of the singers. The time has passed when one singer Li Guyi used to sing five songs on her own in one show in the early days (1984:2\*28\*37\*38\*39). As Ni, Ou and Shan reveals, this situation makes many old face singers such as Na Ying and Teng Ge'Er change their attitude towards NYG from 'caring a lot' at the beginning to 'not caring at all' today (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 346). The situation has changed: In the past, if one wants to be famous, he/she should perform in NYG. Today, if one wants to perform in NYG, he/she should be famous already. Even though new stars are bringing new songs and comedies to NYG every year, their influence cannot be compared with the sensation in the early NYG.

## ***Chapter 8: New Year's Gala—The Ideologies***

### **(1) Official Chinese Culture VS Regional Chinese Culture:**

Official Chinese culture, as indicated by the term, refers to the most typical and representative part of the Chinese culture that is commonly known by the public. It is more formal and more authoritative. NYG, as the annual national TV event especially dedicated to the celebration of the Chinese New Year with all the Chinese, exhibits the official Chinese culture explicitly. It is shown in the speaking of standard Mandarin, the Chinese history and culture, the Chinese traditional clothes, and the main traditions and customs that are widely shared among the Chinese people, such as the family reunion on the New Year's Eve, the moon calendar, and the Chinese zodiac, despite of all the regional differences. Although China covers 9.6 million square kilometers across different climate zones, there are no different time zones available in the country. Instead, the whole China shares one time, that is, the 'Beijing Time', which is stressed more than once in NYG, especially during the New Year Countdown. The reason to stage the official Chinese culture is to show the common culture shared among the Chinese, just like the Chinese New Year itself, on which NYG is based.

The regional Chinese culture, on the other hand, is more diversified. By combining all the small kingdoms from ancient dynasties, China was reunited and the P.R. China was founded in 1949. This means that China not only has the history of 5000 years which has shaped the Chinese culture with different characteristics over the time, but also contains 34 administrative regions, of which 23 provinces, 4 municipalities, 5 autonomous regions, and 2 special administrative regions. Each region has its certain distinctive features. Apart from the regional differences among the ethnic majority Han Chinese, the difference is even more obvious among the 55 ethnic minorities in China, in terms of their own language, history, culture, religion and costumes, etc. In NYG, the regional Chinese culture is mainly shown in the different dialects in comedies, special traditional costumes, and unique performing styles in folk songs and ethnic dances. The

reason to stage the different regional Chinese culture is to include the nation-wide audiences in this collective New Year celebration experience through NYG.

Every Chinese Lunar New Year, NYG tries to stage the regional Chinese culture in one way or another, along with the official Chinese culture. For example, the Chinese opera (1986:\*19) was made into an interesting comedy by showing the different regional culture and language in China, as the opera singers cannot understand each other when they used different regional dialects to sing the opera. To make it understandable to the audience, lyrics and subtitles were provided at the bottom of the screen during performance. This kind of creation made the standard Chinese opera in NYG more appealing. What's more, the New Year occasion was also mentioned in the opera, which made the time in the opera performance the same as the time in reality. This not only emphasized television's function as the calendar for the society, but also created a shared intimacy and experience between the NYG and the audience.

Sometimes, different provincial TV stations also provide performances with their regional features for NYG and their mise-en-scenes are shown in the following examples: the acrobatics performance (1991:\*6) where different groups of acrobatics were presented in slow motions to magnify the details of the acrobatic movements under the Chinese folk music; the song and dance performance (1991:\*17) where performers were dressed in traditional folk costumes and portrayed the various working scenes of the farmers and workers with relevant props to give the vivid image; And the special talent performances (1991:\*16; 1991:\*43) where people from different parts of China were showing their extraordinary skills such as creating paper-cut art with eyes covered and designing clothes in one minute without using scissors, thread and needles. With the presenter explaining and guiding the audience, the performances were taking place among the auditorium so that the audience can witness the special talent in the closest distance. Tight close-up shots were used from different angles to give the best view to the TV audience for each movement. Four girls were singing and dancing on

stage as background to bring up the mood and atmosphere of the talent performance taking place among the auditorium. Here, the importance between stage and auditorium was reversed for the TV camera, as the main performance took place among the auditorium.

Also, the 1996 NYG was held in three different venues in Beijing, Shanghai, and Xi'An and this was shown in its mise-en-scene. As the presenters emphasized, the live satellite link technology was used in this NYG to join the simultaneous performances live from three different places under the same topic, which aimed to show the different regional culture in different parts of China. For example, the sketch comedy 'A Missing Wallet' (1996:\*9) was a serial of comedies performed by three different groups of comedians one after another in the three difference venues. All the comedies shared the same story plot to portray how the different culture, behaviors and characters of the people from these different regions in China handle the same situation differently. The regional dialect, the regional dressing style and typical characters of the people were all included in each comedy. The studio audience can watch other venues' performances live through the big video walls installed in each venue. As for the TV audience, they were provided with the same view through a wide establishing shot from the back of the auditorium to show that the studio audiences were watching the live broadcast on video wall, before the camera zoomed in gradually until the images from the video wall was cut to full screen for the TV audience.

The presenter's statement once expressed it clearly, 'We are all the sons and daughters of China and Chinese New Year is our biggest festival of the year and the Chinese traditional culture is something we have in common, no matter where you come from'. This message brings together the Chinese people all over the world who share the common Chinese culture in the centre of the NYG. In the 1985 NYG, presenters at that time spoke Mandarin with regional accents. Nowadays, all the presenters speak perfect Mandarin. The folk songs and Chinese operas were the dominant performance genres in

the early NYG during the 1980s, with most of them performed in their regional dialects. This is not the case anymore today, as most of the regional performances are performed in Mandarin. The ‘CCTV’ accent with its characteristic standard Putonghua (普通话) still dominates in the Chinese television. This is especially important for the big national events like NYG. Lury points out, ‘although acousmatic voices are increasingly diverse in television, voices that “speak for” channels at times of national mourning or celebration tend to be recognizably similar in terms of class, pace and pitch’ (Lury, 2005: 64).

Nevertheless, the regional Chinese culture with diversities still exists in NYG. The regional culture performances mainly exist in: ethnic song and dances, pop music from HK and Taiwan, regional Chinese operas and folk dances and sketch comedies. As recent as the 2006 NYG, provincial TV presenters (including those from HK, Taiwan and Macau) took the role of the ‘New Year messengers’ and gave New Year greetings to the audience on behalf of their provinces between the performances. Each provincial TV presenter embedded the New Year wishes in the form of Chinese riddles describing the distinctive regional culture and characteristics of each province. In the early NYG during the 1980s, there used to be many regional folk songs, Chinese operas and pop music performed in Southern dialects, which was represented by the co-hosts and performers from HK in the 1985 NYG. Later on, well-known presenters from HK, Taiwan and Singapore hosted the 1992 NYG together with their mainland counterparts and brought the regional performances from HK, Taiwan and Singapore to the NYG through live transmission. Nowadays, performances based on Northern Chinese culture are more dominant on the NYG stage. The North-Eastern farmers with their distinctive dialect and behaviors are a common subject in the NYG sketch comedies and the folk song and dance featuring the North-Eastern styled Yangge (秧歌) with their typical costumes and props are widely used in the NYG performances.

It is worth noting that compared with Southern Chinese dialects, Northern Chinese dialects are very close to Mandarin and therefore it can be understood by more people in China. As Li states, ‘NYG expresses the core value of “national reunion” through the medium of the standard Mandarin speech’ (J. Li & Q. Li, 2006: 207). As a result, Northern Chinese culture is more portrayed in NYG, which makes the representation of all the regional cultures difficult. As Zhou explains, ‘The Northern dialects are more similar to Mandarin and Northern regions share the similar New Year traditions and customs’ (Zhou, 2007: 183). Zhang studied the audience ratings of the 2005 NYG in each part of China: Northwest China: 49%, Northeast China: 47%, North China: 46%, East China: 34%, Central China: 32%, Southwest China: 29%, and South China: 18% (W. Zhang, 2006: 143). Seen from the seven geographical areas in China, three areas (Northeast China, North China, and Northwest China) had relatively high audience rating for NYG. It can be speculated that the influence of the Northern Chinese culture can be one of the reasons behind the different audience ratings in different regions in China. About this, the NYG’s staging director Chen Yan comments, ‘*The different provinces in China are like different countries in Europe. There are big differences in their culture and custom*’ (Appendix E). Each region in China has their dialects, culture and different traditional customs. As a result, this makes the representation of all the regional cultures difficult.

## **(2) The Traditional VS The Popular:**

Cultural values and cultural significance (such as the conventions of dressing and hair style of the related culture) form an important part of television style which cannot be ignored in the discussion of its mise-en-scene. Butler points out, ‘Stylistic description, thus, is not just a description of techniques in individual shots. Rather, it is always a matter of placing those techniques in broader contexts’ (Butler, 2009: 4). Although there are significant variations in some regions, the general traditions in the New Year celebration in China mainly include: making dumplings, gathering with the family, setting off fireworks, putting up Chinese paper-cuts and couplets on the windows and

doors, doing folk performances such as dragon dance and Yangge dance, and watching NYG with the family as a newly formed folk custom. As the annual TV show especially dedicated to the celebration of the Chinese New Year, NYG is full of the signs and symbols of the Chinese traditional culture, which are expressed in its mise-en-scene: the red and gold New Year theme color shown in set design, the animated Chinese paper-cut projected on the stage, the Chinese traditional costume Qipao (旗袍), the red lantern as the studio decoration, the sound of the firework, and the Chinese couplet making by the presenters, etc. In short, all the New Year traditions are explicitly shown in this entertainment variety show. Indeed, the Chinese New Year itself comes from the ancient tradition dated back thousands years ago, and therefore the old traditions and customs are expected in NYG; Otherwise, it is not the Chinese New Year as we know anymore. As the former head of CCTV Overseas Centre Zhao Yuhui concludes, '*The New Year's Gala bears a strong sense of traditional Chinese culture heritage*' (Appendix D).

Chinese traditional culture is also shown in the NYG performances: the Chinese folk song and dance, the Chinese opera, martial art performance, the dumpling making plot in the comedies, and other traditional art forms such as story-telling performances. Starting from the opening scene, the NYG contains as much Chinese traditional culture as possible. Take the mise-en-scene of the animated opening scene of the 2005 NYG as an example: Under the Chinese folk music (mostly heard in the Chinese New Year), a golden (showing royalty) phoenix (the holy mythical bird from the ancient Chinese culture) was flying from the sun, over a lotus flower (showing prosperity), and then across the festive city before landing on the CCTV building. While several red lanterns (showing happiness and festive) on the right hand side were swinging with gold coins (showing good fortune), the screen cut to the live NYG studio where audiences were cheering and applauding happily. With the big red stage curtain rolling up, many dancers in golden phoenix costumes were revealed in dance position. The performers started to dance once the music was played while the title 'the 2005 CCTV NYG'

appearing on the screen. All of them were the typical signs from the Chinese traditional culture.

Apart from just forming a certain aesthetic media product, *mise-en-scene*, to a further level, can also construct meanings through its use of visual codes and conventions. It is said that 'A media text is not only constructed using a media language, but the codes which are chosen to also convey certain information' (Selby & Cowdery, 1995: 4). This is because we all take a certain cultural knowledge to a visual image and our reading of it will be affected by the type of cultural knowledge we possess. All the signs in NYG are directly linked to the traditional culture that shared among the Chinese people. It is based on this common knowledge that NYG creates the certain *mise-en-scene* to give the traditional festival look and feel. However, certain meanings are only produced in certain context and we cannot separate them from the overall picture. In a different context other than NYG, these individual signs will mean different things: lotus flower can also show purity in painting, while red can mean energy and heat. These signs make sense only when they are considered together with other elements, as Gibbs concludes, 'It is worth remembering from the outset that these elements are most productively thought of in terms of their interaction rather than individually—in practice, it is the interplay of elements that is significant' (Gibbs, 2002: 26).

Also, the Chinese traditional culture is often portrayed in the *mise-en-scene* of song and dance performances: the singers and dancers are dressed in the traditional folk costumes (usually consist of a high-collar top and wide cropped pants in bright colors such as red, green or floral prints), doing the folk dances (mostly Yangge moves in which crowds of people dance together in a line or in a circle and swing their bodies to the festive country folk music) with props such as red silk ribbons, dancing fans, waist-drums and trumpets, to express happiness, luck and prosperity. Taken from a Chinese proverb, the title of the 2003 NYG opening song and dance (2003:\*2) was named 'Good News Make Noise', in which many kids were dressed in the traditional costumes, jumping and

cheering loudly and happily to the festive folk music. This shows the Chinese traditional way of celebrating the New Year in ‘busy, loud, and noisy’ manner, which is expressed in most of NYG’s opening song and dances. Presenters and performers often embed the traditional Chinese values in their speeches and New Year wishes to the audience. For instance, traditional values such as ‘good health to the elderly and good achievement to the young’ are usually expressed in the song lyrics. In the 2000 NYG, presenters mentioned the old Chinese idiom that ‘We Chinese people think good thing should happen in pairs’. Therefore, many couples married in 2000, as it was the year of Dragon, which is the traditional zodiac symbol containing all the optimistic and propitious meanings. In this way, NYG presents a vivid picture of the Chinese New Year by transferring the New Year traditions and customs onto the NYG stage.

It can be said that the popular culture staged in NYG shows the shifts in the Chinese society in the past two decades. The NYG presenters’ outfits had always been considered as the latest fashion in China. To some extent, what is shown in NYG can indicate what is the most popular and fashionable trend of the year, which constructs some of the key elements in NYG’s mise-en-scene—from big shoulder pads to shirt dresses, from the Chinese tunic suits to evening suits with bow tie. Having the pop singers (especially those from HK and Taiwan) to perform the pop music every year is one of the main practices to include the popular culture in NYG. What is popular in the Chinese society has also been portrayed in the NYG comedies, such as the introduction of mobile phones, game shows, online dating, foot massages, and laptops, etc. The representation of the popular culture in NYG is also achieved by inviting the TV stars from the most popular TV drama ‘*The Journey to the West*’ (西游记) to perform with live studio interaction (1988:\*41). The well-known actors were dressed in their symbolic costumes with the props exactly as seen on TV. Under the familiar soundtrack of the TV drama, the stars walked onto the stage while shaking hands with the front row audiences who were cheering and waving with balloons in their hands upon their arrival. As a common gesture in NYG, the stars gave New Year greetings to all the audiences before their performances.

The traditional and the popular are well mixed in NYG. This is achieved through its *mise-en-scene*: the combination of modern and traditional decors, the Western suits in the Chinese stand-up comedies, the patriotic song with the modern dancing style, and the traditional Chinese opera performed in modern language with a humorous touch. With the help of the technology nowadays, Chinese traditional culture is staged even more effectively through the advanced production equipment and the multi-functional stage. For instance, one of the key elements of the *mise-en-scene* of the 2008 NYG was: the animated red lanterns with different motions were projected on the stage, providing a variety of backgrounds for different performances. An obvious reason behind this combination of the traditional and the popular is to offer more varieties in the evening gala for the diverse Chinese audience with different professional, cultural and age background. As all the three interviewees for this project discussed, the traditional cultural performances aim at the elderly audience, while the popular cultural performances target the young audiences. Having both of them together in NYG is a gesture to take care of different audience groups so that everyone can find something they like in this one single show on the New Year's Eve.

Nevertheless, by observing the performance genres throughout the NYG history, this thesis noticed that there has been a consistent decline in the number of the traditional cultural performance in the NYG over the years. Traditional cultural performances such as Chinese opera, Story-telling, Shuanghuang and ballads have been cut down more and more in NYG. In the early NYG such as the 1988 NYG, most of the songs performed in NYG were either folk or Chinese opera, with a few pop music performances. Nowadays, the situation is the other way round. This shift may be caused by the fact that NYG attempts to attract more young audiences in the intensive market competition by including more popular culture on the stage. The pop song and dance performed by stars from HK and Taiwan is another representation of the popular culture in NYG. Since the first NYG, the high-profiled pop stars from HK and Taiwan have been invited to

perform in front of the mainland audience. In addition, having them perform in NYG is also an effective way to promote the ideology such as 'We are all Chinese' through their performances and their 'missing motherland' speeches after the performance.

However, it is important to emphasize that symbolic representations of the Chinese traditional culture have always been in the NYG mise-en-scene: the red and gold theme colour, red lanterns, Chinese paper-cut and couplets, the Chinese folk props, the traditional poems and idioms in presenters' speeches, and the traditional costumes dressed by the performers. For instance, the outdoor game 'Bull Fighting' (1992:\*24) was held in a countryside in Shanxi and broadcast live to the national audience on the New Year's night. As a traditional New Year game for the locals, two groups of local farmers were wrestling against each other inside a big wooden bull on a small river bridge and the defeated team was pushed into the cold winter river. As for the key elements of its mise-en-scene, an on-location reporter was explaining the game to the audience by standing among the crowded villagers who were standing at the end of the bridge. The loud and exciting cheering from the crowd overrode the voice of the reporter. Long shots were mainly used to show the audience the overall picture and the general atmosphere of the game. As Selby & Cowdery state, long shots can create context and public distance (Selby & Cowdery, 1995: 58). As it was filmed outdoor live in the evening, extra lighting was set up outdoor and the loud and noisy sound from the exciting crowd was recorded to maximize the 'live' feeling. To inform the audience with New Year related knowledge, the meaning of the word 'Year' in Chinese was explained in text during the game in terms of its origin, background, and customs, which scrolls from right to left across the bottom of the screen. To give greetings to the farmers specifically, the text 'Happy New Year to all the farmers in the country' was shown on the screen on top of the live coverage of the game at the end. In this performance, the regional culture and traditional culture is explicitly shown and enhancing each other on the New Year occasion in an attractive way.

In his interview, the staging director Chen Yan states,

*'New Year's Gala contains many fixed signs and symbols which cannot be taken away despite of many critical comments. This is why many people criticise that New Year's Gala has many old elements. But it is a New Year celebration, a ceremony, which cannot be changed through innovation. For example, when you buy Chinese couplets to put up around the door frame, you get the couplets in red and golden colour like everyone else. If I give you a blue or green couplet, no matter how pretty it is, do you want it? ... Yet red is the major colour of our traditional culture. This is something that we cannot change'* (Appendix E).

There may be two reasons why red and gold colours are explicitly shown in the NYG's mise-en-scene: in the animated pictures projected on the big screen, the props of song and dance performances, the performers' costumes, the stage curtain, the posts around the studio, the lighting, and even in the text inserts. First of all, the combination of red and gold colour comes from the original Chinese traditions such as paper-cuts, couplets, lanterns, fireworks, and costumes. Secondly, it is also the colour of the Chinese national flag which appears in NYG very often for the nation building purpose and patriotic themes. In this way, the ideology is embedded in the mise-en-scene of NYG, which shows how certain mise-en-scene can indicate relevant ideologies. Another example is the New Year tradition of 'spending the New Year's Eve together with the family', which is highly promoted in NYG. In the 2005 NYG, presenter Zhou Tao announced the key word for the New Year was 'Going Home' and that everybody should go home for the family reunion on the special New Year occasion. Based on this traditional culture, not only song and comedies are frequently dedicated to the people who cannot join their family on the New Year due to work duties such as army soldiers, the theme of 'we are all Chinese' is also enhanced at the same time by expressing the 'motherland reunion' homesick emotion of the Chinese people in HK, Taiwan and Macau in almost every NYG. Therefore, the emphasis on the Chinese traditional culture also promotes the official Chinese culture.

Hence, NYG has its own style by blending the global trend into the Chinese traditional culture. This is the reason why the NYG cannot easily change its style, despite of being criticized as ‘old-fashioned’. As Chen Yan argues:

*‘Talking about old-fashioned, it depends on what you want to express. The so-called old-fashioned comes from the fact that the audience sees too often of these traditional symbols and signs. But as a matter of fact, they cannot be rejected. When you are put in an old environment every year, it is very easy to feel in this way, and as the New Year’s Gala production team, we feel the same. But what can we change? Setting off fireworks on the New Year’s Day is old-fashioned, but we still have to do it nowadays as a tradition dated back to ancient times. It is the same reason with the busy and loud opening scenes and the New Year midnight countdown, as all these features come from the tradition of the Chinese New Year celebration that has been carried on over hundreds of years....There is a set operating procedure in every medium’* (Appendix D).

Although Chen Yan also feels that the NYG appears old-fashioned, he does not think this particular style can be changed easily, as these traditional symbols and signs cannot be taken away from NYG. Otherwise, there will be no New Year feeling on the Chinese New Year.

### **(3) Common Themes that have not been changed:**

When analyzing the millennium night relayed by the BBC which presented a day of continuous programming with a series of different ‘live’ midnights from around the world, Lury suggests, ‘The televising of public events represents a self-conscious attempt by broadcasters to produce “History”, to mark and in some sense organise public events so that they become meaningful and comprehensible to the audience’ (Lury, 2005: 128). In this sense, the meaning and function of NYG certainly exceeds its initial task of New Year celebration. The potential of broadcasting works as a unifying force, pulling together individuals, families and groups into a national whole. In this way, television becomes another tool in the construction of the nation state. This power

of television is naturalised through liveness, which makes the audience believe television is the irreplaceable authority giving access for anyone who wants to be connected to the society as a whole. In this sense, Jane Feuer suggests that liveness is an ideology (Feuer, 1983). Feuer uses the term ‘ideology’ to refer to the taken-for-granted way of seeing, which is different from the ‘ideology’ promoted in NYG meaning ‘ideas’, ‘messages’, or ‘themes’ in this thesis. Based on this special potential of television, NYG, apart from just being an entertainment show to celebrate the Chinese New Year, also works as an important institution where national identity, social moral standards, and public education are established and enhanced.

Critics claim that ‘mise-en-scene was the vehicle by which themes were expressed, the visual representation of character, theme, and ultimately, the director’s attitude to his subject’ (Keathley, 2006: 90). NYG has a set purpose—to unite the peoples of China at this special time of year, and to promote the current ideas and ideologies. These aims are reflected in the composition of each show. The pattern of the programmes consists of long performances linked by short but frequent presentations and factual items in between. But many of the entertainment items also carry ideological messages: sketch comedies often portray and discuss the everyday realities of life, while the lyrics of the song and dance often contain and respond directly to the ideological messages.

As Chen Yan suggests, *‘I think, whether it is style or content, in the case of television programmes such as New Year’s Gala, what is important is to express its opinions and themes’* (Appendix E). As discussed previously, there are several common themes which widely exist throughout the NYG history (the changes taking place in China, the motherland China, the improvement of the farmers’ lives in the countryside, the selfless spirit of the army soldiers, the great leadership of the government, and the ‘we are all Chinese’ theme applying to both the ethnic minorities in the mainland and the Chinese in HK, Taiwan, Macau and Overseas). Those common themes are interrelated and closely connected with each other, which are extended and developed based on the

subject of the Chinese New Year. In terms of the theme on the great changes taking place in Chinese people's lives, promoting the new look in the Chinese countryside has been an important part of the NYG comedy. For example, the topic of sketch comedy (1985:\*17) portrayed the big transformation taking place in the Chinese countryside at that time. As for its key mise-en-scene: The only prop on stage was an empty plastic basin. One comedian pretended to splash 'water' to the other comedian by holding the empty basin, while the other comedian acted as if he got wet through from the 'water' threw to him by holding his arms shivering from the 'water'. This is a typical example that due to the lack of props in the early production, imaginations of the audience were required more to understand the NYG comedy than today's comedy with fully equipped detailed props. During the coverage of the comedy performance on stage, the image of the laughing studio audience was frequently shown with short durations (2 seconds each on average) while the audio of the comedy conversation kept playing without interrupting the performance. It is a good way to attract and hint the TV audience that this programme is interesting as the studio audience seems to be very entertained.

Lasting for 8 minutes 9 seconds (a common duration for NYG comedies), the stand-up comedy (1996:\*22) described the significant improvement of the living quality by comparing today's China with its past. The mise-en-scene of the comedy itself has probably already demonstrated the big changes in the Chinese society: from comedians' Chinese tunic suits to Western suits, from usage of standing microphone to clip microphone, from live broadcast in the single CCTV studio in Beijing to the live two-way broadcast from three different venues in Beijing, Shanghai, and Xi'an. Twenty years after the launch of the NYG, this topic remains widely in the NYG comedies. The sketch comedy (2003:\*9) featured a country man becoming rich and all the big changes taken place in his poor old village. The key elements of its mise-en-scene were shown as follows: Standing on the staircase of the stage which was decorated with colourful light bulbs, the comedian expressed his gratitude for benefiting from the great leadership and policy in his local Northern Chinese dialect and poem-reciting style with expressive body languages such as wide open arms and eyes looking afar to show his

emotion fully. For instance, quite a few performances in the 1999 NYG alone (1999:\*2,\*12,\*17) were dedicated to the rapid development of China in recent years, as well as the great leadership and achievement of the government.

The theme on the motherland China is mainly shown in song and dance performances and its mise-en-scene. These patriotic song and dance performances are arranged throughout the evening gala: at the beginning, the middle and the end of the show. For example, following groups of kids running onto the stage together shouting out happily ‘Happy New Year’ (a common practice for the beginning of NYG), the patriotic song ‘This Is the Beautiful Motherland’ (1996:\*1) showed the beautiful Chinese landscape as the opening song and dance. To express the theme further, the same song was performed independently by three singers in three different venues (Beijing, Shanghai and Xi’an) at the same time. In each venue, there were many background dancers dancing in waltz around the singer and they were all dressed in ceremonious evening dresses. For the TV audiences, under the same song, the camera cut between the performances taking place in three different venues with texts indicating the location at the bottom of the screen (the coverage for other two subsidiary venues was provided by local TV stations: Shanghai Oriental TV and Shanxi Provincial TV). For the studio audiences, two videos walls were set up on the stage to bring the performances from other two venues together and live. In the 2002 NYG, arranged right before the New Year countdown occasion at the midnight, the patriotic song (2002:\*32) expressed how proud to be Chinese who are hardworking, wise, and intelligent. Dressed in different styles (one in Chinese traditional costume, one in fashionable dress and one in formal evening suit), the three singers sang one after another to share the song together. As for the background dancers, it was a diverse group: there were young girls dressed in red shots, kids, and ethnic minorities. Lasting for 3 minutes and 28 seconds (a common duration for NYG song and dance performances), the folk song (2007:\*6) described the nice Chinese country life. The singer was dressed in an evening dress and sang in soprano, while the many background dancers were dressed in folk costumes and doing folk dance in groups with red flag in their hands. Artificial smoke was created on stage

to give extra effect. As the background of the performers on stage, the video of the nice Chinese landscape and the vibrant Chinese culture with the international friends was played on the large video wall.

As a common style of the NYG *mise-en-scene*, these patriotic songs are performed by the old face singers (such as Yin Xiumei, Zhangye, and Li Guyi) who are dressed in ceremonious evening prom dresses and sing in folk or *Bel Canto* style, surrounded by many background dancers dressed in colourful costumes and doing contemporary dance with props. To portray the theme further, videos of the beautiful landscape of China and the Chinese leaders visiting industries and local homes are often played on the big video wall behind the performers. Lury proposes, ‘The function of these images is to encourage the audience to observe, witness and, perhaps, make judgements about the people, places, and situations being described’ (Lury, 2005: 19). All these features are working together to promote and enhance the theme effectively and expressively. Indeed, the NYG is a mixture of different entertainment and factual forms. The effort of promoting ideological themes and messages is shown in both the factual forms and in the entertainment forms which depict everyday life such as in sketch comedies and song and dances.

As it is explained previously, Chinese farmers have always been featured in every NYG, which are shown explicitly in the *mise-en-scene* of NYG. Performances such as folk song and dance (1991:\*17) portraying various working scenes of farmers and workers are widely seen in NYG. Dressed in traditional folk costumes (the symbolic outfits for farmers), different groups of background dancers followed one after another to depict various labour works (planting, harvesting, picking) with relevant props (hoe, reaping hook, baskets). Also, the Chinese farmers have been the main characters of the NYG comedies. In the traditional stand-up comedy style (comedians dressed in Chinese traditional robe and performed behind a table), comedy (1997:\*27) described how the farmers celebrate the New Year in their villages, and the fundamental changes taking

place in their daily lives. The farmer's folk costume (white sleeveless blouse with wide pants), the North-east regional accent, and the typical rural home setting such as red Chinese paper-cuts are all put onto the NYG stage. What's more, sometimes the farmer theme has further connotations. For instance, comedy 'Stories from Our Village' (2007:\*3) portrayed a farmer revisiting his hometown in the countryside after he got rich by working in the city. The ideology 'supporting the development in Western China' was also discussed and embedded in the comedy. To create an intimate interaction and bring the audience closer, the comedians started the performance by giving New Year greetings to the audience while talking from the auditorium among the studio audience to the stage.

As for the subject of the Chinese army soldiers, there are performances especially dedicated to them. Its mise-en-scene is shown as follows: In the 1985 NYG, a pre-recorded video was played on the screen in which the singer was singing to praise the spirit of the soldiers. Close-up shots were used extensively to portray their faces while standing firmly in the heavy snow guarding the safety of the country on the New Year when the rest of us were celebrating the New Year with family at home. As the army songs are included in almost every NYG, those military singers (such as Yan Weiwen and Yu Junjian who perform in their military uniforms with badges) have become the old faces in NYG. At the same time, some military songs have also become the classic tunes known by everyone (such as 'Some words from the heart'). As the technology and production skills improve over the years, background dancers dressed in army uniforms are added to the military songs by doing the military parade and dancing with national flags. The videos portraying the army soldiers as national heroes are also played on the big video wall behind the performers, such as in song and dance (2005:\*29 \*35). All these together were used to maximize the effect and therefore to promote the theme further. Sketch comedy is another common form to develop the army soldier theme. For instance, comedy (2005:\*4) was about the children and grand children paying New Year visit to their respectable grandfather who was an elderly communist party army soldier and war hero. In this way, the patriotic theme and the

military theme enhanced each other further on the Chinese New Year occasion. Brave war stories and the hard fighting for establishment of the P.R. China were also expressed in the comedy. Educational messages such as showing love and respect to the elderly people was also promoted in the comedy at the same time. As the comedy story took place at home, much more detailed props were provided on stage (coffee table, calendar, sofa, plants, chair, and TV set) to transform the stage into a domestic family home, compared with the very limited props in the early NYG comedies. To develop the army theme further, army-themed songs were usually arranged right after the comedy.

The 'We are all Chinese' theme is mainly expressed in the ethnic song and dance performances and the pop music from HK and Taiwan. In the early years during the 1980s, only one ethnic song and dance was performed in the NYG to show the exotic culture, and it was not often arranged at important time slots such as the beginning of NYG, the end of NYG and the midnight New Year countdown. It is since the 1990s that a new arrangement of the ethnic song and dance has been introduced in NYG: not only more ethnic song and dance performances are included, but also they are put at the important time slots. Ethnic minority performers dressed in the traditional costumes are arranged to stand around the presenters at the centre of the stage during the opening speech, the closure speech and the New Year countdown speeches. Take the *mise-en-scene* of the ethnic song and dance in the early NYG as an example: in the song 'Girls from Ali Mountain' (1984:\*23), HK singer sang this famous ethnic song while doing the minority dance with flower baskets in her hands. Dressed in minority costumes, four girls were dancing in a circle with the singer. This was the only performance equipped with background dancers in the 1984 NYG. Nowadays, the ethnic song and dance put all the 56 ethnicities together on stage in one performance under the name 'ethnic minorities'.

One of the most classic ethnic songs dedicated to the diverse culture from the 56 ethnic groups in China is called ‘Love My China’ (爱我中华), which is very often performed in many NYG. As its lyric sings, ‘56 ethnicities are like 56 flowers and 56 sisters and brothers who are one family’. The ideology is made more obvious when mixed into the ethnic song and dance. For example, the classic patriotic song ‘Chairman Mao is the Red Sun in Our Heart’ expressed the great leadership of the Chinese communist party, which has been performed several times by the Tibetan singers throughout the NYG history with the most recent performance in the 2007 NYG. As for the key elements of its mise-en-scene: The Tibetan performers were dressed in their traditional costume of wide sleeved loose garments, caps, sashes, boots and aprons. They sang this patriotic song together in both Mandarin and Tibetan language while dancing hand in hand in a circle in their traditional circle dance. This shows the gratitude from the ethnic minorities in China towards the government, who has made achievements and improved their lives in the project of the Western China Development. Also, the performance featuring the ethnic minorities is mainly song and dance, and there is only one stand-up comedy under this theme throughout the NYG history. The stand-up comedy ‘Ethnic Happiness’ (1992:\*29) was performed in Mandarin by two ethnic minority comedians, which was about practicing the pronunciation of the minority comedians’ Mandarin by playing word games and tongue twisters. Both comedians were dressed in their ethnic minority costumes (a long gown with a tilted front and a waistband but no buttons) and they performed in the auditorium by standing among the studio audiences. Their traditional singing and dancing were also performed in the comedy. The messages such as the happiness and harmony of all the ethnic minorities united in China were mentioned in the comedy. At the end of the comedy, the texts ‘New Year greetings to all the ethnicities in China’ were written across the screen to reassert the theme.

In terms of the performances given by high-profiled stars from HK and Taiwan, they are mainly song and dance performances, mostly pop music. Song (2006:\*2) was performed by three celebrity singers from mainland, HK, and Taiwan and a girl from Macau performing martial art. They were all dressed in Chinese traditional costumes.

The song was about all the Chinese share the same root and culture and they all love their origin to promote the ‘we are all Chinese’ theme. Similar to the situation in NYG ethnic performances, there is only one stand-up comedy (2006:\*24) performed by the Taiwanese comedians. The comedy was about practicing tongue twister as a basic skill for the stand-up comedians. The ideological lines such as ‘We are all Chinese’ were addressed by the Taiwanese comedians during the comedy. In 1993, celebrity presenters from HK, Taiwan and Singapore co-hosted the show with the mainland presenters again. They also brought their local performances to the NYG studio through satellite transmission. For example, in its opening speech, the presenters from HK, Taiwan, Singapore and mainland gave New Year greetings to the audience in turn by expressing the happiness of the Chinese New Year which is celebrated all over the world no matter where you come from, as we share the same root, culture and origin. In this way, NYG promotes the themes by staging them in its mise-en-scene. As Sun states, the NYG communicates messages of patriotism and national unity by embedding them in entertainment (Sun, 2007: 191). Therefore, the mise-en-scene of NYG uses the values and characteristics of entertainment to realize the messages proposed in the factual elements.

#### **(4) The Portrait of the Crucial Moments:**

Although falling on different days every year according to the moon calendar, the Chinese New Year has been relayed by television since the early 1980s, which enables the Chinese people to witness the passing of the year together at midnight. Lury comments, ‘At the grandest scale, television marks the passing of years, and of each year—television’s relaying of seasons (Christmas, summer) echoes and confirms the passing of the real seasons for the television viewer’ (Lury, 2005: 98). Indeed, gathering together with the family and watching NYG at home on the Chinese New Year’s eve marks the beginning of the year for many Chinese. This symbolic once-in-a-year experience is enhanced by media ritual. Media rituals are practices to naturalise TV medium’s concentration of symbolic power, and to make people believe television is the

natural representatives of society's 'centre'. Couldry takes a critical view of media rituals in this power enhancing process, as he argues, 'Media rituals are the actions where such discourses take their most condensed and naturalised form; as such, they are a principal means through which the misrecognition of media power is reproduced' (Couldry, 2003: 46). In the case of NYG, media ritual is mainly shown in these crucial moments (the opening scene, the closure scene, the New Year countdown, and the theme slots). Under the effect of media ritual, ideologies are also promoted during these crucial moments in NYG.

In terms of the opening scene of the NYG, it is often shown in the *mise-en-scene* as follows: the loud and busy song and dance featuring the Chinese folk style with full of traditional signs and symbols. Usually, the presenters are dressed in fashionable outfits of the time, and they are packaged as celebrities in recent years. As NYG is an annual TV event especially dedicated to the celebration of the Chinese New Year, the presenters' opening speeches always address the happiness and excitement in welcoming the New Year, as well as the common Chinese traditional culture that is shared among the Chinese around the world. To express these special feelings on this special night, the NYG presenters have a particular speech style: many poetic words, rhetorical sentences, and Chinese couplets (as one of the Chinese New Year traditions) are used to describe the excitement and happiness of the upcoming New Year. Under the cheerful background music and warm audience applause, each presenter speaks a few sentences in turn before finishing the opening speech together at the end by giving New Year greetings to the audience.

As it is suggested previously, the common ideologies that are usually promoted during the opening scene of the NYG are: the 'we are all Chinese' ideology and the 'Chinese New Year' ideology. For example, in the 1995 NYG, Presenter Zhao Zhongxiang emphasized how important the Chinese New Year is, by saying 'Spring Festival is indeed a special festival. No matter where you are, and no matter how far away you are

from each other, all the Chinese will come back home to reunite on the Chinese New Year. It is only on this day that all the Chinese around the world celebrate the same thing'. As for the closure scene of the NYG, the end of NYG is often accompanied with the classic closure song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight'. Similar to the arrangement of the opening scene, the presenters appear together in making the closure speech with rhetorical words in poetic style, surrounded by all the NYG performers waving excitedly to the camera. Usually, a bird's eye view shot is made above the stage to cover the performers who are gathering together, waving, cheering and jumping happily in front of the camera. As balloons and glitter are falling everywhere in the show, the presenters announce the official ending of the evening gala by wishing great year ahead to the country and the people. Hence, similar ideologies are reinforced during the closure scene and even in the same way.

As far as the midnight New Year countdown is concerned, it usually takes place five minutes before the midnight. The key elements of its mise-en-scene are: Under the presenters' lead, the whole nation count down together by shouting out loud the seconds to the midnight, followed by the cheers and applauses. The big close-up of an animated clock that takes up the whole screen is shown not only to express the excitement of the countdown, but also to insert announcements of commercial sponsorships. In her case study of the BBC's coverage of the millennium night, Lury proposes, 'The broadcast is distinguished by the fact that "time" not only structures the programme, but is also the event it wishes to describe' (Lury, 2005: 138). The NYG, as a TV event especially dedicated to the celebration of the Chinese New Year, has excessive focus on time. Apart from the digital clock shown on the top of the screen and the analogue clock frequently filmed on the wall of the auditorium, the presenters also constantly tell us the time and discussing time passing, especially around the occasion of midnight countdown. Once the New Year has arrived, the sound of the bell ringing and firework is played, the colorful streamers and glitters are falling from the sky, and everyone in the studio are jumping and cheering happily. Song and dance performances are arranged before and after the countdown occasion to match with the celebration mood. The

presenters' New Year speech, looking back at the past year and looking forward to the New Year is an important, matching the meaning of the midnight countdown: the special occasion of transiting from the old year to the New Year. Similar to the arrangement of the opening and the closure scenes, the presenters appear together to make the speech with rhetorical words in poetic style, surrounded by all the NYG performers. It is a common practice for the broadcasters to welcome the new upcoming year by reflecting and looking back on the passing year. For the New Year celebration in 1996, the local NBC channel of Los Angeles broadcast a group of unidentified images accompanied by music in a montage that memorialized the year. By analyzing the New Year's Eve montages which have a high degree of abstraction in the image fragments in a weak thematic organization, Sobchack states, "History" here resolves itself into no grand narrative... No chronology, no linear temporality, dictates the editorial order of these images that mark the year's "historic" moments. Instead, images of people and events tend to adhere to each other in sporadic and ephemeral attachments that seem based on no consistent principles' (Sobchack, 2002: 99).

By describing a list of shots (a raging brush fire in Southern California, Hostages leaving a building, Bill Clinton speaking from a podium, Madonna dressed in the 1940s clothing, Boris Yeltsin dancing, a rooftop with people looking upward at a giant spaceship and Yankee ballplayers hugging each other), Sobchack studied the New Year's Eve montage which was a mixture of official and popular, high and low, historical and cultural events (Sobchack, 2002: 95). Although also listing the main events happened in the passing year, NYG celebrates the New Year in a different way: Firstly, events of the passing year are always stated by the presenters in their emotional and poetic speeches (mainly during the crucial moments such as the beginning, the countdown and the end of NYG), not in the form of images in a montage; Secondly, NYG focuses mainly on the serious achievement that made official contribution to the country (such as the successful return of Shenzhou IV Spaceship and the Olympic champions as national heroes), rather than a variety of subjects also including the popular culture and light entertainment (such as Madonna's performance in *Evita* and

the release of the film *Independence Day*) as in the NBC's New Year celebration; Thirdly, NYG mainly emphasizes on the domestic events happened inside China (such as the heavy snow in several provinces and the improvement of life in the Chinese countryside), not so much about the international events (such as the Japanese embassy hostage crisis in Peru and the former Russian president Boris Yeltsin dancing after his health recovery) as in the U.S. counterpart.

What is common in the beginning, the ending and the countdown moments is the celebration and emphasis of the liveness. Many techniques have been using in creating the vivid liveness, which composes an important part of the NYG mise-en-scene: the word 'live' inserted on the screen, the presenters repeating many times throughout the entire evening gala that 'Dear audience friends, you are now watching CCTV NYG LIVE', the on-screen clock in the studio showing the same time as ours at home, and the camera shots in one continuous take, etc. While greatly celebrating liveness, the charisma and media ritual effect of the evening gala also reach the top at the same time. Moreover, similar ideologies are promoted in the presenters' speeches at the New Year countdown with similar styles. Sometimes the Chinese leaders also participate in the NYG's New Year countdown, which makes the occasion even more special. For example, during the leaders' speeches at the New Year countdown in the 1990 NYG, a pan studio shot was often used to show the general studio environment. When being introduced by the presenters in exciting voice, the president and premiere of that time walked onto the stage from the entrance on the right hand side of the stage. Two cameramen were captured walking behind the leaders while filming the event. All the studio audience rose up from their seats and welcomed the leaders with warm cheers and applauses. After the speech, the president shook hands and exchanged some friendly conversations with the performers while passing the first row of the audience seats. They also waved to the model workers who sat at the back of the auditorium.

Certain theme slots are especially allocated to continue promoting the ideologies, which are handled in a systematic way. When it is in the form of studio interviews /activities, the ideology is often handled in a fixed order—Presenter’s introduction on a topic, studio interview/activity with guest about this topic, and song and dance performance promoting the topic further. For example, as for the theme slot in the 1995 NYG, presenter Ni Ping made a speech on China’s mother river Yellow River poetically and emotionally under the expressive background music. She then introduced the 99 sample tubes that were taken at exact the same time along the Yellow River from its origin. After that, she invited a group of people, who brought the samples from the Yellow River in their hometowns. They were a girl from Tibet, a girl from Inner Mongolia, and other seven people from the regions along the river. They were dressed in their distinctive traditional costumes, and introduced themselves in their local dialects while holding a pot in their arms. At the end, the old man who brought the end sample of the Yellow River shook hands with the Tibetan girl who brought the sample from the origin of the Yellow River. Ni Ping used an ancient poem to express the close relationship of all the ethnicities in China who are all brought up by the same mother river. With the exciting voice, Ni Ping gave best wishes to all the ethnicities in China. At the end, Ni Ping invited a group of students from Taiwan onto the stage. Ni Ping asked the Tibetan girl to give the pot of the Yellow River origin sample to a Taiwanese boy. Ni Ping emphasized the theme by saying, ‘we are all Chinese, and we are as close as a family!’ which brought Taiwan close to the mainland. The audience applause was mixed with her emotional tone. In this way, the ideology of ‘we are all Chinese’ is realised by joining together all the ethnicities as well as Taiwan with the mainland. Lasting for 4 minutes 25 seconds (a common duration for theme slot on average), this studio activity was followed by a pop song performed by a HK star which attracted many cheers and applauds from the studio audience as he walked from the auditorium to the stage. The studio was darkened except for a single spotlight shining at the centre of the stage where the HK singer stood. No background dancers or props were added to the performance. To focus on the HK singer and him alone, there was nothing on the stage except the singer himself. Dressed in evening suits, the singer sang to the graceful music with a microphone in his hand, as if it was part of his personal live concert. Smoke was used

on stage during the performance to create special visual effect. This is how mise-en-scene works to express the theme further.

As it is illustrated above, NYG has a particular system in portraying crucial moments to promote the ideologies. Just like a comedy from the 2005 NYG concludes, it is the typical four-step strategy used in NYG—bring the audience closer with touching speeches, recalling the story, looking at photos and playing emotional music. In the discussion the sound as music, Lury suggests, ‘Music colours, provides mood and atmosphere and imparts a “meaningfulness” (if not always a concrete meaning) to events and images seen on-screen’ (Lury, 2005: 71). This theme-developing strategy is also found in other CCTV programme such as the celebrity talk show ‘*Art and Life*’ (艺术人生), in which everything is made extra emotional and personal. This is an effective way to promote the ideologies by personalizing everything and bringing the audience closer. In this way, each type of crucial moment has its own fixed pattern and format, which has not been changed much throughout the history of NYG. This has restricted the innovation in NYG.

## ***Chapter 9: New Year's Gala—The People***

### **(1) Presenters' Presentation Style:**

Bonner claims that presenters speak on behalf of the programmes and they are embodiments of the programme's ethos (Bonner, 2003: 68). The presenters have played an important role throughout the history of NYG and their presenting style is an important part of the NYG mise-en-scene. Whether in the early period when their roles were not clearly defined, or in nowadays when they are treated like celebrities, the NYG presenters all have the crucial job of hosting the 4-hour national live show and linking everything together organically. In short, the role of presenters is indispensable in non-fiction TV shows, especially the live broadcast shows like NYG. The former chief director of NYG Huang Yihe believes the role of presenter is like a strand, which holds the loose pearls together (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 206). Based on the detailed observation of the presenting style of the NYG presenters, the presenting style can be divided into three periods: the informal period (1984-1993), the professional period (1994-1999), and the formal period (2000-2008). This is mainly the result of the development of the Chinese television and the production experience gathered in NYG in the past two decades. However, it is found that the presenting style of NYG in all three periods is characterized by three underlying features: rigid, ceremonious, and emotional. As a result, the feel and look of the presenting style has not fundamentally changed since the beginning of NYG, despite of the related development.

In the first period, the presenter's role was not clearly defined as nowadays, and the NYG needed somebody to organise the show and link the performances together. Famous and popular people at that time were asked to present NYG. Hence the famous comedians such as Jiang Kun were responsible for this job. There was no self-introduction upon their first appearance at the beginning of the show and no information was provided on the screen to tell the audience who they were. As a matter of fact, there was no such a term as 'presenter' in NYG at that time. Instead, they were considered as part of the production crews, helping with the stage preparation,

warming-up the studio atmosphere, sorting out the wires on the floor and fixing microphones. However, they all had background and experience in the broadcast media, such as working as film stars, radio announcers, stand-up comedians, and TV professionals, etc. Therefore, apart from hosting the show, most of the presenters in the first period also gave performances on stage such as comedies and songs. In terms of their costumes, the presenters have always been wearing the most fashionable outfits of the time.

Humour and real emotions were always considered very important in presenters' lines. For example, before introducing the next Chinese folk song (1986:\*28), presenter Wang Gang tried to sing the Chinese folk song in the European Opera style to make the audience laugh. The presenters' considerate interactions with the studio audience also brought the audience closer to the show. In the early NYG, presenters often asked the studio audience during the show how they felt and if they were tired. Sometimes links were created through the conversation and comedic plots between the presenters. For instance, each presenter in the 1990 NYG led a group of studio audience to compete with other teams by giving the performances. The subjects of challenges were given by a judge who decided which team won based on the performance. The performers, the presenters, and the studio audience were mixing together on stage as well as among the audience seats, celebrating the Chinese New Year. In this way, the NYG at that time looked a bit like a private party despite its ceremonious character.

Examples and key elements of *mise-en-scene* of the informal presenting style in this period are: the presenters announced the next performance by reading out from a wrinkled piece of paper in hand, they walked across the camera during the performance, and they made oral mistakes frequently. Also, the presenters and performers in this period did not speak and perform to camera. Instead, the presenters and performers faced to the studio audience, which distanced the TV audiences. All these characteristics of the presenters in the first period were formed based on the certain environment at that

time: TV sets were not widely spread in China as nowadays, the TV production equipments and facilities were not as advanced and the TV production skills and techniques were not as experienced. Like many other countries in the world at that time, this beginning period was an inevitable phase of the historical development of television. In the 1993 NYG, all presenters were dressed in fashionable day dresses. They changed their outfits during the evening gala. Humorous interaction between performers and presenters was a common way of starting a performance naturally. Also the presenters were often filmed sitting at the auditorium among the studio audiences and watching the performance, which is rarely shown today. Towards the end of the first period, the presenters started to speak to camera instead of to the studio audience like in the early years; the presenters were only linking and introducing the performance without doing other studio work such as warming up audience, sorting out the cable on the floor, or assisting in preparing the props on stage in the early years; the presenters handled the two-way live broadcast between the NYG studio and the outdoor location professionally by lifting up the right arm and pointing towards the video wall to direct audience's attention and asking questions to the location presenter on behalf of the audience.

The key characteristic of the presenting style in the second period (1994-1999) can be best described as professional. In this period, the presenter's role was clearly defined in NYG through their self-introduction at the beginning of the show with their names written at the bottom of screen. They did not have to take care of other jobs such as preparing for the stage and warming-up the studio audience. Also, their role appeared to be rigid when their emotional speeches were especially allocated at the beginning and end of the NYG and at the New Year countdown. Compared with the first period, the presenters in this period were more professional in hosting the live TV show. Direct address was applied in this period, which was effective in producing the sense of liveness in NYG. The presenters looked directly into the camera and talked in a personal way, just as if they were standing in front of you. However, the NYG presenters also lost the informal style from the first period. The leading TV director Yang Bo

thinks there are mainly two reasons for this rigid and ceremonious aspect of the style: *‘One reason is that they have different target audience groups, as some audiences are older while some are younger. Therefore they have to show basic respect to all of them. The other reason is that the Chinese New Year is a very important festival in China, and it is more appropriate to present in this way on this special occasion’* (Appendix C).

What’s more, hotline presenters were also introduced in the show together with the audience voting activity called ‘My Favorite New Year’s Gala Performance’, who are in charge of the audience hotlines and explaining the voting procedures to the TV audiences. Similar to the first period, performances sometimes followed one after another naturally without presenters’ links. The main presenters in this period were Ni Ping and Zhao Zhongxiang, with little changes over the years. Zhao Zhongxiang hosted 14 years’ of NYG and Ni Ping hosted 8 years. They are mainly known for the emotional style with its obvious body languages and dramatic intonations. Ni Ping is well known for her special technique in bringing out the audience’s tears through her emotional story-telling, and Zhao Zhongxiang is famous for his ceremonious and rhetorical expression. Their styles were so distinctive that they became the icon of NYG, and their speeches became a major part of the show.

For this emotional presenting style, Yang Bo and Chen Yan believe it comes from spontaneous comments. As the NYG’s staging director Chen Yan explains, *‘It is common for New Year’s Gala presenters to use their feelings and emotions when expressing the theme. This is a means, which I think is also a style. Most of the audience with life experience can still accept this presenting style. However, this particular presenting style may not be understood easily by the young generation’* (Appendix E). Also, the presenters adopted a typical style in their presenting with expressive body languages such as nodding head, putting emphasis on the key words, giving open arms, showing emotional faces, and dramatic intonations with pauses, etc. This is also expressed in the former head of CCTV Overseas Centre Zhao Yuhui’s interview:

*'I think the presenter's linking lines are pre-written beforehand. These lines are not their spontaneous statements on the scene, but something recited. The ability of the presenters is mainly about how to make the audience feel these recited pre-written lines are natural comments and spontaneous interactions. These presenters are professional in achieving this effect. They seldom do any spontaneous performance or interactions. Most of them act according to the scripts and they can not talk freely as the way they want' (Appendix D).*

It is hard for this entertainment variety show to attract the audiences with this rigid style and not to be taken as old-fashioned. As Zhao Zhongxiang reveals in his interview, the presenters were not allowed to make oral mistakes. Based on these regulations, Zhao Zhongxiang explains the reason behind is to guarantee the smooth running of the show as scheduled. For instance, the accurate midnight New Year countdown with the whole nation may be delayed and even missed if the presenter is doing something else out of the plan rather than following the tight schedule. It is also a responsibility they hold for the nation-wide audience. This idea is confirmed by Chen Yan, who emphasizes that the priority of NYG is to guarantee the smooth running of this big TV event, and it is not a place for the presenters to express their individuality and creativity. However, in this way, liveness is interrupted by the broadcast schedule which fails to deliver immediacy. Marriott points out, 'Such programmes tend to have running orders established and set in motion well before they air. It might therefore seem predictable that they would contain considerable quantities of non-live material, given their reasonably elaborate 'forestructuring' (Scannell, 1999: 29) by the broadcasters' (Marriott, 2007: 46). As a result, these strict requirements have caused a rigid, ceremonious and emotional impression on the NYG presenters, and on the NYG programme as a whole.

The characteristic of the presenting style in the third period (2000-2008) is mainly shown as formal. Although there are patriotic songs and educational comedies, the presenters and performers do not make as many emotional speeches as in the previous

period. Also, in this period, presenters usually discuss the topic of the upcoming performance in a casual personal style. Although it is a conversation between the presenters, they speak to each other by facing the camera frequently. This shows their professionalism in TV presenting and a skill to bring the TV audience closer. This is very different from the early NYG in the first period where the presenters seldom spoke to camera.

The presenting style is adopted according to the new era. Speech style such as the tones, colourings and intonational patterns all contribute to the construction of ordinary conversational exchange. In order to establish the ‘knowing’ relationship with the audience, the NYG presenters have adopted a more formal and conversational style nowadays. Gradually Ni Ping and Zhao Zhongxiang were replaced with the younger new face presenters (Zhou Tao, Zhu Jun, Dong Qing and Li Yong). The technique of personal address to the audience is also often adopted by the presenter to create the sense of ordinariness and intimacy in order to get close to the audience. Scannell describes the latter mode as an address that is ‘always, at one and the same time, for me and for anyone. Thus it is an intermediary structure that mediates between the impersonal for-anyone structure and the personal for-someone structure’ (Scannell, 2000: 9). In NYG, it is shown in either the direct ‘one-to-one’ interaction in the phone-in activity of the early NYG (the full name of the caller was addressed), or in the default mode called ‘for-anyone-as-someone’ structure in today’s NYG (‘dear audience friend’). Like Zhao Yuhui points out, *‘Nowadays the presenters behave more natural and use more spoken Chinese. Today it is difficult to use spoken Chinese for the emotional intonations and poetic speeches’* (Appendix D). Before the song (2003:\*30), four new-face presenters appeared together on stage and made speeches one after another. They announced the next activity as ‘Call for Love’, suggesting all the Chinese around the world make a good wish to the motherland China, after describing the achievements in China: the success in bidding for the Olympics and Expo, the rapid rise of GDP, and the messages from the audience hoping the peaceful and prosperous years

can continue. Hence, the presenters suggested all the audience make a good wish in their heart for the country by saying it out loud together.

On the other hand, as the production of the NYG is getting more advanced and experienced over the years, the presenter's role is also taken more serious than in the first period, and higher requirement and standard have been applied to the NYG production including its presenters. While they are more and more professional and experienced in hosting the NYG, the presenters also behave more formal and ceremonious, as a way to enhance the charisma and media ritual of the NYG as the biggest annual TV event in China. For instance, the presenter's lines are still very rhetorical and poetic, which forms a big contrast with the humorous conversations with trendy phrases offered by the presenters in '*Happy Camp*', a popular entertainment variety show from Hunan Provincial TV Station.

Compared with the presenting style in the first period, the presenters are not as informal in this period. As discussed above, in order to keep the perfect live show with, the NYG presenters are under pressure to make sure nothing goes wrong beyond the pre-planned schedule and tasks. Just as in the second period, no oral mistakes are allowed in this period. As discussed previously, everyone can still remember the 'dark three minutes' happened in the 2007 NYG, when all the presenters made serious oral mistakes and awkward chaos one after another at the crucial New Year countdown occasion. It was criticized and public apology was made by the presenters. Under such pressure, it is hard for the NYG presenter to act lively and spontaneous to stir up the studio atmosphere. Presenters' speech is the main place where the ideological messages are communicated to the audience. As a result, mixing education in hosting the entertainment variety show is the fixed style of the NYG presenters, making it appear emotional, rigid and ceremonious.

## **(2) Performing Styles of the NYG Performers:**

As the main performance genres in the NYG are Song and Dance/Sketch Comedy/Stand-up Comedy/Acrobatics and Magic Tricks, hence the performing style of the NYG performers, as part of the mise-en-scene, have to be discussed and analyzed independently according to different performance genres. The general trend is: the performers are better equipped with costumes and props due to the progress of the TV production techniques and skills, but their performing style has not changed much over the years. In addition, the performers are under the pressure of delivering the perfect show with no mistakes, which makes their performance appear rigid.

### *Song and Dance:*

In every NYG, song and dance has been a major part of the NYG performance. In his discussion of the Hollywood musical, Barry K. Grant indicates that it is the activity of singing and dancing itself that brings these good feelings to the characters, as he claims, 'in movie musicals, characters are able to satisfy their desire or at least to feel better by dancing or singing' (Grant, 2012: 46). In the early NYG during the 1980s, the performing style of the NYG song and dance performers was casual and informal. Due to the limited amount of the singers in the country at that time, all the song and dance performers were well-known stars in film and TV industry. Hence, to fill up the air time of the show, one singer had to perform several songs in one evening gala. For example, singer Li Guyi performed six songs on her own in the 1984 NYG (1984: \*1 \*2 \*28 \*37 \*38 \*39). This forms a strong contrast with the opposite situation nowadays when many singers share one song together, which will be discussed later. Some singers were also titled as 'guest performers' in NYG, and this term has not been used again afterwards. Also, the stage was not the only place for the singers to perform. Singers sometimes rose up from their front row seats and started singing in the auditorium. After the performance, they returned back to their seats just next to them. What's more, the singers were lip-syncing instead of doing real singing, as there were no microphones near them during the performances. Regarding this practice, NYG old face presenter

Zhao Zhongxiang explains the reason why lip-syncing was adopted in the early NYG was because the TV production facilities and equipments were not advanced enough to present the sound quality of the singing at that time, and lip-syncing was applied to give the best artistic effect of the evening gala. But this does not mean that the singers cannot sing properly, as it is purely used to solve the technical problems, as discussed previously.

Compared with many background dancers included in almost every song and dance performance nowadays, the number of the background dancers was very limited in the early time—around eight of them in each performance. Take its *mise-en-scene* as an example: in song (1986:\*1), the same group of background dancers were used in several different songs. Sometimes the same group of background dancers remained on stage to carry on dancing for next song without changing costumes. Background dancers added dramatic facial expressions while dancing to match the subject/story of the song. Camera also started to give close-up shots to the background dancers' faces. From then on, background dancers' job has become more than just doing the pure dancing to fill up the empty stage or make the staging more beautiful, as they also express the theme of the song through dramatic acting (changing from big wide smile suddenly to frown teary eyes along with the storyline of the performance). This effect is achieved by the *mise-en-scene* from the drama series, as they 'typically use a great deal of close-ups, reverse shots, the slow motion editing and background music, which emphasizes individual's inside world around the characters of people' (Abercrombie, 1999: 42). Like the presenters, the costumes for the singers and dancers were mainly the fashionable day outfits at that time (such as leather biker jackets and batwing-sleeved blouses in the 1980s), except for the traditional folk songs, Chinese opera and ethnic song and dances where special costumes are required.

As for the song and dance performance itself, each performance in the early NYG lasted longer than nowadays. Although the performers in the early period may be considered

as ‘inexperienced’ and ‘unprofessional’, they were also more experimental and adventurous. As another example of the mise-en-scene, the song and dance ‘Miss You Forever’ (1988:\*12) was an interesting combination of mixing the Chinese folk music with the singer’s fashionable 80s dressing style and pop dance movements. The background dancers’ traditional folk costumes formed a strong contrast with the spinning disco ball in the dark studio, which was an interesting part of the mise-en-scene. During the song, the performers of the next performance were filmed standing by the side of the stage to get ready.

During the 1990s, the performing style of the singers and dancers was a good indication of the development of the NYG production skills and techniques at that time. The improvement of the TV production facilities and techniques has brought influence on the performing style of the song and dance performances. For instance, in dance (1990:\*20), the Chinese folk culture was explicitly shown in its mise-en-scene: the folk music, the folk costumes of the dancers, the folk dance moves, and the folk props. The story about a group of housewives recalling each of their wedding days was explained in text scrolling from right to left across the bottom of the screen. The dancers also illustrated the storyline through adding dramatic facial expressions and expressive body languages into dancing. Fast and slow motion effects were applied in editing to increase the dramatic effect. Graphic effects were also used to distinguish between the present time (now as housewives) and the old memories (on the day they married) by replacing part of the image from stage performance (representing things happening now as housewives) with a white circle which was filled by the image from a pre-recorded footage (representing things happened before when they married). Also, to create a special effect at the end of the song (1995:\*27), a small platform rose up and down automatically at the centre of the stage while the background dancers were dancing on it. Same as the early years, the singers did not use microphones while singing, which indicates that the lip-syncing was still used in this period despite of the improvement in TV production. This phenomenon is confirmed by Wurtzler, as he notices, ‘The production of live popular music concerts is increasingly characterized by the

simultaneous presence of “live” performance, audio playback of prerecorded material, and large screen video representations of onstage events’ (Wurtzler, 1992: 93).

Furthermore, a more tightly arranged schedule was adopted in the song and dance performances, as there was hardly a break between the performances: before the performers of the last song completely got off the stage, the performers of the next song had already taken over the stage. In some cases such as the opening song and dance of the 1995 NYG, the last group of performers remained on stage dancing while a new group of performers joined at the centre of the stage. The singers and dancers were wearing evening dresses and suits, which was the fashion of that time. Also, the facial expressions and body language of the singers and dancers was very expressive and rigid.

During the 2000s, the performing style of the singers and dancers in NYG is stable and fixed, based on the previous experience. It is noticed that lip-syncing is still widely applied to the NYG singers. Lip-syncing is still used in NYG even though all the technical problems have been solved nowadays with the development of TV production skills and facilities. Hence, it has become a controversial topic, as the audiences experience the unauthentic singing in NYG while the NYG singers and the production team feel more secured and used to the lip-syncing that guarantees the broadcasting quality of the live show. Lip-syncing performances in NYG hence is a combination of ‘spatial co-presence in an image origin (the performer)’ and ‘a temporally anterior sound origin (recorded voice)’. According to Wurtzler, the television consumer also ‘misperceived a temporally simultaneous sound original’. He continues, ‘It was this misperception, or rather the revelation of such a misperception, that necessitated the spin control’ (Wurtzler, 1992: 90).

By the 1997 NYG, colourful and eye-catching stage costumes are used to create the spectacular and colorful stage effect nowadays. For example, in the mise-en-scene of the song and dance (2003:\*38), the background dancers were dressed up like angels in white shimmery gowns with a big pair of white wings on the back. Usually, the color and style of the stage costumes also match with the theme of the song and the computer generated images projected on the stage. For example, green for spring and hope, white for winter and purity, gold for power and royalty, and red for happiness and tradition. Moreover, the props and staging are better equipped and decorated for the song and dance performances in this period. With the improvement of the TV production techniques and facilities over the years, the props are better equipped with more details and the staging is made beautiful and coherent with various high-tech effects. Take the mise-en-scene of the song and dance (1999:\*21) as an example: to present the traditional festival scene of family making dumplings together, the background dancers held dumpling making tools such as rolling pins and plates filled with dumplings while dancing to the folk music. Dressed in aprons, the singers were actually making dumplings on the stage while singing: pushing two tables with wheels, mixing flour dough with hands, and shaping dumplings with fingers. Close-up shots filming on the dancers' rich facial expressions were also very often used. In this way, the folk song is made more special and cozy by putting the private family New Year celebration scene on the public stage. Also, the singers in (2008:\*36) made their appearance by singing while standing on a golden carrier which was lowering them down gradually from the sky.

Due to the over-commercialised environment in the Chinese TV industry in recent years, there are more performances included in this four-hour live show nowadays. Hence, the schedule is made very tight for each performance and songs have to be abbreviated to save time. Also, to bring more performers in one performance, many singers have to share one song together. For example, each of the opera singers used to perform alone in the early NYG and now they have to share the same opera with other 12 singers in one performance (1998:\*24). Song and dance combination such as

(2003:\*41) and (2006:\*12) is shared by many singers in which one singer can only sing one sentence. As a result, what is left is a busy scene on the stage where each singer can only sing few sentences of a song and have to leave the stage before the audience can remember their faces. As a result, a conventional arrangement for song and dance performances has been developed: each group of singers with their own group of background dancers follows tightly one after another. The performance is made too short and busy.

### *Sketch Comedy:*

David Marc proposes that comedy let audiences forget what they see is artifice and contrivance. Therefore, he considers comedy as a form of safe escape where the harsh realities of life are ‘experienced through cushions’ (Marc, 1989: 11-12). It is through this psychic transportation while watching the NYG comedy that the audience finds it hard to distinguish the fictional comedy story from the reality. Thus, this situation makes it easy to pass on the messages and ideologies to the audience through the NYG comedy. In the NYG sketch comedy, the comedians usually start the comedy by appearing from the audience seats and making humorous interactions with the audience. This seemingly natural arrangement is to increase the audience interaction in the studio on the one hand, and to promote ‘intimacy and ordinariness’ of the NYG on the other hand. In this way, the star performers on stage are brought closer to the ordinary audience through the intimate personal conversations. Just like the conventional set-up for the sitcom, the sets and props in the NYG sketch comedies are presented either directly facing the audience or at a slight angle. The comedians and their actions are therefore also choreographed to move across the set.

Apart from performing like sit-com comedians, the NYG comedians have to perform in emotional and solemn ways to promote the ideologies, usually towards the end of the comedy. Usually the comedy starts with a humorous story from ordinary daily life, and then it promotes certain ideologies towards the end. The comedians usually make

emotional speeches with tears, dramatic facial expressions, solemn gestures and expressive body language. With the touching storyline and emotional speeches, expressive music is played as background to promote the emotional mood further, and the studio audiences are filmed touched with tears. It is suggested that the touching moments and ideology inserts in the NYG comedy require the comedians to cry and laugh loudly with strong emotions during the performance, which makes the NYG comedy different from other comedies (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 263). For example, the storyline of the sketch comedy 'A Postage Stamp' (1998:\*20) developed from an ordinary event (stamp exchange among the stamp lovers) to a touching and profound topic (a Taiwanese girl travelled all the way to the mainland to exchange for a particular stamp to realize the wish of her grandfather who missed the motherland dearly).

As for its mise-en-scene, the girl cried out loud with her hands covering her face while explaining how much her grandfather missed the mainland in Taiwan with touching stories. At the same time, expressive music was played at background, close-up shots were used to capture the comedian's teary face, and the image of several studio audiences wiping their tears while watching the performance on stage were filmed to emphasize the touching moments. When discussing the music used in television, Lury reflects, 'On the one hand, then, television uses music, as film does, to support and enhance the visual stories being told, whether as a score or as in a musical. On the other hand, music on television is also presented as an event in itself and television often uses music to reach out to its audience and literally demand a response' (Lury, 2005: 72). As the story of the comedy took place in ordinary daily life (like in most NYG comedies), the comedians were dressed in ordinary day outfits. To match with the comedy story, animated stamps were both inserted next to the performance title at the beginning of the performance, and projected on the stage as background during the performance. At the end of the performance, the theme was concluded again by the comedian expressing his hope that the people from Taiwan and mainland can reunion soon. This is an example of how ideology is embedded in the NYG comedy by containing deep and meaningful subjects and messages behind simple ordinary stories from daily life.

The comedian's performing style has not changed much over the years also because the same group of old-face comedians has dominated the NYG stage in the past two decades. They are: Guo Da, Cai Ming, Huang Hong, and Zhao Benshan, etc. Also, these old face comedians have not changed their performing styles. As it is discussed above, the topic of the NYG comedies comes from the ideologies that are implicitly embedded in the ordinary funny stories from our daily lives, which can bring the audience closer. It is often claimed that the NYG sketch comedies are becoming less and less funny over the years, despite the detailed props and costumes provided to the comedians. This may be due to the highly commercialized environment in which the playwriting is being produced, as discussed previously.

#### *Stand-up Comedy:*

Stand-up comedy has been one of the dominant performance genres in NYG. The stand-up comedians usually are dressed in suits, and sometimes in traditional Chinese robes to present this traditional Chinese artistic form. The comedians usually start the comedy by giving New Year greetings to the Chinese people. Apart from standing in front of two microphone stands on the stage, the stand-up comedians sometimes also perform among the audience seats with clip-microphones. Zhao Yuhui concludes that the main characteristics of the NYG comedy as: '*Comedies in New Year's Gala usually last for 3 to 5 minutes, maximum 10 minutes. Sometimes female comedians also participate in the stand-up comedy, but it is mainly performed by male comedians. There is no fixed number of comedians in one stand-up comedy, as it can be one person, a group of comedians, or a pair as the main form*' (Appendix D). Similar to the singers and presenters, the comedians did not speak to camera in the early NYG, and later the awareness of speaking to camera improved with the TV production skills and techniques.

There has also been the same group of old-face comedians dominating the stand-up comedy scene in NYG. They are: Jiang Kun, Tang Jiezhong, Feng Gong, Niu Qun, Shi Fukuan, and Xiao Lin, etc. These old face comedians were also doing the presenters' job in the early NYG: before the start of the performance (1991:\*36), old face stand-up comedians Niu Qun and Feng Gong introduced it with funny English translations. In the 1988 NYG, the old face comedian Xiao Lin was filmed standing up from his audience seats and encouraged the studio audience to give a big applause as studio warm-up man. Nowadays, these specific roles are more clearly divided and the stand-up comedians only need to perform on stage like other performers. Sketch comedy has become more frequent in the NYG since the 1990s, replacing the former domination of the NYG stand-up comedy in the 1980s. Indeed, it is not surprising that the sketch comedy has taken over the popularity since the 1990s, as the performance is more visual and vivid than stand-up comedy, hence this more 'televised and made-for-TV' characteristic is very suitable for NYG. As the critics suggest, the reason why stand-up comedies were very popular during the 1980s was because the economic reform and opening-up policy had just started to transform the Chinese society. The stand-up comedy hence achieved success in the first few NYG (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 271). Therefore, this shift of popularity from stand-up comedy to the sketch comedy in the NYG took place during the 1990s.

Furthermore, the stand-up comedy in the early NYG was more diverse in style. Take the *mise-en-scene* of the stand-up comedy (1988:\*17) as an example: there were eight comedians divided into four pairs and each pair performed one after another based on the same topic, in the roles of grandpa and grandson, the army soldier twins, and husband and wife. Without limited the performance on stage, the comedians also performed in the auditorium among the studio audience, around the round tables at the front row audience seats, and along the corridors between different seating areas. This arrangement not only gives a more diverse and spontaneous feeling to the show, but also makes the studio look big and spacious. Also, the comedians (1991:\*45) were all dressed in the traditional Chinese robes, including a Hungarian comedian Shi Keda who

performed the comedy in perfect spoken Chinese. The comedy is about a comedian who is trying to teach his foreign student the art of the Chinese stand-up comedy in Chinese.

To impress the audience, the stand-up comedians usually present their other talents during the comedy. Singing plays a common role in stand-up comedies. For instance, comedian Jiang Kun sang in the comedy (1986:\*34), which showed his talent to the audience. The comedian was also singing Chinese opera to give good New Year wishes in the stand-up comedy (1986:\*22). In addition, word games and tongue twisters are often played under the New Year topic such as sending wishes to the audience by including the words from the Chinese zodiac. For example, the stand-up comedians (1995:\*35) used their names to give New Year greetings. Very often life philosophies on love, family, education and career, etc. are also discussed in the NYG stand-up comedy such as (1991:\*39). Like sketch comedy, stand-up comedy is getting less and less interesting and funny over the years, as discussed previously.

#### *Acrobatics, Magic tricks and Others:*

Besides the three dominant performance genres (song and dance, sketch comedy and stand-up comedy), the rest of the performances in NYG are mainly acrobatics, magic tricks and others such as mini-musical. Although there are only one or two performances from this category in each NYG, they are included every year. The acrobatic and magic performances are made more professional by having assistants helping with the preparation work, instead of asking help from the presenters in the early NYG during the 1980s. In recent years, the old face magicians and acrobatic performers are replaced by international award winning performers (such as the well-known American magician Bray Dennis in the 2003 NYG). It is a good way to promote the NYG as an exclusive place to stage the 'extraordinary', and hence making it irreplaceable to the audience. To attract the audiences, even the presenter has also performed magic tricks while hosting the show several times nowadays. However, compared with the serious performing style nowadays, the acrobatic and magic

performances in the early NYG during the 1980s always had a humorous touch. For example, the acrobatic performance named ‘Comedic Acrobatics’ (1988:\*4) was added with comedy plot to make the acrobatics fun to watch, like a funny circus show.

As for its mise-en-scene: Under the light-hearted background music, the acrobatic performers were dressed in different costumes to play their different roles. As a popular editing style widely used on TV at that time, fast and slow motions were applied when filming the movement of the acrobatics to increase dramatic effect. Although the production skills can not be compared with nowadays—the lighting was unstable (suddenly turned bright and suddenly turned dark), the image was out of focus, the sound recording was noisy (mixing the sounds from background music, the performance props, the presenter’s comments, and studio audience’s cheering and talking), and no decoration was arranged on stage except a few pots of flowers, this performance was made exciting in its own way. Before the performance, the presenter walked off the stage to the auditorium and asked the studio audiences from the front row to test the props of the performers as a proof that they were real. During the performance, several studio audiences sitting at the front row round tables were challenging the skills of the performers by throwing their own different objects to the performer, including a baby-holding mother handing in a kid’s bicycle to the acrobat. The studio audience engaged in the performance actively by cheering and commenting loudly during the performance. This spontaneous and natural interaction brought studio audiences closer to the show, as participants of the performance, rather than observers of the performance in today’s NYG.

In addition, there is a particular style in the acrobatic and magic performances: Due to the technological progress, they are made more mysterious and exciting by the dark stage and the dramatic music. Compared with the early NYG, more things are injected into a simple acrobatics and magic tricks nowadays. As the winner of the international acrobatic competition, the mise-en-scene of the acrobatic performance (2003:\*10) is as

follows: It was equipped with many background dancers who were dressed in the butterfly costumes and danced around the acrobats on a small round platform rising up automatically from the underground at the centre of the stage. The acrobatics was made more glamorous with performer's shiny costumes, the blue laser lighting mixed with smoke, beautiful dance moves, the background music, and the changeable computer generated images projected on stage. Also, in the 2008 NYG, a basketball match and hip-hop dancing were added to the acrobatic performance. Compared with the plain martial art costumes wore by the performers in the acrobatics (1988:\*26), even the assistants of the performers nowadays are fully polished with salon effect hair and colourful stage costumes. Everyone in NYG has to appear with glamorous make-over, even only for few minutes on stage. Compared with the pure artistic performance in the early NYG, there are now so many other things to consider in the NYG performance. As the critics reveal, the chief director asked the comedians to prepare according to the script without making any mistakes (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 142-143). As a result, the NYG performers are under pressure in delivering the perfect show nowadays. Like many other old face performers, comedian Song Dandan does not want to perform in NYG anymore because of this pressure on stage in recent years.

As a matter of fact, from the very beginning, the production team has been in the constant battle in deciding what to offer. According to Li, in the first NYG, some people in the production team insisted putting the positive messages as the priority, while others was trying to break the old style (J. Li & Q. Li, 2006: 7). Until today, people involved in the production of NYG still have different opinions on how to make the evening gala entertaining as well as educational. Therefore, many performances experience a long assessment before they are put on the NYG stage, as careful consideration and discussions are made. As Ni, Ou and Shan reveal, many assessments have been applied to each candidate performance, and most of the performances are eliminated in the end after several times' examinations, leaving only few to be altered with recommended changes (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 144).

### **(3) Old Faces VS New Faces:**

From comedy to song and dance performance, almost all the performers are old faces who have never actually left the NYG stage in the past two decades. Hardly any space is left for the new face performers as there are so many old face performers in each performance genre. This situation may have contributed to the unchanged image of NYG in the past two decades. As the main players in NYG, these old face performers have their own performing styles (together with the *mise-en-scene* of their performances) in each performance genre, which have been discussed in the previous sections. The old face comedians Chen Peisi and Zhu Shimao always work together in their NYG sketch comedies. Their roles are also fixed in the comedy story, as Chen plays the role of villain while Zhu plays the role of hero. Similarly, old face comedians Zhao Benshan and Song Dandan often play the role of the North-Eastern village farmers with their distinctive accent, behavior and dressing style. In terms of the old face singers, Yin Xiumei and Zhang Ye usually dress in ceremonious evening dresses and sing the patriotic songs in *Bel Canto* style to praise China, the Chinese people, and the big transformation taking place in China. While military singers such as Yu Junjian and Yan Weiwen often dress in army uniforms and sing army songs in portraying Chinese army soldiers' dedicative and selfless spirit. As Ni, Ou and Shan reveal, among those old face performers, many of them are teacher-student relationships. With this special network, they recommend one and another to perform in NYG. For example, the old face NYG comedian Ma Ji has sixteen students, four of them (Jiang Kun, Feng Gong, Zhao Yan, and Liu Wei) have also become old face performers in NYG after their teacher's introduction (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 272).

There are several reasons why the old face performers are preferred to the new face performers. First of all, the NYG production team is more comfortable to use the experienced and successful old face performers to minimize the risk of mistakes. As Chen Yan comments, the priority of NYG is to deliver a four-hour live show to the

national audience safely and smoothly without unexpected accident. NYG is not a practicing ground for the new face performers, and hence the old face performers are preferred as they are more experienced with everything. As a result, the opportunities for new face performers are very limited in NYG. Similarly, Yang Bo claims:

*‘I think the old face performers remain in the gala is because their performances are good, which receive recognition from the audience. This is the reason why they are selected every year. There is a “My Favorite New Year’s Gala Performance” voting activity every year and old face performers such as the sketch comedian Zhao Benshan often wins the highest vote. That is how we know the old face performers are popular among the audience’ (Appendix C).*

Of course it is hard for old face performers not to win the vote if they provide most of the total performances every year. Now that the new face performers are not even given the chance to show their talent on the stage, it is a one-sided judgment to say that the new face performers are not as good as the old face performers, or that the audiences prefer the old face performers.

Secondly, the main argument behind having these old face performers all these years is that they are favored and expected by the Chinese audience. Despite of the constant ‘call for new faces’ among the audience in recent years, everybody is aware of one fact: that is, all the old face performers have to be there in NYG every year. On this matter, Zhao Yuhui expresses his view,

*‘Although there are new face performers every year, they cannot challenge the position of old face performers yet. We have to consider the audience rating. The audience rating will drop if there are no old faces on the stage.... It is because the old faces still have their popularity, charms and influence to attract the audience. They are used because they can improve the audience rating’ (Appendix D).*

The critics even made a proposal: imagine—if Zhao Benshan is not in the sketch comedy, Feng Gong is not in the stand-up comedy, and Yin Xiumei is not in the song

and dance, would the evening gala still be the NYG as we know it (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 340)? In order not to disappoint the audience, the performances by new face performers have to be cut down more and more, or even eliminated in the end. However, it can be argued that the NYG, like any other TV medium, has the responsibility to lead the public taste and popular culture. It is not always a sensible strategy to offer whatever the audience wants and it is not possible to always please the audience.

Thirdly, NYG also promotes the popularity of these old face performers in one way or another. For example, in opening scene of the early NYG during the 1980s, the old face performers were filmed walking into the NYG studio and they also gathered together on the stage at the beginning and end of the NYG. Later on, such as in the 2001 NYG, the names of the old face performers in the upcoming performances were displayed across the screen during the show to attract the audience and inform them what comes next. Before the NYG performance schedule is finalized, the performances from the old face performers are being assessed several times every year. But what are assessed are only the performances, not the performers (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 339). Therefore, although their performances are being changed, the performers remain the same in NYG.

The relationship between the old faces and the new faces is ambivalent. Every old face performer used to be a new face performer and it is the appearance and growth of those new faces in the early times that constrain the development of the new faces today. As a matter of fact, new faces do appear in NYG every year, but they are in very limited number. It is worth mentioning that the new face performers have the same performing style as the old face performers in each genre, under the same type of mise-en-scene and staging during their performances. This indicates the reason why the new face performers cannot stand out and distinguish themselves from the old face performers, and therefore impress and attract the audience in a new fresh way. Regarding the problem of promoting new faces in NYG, Chen Yan expresses that this issue does not

have an easy solution, *‘Very often, we try to put new faces on stage, but only receive complaints from the audience that they are not good enough... Audiences often complain that there are so many good performers, why him/her? But the new faces that we put on stage are already the best and audiences just cannot realize it very quickly’* (Appendix E). As for the comedians, they usually play a supporting role in a comedy with the old faces as leading performers such as Zhao Benshan and Huang Hong. In the end, it is still the old face performers who are dominating the prime-time performances alone. The chief director of the 2004 NYG Yuan Dewang explains this arrangement, *‘It is not possible to let the new face performers do important jobs in NYG if they do not have successful performing experience. I can arrange some new face performers to appear on NYG, but it is too risky for the director and the performers if the new faces are taking important roles’* (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 342). It can be speculated that the audiences like the performances assigned to the old faces, but not the old faces themselves. The same old performing style from the old faces may give the audience the impression that the show is old-fashioned. This may also be because the work is created in the highly commercialized environment nowadays. It is easy to become conventional and rigid to use the same group of performers every year.

#### **(4) The High-Profiled VS The Ordinary:**

Since its launch, the NYG has been one of the most exclusive shows of the year, where celebrities and famous people from all fields gather. As early as the first NYG, the well known artists such as comedian Jiang Kun were taking the role of presenters, and many performances were given by the high-profiled performers in the country. Since then, the audience has been expecting to see *‘the extraordinary’* in NYG—people and things that we cannot easily see in our ordinary life. As Yang Bo concludes, *‘Whether the performers are new faces or old faces, they must be either very famous or very popular among the audience’* (Appendix C).

Over the years, this tendency is getting stronger and stronger. Although the NYG invited quite a few famous celebrities in the early years, such as having the winner of the International Song Contest in Vienna to sing the song (1985:\*7), ordinary performers were included more in the early NYG than nowadays. As a gesture to show that CCTV gave equal opportunities to the ordinary artists to perform in front of the national audience, the folk song (1992\*18) which was written by an ordinary person from the countryside was performed by an amateur singer who had never performed in NYG before. However, since the second half of the 1990s, the NYG has been only interested in the already-popular performers and high-profiled celebrities, making it a follower rather than a creator of the stars as discussed before. The international awarded acrobatic performance was put on the NYG stage in 2007, which confirms that NYG only stages the best. Inviting high-profiled celebrities into live TV shows such as NYG is a way to attract the audience by creating media ritual and liveness, making the show appear exclusive and irreplaceable to the audience.

These high-profiled celebrities are expected and welcomed by the mass audience as the highlight of the show, as only in this occasion that the ordinary members of public can see the stars closely on the stage. There is limited amount of time in an evening gala, and hence only limited amount of performances can be put on stage. Yang Bo states, *'Audiences would like to pay attention to the high-profiled performers, and that is why those people are on the stage of New Year's Gala'* (Appendix C). As a result, there is hardly any time or space left for the ordinary performers. One chief director summaries: The high-profiled celebrities have experience and they all have their own teams who can deal with all kinds of relations. Ordinary performers can also be very talented, but have limited human resources and finance, and hence hard to catch good works. Sometimes one person's talent and power is not enough to make it in NYG (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 341). In order to bring the audience closer to the show, NYG also uses other ways to include the 'ordinariness' in the show: having ordinary people performing difficult Qi Gong martial art, because they are all ordinary people except for their special talents and skills, compared with politicians and polished celebrities. Similarly,

inviting model workers and army heroes as special guests and conducting small studio interviews, is to send the message to the audience that ordinary people can also make extraordinary achievements and contributions to the society. In this way, a new sense of ‘intimacy’ is created in NYG.

Media rituals create the sense of power by implicitly draw the boundary between the ordinary people and the media people. For example, the TV medium does not use random people from the street to host the programme in the ordinary way. Instead, they use celebrity hosts to act intimately with the audience while still being at the special status as being ‘celebrity’. Although ordinary people are invited to the programme, what they offer on TV is not ordinary—they are either with special talent that makes them stand out, or their personal stories (whether true experience or performance), are quite extraordinary and dramatic (Couldry, 2003: 121). One cannot expect to get on the media stage by ‘just being ordinary’. In other words, ‘ordinary people’ have to do ‘extraordinary things’ to be on TV, as a producer notes, ‘if you behave the way I’m asking, you’re more likely to be on TV’ (Gamson, 1998: 87). Here, the hierarchy between the terms ‘ordinary’ and ‘extraordinary’ are just another reflection of the media and the ordinary people.

##### **(5) Lively Studio Audience VS Rigid Studio Audience:**

The studio audience is a crucial part of the live studio entertainment show such as NYG. They can create good studio atmosphere by interacting with the presenters and performers on stage, and they represent many TV audiences sitting at their own homes watching the show. Since its launch, it has been a common practice in NYG to film the reaction of the studio audience during the performance. By capturing the reactions of the studio audience, not only is the expected studio atmosphere for different occasions achieved and enhanced, but also the TV audience is influenced by the reaction of the studio audience. The evening gala somehow appears more appealing to the TV audience when they see the studio audience is enjoying the show happily with laughter, which

makes the TV audience want to stay with the programme to find out what is in the show that seems so interesting to watch. By hearing their exciting cheers and applauses, we cannot wait to be 'there' with the studio audience to participate in the show. In entertainment variety shows such as NYG, the crowd's roars, applauses and cheers are crucial to the experience and atmosphere of the programme. Lury suggests, 'the sound of the audience is included to cue the audience at home as to the kind of affective response the actions of the actors and entertainers should generate' (Lury, 2005: 83). Also, it is not the first time that we cannot hold back our tears anymore by seeing the close-up shots on the teary eyes of the studio audience during the touching story in the studio interview. To portray the touching moments in the performance such as the sketch comedy 'Visit from the Soldiers' Wives' (2008:\*10) and in the studio interview such as the Taiwanese singer's home-sick emotion on the motherland in (1989:\*34), the filming of the studio audience wiping their tears with close-up shots in its mise-en-scene is undeniably an effective influence to the TV audience, reinforcing the ideologies such as 'we are all Chinese'. Needless to say, the studio audience plays an important part of the NYG mise-en-scene. As Yang Bo suggests, '*During the production of the New Year's Gala, the studio audience is a co-operative part of the show*' (Appendix C).

Close observation shows that the studio audiences were lively in NYG until the middle of the 1990s. In the early NYG, the studio audience was filmed talking to each other and some of them were captured by camera when walking around in the auditorium during the performance. Many audiences were even filmed standing at the entrance of the NYG studio to watch the show. More studio games and activities were included in the early times, when the studio audience were selected randomly to participate in the basketball playing and riddle guessing on stage, with small presents given as reward at the end. In the 1986 NYG, a real wedding ceremony was held live in the NYG studio witnessed by the national audience, and New Year greetings to the audiences were also written across the screen during song (1986:\*15) and (1986:\*31) over the image of the studio audience, which was an interesting way to bring the audience closer. This situation may be caused by the fact that the 'made-for TV' character of NYG was not

properly developed yet at that time: the presenters spoke to the studio audience instead of speaking to camera, and the studio audience participated in the show actively by shouting loudly to the performers on stage, even though it interrupted the flow of the show. As the critics comment, the reason why people can still remember the first NYG is because of its mass celebration, true entertainment and the active participation of the audience. The NYG afterwards has become less and less interactive, which isolates the audience participation (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 147-148). It is worth mentioning that the producer of the successful sketch comedy ‘The Day with the Mother of the Hero’ (1989:\*6) generated the idea from the audience (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 226).

In contrast, since the mid 1990s, not only have the studio activities been cut down to almost none, but also the interactions with the studio audience have been pre-arranged and performed. It is an important characteristic of the recent NYG that seemingly spontaneous and natural interactions have to be performed in order to make sure nothing goes wrong: the studio audiences are instructed by the warm-up man and presenters only choose the designated studio audience who prepared his lines before-hand. To some extent, the studio audience functions as a particular part of the overall NYG picture. In this way, the role of the studio audience has shifted from participants to observers. This gradual change has also been noticed by Chen Yan, who suggests, *‘In the early times, we say the relationship between watching and performing is like a close communication. Nowadays, the relationship is more separated and independent from each other. This is a very common change which takes place everywhere in the world and is formed naturally over time’* (Appendix E).

In addition, the studio audience has been behaving quiet since the middle of the 1990s. Army officers and senior officials are often filmed sitting among the audience seats, usually as special guests sitting at the front row audience seats. At the same time, seeing the studio audience being observers rather than participants, the TV audience feels distant from the NYG. Li confirms, ‘The arrangement of the auditorium creates a sense

of distance and illusion in front of the millions of the TV audience' (J. Li & Q. Li, 2006: 129). However, as the 'made-for-TV' characteristics have been developed over the years, the TV audience is considered more and more important in the production of NYG. Not only did the presenters start to speak to camera for the TV audiences, more interactions and activities from TV audiences have also been in place: calling NYG hotlines, sending comments over mobile phone messages, and the voting 'My Favorite New Year's Gala Performance' by phone-in, by text message, by mail, by digital TV, and by Internet. In the 2002 NYG, the online forum of the NYG was established to make it even more interactive to watch the NYG live online, to vote for the favorite performance, and to chat/comment with other users about the evening gala at the same time. In this way, web communication became part of the NYG for the first time. It is since the 2005 NYG that the role of hotline presenter has been introduced in to evening gala to be especially in charge of the TV audience hotlines, explaining the voting activity, and reading out the New Year greetings from the commercial sponsors as well as Chinese embassies overseas.

The TV audience's active participation shows an increasing tendency of people's desire to connection with others through television. As discussed previously, the integrative social function of the media is expressed by Bourdon who states, 'Media technological history at least partly reflects an effort to reduce the gap between events and media users' (Bourdon, 2004: 192). However, social integration is also the occasion where the television's importance is shown. TV audience's participation reinforces television's place as an access to the society's centre (Couldry, 2003). It is worth mentioning that the audience cannot intervene in the TV production process, no matter how active they are in responding the programme with various means. Instead of being undermined by new media platforms such as the Internet, television uses the new media to reassert its place in the centre. In this way, the private/public and ordinary/media boundaries become bigger, which makes people rely on the TV medium for social integration and hence reinforces TV's power in connection people as the society's centre (Couldry, 2003). Couldry believes that this boundary suggests an underlying value—media

somehow ‘stand in’ for, or represent, the social world as a whole (Couldry, 2003: 27). TV’s power lies behind this constructed cover of ordinariness and intimacy.

All the different effects of *mise-en-scene* (entertainment, dramatisation, liveness, ritual, intimacy and ordinariness) exist in every programme and every genre, as they are closely related to one another, and interact and influence one another in a dynamic way, although some is shown more dominant than others depending on the requirement of different programmes. The function of these different effects of *mise-en-scene* are not just to give certain look and feel to demonstrate certain genres or to give some special effects, but essentially, they are constructed to reassert TV medium’s irreplaceable power in connecting people with the society as a whole. All these *mise-en-scene* elements working together are ideologies that reinforce the TV medium’s power in representing the society’s centre which everybody has to rely on to get connected with the outside world. Essentially, it is the media power that all these effects of *mise-en-scene* serve. All the effects of *mise-en-scene* are used as tools to naturalise this media power by making it less apparent in television programmes (Couldry, 2003).

It is in this way that the *mise-en-scene* of the NYG constructs the ideas such as the ‘one nation of China’ in which every member of the audience is a part. Nevertheless, while media events bring people together, it is important to note that not all the audiences feel the same as the media event portrays. Different people have different feelings, which may be different from the collective emotion that media event presents. Just because lots of people share the same event, it does not mean everybody feels in the same way. As Dyer believes, entertainment’s deeply contradictory nature is expressed in being moments ‘heavily representational and verisimilitudinous’, and at other moments ‘heavily non-representational and “unreal”’ (Dyer, 2002: 25). This applies directly to the NYG. As an entertainment variety show, NYG includes both comedy and singing and dancing—the comedy depicts the daily life experiences of the audience while the singing and dancing brings the better feelings on how a better world could be. As far as

the NYG is concerned, this results in the difficult juggling between the market, the ideology and the audience. The categories discussed in Chapter 7, 8 and 9 are inter-related with each other and influence each other. Therefore, in the comparative analysis of NYG's mise-en-scene throughout its history, both differences and similarities exist in each area of discussion.

## ***Chapter 10: Conclusion***

Through analysing the mise-en-scene of the 25 years' NYG, conducting interviews with the CCTV senior staffs, and attending the rehearsal of the actual programme, this thesis examines what the mise-en-scene of the NYG is and how it has or has not changed over the years. It explores the commercial and ideological influences in the production of NYG by applying the mise-en-scene approach in the discussion. In addition, the findings are discussed in relation to the programme's popularity and suggestions are provided for the future development of the programme. The entire history of NYG has rarely been examined in existing researches. While many studies have discussed the content of NYG, its mise-en-scene has hardly been analysed. Relating the discussion of mise-en-scene to the content of NYG in this thesis has generated an insight into NYG and its history. Based on the findings of the research, the following key conclusions can be drawn:

1. The mise-en-scene of NYG generally gives the colourful, spectacular, busy and commercial 'look' and the celebrative, formal, ceremonious and loud 'feel'. It is shown in the following details: the setting is spacious and modern with New Year decorations, the lighting is warm and colourful, the costume of the figures is eye-catching and glamorous, and the behavior of the figures is rigid and ceremonious. In terms of the setting, almost every year's NYG takes place in the CCTV No.1 Studio. Its stage is 10 meters in height, 20 meters in width, and 20 meters in length and faces the auditorium. A few rows of round tables are placed at the front of the auditorium for special guests. Plants and flowers are usually placed around the stage and along the staircases between different parts of auditorium. As the annual TV show especially dedicated to the celebration of the Chinese New Year, every year NYG creates the New Year look by expressing many traditional signs and symbols of the New Year through its mise-en-scene: the Chinese paper cuts decorated on the walls around the studio, the Chinese couplets included as props in the sketch comedies, red lanterns hanging on the studio ceiling above the

stage, the sound of the firework played at the background, the Chinese traditional costume Qipao worn by performers as well as presenters, the folk song and dance, the ancient poems recited by the presenters in their speeches, and the combination of red and gold colours widely used in stage lighting. These are the symbolic representations of the Chinese traditional culture.

In addition, NYG has its own style by blending the global trend into the Chinese traditional culture: The Western evening suits worn by the Chinese ballad singers, the traditional Chinese opera performed in modern Mandarin language, and the Chinese lanterns projected on the stage with various colours. What is common in the beginning, the ending and the midnight countdown occasion of the NYG is the celebration and emphasis of live. The NYG, as a TV event especially dedicated to the celebration of the Chinese New Year, has excessive focus on time: the showing of the digital clock on the top of the screen and the analogue clock on the studio wall behind the auditorium, presenters' repeated reference to the live status during the programme, the famous two-ways cut between the live studio and the remote locations, the presence of the live audience in the studio, and the word 'live' is inserted on the screen. At the midnight countdown, the big close-up of a clock that takes up the whole screen is shown not only to express the excitement of the countdown, but also to insert announcements of sponsorships, which adds to the commercial feel of the show. While greatly celebrating liveness, the charisma and media ritual effect of the evening gala also reach the top at the same time. A mixture of long, medium and close-up shots is used to film the studio setting, the performers and presenters on stage and studio audiences to show the general environment as well as the details. The lighting is warm and colourful and the rhythm of the editing such as sharp zooming in/out roughly coincides with the beat of the music.

The costumes of the performers and presenters are generally colourful and fashionable, except in folk song and dance, Chinese opera and acrobatics, where the

performers are mainly dressed in their special professional costumes. Also, all background dancers are dressed in the same costume to create the look of the clear ceremonious order. Presenters change their costumes several times throughout the evening gala. Performers and presenters mainly position themselves on the stage, while sometimes they also stand among the studio audience or in front of the auditorium by the round tables, to give a diverse angle. Both the performers and the presenters on the stage appear emotional, ceremonious and rigid with dramatic facial expressions and rhetorical poetic speech style. The NYG song and dance performances usually look busy, festive and spectacular with many background dancers dancing around the singer(s). For all the performers, they perform in high spirit with big smiles and wide open eyes to give the happy and lively impression. With the touching storyline and emotional speeches, performers also portray the ideological themes by acting with expressive body languages and dramatic facial expressions such as laughing out loud, attentive eyes, and crying out loud with hands covering the face. This is often captured by camera in close-up shots. In most cases, there are six presenters hosting NYG in total (three male presenters and three female presenters). The NYG presenters work in pairs (one female and one male presenter in each pair). Two pairs of presenters are in charge of hosting the show and one pair is in charge of the hotline, announcing the voting procedure and New Year greetings. When linking the performances in between during the evening gala, they often work separately in three pairs, except for the important occasions such as the beginning, the midnight countdown and the end of the NYG, when they all join together in a line at the centre of the stage to make the official speeches in poetic, ceremonious and exciting style. Filmed in close-up shots, the NYG presenters usually speak with expressive body languages, attentive facial expressions and dramatic intonations such as nodding head, putting emphasis on the key words, giving open arms, showing emotional faces, and dramatic intonations with pauses, etc.

2. Due to the technological development in Chinese television over the years, the technical aspect of the production has progressed dramatically in NYG. However, these changes do not create significant influence to the look and feel of the programme. Furthermore, the general technological and economic development has been experienced by the Chinese people over the past two decades and is not limited only to the production of NYG. The technical changes in the production is summarised as follows: The camerawork has changed from shaky and out-of-focus to steady and clear camerawork which do not create the impression of abruptness; the sound recording has changed from noisy background sound to good sound quality; the lighting has changed from unstable lighting to sufficient lighting from all directions; and the editing has changed from full of jump-cuts to fluid with special effects. CGI has been frequently applied to decorate the studio electronically, which enables NYG to present various images effectively.

Moreover, the props are better equipped for the performances. For example, more detailed things are put onto the stage to vividly create different environment settings for the sketch comedies: compared with a few chairs and tables in the early NYG, there are a vase with flowers, a calendar and a tea set on the table in the centre of the stage, a school bag hanging on one of the chairs around the table, sippers randomly lying on the floor, a coat hanger stand and a TV set by the side of the table. Compared with the early NYG, the glamorous stage costumes are used to create the spectacular and colorful stage effect nowadays. The costumes have changed to more colourful, eye-catching and exaggerated, especially for the background dancers: sometimes they are dressed up like angels in white shimmery gowns with a big pair of white wings on the back, and sometime they are dressed up like phoenixes in red silk dresses with bat-wing sleeves and bird hats on the head. Usually, the colour and style of the costumes and the colour of the CGI images projected on the stage also match with each other, working together to express different themes of the songs: green for spring and hope, white for winter and purity, gold for power and royalty, and red for happiness and tradition.

As the production skill in managing live broadcast is getting more experienced and mature, pre-recorded footages are used less and less in NYG. The satellite technology offered the two-way communication between the reporter at the subsidiary venue and the presenter at the NYG studio, enabling them to speak to each other ‘live’ in front of the video wall in the studio. While the performance is shown, more things are added onto the screen: the NYG hotline number for the audience to vote for their favorite performance is scrolling at the bottom of the screen, the text ‘live broadcast’ is inserted at the top right of the screen, and New Year symbols such as animated red lantern, firework and the Chinese zodiac of the year are displayed at the right hand side of the screen. These are all the indications of improvement based on the technological and economic development, which not only bring changes in the technical aspect of the NYG production, but also in every aspect of our life over the past two decades.

3. However, these technical progresses do not compose a different style, or bring key changes and fundamental impact to the mise-en-scene of NYG, as they do not affect greatly on the style, the look and the feel of the programme. In addition, these changes correspond to the changes experienced in the daily life of the Chinese people in the past two decades, as discussed previously. Based on the observation of the mise-en-scene of NYG throughout its history, it is found that the mise-en-scene of NYG has not changed much in the past two decades. Each of the performance genres in NYG has its own particular mise-en-scene and format. The mise-en-scene of the main performance genres are described as follows:

*Mise-en-scene of Song and Dance:* A conventional arrangement for song and dance performances is in place: Groups of singers and dancers follow tightly one after another to take over the stage, sometimes even before the performers from the last performance can leave the stage completely. This creates a busy scene on the stage.

Also, artificial smoke is often created on stage as a special effect. In folk song and dance, the singers and dancers are usually dressed in traditional folk costumes (usually consist of a high-collar top and wide cropped pants in bright colors such as red, green or floral prints), doing folk dances to the Chinese folk music (such as Yangge moves in which crowds of people dance together in a line or in a circle and swing their bodies to the festive country folk music) with props such as red silk ribbons, dancing fans, waist-drums and trumpets, to express the happy and nice Chinese country life. Sometimes performers also portray a simple story by acting with expressive body languages and dramatic facial expressions during the folk song and dance, which is captured by close-up shots. Patriotic song and dance performances are often arranged at the beginning, the end, and the midnight countdown of the NYG. Dressed in glamorous evening dresses, the singers usually have open arms and attentive facial expressions while singing out the patriotic lyrics in Bel Canto style. They are surrounded by many background dancers who are dressed in colourful costumes and doing contemporary dance moves with props such as flags. In ethnic song and dance performances, the representation of the 56 ethnicities in China is put onto the stage, where performers are dressed in different traditional costumes, singing and dancing in their distinctive regional styles. It is also worth mentioning that kids have always been in NYG performances, especially in the opening song and dance to create the loud and festive look in welcoming the New Year. They are often in big groups, dressed in traditional Chinese costumes and run onto the stage together while cheering loudly and shouting out 'Happy New Year' happily.

*Mise-en-scene of Stand-up and Sketch Comedy:* In terms of the stand-up comedy, the comedians are usually two people dressed in traditional Chinese robes as traditional style, or in suits as modern style. Apart from standing in front of two microphone stands on the stage, the stand-up comedians sometimes also perform among the studio audiences with clip-microphones. The comedians usually start the comedy by giving New Year greetings to the studio audience. To impress the

audience, the stand-up comedians usually perform their other talents during the comedy such as singing to the professional standard. In terms of the sketch comedy, it usually starts with a story from ordinary daily life with humorous scenario and dramatic tension, and then promotes certain ideologies towards the end by the comedians. To develop the ideological themes further, a song and dance performance under the same theme is often arranged right after the comedy. Just like the conventional set-up for the sitcom, the sets and props in the NYG sketch comedies are presented either directly facing the audience or at a slight angle. The comedians and their actions are therefore also choreographed to move across the set. Comedy stories are often based on ordinary life, they take place at home and the comedians are usually dressed in ordinary day outfits. The regional dialect, the regional dressing style, and typical characters of the people from different parts of China are often portrayed in sketch comedies. To create a spontaneous and intimate effect, comedians often start the performance by appearing among the studio audience, giving New Year greetings and making humorous jokes while walking onto the stage from the auditorium. Apart from performing like sit-com comedians, the NYG comedians often perform in emotional and dramatic ways. With the touching storyline and emotional speeches, the comedians use expressive body languages and dramatic facial expressions such as laughing out loud, attentive eyes, and crying out loud with hands covering the face. At the same time, expressive music is played at the background, close-up shots are used to capture the comedian's emotional face, and the studio audiences are filmed wiping their tears to promote the touching moment further.

*Mise-en-scene of Acrobatics:* The acrobatic performances are often given by award-winning acrobats. As the particular style of the acrobatics in NYG, it is made mysterious, beautiful and exciting by the dark stage, the colourful costumes of the performers and the dramatic music. The acrobatic performance is equipped with many background dancers who are dressed in circus costumes and dancing around the acrobats. The acrobatics is made glamorous and sophisticated with performer's

shiny costumes, the blue lighting mixed with smoke, beautiful dance moves, the exciting background music, and the images displayed on the stage. Some acrobatic moves are presented in slow motions to magnify the details of the acrobatic movements. Fading in/out effect is applied frequently when cutting between the shots to give more artistic feeling to the performance.

*Mise-en-scene of the Presenting Style:* In terms of the costumes of NYG presenters, they appear like celebrities by wearing the most fashionable clothes of the time, usually evening dresses for female presenters and evening suits for male presenters. Sometimes they change to other different outfits several times during the NYG. The typical presenting style of the NYG presenter is rigid, ceremonious, and emotional, which has not changed over the years. To express the special feelings on this special night, the NYG presenters have adopted a particular speech style: They often use many rhetorical words, poetic sentences, making Chinese couplets (as one of the New Year traditions), and citing ancient poems to express the excitement and happiness of the New Year celebration. When promoting a certain theme, filmed in close-up shots, the presenters usually speak with expressive body languages and dramatic intonations such as nodding head, putting emphasis on the key words, giving open arms, showing emotional faces, and dramatic intonations with pauses, etc. As the background music gradually rises, the audience applause is mixed with the emotional tone and exciting voice of the presenter. At the same time, in order to establish the ‘knowing’ relationship with the audience, the NYG presenters have also adopted a light-hearted and conversational style. The technique of personal address to the audience is also often adopted by the presenter. In NYG, it is shown mostly in the default ‘for-anyone-as-someone’ structure, as the presenters always address the audience as ‘dear audience friend’. During the performance linking, the presenters sometimes stand on the stage, and sometimes stand among the audience at the front rows of the audience seats, to give another diverse viewing angle and also to make the studio look more spacious with a different background. During the important occasions such as the beginning, the midnight countdown and the end of

the evening gala, presenters speak with excitement under the cheerful background music and audience applauses. Each presenter speaks a few sentences in turn before they finish the speech together at the end by giving New Year greetings to the people. In this way, the excitement and ritual of the moment in NYG is transferred to the millions of Chinese viewers in front of the TV.

*Mise-en-scene of the Beginning, Midnight countdown and End of NYG:* The official beginning of the NYG starts with loud and busy song and dance with spectacular setting and colourful lighting. As the classic style of NYG, at the beginning of the opening song and dance, the camera usually gives a wide pan across the studio to show the general environment of the evening gala to the audience. Under the cheerful Chinese folk music, the screen cuts to the live NYG studio where studio audiences are cheering and applauding happily. As the big red stage curtain rolls up, many singers and dancers start to perform once the music starts playing. At the same time, the title 'CCTV New Year's Gala' appears in the middle of the screen. The opening song and dance usually contains many traditional New Year symbols and customs such as dancing with Chinese couplets as props, kids acting like setting off firework, and the costumes in red and gold colours, etc. Everybody on the stage is in high spirit, festive, and happy. Dressed in the most fashionable outfit of the time, the presenters walk onto the stage together at the end of the opening song and dance, give New Year greetings to the Chinese people, and make opening speech to start the NYG officially.

As far as the New Year midnight countdown is concerned, it usually starts five minutes before the midnight. Presenters gather together at the centre of the stage in a line facing the studio audience, and make New Year speeches one after another with poetic and ceremonious style. Ten seconds before the midnight, the studio audiences and all performers are counting down excitedly out loud under the presenters' lead, with the big close-up on a clock with the announcement of the commercial

sponsorship. Once the New Year arrives, the whole studio is covered with shiny glitters and colourful balloons that are falling from the sky onto the people everywhere in the studio, and the mixture of sounds of people's cheers and applauses, the bell ringing, firework, the festive background music, and presenters exciting and poetic speeches. A song and dance performance is often arranged after presenters' speeches, expressing the happiness in welcoming the arrival of the New Year.

Every year, once the NYG closure song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight' starts playing at the background, it is a sign to indicate the end of the NYG. The presenters gather together on stage together, making their closure speeches and giving the New Year wishes to the people with rhetorical words in poetic and ceremonious style. Still dressed in their different costumes (some in ethnic minority clothes, some in acrobatic outfits, some in prom dresses, and some in Chinese opera costumes), all the performers also gather together on the stage, standing around the presenters to say goodbye to the audience. At the end, the bird's eye view shot is used to capture the performers and presenters from above the stage who are waving, cheering and jumping happily to the audience. This view effectively creates a festive feeling to the show, which is only available to the TV audience.

*Mise-en-scene of Theme Slots:* Theme slots are especially allocated in NYG, usually in the middle of the evening gala, to promote the ideological themes. There is a fixed format in portraying the themes—Presenter introducing a certain topic with emotional and poetic speech with expressive music playing at the background, and then presenter conducting studio interview/activity by inviting relevant guests to the stage to talk about this topic and express the ideological themes behind this topics, followed by a performance (usually a comedy or a song and dance) under this topic to emphasize the educational aspect further.

*Mise-en-scene of the Studio Audiences:* Since its launch, it has been a common practice in NYG to capture the reactions of the studio audience during the performance. The crowd's roars, applauses and cheers are crucial to the experience and atmosphere of this live show. To portray the touching moments during the sketch comedy or the studio interview/activity, the filming of the studio audience wiping their tears with close-up shots is undeniably an effective influence to the TV audience, reinforcing the topic. There is a close relationship between the studio audience and the overall mise-en-scene of NYG, which determines the viewing experience of the TV audience. There is not much interaction between the studio audience and the performance. Seeing the studio audience as witness rather than participants, the TV audience feels distant from the NYG.

4. Since the mise-en-scene of NYG has not changed much over the years, and the fact that commercial and ideological influences have always been embedded in NYG which is discussed frequently by scholars (see Chapter 2, 3 and 4), there may be a link and relation between these two. As mise-en-scene is known as a vehicle to express themes and messages, the mise-en-scene of NYG has not changed much over the years may be because the commercial and ideological influences remain embedded in the programme. These influences are expressed in the mise-en-scene of NYG, making it hard to have breakthrough changes. Mise-en-scene is known to be the 'look' and 'feel' of the television programme, which is the very first thing that grabs the audience's attention and gradually shapes the audience's viewing experience of the programme. The unchanged mise-en-scene today may appear old-fashioned, rigid and over-commercialized, which could be one of the reasons contributing to the declining popularity of NYG.
5. In this one single programme, NYG combines the commercial activities from the sponsors, the ideological messages from the party, and the different expectations of the diverse Chinese audiences in the competitive television market nowadays. This

difficult juggling relationship between the market, the ideology and the audience is shown in the unchanged mise-en-scene of NYG. While being financially sponsored by the state, NYG generates enormous profits by inserting advertisements and product placements in various ways. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that the success of the most popular entertainment variety show *'Happy Camp'* from Hunan Provincial TV station proves that the commercial activities in a TV programme do not drive the audiences away. Hence, the commercial influence in NYG may not be the only reason that leads to its decline. Ideological influence may be another: not only have certain ideological themes been embedded in every year's NYG, but also the ways to promote these themes have not been changed either. As a result, this may have limited the possible innovative changes in NYG.

6. Great effort has been put in making this 'perfect show', as NYG is the biggest TV event of the year and mistakes are not expected. As a result, all the people involved in the production of NYG are under stress in delivering the perfect show, which gives the rigid and formal look to NYG. As the NYG staging director Chen Yan explains, *'In some cases, the style can be changed. But for a big scale live entertainment variety show like New Year's Gala, it is not an experiment. It does not allow you to try all the fancy things. What it needs most is being steady and reliable'* (Appendix E). Indeed, it is very common that a performance has to pass several assessments every year before they are finally put onto the NYG stage. It is said that assessments can prevent 'low taste performances' from appearing in NYG, but if the NYG is too perfect and educational, the evening gala will appear very rigid and serious.
7. From the findings presented so far, it could be concluded that NYG could improve the programme by embedding less commercial and ideological influence in the show. In addition, less effort could be put into making the perfect show, therefore allowing more room for possible changes. As mise-en-scene expresses a director's

attitude and worldview, a further push towards improvement could result if NYG opens up to the talents outside of CCTV Cultural and Art department in every year's bidding competition. Selecting NYG directors only from CCTV internally makes it even harder to breakthrough the conventions and fixed patterns. Similarly, new talents and non-celebrities could also be included more in NYG which has been dominated by the old face performers and high-profile celebrities, which may bring a more diverse performing style into the NYG mise-en-scene.

8. Finally, there are other factors in the changing popularity of the NYG which are discussed among the scholars in China in recent years: Some believe the nature of NYG as a national TV event makes it hard to please everyone from such a big and diverse audience group in China (TV director Yang Bo, see Appendix C); Some think the Chinese people nowadays are exposed to more entertainment means and life styles to spend the New Year than twenty years ago (former head of CCTV Overseas Centre Zhao Yuhui, see Appendix D) and eating New Year's dinner while watching NYG is not the only way to celebrate the Chinese New Year anymore (Xiao, 2003: 83-84); While others speculate that more TV programmes are offered to the audiences such as local NYG during the New Year season in today's competitive TV market in China (NYG staging director Chen Yan, see Appendix E) and this new situation makes the Chinese audience have higher demand and expectations in TV programmes than twenty years ago, which moves much faster than the progress of NYG (Ni, Ou & Shan, 2003: 458). In combination with the significant role of mise-en-scene, we cannot ignore the above factors which may also contribute to the changing popularity of the NYG.

In short, the mise-en-scene of NYG generally gives the colourful, spectacular, busy and commercial 'look' and the celebrative, formal, ceremonious and loud 'feel'. It is shown in the spacious and modern setting with New Year decorations, the warm and colourful lighting, the eye-catching and glamorous costume of the figures, and the rigid and

ceremonious behavior of the figures. It is found that although the technical aspect of the production has progressed dramatically due to the technological and economic development in the Chinese television market over the years, the mise-en-scene of NYG has not changed much in the past two decades. The juggling relationship between the market, the ideology and the audience is shown in the unchanged mise-en-scene of NYG. Like any other programmes in the world, New Year's Gala is decided by the current status and culture of the country, which is special in its own way. Maybe the uniqueness of New Year's Gala can be best concluded by the words from its staging director Chen Yan: *'The mise-en-scene of New Year's gala is very complicated, just like the content it expresses... New Year's Gala is a special product that cannot be found by any certain routine...New Year's Gala bears culture, entertainment and many other things. Although New Year's Gala is just a medium, it bears more than the medium can express'* (Appendix E).

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***Tele-ography:***

<b>Programme Name</b>	<b>Airtime</b>	<b>Air Channel</b>	<b>Production Company</b>
<i>Happy Camp</i> 快乐大本营	Every Saturday at 20:10 since 11 July 1997	Hunan Satellite Television	Hunan TV Station
<i>Focus Interview</i> 焦点访谈	Everyday 19:38 - 19:51 since 1 April 1994	CCTV-1 CCTV-News Channel	CCTV
<i>Super Girl</i> 超级女声	Every Friday at 20:30 from 6 May 2004 to 2006	Hunan Satellite Television	Hunan TV Station E.E-Media

*Appendix A: New Year's Gala Programme Observation Table (1984-2008)*

	<b>New Year's Gala 1984</b>
<b>Total Length</b>	04h 15m 18s
<b>Presenters</b>	Zhao Zhongxiang, Lu Jing; Ma Ji, Jiang Kun, Jiang Lili, Huang Ayuan, Chen Sisi (HK).
<b>Director(s)</b>	Huang Yihe, and Zhang Shufen.
<b>No. of Items</b>	40
<b>Themes</b>	To prepare for the Olympics, a table-tennis match was held on stage, which was played by the former Olympic champions; The actress Yu Shuzhen expressed her grateful thanks to the people's support and Tianjin Mayor Li Ruihuan's leadership in improving the water quality in Tianjin; A stand-up comedy praised the hometown, the great changes in the countryside, and the correct leadership of the Party.
<b>Special Greetings to</b>	Kids were sent to give flowers to the model workers in the audience seats to show people's respect to them; A stand-up comedy used the form of Chinese couplets to glorify the audience, the farmer, the factory worker, and the army, etc; Presenters gave New Year greetings to all Chinese and those still working at their positions.
<b>Ethnic Minority Features</b>	Two regional songs (*31) were performed by a minority singer who welcomed the audience to her hometown; a regional song (*23) was performed by HK star Xi Xiulan with background dancers dressed in minority costumes.
<b>HK, Taiwan, Macau &amp; Overseas</b>	Group singing was performed by three Taiwanese artists who stayed in mainland for a while. They expressed missing their families back in Taiwan and their wishes that the mainland and Taiwan can reunion soon. Two HK singers performed patriotic songs.
<b>Chinese Zodiacs</b>	No clear indication for the Year of Rat, except the rat picture printed on the big plate in the acrobatics.
<b>Beginning</b>	With the folk music, the title of '1984 NYG' was written on the red background. The presenters introduced that the new technology of live broadcast was used. Then all the presenters counted down to the official start and introduced the performers from the audience seats. Presenters from mainland, HK and Taiwan greeted the audience and the first performance started with 8 singers walked to the stage from their audience seats.
<b>New Year Midnight Countdown</b>	With bell ringing, the screen cut to the image of Beijing tower. The night sceneries of different cities in China as well as people busy working in different filed were presented. Presenters announced the arrival of the spring, before all the performers singing the folk song together. All the people in the studio greeted each other.
<b>Ending</b>	Presenters sent New Year greeting and farewell to the audience in emotional poetic speech. The evening gala ended with the theme song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight'. Audience and performers left their seats and greeted for the New Year by giving Chinese couplets and toasts. Streamers were scattered from above. A little girl holding a doll asked the HK and Taiwan presenters sadly if they would leave the mainland after the show. She gave the doll to HK presenter and asked her to give it to the kids in HK and Macau.
<b>Studio Audiences</b>	Audiences were mainly the army soldiers, the model workers, the ordinary people and ethnic minorities, and the performers. All studio audiences sat around the round tables with snacks, fruits and tea provided. They moved around freely and often jumped out of their seats to cheer. Active interactions were among the performers, the audiences and the presenters. During the studio games, the studio audiences were very excited in helping getting the answer, as they shouted out loud from the audience seats.
<b>TV</b>	Most of the performances were organized according to the TV audience's ordering over the phone/letter (some of them were army soldiers and HK students traveling in mainland).

<b>Audiences</b>	The presenters were simply reading out the audience ordering to decide the next performance spontaneously.
<b>Audience's Favorite</b>	The Award of 'My Favorite NYG Performance', voted by the audiences, was Not Available until the 1992 NYG.
<b>Pre-recorded Material</b>	At the countdown, a pre-recorded clip showing people busy working (factory, post office, hospital and army, etc.). The recorded video was the basketball match given by monkeys and bears in the zoo.
<b>Presenters' Costumes</b>	All the male presenters were dressed in suits and female presenters were in fashionable day dresses. None of the presenters changed their costume.
<b>Presenters' Speeches</b>	Presenters sent New Year greeting and farewell to the audience in emotional poetic speech. Polite, humorous, natural, praiseful, formal, intimate, and relaxed.
<b>Other Features of Presenters</b>	Presenters read out their speech frequently from a piece of paper in hand. Presenters' linking lines were designed in a spontaneous way. Presenters and performers talked in casual and relaxed manners. Performers often introduced themselves before giving performances, and the presenters quickly handed over the microphone.
<b>Performers' Features</b>	Sitting at the audience seats, the performers came from all parts of China. They introduced themselves (some in their regional dialects) and some appeared shy. The performers walked from their audiences seats onto the stage to perform. Very often, the performers waited on the stage for the results of the audience ordering, before they decided what to perform. Simple make-up and dressing styles. Their facial expressions were attentive and holy. Sometimes they performed around the fountain. Most performers gave more than two performances each.
<b>Old Faces</b>	Ma Ji; Zhao Yan; Jiang Kun; Zhu Shimao; Chen Peisi; Jiang Dawei; Li Guyi;
<b>Celebrities in Show</b>	Jiang Lili, Song Shixiong; Yuan Kuocheng; Zhu Mingying; Ma Lan; Shen Xiaochen; Niu Decao; Yu Shuzhen; Su Ping. (HK): Chen Sisi; Zhang Mingmin; Xi Xiulan.
<b>Presenters in Show</b>	Songs performed by Taiwanese presenter and HK presenter (*35). Two stand-up comedies given by Ma Ji (*7;*28); Stand-up comedy and song given by Jiang Kun (*37;*39); Presenters joined in the acrobatics, studio games, and special talent performances, to help prepare and remove the props.
<b>Kids in Show</b>	The studio game 'nose-sticking' was played by kids and was organized by presenters.
<b>Background Dancers</b>	No background dance except in one song and dance (*23) given by HK singer Xi Xiulan, where four girls dressed in minority group costume and danced with the singer.
<b>Regional /Chinese Folk</b>	Chinese opera with Henan regional dialect (*12); Songs in Cantonese (*14) and Taiwanese dialect (*35); Chinese opera in general were performed in regional dialect
<b>Performance Genres &amp; Quantities</b>	1 Story Telling, 1 Sketch Comedy, 3 Stand-up Comedies, 2 Studio Games, 1 Table-tennis Match, 2 Acrobatics, 1 Special Talent, 2 Pantomime, 1 Video Footage, 8 Chinese Operas, 14 Song and Dances.
<b>Set Design</b>	The stage is not big in size. Only one central stage with changing colorful lights under the floor; There was a fountain at the back of the stage with the fish sculpture; There were plants around the stage and big posts around the studio with curtains and lanterns.
<b>Television Production</b>	No subtitles were provided at the beginning of each performance except the lyrics for few songs. There were four cameras in the studio to capture different angles. Shaky camerawork, out of focus shot, too fast pans that make the viewers dizzy, and jump cuts. The behind-the-scene production team was widely filmed as they held the camera and sorting wires. Techniques of close-up, overlapping, fading in and out, and colorful lighting were already applied. Props are very basic and simple.
<b>Significant Absence</b>	Firework and Chinese zodiac of the year.

	<b>New Year's Gala 1985</b>
<b>Total Length</b>	04h 09m 33s
<b>Presenters</b>	(Mainland): Zhao Zhongxiang, Ma Ji, Jiang Kun, Zhang Yu; (Taiwan): Zhu Wanyi; (Hong Kong): Ban Ban.
<b>Director(s)</b>	Huang Yihe
<b>No. of Items</b>	31
<b>Themes</b>	Famous sports commentator Song Shixiong introduced the families, doctors, drivers, and coaches of the volleyball players who were practicing hard even during the New Year to prepare for the volleyball competition. A video was played recording the life of the volleyball players to praise their dedicative spirit. Then the leader of the volleyball team gave speech on behalf of the national volleyball team. As the first Chinese mayor in U.S., Huang Jinbo made a speech before his patriotic song. He wished China to become more and more powerful. The theme of 'we are Chinese' was promoted.
<b>Special Greetings to</b>	Presenter Huang Ayuan gave New Year greetings to the Chinese in mainland, HK, Taiwan, and overseas in his regional dialect. Presenter Zhang Yu gave her new year greetings to the audience in Shanghai dialect. The singer in (*6) emotionally expressed his gratitude towards mothers. The singer in (*8) dedicated the song to the teachers. The singer in (*18) was dressed in army uniform, and the song portrayed the selfless spirit of army soldiers.
<b>Ethnic Minority Features</b>	The place where each performer came from was very often mentioned before the performance. In (*13), the Uigur singer was dressed in minority costume and performed in the minority dialect.
<b>HK, Taiwan, Macau &amp; Overseas Features</b>	HK presenter Ban Ban gave her greetings and wishes in Cantonese. Taiwanese presenter Zhu Wanyi sent new year greetings in Taiwanese dialect and expressed her happiness in 'returning to this lovely big family'. At the end the first song (*5) of the HK star, he told the audience that he was very excited to perform in the mainland for the first time. He used the word 'our country China' and 'us Chinese people'. Song (*23) of the HK singer Xi Xiulan expressed the feeling of the overseas Chinese who miss the motherland China.
<b>Chinese Zodiacs</b>	The big lighting board at the background of the stage composed the pattern of an ox, indicating the year of ox. The lyrics of the Chinese opera (*20) celebrated the year of ox, whose character was described as hard working, loyal, the successful revolution led by the Party, and also the spirit of the women's volleyball players.
<b>Beginning</b>	The title of 'New Year's Gala' was written on the moving graphic pattern under the theme song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight'. Presenter introduced the Beijing Workers' Stadium as this year's venue. With the background music, all performers and celebrities walked to the stage and waved to the audience. The presenters made a poem for the New Year together.
<b>New Year Midnight Countdown</b>	The presenters stood in a row to announce the bell of the New Year will ring soon. There was a big close-up of a watch to show the time. Under the presenters' cheering, a recorded video was played on the screen, showing how people celebrate the New Year.
<b>Ending</b>	At the end of the dance (*31), all performers and celebrities gathered on the stage and waved to the audience. Presenters appeared at the centre of the stage announcing the end of the NYG. Under the background music 'I Will Never Forget Tonight', the words 'Great Snow Great Year' was shown.
<b>Studio Audiences</b>	Studio audience were sitting casually, changing seats and walking around freely. Western audiences, government officials and army soldiers were filmed watching the gala in the audience seats. The discussions among the studio audience were also recorded. A volley ball was given to the studio audience who was asked to the stage. In the studio game (*15), the lucky number was generated from the basketball playing by two studio audiences.

<b>TV Audiences</b>	None
<b>Audience's Favorite</b>	Not available till 1992
<b>Pre-recorded Material</b>	During the New Year Countdown, a recorded video was played on the screen, showing the scenes of how people celebrate the new year in China.
<b>Presenters' Costumes</b>	The male presenters were dressed in suits and the female presenters were dressed in fashionable clothes at that time. Most presenters did not change their costumes throughout the evening gala, except the female presenter Zhang Yu who changed the costume once at the midnight countdown.
<b>Presenters' Speeches</b>	'Comrade' was the word to call the performers and celebrities by the presenters. Presenter made expressive gestures while making the poem. The presenters all held paper in hands to read out the speech in an emotional and rhetorical way one after another. In (*2), Presenter introduced the next performance by reciting a poem with close-up shots on her emotional facial expressions.
<b>Other Features of Presenters</b>	Presenter did not speak to the camera. Presenter suggested the audience to relax and have a cup of tea, which made the audience feel closer. In (*7), the hesitation on the presenter's face of having difficulties in remembering the lines was captured. Presenter Huang forgot his lines sometimes and appeared nervous. In (*6), two female presenters chatted like old friends on stage. This 'private conversation' linked the performance.
<b>Performers' Features</b>	The face expression and gestures of the singer also match the content of the lyrics. Very often, Presenter asked the performers to say a few words and greetings to the audience. Performers all said thank you and bowed at the end of their performances. The performers did not wear ceremonious evening costumes.
<b>Old Faces in Show</b>	Huang Ayuan, Chen Peisi, Zhu Shimao, Wang Jingyu, Zhao Zhongxiang, Ma Ji, Jiang Kun,
<b>Celebrities in Show</b>	(Mainland): Zhang Yu, He Saifei; (HK): Wang Mingquan, Zhang Mingmin, Luo Wen, Xi Xiulan, Ban Ban; (Taiwan): Zhu Wanyi; (Overseas) Huang Jinbo
<b>Presenters in Show</b>	In (*22), presenters helped prepare for the props and explained the performance to the audience. Presenter Jiang Kun also gave a performance in the stand-up comedy (*27).
<b>Kids in Show</b>	None
<b>Background Dancers</b>	No background dancers in most of the song and dances. In (*5), the singer came with more background dancers than in 1983.
<b>Regional / Folk</b>	In song (*4) (*9) and (*16), the singers sang the regional folk song in Cantonese. Three singers in (*20) sang the Chinese opera in Henan dialect.
<b>Performance Genres &amp; Quantities</b>	15 Song and Dances; 1 Music played with instruments; 3 Studio Games; 1 Sketch Comedy; 5 Chinese Operas; 2 Stand-up Comedies; 1 Acrobatics; 1 Pre-recorded Video; 2 Qi Gong and Martial Art performances
<b>Set Design</b>	The presenter explained the different performing areas on this stage. There were four pavement stairs from each direction leading to the central stage. The fountain and bridge worked as the settings of the stage. In (*4), the studio lighting turned dark with the big lighting board gradually creating the pattern of the great wall and the dragon on the stage. In (*7), smoke effect was added to the stage.
<b>Television Production</b>	The bad lighting made the faces of the presenters sometime dark and sometimes light. The quality of the sound recording in (*25) was bad. Camera work was constantly out of focus, shaky and unsteady. More props were used in the performance than in 1983. More performers were in the performances. Lyrics were provided at the bottom of the screen for the songs, but no credits for the performance titles.
<b>Significant Absence</b>	Not much traditional New Year decorations on the stage as in 1984 NYG.

	<b>New Year's Gala 1986</b>
<b>Total Length</b>	03h 36m 07s
<b>Presenters</b>	Wang Gang, Jiang Kun, Fang Shu, Gu Yongfei, Zhao Zhongxiang.
<b>Director(s)</b>	Huang Yihe
<b>No. of Items</b>	36
<b>Themes</b>	Presenters listed the great achievements and progresses in recent years: 46 world champions in the 1985 Olympics and five world-record breakers. In (*15), a real marriage between a soldier and a singer was held live in the NYG studio. The marriage was witnessed by a government official. He commented the marriage as extraordinary as the couple made great contributions for the country.
<b>Special Greetings to</b>	In the countdown, presenters gave New Year wishes to the children and the elderly, and to the people working at the frontline during the New Year including factory workers, farmers, soldiers, scientists, and the Chinese from HK, Taiwan, and the overseas.
<b>Ethnic Minority Features</b>	Minority songs were performed by the Han Chinese in (*1) and (*26). For song (*31), it expressed all the Chinese ethnicities were united in the happy life led by the Party. The background dancers were dressed in ethnical costumes, doing the traditional dances.
<b>HK, Taiwan, Macau &amp; Overseas</b>	Presenter introduced two singers from Hong Kong—in (*26) and (*27). All songs from HK and Taiwan were sung in Mandarin in NYG instead of its original Cantonese version. Both of the songs were pop music. During the song, the star walked down to the audience seats and shook hands with the performers and special guests sitting at the front row.
<b>Chinese Zodiacs</b>	The tiger lighting was put on both sides of the stage, as the zodiac symbol. The comedy (*2) glorified the national policy, soldiers, and ethics by using the word 'tiger'.
<b>Beginning</b>	Under the folk music and firework, the video was the played with the words of '1986 NYG' written over the spinning firework. A car was driving at night and stopped in front of the CCTV building. As the performers climbed out of the car and entered the studio, the presenter informed the audience in both Chinese and English that the NYG will be simultaneously translated into English and broadcast live by radio Beijing.
<b>New Year Midnight Countdown</b>	At the end of the comedy (*34), the camera cut to the close-up of the clock hanging in the studio. Fifteen seconds before the midnight, the clock was ticking. When the second-hand pointed at the midnight, with the audience cheered and the presenters welcomed the arrival of the New Year. Under sound of the belling ringing, camera cut to the recorded footage of setting off fireworks, the dragon dance, dumpling-making, family cheering at the dinner table, and the working scenes of the soldiers, doctors and factory workers.
<b>Ending</b>	By the special effect from editing, presenter pushed the words 'See you on next New Year's Eve' away on the screen. The presenters acted as if they forgot to announce the answers to the riddles given out throughout the evening gala. After giving out the answers, the characters of 'See you on next New Year's Eve' appeared again on screen with each presenter reading them out loud.
<b>Studio Audiences</b>	The studio audience did not stand up and greet each other like in the 1984 NYG. The studio audiences were dressed in their best with make-up on. Performers and important guests such as Olympic Champion Li Ning were sitting at the round table. During the performance, studio audiences were filmed changing seats casually. The studio audiences were clapping collectively with the song. The audience cheered loudly and happily.
<b>TV Audiences</b>	Presenters gave riddle questions between the performances throughout the evening gala to target different audience groups. Presenter read out the letters sent by the overseas Chinese student in Japan and the UK who expressed their home-sick feeling on this special occasion. There were less and audience interactions in NYG over the years.
<b>Audience's</b>	Not Available until the 1992 NYG.

<b>Favorite</b>	
<b>Pre-recorded Material</b>	A pre-recorded video of the dolphin performance (*5) was played. In the studio marriage (*15), a footage was played to show a small flat for the newly married couple. During the song (*17), a video of the sailor's life on the sea was played to portray the theme.
<b>Presenters' Costumes</b>	Presenters were dressed in suits, the Chinese traditional dress and fashionable sweaters. At the Countdown, four out of five presenters changed their outfits once.
<b>Presenters' Speeches</b>	The presenters spoke in poetic and solemn tone with the close-up on their emotional faces. Presenter deliberately announced the singer's name wrong to make jokes. Presenters addressed each other as 'Comrade'.
<b>Other Features of Presenters</b>	Presenters did not speak to camera. There was no self-introduction of the presenters. Sometimes one presenter deliberately interrupted another presenter while he/she was talking to create the storyline for linking of the next performance.
<b>Performers' Features</b>	The singer walked to the stage to perform from their front row audience seats. The comedians in (*12) were performing in front of the audience seats by facing the audience. The lips of the singers did not match the lyrics, which showed they were lip-syncing.
<b>Old Faces in Show</b>	Yin Xiumei, Cheng Fangyuan, Yu Junjian, Jiang Dawei, Jiang Kun, Tang Jiezhong, Wang Gang, Zhao Zhongxiang, Feng Gong, Chen Peisi, Zhu Shimao,
<b>Celebrities in Show</b>	Su Xiaoming, Fang Shu, Gu Yongfei (mainland), Jiang Hua (HK), Zhang Delan (HK)
<b>Presenters in Show</b>	Presenters gave riddle questions to different groups of audiences throughout the evening gala. Presenter Jiang Kun performed in the stand-up comedy (*30) and (*34).
<b>Kids in Show</b>	None
<b>Background Dancers</b>	No background dancers in most song and dances. Background dancers can keep their different hair styles to remain individuality. Unlike today, background dancers have to look the same.
<b>Regional /Chinese Folk</b>	In (*1) (*9) and (*21), dancers were dressed in folk costumes and danced in traditional folk style to the Chinese folk music. The song portrayed the happy scene of a marriage. Clapper Ballad (*24) is a regional art form from Northeast China. The comedy (*20) was performed in Sichuan regional dialect.
<b>Performance Genres &amp; Quantities</b>	12 Song and Dances; 5 Stand-up Comedies; 2 Sketch Comedies; 2 Magic Shows; 1 Pure music playing; 1 Studio Activity; 5 Riddle games; 3 Chinese Operas; 1 Pre-recorded Video; 2 Pure Dances; 1 Shandong clapper ballad.
<b>Set Design</b>	The comedy props were better equipped than the 1984 NYG. The studio is small but decorated with colorful lighting and a peacock at the back of the stage. Stage staircases were decorated with light bulbs. The colorful disco lights were spinning on the ceiling. Chinese red lanterns were hung on the studio ceiling. Plastic trees were placed to decorate the stage. There was a small black and white TV monitor at the back of the audience seats to show the live broadcast of the evening gala.
<b>Television Production</b>	Production crews were filmed passing behind the comedian and preparing the stage. Because there was no clip microphone at that time, the comedians put the hand-held microphone in the pocket of their suits to amplify their volume during their performance. Performance titles and lyrics of the song were provided. Many camera shots were taken from different angles to capture the performances. Sometimes the camerawork was shaky, due to lack of operational experience at that time. The scene looked a bit chaotic in (*1) with some people blocking the camera view by walking freely.
<b>Significant Absence</b>	No performance was arranged after the midnight Countdown, which is different from other NYGs. In this NYG, the studio audiences and performers did not stand up and greet each other for Happy New Year like in the 1984 NYG.

<b>New Year's Gala 1987</b>	
<b>Total Length</b>	04h 05m 12s
<b>Presenters</b>	Li Moran, Wang Gang, Li Xiaobin, Jiang Kun.
<b>Director(s)</b>	Deng Zaijun
<b>No. of Items</b>	33
<b>Themes</b>	The famous CCTV sports commentator hosted the award ceremony of the 'Best Ten Athletes' voted by 20 news institutions in Beijing in 1986. Ten athletes and their great achievements in the Olympic and Asian Games were introduced to the stage. Some athletes were asked to say a few words to the audience and they looked nervous while talking. After the award ceremony, the athletes gave a gymnastic performance on stage together.
<b>Special Greetings to</b>	Song (*21) was dedicated to all the ordinary workers who have contributed a lot to our society. During the song, an elderly lady was introduced on stage as the head of the Beijing Red Cross Obstetrical Hospital. She has delivered numerous babies in her life. At the end, presenter praised the great contribution by the ordinary workers in China.
<b>Ethnic Minority Features</b>	In (*5), eight background dancers were dressed in Tibetan costumes and doing their ethnic minority dance. (*32) was a song and dance combination featuring many ethnicities in China. The singers and dancers all sang their regional songs in standard Mandarin but they were dressed in their traditional costumes.
<b>HK, Taiwan, Macau &amp; Overseas</b>	The singer did the 80s-style dancing moves during singing. She expressed her pleasure of being invited by CCTV to perform in NYG. During the song, she shook hands with the audience. Being introduced as a Taiwanese artist, Fei Xiang mentioned that it was the first time he returned to his motherland. His song was dedicated to his mother and grandmother from the mainland. His 'missing motherland' speech was one of the fixed themes.
<b>Chinese Zodiacs</b>	A big rabbit toy was placed as the background of the stage. In (*1), kids were dressed in rabbit costumes and dancing to the music. Comedy (*2) uses the theme Rabbit to make Chinese couplets. In magic tricks (*16), the magician gave rabbits to studio audience.
<b>Beginning</b>	Under the Chinese traditional music, the screen showed the bird's eye view of the CCTV building in the evening. With the doors opening, the CCTV studio was revealed. The studio audiences were cheering and applauding, while the performers were waving with New Year toys on stage. Presenters stood in front of the performers and gave best wishes to the Chinese in poetic speeches on behalf of CCTV and all performers and production crews.
<b>New Year Midnight Countdown</b>	All the performers gathered on stage. During the song, the screen cut to a clock with the second-hand running to the midnight. The bell started to ring and all the performers and audiences cheered happily by hugging each other and jumping around. 'Happy New Year to all Chinese people' was shown on the screen.
<b>Ending</b>	Presenter Li gave poetic speech to welcome the New Year with pause, intonations and hand gestures. He ended the NYG by announcing seeing the audience next year. The ending of this NYG was arranged right after the New Year Countdown. There was no performance between the Countdown and the End.
<b>Studio Audiences</b>	Studio audience and production crews were filmed walking freely across the studio. Most of the front row studio audiences were performers. Olympic Champions, army officers, and ethnic minority performers/audiences were sitting at the front row. The studio audience were shouting/raising hands from their seats in the studio riddle game (*26).
<b>TV Audiences</b>	None
<b>Audience's Favorite</b>	Not Available until the 1992 NYG.

<b>Pre-recorded Material</b>	Animal performance (*6) was a pre-recorded video, featuring a family banquet performed by all kinds of circus animals.
<b>Presenters' Costumes</b>	Presenter was dressed in suits with the CCTV logo printed on his pocket. Male presenters were dressed in suits. Female presenters were dressed in Chinese traditional Qi Pao. The presenters did not change costumes in this NYG.
<b>Presenters' Speeches</b>	Jokes were created by presenters to link the next performance. Presenters introduced the next performance by reciting a poem (in a slow and emotional way with eyes looking afar and tones up and down).
<b>Other Features of Presenters</b>	The three presenters did not appear together on stage to give speeches like nowadays NYG. The presenters were not introduced to the audience as presenters at the beginning, and no credit was given to them on the screen.
<b>Performers' Features</b>	Some performers were introduced as guest performers in CCTV. The comedians performed in front of the audience seats and greeted the audience.
<b>Old Faces in Show</b>	Liu Wei; Feng Gong; You Benchang; Li Yang; Xiao Lin; Li Guosheng; Jiang Kun; Tang Jiezhong; Yin Xiumei; Wang Gang; Guo Da; Yang Lei; Jiang Dawei; Shi Fukuan; Yu Junjian; Ma Ji; Zhao Yan; Liu Yajin. Some old face performers gave more than one performance in NYG.
<b>Celebrities in Show</b>	(Mainland): Li Ning (the Olympic Champion); Wang Fuli (TV soap star); (HK): Ye Liyi; (Taiwan): Fei Xiang.
<b>Presenters in Show</b>	Presenter Jiang Kun organized the studio game (*26) and in stand-up comedy (*18).
<b>Kids in Show</b>	Many kids in (*1) were dressed in rabbit costumes and dancing to the kids' music.
<b>Background Dancers</b>	There were more background dancers than the 1986 NYG, around 20 dancers in (*1). There were background dancers in each group, following tightly one after another in (*32).
<b>Regional /Chinese Folk</b>	(*1) (*22) and (*24) were the Chinese folk song, the singers were dressed in the traditional Chinese costumes and the background dancers were doing the folk dance. The comedians in (*20) and (*29) spoke in Northern regional Chinese dialect.
<b>Performance Genres &amp; Quantities</b>	14 Song and Dance; 5 Stand-up Comedy; 3 Sketch Comedy; 1 Chinese Opera Comedy; 1 Sports Performance; 1 Fashion Show; 2 Comedy Insert; 1 Studio-Game Riddle; 1 Magic Show; 1 Chinese Opera; 2 Pre-recorded Video playing; 1 Award Ceremony.
<b>Set Design</b>	The stage was small. There were several big golden posts at the back of the stage and two red curtains were hung on both sides. Red lanterns were placed between the posts. Two small fountains were on the both sides of the stage. Chinese paper cut was put right in the middle of the wall as the background of the stage. Flowers and small trees were placed around the stage. The front row audience seats were provided with the round tables and the soft drinks. There were four different locations where the performances took place: the central stage, the arches by the side of the stage, the red Chinese pavilion on the other side, and the tree sculpture at the back of the audience seats. The camera cannot move around much as each location was not very spacious. There were three rows of round tables at the front of the audience seats.
<b>Television Production</b>	Performance titles and lyrics were provided at the bottom of the screen. Some shots were a bit unsteady and out-of-focus. The props were better equipped than the previous years' NYG. The sound recording skill was not good at that time. During the New Year Countdown, the voice of the presenter could not be heard at the beginning.
<b>Significant Absence</b>	The ending of this NYG was arranged right after the New Year Countdown. There was no performance between the Countdown and the End of this NYG.

	<b>New Year's Gala 1988</b>
<b>Total Length</b>	04h 12m 36s
<b>Presenters</b>	Sun Daolin, Wang Gang, Jiang Kun, Hou Yaowen.
<b>Director(s)</b>	Deng Zaijun
<b>No. of Items</b>	42
<b>Themes</b>	The song (*22) was dedicated to the Chinese army soldiers. All the performers were army soldiers dressed in their uniforms. During the song, quite a few army officers rose up from their audience seats and solute to the song. Some of the army officers had tears in their eyes. (*35) was a pure dance featuring all major ethnic minorities. Some of the dancers had with ethnic minority background and some were the majority Han Chinese from Beijing Dancing Academy. The presenters interviewed a national football player sitting at the audience seats. The football player expressed the great achievement that the Chinese football team made and gave greetings to all the supportive football fans.
<b>Special Greetings to</b>	See the 'Themes' column.
<b>Ethnic Minority Features</b>	(*2) was a patriotic song to express the happy united China with all different ethnicities loving the motherland. Song (*27) was a love romantic song from an ethnic minority region. Both the dancers and the singer were dressed in the ethnic costumes. Song (*31) was a Uigur ethnic minority song and dance, which expressed the happiness of their life. The name of (*38) indicated it is a Tibetan ethnic performance. The singer also came from Tibet.
<b>HK, Taiwan, Macau &amp; Overseas</b>	Song (*9) was about passionate feeling for the hometown, which has special meanings to be performed by HK singers, to express that China is their hometown. Song (*28) was called 'reunite in the Year of Dragon' which expresses the missing motherland feeling between the mainland and Taiwan. During the song, the singer was hugging the studio audiences with tears. Many studio audiences stood up for this emotional moment.
<b>Chinese Zodiacs</b>	At the opening scene, the screen showed the close-up of several dragon sculptures. There was also a big Chinese traditional picture of dragon at the background of the stage. Stand-up comedy (*7) was about discussing the merits and shortcomings of the Chinese zodiacs. Song (*13) was called 'Chinese Dragon', which indicated the year of Dragon, and also glorified the Chinese origin as the descendants of the dragon.
<b>Beginning</b>	Under the glorious music, the screen showed the close-ups of several dragon sculptures, and then the evening scene of the busy street with cars and the image of the CCTV building. Then, the subsidiary venues in Guangdong, Heilongjiang, and Sichuan were shown. By showing a close-up shot of a watch, the NYG started.
<b>New Year Midnight Countdown</b>	Once the last performance was drawing to the end, the screen faded in with a big red clock. All the people in the studio stood up from their seats and cheered happily. Then a pre-recorded footage of the New Year greetings given by a former government official and the Chinese students in the U.S. The footages of the firework were inserted.
<b>Ending</b>	All the performers gathered on stage and danced happily. All the studio audience stood up and clapped with the song. A big flower basket of wishing great future with Taiwan was placed on the stage.
<b>Studio Audiences</b>	Some studio audience gave passionate cheers during the performance. Army officers were filmed sitting at the round tables. Studio Game (*21) was a mix of different sound tracks from films for the studio audience to guess with prizes awarded. At the end of magic tricks (*34), a box of candies was thrown to the studio audience.
<b>TVAudiences</b>	None
<b>Audience's</b>	

<b>Favorite</b>	Not Available till the 1992 NYG.
<b>Pre-recorded Material</b>	During the New Year Countdown, two pre-recorded videos of the New Year greetings given by a former government official and the Chinese students in the U.S. were played. The pre-recorded cartoon (*8) was a Chinese cartoon made for the children audiences. Song (*18) was a pre-recorded video of the New Year celebration scene in Guangzhou. A pre-recorded song (*37) described all kinds of wonderful street food available in Sichuan.
<b>Presenters' Costumes</b>	Male presenters were dressed in suits and female presenters were dressed in fashionable sweaters. They did not change the costumes throughout the NYG.
<b>Presenters' Speeches</b>	Presenters hardly appeared to do the linking between the performances. Presenters also helped with the setting up props for the performance and the narration.
<b>Other Features of Presenters</b>	The presenters appeared once in a while between the performances to do necessary linking, as most of the performances followed one after another tightly without presenters' introduction. Each presenter did not introduce themselves upon their first appearances. The presenters did not have the emotional, poetic and ceremonious style, instead, they kept their lines very light, brief and humorous and you can feel they were also having fun.
<b>Performers' Features</b>	The singers were dressed in fashionable daily outfits such as sweaters and day dresses. At the end of a song, all the singers gathered on stage together with the dancers dancing around them to pause. The performers including male performers had heavy make-up on. When not giving performances, the performers all sat at the front row audience seats.
<b>Old Faces in Show</b>	You Benchang, Zhao Lirong, Yan Weiwen, Liu Wei, Feng Gong, Zhao Baole, Li Yang, Mao A'Min, Zhao Shilin, Niu Decao, Guo Da, Shi Fukuan, Xiao Lin, Li Guosheng.
<b>Celebrities in Show</b>	Mainland: Liu Xiao Ling Tong, Chi Zhongrui, Ma Dehua, Yan Huili (TV stars from the popular TV drama series 'Journey to the West'); Yue Hong (flim star) HK: Jiang Liping; Taiwan: Bao Nana; Wan Shalang
<b>Presenters in Show</b>	Presenter Jiang Kun performed the stand-up comedy (*29) among the audience seats. In Magic Show (*34), presenter explained the magic procedures to the audience.
<b>Kids in Show</b>	At the end of song (*1), a group of kids were standing a line with flowers at the front.
<b>Background Dancers</b>	In song (*1), there were only 12 background dancers (6 male and 6 female), dressed in folk costumes and the same background dancers were doing folk dances for other songs.
<b>Regional /Chinese Folk</b>	Northern Chinese regional dialect was spoken in the musical comedy (*25). Song (*37) was sung in Sichuan dialect with lyrics provided at the bottom of the screen. (*19) was a folk song featuring the romance of a couple. The singers were dressed in the traditional folk costumes, singing and performing this love song to the folk music.
<b>Performance Genres &amp; Quantities</b>	17 Song and Dance; 6 Stand-up Comedy; 3 Sketch Comedy; 1 Chinese Opera Comedy; 2 Pure Dance; 1 Pre-recorded Cartoon; 1 Magic Show; 2 Studio Games; 2 Chinese Opera; 2 Acrobatics; 1 Story Telling; 3 Studio/OB live interaction; 1 Martial Art
<b>Set Design</b>	The stage was very small which can hold 50 people maximum. There were round tables placed at the front row of audience seats. There were several big pictures of Chinese zodiacs on the wall at the back of the auditorium. Several big posts were placed on the side of the stage where water running through the surface like fountains. There were lights decorated along the staircases of the stage. A disco ball was hung on the studio ceiling above the stage. The props for sketch comedy were better prepared.
<b>Television Production</b>	Lighting was very unstable as the stage was sometimes very bright and sometimes very dark. Interesting camerawork as it is steadier and with more interesting shots from various angles. The zooming-in/out was not operated smoothly. The fast and slow motions were applied in the editing. The sound recording was very noisy.
<b>Significant Absence</b>	Instead of using the NYG closure song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight' as usual, this NYG used another song 'We are all friends' to end the NYG.

	<b>New Year's Gala 1989</b>
<b>Total Length</b>	04h 18m 44s
<b>Presenters</b>	Li Moran, Zhao Zhongxiang, Jiang Kun, Gan Lijun, Li Yang, Ju Ping and Feng Gong.
<b>Director(s)</b>	Zhao An, and Zhang Xiaohai.
<b>No. of Items</b>	48
<b>Themes</b>	The Taiwan singer Pan Anbang chatted with three old Taiwanese soldiers who remained in mainland over forty years. Being interviewed at the audience seats, the old soldiers told their own life stories in tears and expressed how much they miss their home in Taiwan. The signer hugged them and hoped they can come home soon. The song matched with this theme of Taiwan and mainland getting united soon.
<b>Special Greetings to</b>	Army Songs (*18) (*19): The screen cut to the subsidiary venue in the China Grand Theatre where 700 Chinese army representatives from Land, Navy, and Air force were seated. The soldiers sang all together in clear order without any background music. Audiences applauded with the song. At the end, the words 'Happy New Year to all the Chinese army soldiers and their families ' were written on the screen.
<b>Ethnic Minority Features</b>	In Song (*44) and Dance (*47), ethnic performers were dressed in different traditional costumes and sang together. The names of each ethnic minority were provided on the screen. Greetings words 'Best wishes to all the ethnical groups in China', and 'United People, Powerful Country' were written at the bottom.
<b>HK, Taiwan, Macau &amp; Overseas</b>	A foreign student from former Yugoslavia performed Chinese opera in (*29). She was also interviewed by the presenter in fluent Chinese. Pre-recorded song (*27) was given by a famous HK singer. In (*34), Taiwan pop singer gave New Year wishes to the audience and received flowers. He talked with three old soldiers from Taiwan who missed their hometown by staying in mainland. They hugged each other in tears after story-telling.
<b>Chinese Zodiacs</b>	One short snake dance (*1) at the beginning of the evening gala.
<b>Beginning</b>	The opening scene started with the live music band playing all kinds of instruments on stage in fast-paced special effect. The performers were filmed walking into the studio and greeting the audience. All kinds of performances such as Chinese opera, hip-hop dance, acrobatic and snake dance, took place on the stage at the same time. Presenters announced the official start of the evening gala and gave their greetings to the audience on behalf of CCTV. Performers were cheering and waving on the stage with toys.
<b>New Year Midnight Countdown</b>	A close-up of a big clock was shown on screen. Presenters asked the audience to countdown together by looking at the clock. The bell rang once New Year arrived. The scenes of all the people greeting each other in the studio were taken from a bird's eye view. With the sound of the bell and the picture of firework as background, texts 'Happy new year to the 100-year-old people' were written across the screen. It was followed by the footages of nine over 100-year-old people celebrating the New Year.
<b>Ending</b>	During the song, all performers and presenters gathered on stage and applauded. The scene of performers and audiences hugging each other and taking pictures were filmed.
<b>Studio Audiences</b>	There were much more studio audiences than those in the 1984 NYG, and the studio audience were not only performers and model workers, more ordinary people were also included. The audience did not behave as casual and relaxed as in previous years, as they sat in strict quiet order. Army soldiers were filmed standing at the entrance of the studio. Studio games participated by the audiences were Speed Calculation (*9), Human Dictionary (*45), and Riddle Competition (*26).
<b>TV Audiences</b>	In (*45), a TV audience phoned the studio during the game. An operator picked up and put the phone conversation to loud speaker so that everyone could hear it. In (*26), the last

	riddle was reserved for the TV audience to play only.
<b>Audience's Favorite</b>	Not Available until the 1992 NYG.
<b>Pre-recorded Material</b>	In (*36), presenter explained the special editing effect to the audience by piecing the scenes from different films together. Song (*27) by HK singer was pre-recorded.
<b>Presenters' Costumes</b>	Male presenters were dressed in formal suits and female presenters were dressed in Chinese traditional clothes Qipao. None of them changed costumes throughout the gala.
<b>Presenters' Speeches</b>	Presenters did not read out their lines from a piece of paper in hand like in the 1984 NYG. All the presenters talked in friendly manner and spoke to the camera. To show they put the audience first, they often asked audience rhetorical questions such as 'Is that all right?!' before the next performance was put on. It is a typical speech arrangement that each presenter says one sentence one after another before they finish the last sentence together.
<b>Other Features of Presenters</b>	Presenters rarely appeared to do the performance linking, as the performances followed tightly one after another without introduction. Presenters hardly appear together. No communications and conversations between the presenters.
<b>Performers' Features</b>	Most performers were dressed in suits, fashionable clothes of the time, and evening dresses. A common way for the performers to interact with the audience was to greet them.
<b>Old Faces in Show</b>	Jiang Kun, Li Yang, Li Moran, Xiao Lin, Zhao Zhongxiang, Li Guosheng, Feng Gong, Niu Qun, Liu Wei, Ma Ji, Tang Jiezhong, Chen Peisi, Zhu Shimao, Song Dandan, Zhao Lirong, Huang Hong, Shi Shengjie, Guan Mucun, Li Jindou, Yang Liping.
<b>Celebrities in Show</b>	Pan Anbang (Taiwan); Xu Xiaofeng (HK); Jun Ping (mainland)
<b>Presenters in Show</b>	Jiang Kun was in Stand-up comedy and Studio Games; Ju Ping was in Kids Speed Calculation; Feng Gong played music for the Chinese opera given by the foreign student.
<b>Kids in Show</b>	The 'Speed Calculation' (*9) was performed by kids. Ten kids performed martial art professionally as background of the song (*10). All the acrobatics (*11) were performed by kids from professional acrobatic teams. Two kids sang the Chinese opera in (*12). Their ages and international awards were provided on the screen.
<b>Background Dancers</b>	Much more background dancers were included in song and dances than in the 1984 NYG.
<b>Regional / Chinese Folk</b>	Performers sang in regional dialects in song and dance (*4).
<b>Performance Genres &amp; Quantities</b>	23 Song and Dances; 3 Pure Dances; 4 Sketch comedies; 5 Stand-up Comedies; 3 Studio Games; 4 Chinese Operas; 1 Special Talent; 1 Shuanghuang Comedy.
<b>Set Design</b>	There were two stages in the CCTV studio. One was the centre stage at the front, and the other was the small round stage at the back of the audience seats. Semi-circle fountain with lotus was arranged as the background of the stage. Plants were placed along the corridors. The auditorium was decorated with lanterns and streamers. The props were better prepared than those in the 1984 NYG. An automatic moving platform was used on stage.
<b>Television Production</b>	All performers had a microphone in hand when performing. Techniques of fade in/fade out were widely used. Sometimes the camera shot was still shaky and out-of-focus. Performers getting ready at the back-stage were filmed. The name and performance titles were provided at the bottom of the screen. New Year greetings to the different audience groups were written on the screen.
<b>Significant Absence</b>	The typical things from real life New Year celebration, which are not included in NYG: firework, Chinese paper-cut and Chinese couplets.

	<b>New Year's Gala 1990</b>
<b>Total Length</b>	04h 14m 45s
<b>Presenters</b>	Zhao Zhongxiang, Li Moran, Gan Lijun, Zhu Shimao, and Tian Lianyuan.
<b>Director(s)</b>	Huang Yihe
<b>No. of Items</b>	36
<b>Themes</b>	Song (*22) celebrated the great historical heritage and origin of the Chinese people. To welcome the start of the Asian Games, a gymnastic performance was given in (*26). In (*25), Five famous painters gave their paintings to the NYG as presents. The themes of their paintings were: United Country, Horses, and Welcome Spring.
<b>Special Greetings to</b>	In(*2) Presenter gave new year greetings to all the Chinese people working in every field, in mainland, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and overseas on behalf of CCTV. Former president Jiang Zemin and premier Li Peng gave the greetings at the countdown to the Chinese people.
<b>Ethnic Minority Features</b>	In (*12), the Mongolian singer was dressed in the Mongolian traditional costume and dedicated her own composed song to her hometown friends.
<b>HK, Taiwan, Macau &amp; Overseas</b>	In (*10), the Taiwanese Singer shook hands with the audiences and performers. Audience applauded collectively with the song. In (*15), the HK singer shook hands with the studio audience while singing. A flower was given to him after the song. Before performing his song (*23), Taiwanese TV star Ling Feng expressed his view that the distance between the mainland and Taiwan should be brought closer, which won a big applause.
<b>Chinese Zodiacs</b>	Sculptures of the horses were placed on the both sides of the stage. In the Opening Scene, a horse pattern was lighted. In (*2), presenter suggested that the next performance should include the word 'horse' in each song lyrics.
<b>Beginning</b>	Under the background music and audiences' applause, an animated horse appeared on the screen with the New Year wishes. Then memorable moments of the previous years' NYG were displayed in still images to remind the audience. The first performance in the studio jumped through those still images in the middle of the screen. During the song, presenters appeared and greeted the audience on stage, leading the performers of their own teams.
<b>New Year Midnight Countdown</b>	Towards the end of the song, a clock faded in to the screen. The presenter commented the New Year was about to arrive in an exciting and emotional way. Once the bell was ringing at the midnight, the studio audiences stood up from their seats, cheering and applauding. Presenter introduced the former president and premier to give greetings to the people.
<b>Ending</b>	All the performers walked to the stage from their front row seats, waving and cheering. Studio audience stood up from their seats while applauding. Presenter announced the final scores of each team after the performance competition. The NYG closure song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight' (*36) was performed in solemn and emotional manner.
<b>Studio Audiences</b>	Some studio audiences held big boards written 'laugh', 'happy New Year', 'red team must win', as the slogans for each team. The studio audiences all wore the hat with CCTV logo written on it. The studio audiences were divided into three groups, marked by three different colors of their hats and cheerleading props. In (*2), presenter introduced national model workers, pioneers in each fields, and the army heroes as special studio guests.
<b>TV Audiences</b>	None
<b>Audience's Favorite</b>	Not Available until the 1992 NYG.
<b>Pre-recorded Material</b>	In (*6), the dubbing voice of Li Yang was pre-recorded with the music background.

<b>Presenters' Costumes</b>	Male presenters were dressed in suits; Female presenter was dressed in colorful and ceremonious evening dress. Presenters did not change costumes.
<b>Presenters' Speeches</b>	Sometimes the presenter did not speak to camera. As team leaders in the performance competition, the presenters shouted out encouraging slogans which received collective exciting responses from the studio audiences.
<b>Other Features of Presenters</b>	Presenters did not do the preparation work anymore like in previous years. Dramatic plots were created among the presenters to make the performance linking interesting and exciting. As leaders of each team in the performance competition, the role of presenter was made more interesting by making humorous conversations to entertain the audience, rather than making emotional poetic speeches.
<b>Performers' Features</b>	Singer (*12) (*17) were dressed in ceremonious evening dress and heavy accessories. The performers in (*3) walked to the stage from the audience seats to sing one after another. Each performer had their colored name tag on their clothes to identify which group they belonged to. Each song followed tightly one after another, with the audience cheering for the groups they were in.
<b>Old Faces in Show</b>	Zhao Zhongxiang, Li Moran, Zhu Shimao, Hang Tianqi, Tang Jiezhong, Liu Wei, Jiang Kun, Feng Gong, Niu Qun, Zhao Benshan, Xiao Xiangyu, Gong Hanlin, Yang Hongji, Yan Shunkai, Huang Hong, Wang Jingyu, Chen Peisi, Li Guyi
<b>Celebrities in Show</b>	Jiang Zemin, Li Peng, Tan Yuanshou, Li Yang, Ling Feng (TaiWan), Wen Zhang (TaiWan), Zhang Mingmin (HK)
<b>Presenters in Show</b>	Presenter explained the paintings in (*25) while showing them to the audience. Presenter performed in the sketch comedy (*29).
<b>Kids in Show</b>	In (*14), kids held Chinese opera masks over their face and danced to the opera music. Kids in (*36) were standing at the front with flowers in hand, as a typical scene at the beginning and ending of the evening gala.
<b>Background Dancers</b>	Background dancers were included in all song and dances except in (*10) (*14) (*28) (*30). They usually were dressed in the clothes to match with the theme of the song, such as in (*17) and (*22).
<b>Regional /Chinese Folk</b>	Singers and dancers were dressed in traditional farmer's folk costumes and dance to the folk music, such as (*4) (*9) (*20) (*28). Sometimes the performers sang in regional dialects, and sometimes they put in moderate acting scenes to match with the theme of the song: describing the pleasant life in the countryside, New Year celebration, and patriotic themes. Singers returned back to their audience seats after the performance.
<b>Performance Genres &amp; Quantities</b>	16 Song and Dances; 1 Couplet Making; 1 'One Minute Humour' Competition; 1 Comedy Dance; 4 Sketch Comedies; 4 Stand-up Comedies; 2 Chinese Operas; 1 Painting Presentation; 1 Gymnastic Performance; 1 Silent Comedy; 1 Puppet Show
<b>Set Design</b>	There was a central stage with several lighted arches at the back. The curtains were hung round the posts. Fountains were on the both sides, and the lights were decorated on the stairs of the stage. Plants were put at the side of the stage. Chinese couplets were decorated on the posts. Red lanterns were decorated on the ceiling. Smoke was created on the stage. The sound recording was bad.
<b>Television Production</b>	Camera work was shaky and out of focus. The pan and tilt were too quick. Singers sang with clip microphones. Audience's laughing and clapping was constantly filmed to show how much they enjoyed the show. More interesting shots were experimented from all angles and styles. Some audiences were captured sleeping during the performance.
<b>Significant Absence</b>	More modern songs and performance, rather than patriotic performances.

	<b>New Year's Gala 1991</b>
<b>Total Length</b>	04h 28m 26s
<b>Presenters</b>	Zhao Zhongxiang, Ni Ping, Zhang Hongmin, Li Ruiying, Li Yang, Ju Ping, Song Shixiong, Gan Lijun
<b>Director(s)</b>	Lang Kun, Hu Miao
<b>No. of Items</b>	48
<b>Themes</b>	Presenter introduced the O.B., which showed the former president and premiere visiting the factories and countryside homes during the New Year. They both gave New Year greetings to those who were still working hard at their positions during the New Year, as well as to all the Chinese in Taiwan, HK and Overseas on behalf of all the political bodies in China. Many journalists and government officials were around them during their visits.
<b>Special Greetings to</b>	The text of 'New Year greetings to all the children' appeared at the end of the performance (*3). The song (*14) was dedicated to the athletes participated in the Asian Games. At the end of the song, the text of 'To all the people who make selfless dedication to the construction of the country' appeared on screen. The text of 'Dedicate to all the people working at their position during the New Year' was shown on screen at the end of the patriotic song (*30). The text of 'Giving respect to all the Chinese People's Liberation Army, Policemen and Police officers' was shown on screen at the end of the army song (*32). The text 'New Year greetings to those who work in the education and science sector' appeared at the end of the song (*41).
<b>Ethnic Minority Features</b>	At the beginning of the gala, dancers dressed in different ethnical minority costumes were singing and dancing together. In (*2), ten different ethnical minorities dressed in their traditional costumes gave their ethnic song and dances one group after another. All the songs were sung in their regional dialects. They all expressed their united love for the country and the good relationship between the army and the people. The text of 'New Year greetings to all the ethnicities in China' appeared at the end.
<b>HK, Taiwan, Macau &amp; Overseas</b>	At the end of the song (*27) performed by both mainland singer and HK singer, the texts 'New Year greetings to the Chinese in HK, Taiwan and Overseas' were written across the screen. Pop songs such as (*9) and (*22) were performed by HK stars who were dressed in fashionable clothes. The famous sports commentator from Taiwan TV gave New Year greetings to the audience. He wished the good working relationship between CCTV and Taiwan TV would continue in the future. Singers (*27) from both mainland and HK were dressed in ceremonious evening dresses and sang the patriotic song together to show the same bond and origin between the mainland and the HK and Taiwan
<b>Chinese Zodiacs</b>	The paper cut talent in (*16) cut the shape of a goat out of the paper. In (*39), all the comedians were born in the year of Goat and they played the word games by including the word 'goat' in each sentence. Song (*40) was dedicated to the year of goat.
<b>Beginning</b>	Under the sound of the bell ringing, the image of CCTV building was shown with colorful lightings and. The text '1991 NYG' was spinning over the image. Then the camera cut straight to the NYG studio. Two sliding doors were open on stage, where many kids dressed in traditional costumes were running and dancing happily with all folk props. Performers gathered on stage and danced to the folk music. All presenters greeted the audience happy new year together.
<b>New Year Midnight Countdown</b>	A clock appeared on the right hand corner of the screen, showing 15 seconds to the midnight. While the presenter was counting down to the midnight, the studio audience rose up from their seats, cheering and clapping upon the arrival of the New Year. The text of 'New Year greetings to all the people in China' was shown on the screen. Then all the presenters gave New Year speeches and greetings to the elderly, the young, those who

	were working in the New Year, the army soldiers, and everybody in China.
<b>Ending</b>	Presenters appeared together to make short poetic speech to welcome the New Year. The closure song and dance was folk Yangge dance. Text of 'New Year greetings to all the audience friends' was shown across the screen during the performance. All the performers joined the dance on stage from their audience seats, and glitters were falling from the sky.
<b>Studio Audiences</b>	The studio audiences include war heroes, model workers, and pioneers from different fields all over China. Studio audience/performers dressed in ethnical minority costumes were filmed sitting at the front row. The studio audience behaved relaxed.
<b>TVAudiences</b>	None
<b>Audience's Favorite</b>	Not Available until the 1992 NYG.
<b>Pre-recorded Material</b>	Performance (*11) was a pre-recorded video. Two professionally trained pandas were giving acrobatic performances. After performance (*37), a video clip was played on the big screen in the studio: the New Year greetings from the Chinese in Los Angeles.
<b>Presenters' Costumes</b>	Presenters were dressed in formal suits and dresses in fashionable styles. All presenters kept the same outfits throughout the show except Ni Ping changed her outfit once.
<b>Presenters' Speeches</b>	Presenters made the speech in a formal and rigid way, with serious tones and gestures which looked very unnatural. Presenter introduced the performance in a brief way without special planned dramatic and humorous plots and storylines. Presenter made oral mistakes.
<b>Other Features of Presenters</b>	Presenters were the long-term news readers of the CCTV evening news programme. All the presenters behaved in a very formal and old-fashioned style. Presenters hardly appeared between the performances to link the performance.
<b>Performers' Features</b>	The singers followed tightly one after another, and several singers shared one song. Comedians usually appeared from the audience seats and gave greetings while walking towards the stage. Performers were dressed in ceremonious dresses.
<b>Old Faces in Show</b>	Huang Hong, Song Dandan, Jiang Kun, Tang Jiezhong, Zhao Zhongxiang, Ni Ping, Gan Lijun, Niu Qun, Feng Gong, Mao Amin, Gong Hanlin, Cai Ming, Cai Guoqing,
<b>Celebrities in Show</b>	Zhang Hongmin, Li Ruiying, Li Yang, Ju Ping, Song Shixiong (Mainland); Zhen Ni, Tan Yonglin, Kuang Meiyun (HK); Jiang Yuheng, Pan Meichen (Taiwan)
<b>Presenters in Show</b>	Presenters were doing the narration in special talent (*16) and (*21).
<b>Kids in Show</b>	Kids were cheering and dancing happily at the beginning and end of the gala. All the opera singers were kids below ten-years old in (*3). Kids background dancers in (*9).
<b>Background Dancers</b>	There were background dancers in most song and dances. The number of background dancers in each performance was around five people. Background dancers performed with acting skills with dramatic facial expressions such as in (*15).
<b>Regional /Chinese Folk</b>	Comedians spoke in the North-East regional dialect in (*4) (*18). Folk songs (*12) glorified the greatness of the Chinese's mother river. In the Song Combination (*29), each song praised one province in different regional dialects.
<b>Performance Genres &amp; Quantities</b>	27 Song & Dances; 5 Stand-up Comedies; 5 Sketch Comedies; 4 Chinese Operas; 1 Acrobatics; 1 Pre-recorded Video; 2 Special Talents; 1 Acrobatic Magic Comedy; 1 Opera Fashion Show; 1 Opera Pantomime Comedy
<b>Set Design</b>	There was no round table at the front row. The stage was decorated with red lanterns and Chinese couplets. There was a fountain by the stage. The props were better equipped.
<b>Television Production</b>	Lyrics and performance titles were provided. The camera work was operated more smoothly and more skilful together with special effects from editing. Production crews were filmed working behind the stage. The lighting was not very stable.
<b>Absence</b>	The classic closure song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight' was not played at the end.

	<b>New Year's Gala 1992</b>
<b>Total Length</b>	04h 19m 58s
<b>Presenters</b>	Yang Lan, Zhao Zhongxiang, Ni Ping
<b>Director(s)</b>	Zhao An
<b>No. of Items</b>	43
<b>Themes</b>	Song (*25) was dedicated to the army soldiers in China. A special feature was inserted where a soldier expressed his homesick on the New Year in front of the camera. In return, his mother was filmed sending the greetings back to her son. In the theatrical play (*27), the 'victim farmers' expressed their thanks in tears to all the people who had helped them to go through the natural disaster in 1991. The words 'Sharing happiness and difficulties together, and the world will be filled with love' appeared on the screen. Some studio audiences were filmed wiping the tears.
<b>Special Greetings to</b>	In a form of a news report, a video showed the former president celebrated the New Year with an army branch and gave greetings to the great army soldiers in each field and to all the Chinese from mainland, HK, Taiwan, Macau and overseas. A video showed the former premiere spent the New Year at the Chinese embassy in Portugal and gave greetings to farmers, factory workers, intellectuals and army soldiers, as well as all the Chinese people. At the end of comedy (*2), greetings text to all the factory workers in China was shown on the screen. The words 'Wishing You a Happy Marriage' was shown at the end of comedy (*11). At the end of song (*23), the words 'Happy New Year to all the scientists in the country' were shown. At the end of Outdoor Game (*24), the words 'Happy New Year to all the farmers in the country' were shown. At the end of (*32), the words of 'Wishing all the elderly people happy and long-life' appeared on the screen.
<b>Ethnic Minority Features</b>	Song (*20) featured the Chinese people from different ethnical backgrounds celebrating the Chinese New Year in different ways, but they were all very happy to welcome the New Year. In (*29), both of the stand-up comedians were from ethnic minority background. All the ethnicities were united in China was mentioned in the comedy. At the end, the words 'New Year greetings to all the ethnicities in China' appeared on the screen.
<b>HK, Taiwan, Macau &amp; Overseas</b>	Song (*10) was performed by a famous HK pop singer. The singer was dressed in ceremonious evening dress and did moderate dance moves. During the song, she walked off from the stage and shook hands with the front row audiences. Song (*16) was a recorded music video which was performed by a pop music band from Taiwan. At the end of the song, words 'Happy New Year to all the Chinese people from Taiwan, HK, Macau and Overseas' were written across the screen. Song (*31) was performed by three singers from mainland, HK, and Taiwan.
<b>Chinese Zodiacs</b>	The year of Monkey was mentioned in the comedy (*2). The kids were dancing with the monkey mask in (*17). Song (*38) was dedicated to the 12 Chinese zodiac signs.
<b>Beginning</b>	Over the animated red lantern and firework, the golden text of 'NYG' was spinning across the screen, under the Chinese music and the sound of the firework. Many dancers were dressed in all different Chinese ethnical costumes and danced to greet the audience happy New Year. All the performers gathered on the stage and waved the colorful pompoms. The presenters made the New Year speech. As suggested by the presenters, the studio audience shouted out 'Happy New Year' together three times and cheered with applause.
<b>New Year Midnight Countdown</b>	The presenters and performers gathered on the stage. By handing over their own microphones, the presenters selected some performers to give short speeches. As the presenters counted down together, the screen cut to the big close-up on a red clock. With the clock pointing at the midnight, the sound of the bell ringing came. Then all the performer and presenters cheered on stage with applause and greeted each other with hand

	shaking and hugs.
<b>Ending</b>	Presenters and performers all gathered on the stage again. They briefly introduced the closure song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight'. During the song, many kids ran to the stage with flowers in hands. The singer was singing among kids. The studio audience all rose up from their seats and the performers were hugging in groups to celebrate the New Year.
<b>Studio Audiences</b>	Most of the people sitting at the front row were performers, still in costumes and make-up. Some audiences were filmed whispering to each other and moving around freely.
<b>TV Audiences</b>	None
<b>Audience's Favorite</b>	Sketch Comedy 'I want a family' (performed by Zhao Benshan and Huang Xiaojuan)
<b>Pre-recorded Material</b>	Song (*16) was a recorded music video provided by Taiwan Chinese TV station. Performance (*17) was pre-recorded and was provided by Shanghai TV station. Dance (*21) was pre-recorded in the NYG studio and was provided by a CCTV programme.
<b>Presenters' Costumes</b>	The presenters were dressed in fashion dresses and formal suits. Two female presenters changed their outfits once.
<b>Presenters' Speeches</b>	The term 'Dear Comrades and Friends' was still used by presenters when giving New Year wishes to the audience. Presenters spoke to the camera.
<b>Other Features of Presenters</b>	Presenters had two pieces of paper in hands for preparation. The presenters showed a bit nervous in the live broadcast. At the Countdown, the presenters read out different time. Yang Lan was the presenter of the popular CCTV programme 'Zheng Da Variety Show'.
<b>Performers' Features</b>	In the song combination (*1), each singer only sang a few sentence in the shared song. The singers were dressed in ceremonious evening dress. Emotional facial expressions and expressive body language was added to the singer's performance in (*28).
<b>Old Faces in Show</b>	Li Guyi; Yin Xiumei; Jiang Dawei; Huang Hong; Song Dandan; Jiang Kun; Tang Jiezhong; Zhao Benshan; Niu Qun; Feng Gong; Zhao Zhongxiang; Yu Junjian; Zhao Lirong; Gong Hanlin; Pan Changjiang; Chen Peisi; Zhu Shimao.
<b>Celebrities in Show</b>	(Mainland): Sun Xiaomei, Deng Jie, Yan Shunkai; (Taiwan): Xiao Hu Dui; Zhang Yusheng; Yu Chengqing. (HK): Hu Huizhong, Liu Dehua.
<b>Presenters in Show</b>	Performance (*14) was given by all the TV presenters and professionals whom the audience are familiar with.
<b>Kids in Show</b>	Kids dressed in different costumes were dancing in (*38) (*42) (*17) (*43) (*1).
<b>Background Dancers</b>	Background dancers only in song (*13) (*36) (*42).
<b>Regional /Chinese Folk</b>	In (*3) and (*21), singers and background dancers were dressed in the Chinese folk costumes and sang the great progress in people's lives shown in every way. The two comedians in (*4) spoke the Northeast Chinese dialect.
<b>Performance Genres &amp; Quantities</b>	22 Song and Dances; 2 Pure Dances; 5 Sketch Comedies; 7 Stand-up Comedies; 2 Chinese Opera; 1 Opera Comedy; 1 Animal Comedy; 1 Shadow Show; 1 Outdoor Game; 1 Theatrical Play;
<b>Set Design</b>	There were big pink curtains hanging at the back of the stage, with two big lanterns in the middle. There is a long staircase on the side of the stage. Big Chinese paper cuts and green plants were placed among the audience seats. The props of the were simple and basic.
<b>Television Production</b>	The texts of 'NYG live broadcast' and 'Happy New Year' were put on the screen with animations. Clip microphones were provided for the comedians. Many editing effects such as repetition, fast/slow motion, zooming in/out very fast were used. Combining the animation with the actual footage was frequently used.
<b>Absence</b>	Firework

	<b>New Year's Gala 1993</b>
<b>Total Length</b>	04h 23m 00s
<b>Presenters</b>	Mainland: Zhao Zhongxiang, Ni Ping, Yang Lan; Hong Kong: Liang Yanling; Taiwan: Li Qing'An; Singapore: Zhang Yongquan
<b>Director(s)</b>	Zhang Ziyang
<b>No. of Items</b>	42
<b>Themes</b>	Presenter made an emotional and poetic speech about a true story in our daily life. The story was about a great factory worker mother who had been donating blood for nine years to save the life of her sick daughter. Close-up shots were often used to capture the studio audiences touched in tears. Then, the presenter interviewed the mother and daughter who sat at the audience seats, before giving them a check from CCTV. In the end, song (*26) expressed the great love from mum to promote the topic further.
<b>Special Greetings to</b>	The big screen showed the former president paying visit at a villager's family. He then gave greetings to all ethnicities in China, Chinese people in HK, TW, Macau and Overseas, the Chinese PLA, army soldiers and policemen, as well as those who were still working at their positions on the New Year. The screen also showed the former premiere paying visit at the railway station. He gave greetings to the railway staffs working far away over the phone. The kids' opera (*4) was dedicated to the elderly. Song (*8) was dedicated to the Chinese army soldiers by expressing their homesick feeling on this New Year occasion.
<b>Ethnic Minority Features</b>	Under the folk music, many dancers dressed in all ethnic costumes were doing different ethnic regional dances on stage. In Song (*18), there were 56 background dancers, all dressed in their traditional ethnic costumes to represent the 56 ethnicities in China.
<b>HK, Taiwan, Macau &amp; Overseas</b>	The performances given by HK, Taiwan and Singaporean performers in (*10) (*11) and (*31) were pre-recorded and especially made for CCTV NYG. They were played on the big screen in the studio. The stars gave their greetings to the audience in the video. Pop song and dances (*22) (*23) took place in Taiwan and were transmitted to NYG studio.
<b>Chinese Zodiacs</b>	In the opening scene, an animated rooster appeared with the Chinese idiom. The Chinese folk song (*34) and Pure dance (*40) were dedicated to the year of rooster. Opera comedy (*7) had a funny discussion on the rooster. At the Countdown, the Chinese painters explained the meanings of their rooster paintings.
<b>Beginning</b>	Under the Chinese folk music, the animated globe appeared together with the Chinese paper-cut with lotus flowers before the title '1993 NYG' emerged. Then the opening song and dance started with many dancers dressed in all ethnic costumes and ran to the stage. The performers gathered on the stage, cheering happily during the presenters' speeches.
<b>New Year Midnight Countdown</b>	Just when all the presenters found their places on the stage, the screen cut to a big clock pointing at the midnight. Right after the bell rang, the presenters greeted each other happy New Year by shaking hands while the studio audience stood up waving and cheering. The glitters were falling from the sky. The presenters gave greetings to all the Chinese
<b>Ending</b>	The closure song 'holding hand in hand' was performed by singers from HK, Taiwan and Singapore to show the friendship of the Chinese people all over the world. Presenters and performers joined on the stage. The theme of 'we are all Chinese' was promoted through the speeches given by the presenters from mainland, HK, Taiwan and Singapore.
<b>Studio Audiences</b>	The audiences had balloons in their hands. Audience clapped with songs. Some audiences were filmed talking and walking around freely. A random studio audience was selected in (*3) to work with the magicians. The audiences responded to the performers actively.
<b>TV Audiences</b>	During the performance, the text 'Welcome to the voting for My Favorite NYG Performance and please see the regulations on China TV Daily' was shown.
<b>Audience's</b>	

<b>Favorite</b>	Sketch Comedy 'A person called Zhang San'(performed by Yan Shunkai)
<b>Pre-recorded Material</b>	In the opening scene, there was a pre-recorded video in which many kids were playing around the red lanterns. During the Countdown, the big TV screen showed the Chinese painters explaining their rooster paintings. Some performances given by HK, Taiwan and Singaporean stars were pre-recorded.
<b>Presenters' Costumes</b>	All the presenters were dressed in formal suits and fashionable dresses. No heavy make-up or ceremonious style. The female presenters all changed their outfits once.
<b>Presenters' Speeches</b>	At the beginning, the presenters introduced themselves in turn. The presenters spoke in a happy, formal and exciting manner without the emotional, serious and rigid style. The presenters were more relaxed and fun, and less rigid and ceremonious.
<b>Other Features of Presenters</b>	The role of presenters, their names and the place they come from were provided at the bottom of the screen. The comedy (*5) naturally started after the humorous interaction between the comedian and the presenter. The HK presenter chatted with two HK film stars through the big screen about how the New Year was celebrated in HK and Beijing. The presenters were filmed sitting at the audience seats and watching the performance.
<b>Performers' Features</b>	The costumes for the performers were more ceremonious and colorful. The comedians started the comedy by making humorous conversations with the audience. The dancers also did some acting to portray the theme of the song while dancing.
<b>Old Faces in Show</b>	Huang Hong, Niu Decao, Wan Shanhong, Cai Guoqing, Zhao Benshan, Yan Shunkai, Jiang Kun, Tang Jiezhong, Yang Liping, Pan Changjiang.
<b>Celebrities in Show</b>	(Mainland): Wang Fuli, Deng Jie, Zhang Guoli, Jiang Xiaohan; (HK):Liang Yanling, Cheng Long, Guo Fucheng, Luo Wen (Taiwan):Kuang Meiyun, Wang Jie, Su Rui, Ma Cuiru; (Singapore): Wu Qixian;
<b>Presenters in Show</b>	HK presenter/singer Liang Yanling's performed in song (*9).
<b>Kids in Show</b>	Many kids were dancing with flowers in the opening song and dance. Performances such as (*4) (*26) were performed by kids. Kids also did background dancing in different costumes for song (*12) (*19) (*34).
<b>Background Dancers</b>	Background Dancers in almost all song and dances except (*8) (*9) (*22) (*32). There were 16 background dancers in one song (*6). Most of the costumes for the background dancers were simple shirts and trousers.
<b>Regional /Chinese Folk</b>	The singers and dancers in (*2) (*6) (*34) were dressed in traditional folk costumes and danced to the folk music with props such as Chinese couplets. The songs described the typical New Year scenes in every Chinese family. Northern Chinese dialects were widely spoken in comedies such as (*5) (*30) (*35).
<b>Performance Genres &amp; Quantities</b>	17 Song and Dances; 3 Pure Dances; 7 Sketch Comedies; 3 Stand-up Comedies; 4 Chinese Operas; 2 Opera Comedies; 1 Music Playing; 1 Magic Trick; 3 Pre-recorded Materials; 1 Outdoor Performance.
<b>Set Design</b>	The entrance for the stage was decorated with a big colourful board with lighting, in the shape of a peacock. Flowers were placed around the studio. The audience seats were arranged in a horse-shoe shape, surrounding the stage. There were two small fountains on the stage. There was also a colourful arch by the side of the stage, as another entrance for the stage. The props were very simple except the very necessary things.
<b>Television Production</b>	The magician was filmed getting ready among the audience seats. Sometimes the movement of the camera was not very steady and smooth. The lighting was still not stable. Various special effects from editing were adopted to match the mood of the performance. The texts 'Live broadcast' and 'NYG' appeared on the corner of the screen.
<b>Significant Absence</b>	Firework; the closure song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight' was replaced by the song 'holding hand in hand' to promote the bond between mainland, HK, and Taiwan.

	<b>New Year's Gala 1994</b>
<b>Total Length</b>	04h 04m 56s
<b>Presenters</b>	Ni Ping, Cheng Qian
<b>Director(s)</b>	Lang Kun
<b>No. of Items</b>	37
<b>Themes</b>	The Olympic Coach was invited to the studio and gave New Year greetings to the people on behalf of the national athlete team. Regarding the achievement in the Olympics, he gave credit to the good open-door policy from the Party, its right leadership with the government and the great support from the people. The Olympic Champion held up the trophy in the cheering crowd and described her painful training experience to the audience in tears. The singer in song (*30) sent flowers to Coach Ma and Olympic Champions while singing. Video scenes of Coach Ma and athletes training were played on big screen.
<b>Special Greetings to</b>	Texts of 'Happy New Year to All the People' were written on the big digital screen.
<b>Ethnic Minority Features</b>	Song and dances featuring all ethnic minorities were put on one stage in (*37). Subtitles were provided for the names of their different ethnical regions. Song (*14) was a chorus performed by an ethnic minority group. They were dressed in their traditional costumes and sang in their own regional dialect. Translated lyric was provided on the screen and Presenter explained their song and culture by the side.
<b>HK, Taiwan, Macau &amp; Overseas</b>	Chinese opera (*6) was performed by a famous female Chinese opera singer from Taiwan. In song (*8), the singer who spent most of his life abroad made a short speech in which he expressed in tears how much he misses home in China and gave new year greetings to the audience. He sang a patriotic song to express his loyalty to his motherland. Some audiences were filmed wiping their tears during this touching theme.
<b>Chinese Zodiacs</b>	In (*5), kids were dressed up in dog costumes and danced to the folk music to present the happy and loud picture of the new year celebration. At the beginning, performers talked about the arrival of the year of dog, and a picture of a dog was displayed on the big screen.
<b>Beginning</b>	Under the folk music, an old man read out the order of the Chinese zodiac one by one. The date of the Chinese New Year was shown on an animated watch. With the cheering from the crowd saying 'happy new year!', the text '94 New Year's Gala' was written on a flag in close-up. The opening song and dance began with dancers dressed in folk costumes and cheering out loud. The stage was spinning while two gigantic spring couplets rolled down from the sky. Presenters announced the start of the gala while walking down from the spinning foot-bridge. They gave New Year greetings to the audience and all the Chinese people in HK, Taiwan, and overseas.
<b>New Year Midnight Countdown</b>	A close-up of a clock was shown on screen, with its second-hand running towards the midnight. The sound of bell was ringing. Presenters stood at the back of the audience seats and gave spring wishes to the people and the country. Audience stood up, cheering with applause. Streamers were flying from above and the New Year greetings to the people were displayed on the big screen.
<b>Ending</b>	Presenters and performers got together on stage and gave new year wishes to the country and all people from all parts of China. All studio audience stood up from the seats, while the performers were waving and cheering on stage. Presenters announced the end of this year's gala.
<b>Studio Audiences</b>	Shots studio audiences whispered to each other and moved around freely during the show. Some audience stood in the auditorium to watch the performance. In (*12)(*16), foreigners, ethnical minorities, model workers and army representatives were filmed in audience seats.

<b>TV Audiences</b>	The means of voting for the 'My Favorite NYG Performance' was announced by the hotline presenters, but no interaction from TV audience was included in NYG.
<b>Audience's Favorite</b>	Sketch Comedy 'Pocker Card Playing' (Performed by Huang Hong)
<b>Pre-recorded Material</b>	None
<b>Presenters' Costumes</b>	Both female and male presenters had changed their outfits for three times. At the new year countdown, Ni Ping wore a ceremonious evening dress.
<b>Presenters' Speeches</b>	Two presenters introduced the next performance through chatting. Sometimes the presenters stood among the audience seats. Presenters spoke to camera. The performance sometimes started with the casual conversations between presenters and performers.
<b>Other Features of Presenters</b>	Presenters appeared much more frequent to link the performances. The comedies usually started naturally with the comedian walking from the audience seats to the stage while chatting with the presenter.
<b>Performers' Features</b>	Performers often walked towards the audience seats from the stage and greeted them by shaking hands to get closer the audience, such as in (*3)(*26)(*28). Comedians sometimes performed among the audience seats.
<b>Old Faces in Show</b>	Guo Da, Cai Ming, Gao Xiumin, Li Jindou, Shi Fukuan, Yin Xiumei, Zhao Lirong, Huang Hong, Xiao Xiangyu, Feng Gong, Niu Qun, Cao Guoqing, Chen Peisi, Zhu Shimaoy, Zhang Ye, Wei Ji An, Yang Lei,
<b>Celebrities in Show</b>	Mao Amin, Wang Fuli, Jiang Tao, Liu Min, Han Shanxu, Meng Ge
<b>Presenters in Show</b>	Presenter explained the special talent (*10) performance given by a little girl who broke the world record by playing 98 hula hoops in one go.
<b>Kids in Show</b>	In (*2)(*5), kids were dressed in folk costumes. They danced happily and cheered loud for the happy New Year celebration. Holding one kid in her arm, presenter told the audience how hard the kids had practiced to perform in NYG.
<b>Background Dancers</b>	Some background dancers also performed a story while dancing with rich facial expressions. The foot-bridge was often used for the background dancers to dance.
<b>Regional /Chinese Folk</b>	In Sketch Comedy (*7) and (*19), comedians were dressed up like countrymen and talked in regional dialect.
<b>Performance Genres &amp; Quantities</b>	22 Song&Dances; 2 Chinese Operas; 7 Sketch comedies; 1 Compositive Art; 1 Magic Comedy; 2 Stand-up Comedies; 1 Live Documentary
<b>Set Design</b>	More studio audiences were included. The foot-bridge was widely used for performers and presenters to perform on. Many big red lanterns were hung up above the stage. Every comedian had a wireless microphone in hand during performance. The big screen at the back of the audience seats displayed the name or the relevant picture of the performance taking place on stage. More detailed props were provided to transfer the stage into a cozy home required for the sketch comedy.
<b>Television Production</b>	Animation and graphic patterns were added to the performance titles at the beginning of each performance. Almost all the music used in the gala was played by a live music band at the corner of the stage. The words 'live transmission' and 'New Year's Gala' appeared seven times on the screen throughout the gala. Sometimes audience blocked the camera view while passing by. The lighting changed to match the different requirements of the performances. All lyrics were provided for the songs.
<b>Significant Absence</b>	Firework

	<b>New Year's Gala 1995</b>
<b>Total Length</b>	04h 10m 27s
<b>Presenters</b>	Zhao Zhongxiang, Ni Ping, Xu Gehui
<b>Director(s)</b>	Zhao An
<b>No. of Items</b>	43
<b>Themes</b>	Comedy (*7) ironically revealed how far the production company can go in the process of packaging a celebrity in the showbiz. Social issues were often mentioned in the comedy, such as beat piracy and the corruption. Slogans such as 'the central government concerns about the local and the local follows the instructions of the central government' were mentioned in the comedy. Like in comedy (*5), farmers were the main subjects in the performances in NYG to show their daily lives, especially the regional accents, dressing style, and traditional way of thinking. This forms a big contrast with the urban lifestyle.
<b>Special Greetings to</b>	Each comedian gave New Year wishes in tongue twister style to: factory workers, village farmers, army soldiers, all ethnical groups, Chinese in HK, Taiwan, Macau, and overseas, newly born babies and kids, and all the TV audiences. Presenters gave special greetings to the farmers who worked hard all year round and brought prosperity to the country.
<b>Ethnic Minority Features</b>	Dancers in (*27) (*38) (*42) were dressed in different ethnic minority costumes and danced together on stage to express all the ethnicities are happily united. Presenter invited a group of people who brought the sample from the yellow river in their hometown. They were all in traditional costumes and introduced themselves in their local dialects. At the end, an old man who brought the sample from the end of the river shook hands with the Tibetan girl who brought the sample from the origin of the river. Presenter cited an ancient poem to express the close relationship of all the ethnical groups in China.
<b>HK, Taiwan, Macau &amp; Overseas</b>	The Taiwanese pop singer (*14) introduced herself and gave greetings to the audience. The singer did some simple dance moves while singing. The HK (*29) star walked from the audience seats before starting the performance. In the studio activity, presenter invited a group of students from Taiwan to stage. The Tibetan girl was asked to give the pot of the river water to a Taiwanese boy. Presenter emphasized the theme by saying, 'we are all Chinese, and we are as close as a family!'
<b>Zodiacs</b>	There was no special address for the year of pig, except the pig printed on kids' costumes.
<b>Beginning</b>	Under the sound of the bell ringing, the word 'Spring' appeared on the screen with animated snow flakes. The NYG studio was revealed where the performers dressed in ancient costume sprinkled the glitters while 'flying' above the studio. Under the Chinese folk music and cheering, the dancers and kids were dressed in folk costumes and danced with lanterns in their hands. The studio audiences were waving the lantern in their seats.
<b>New Year Midnight Countdown</b>	Once the bell was ringing at the midnight, the studio was full of applauses and cheers with the glitters falling fro the sky. The kids were jumping happily on stage. Presenter made poetic speeches to welcome the New Year. The screen cut to the pre-recorded video, where the former president gave greetings to the people on behalf of the government.
<b>Ending</b>	All the kids and performers gathered on stage, cheering and waving the lanterns in hands. The presenters stood among the crowds and made speeches one after another rhetorically, slowly, and happily. In the end, the loud applause and cheers from the studio.
<b>Studio Audiences</b>	Studio audiences were responding to the performing by cheering and waving the lantern in hand collectively in clear order. Model workers and army officers with the red flower badge were filmed sitting among the audience seats. Foreign guests were sitting at the front row round table. Studio audiences were invited to the studio games (*17).
<b>TV Audiences</b>	The means of voting for the 'My Favorite NYG Performance' was announced by the hotline presenters, but no interaction from TV audience was included in NYG.

<b>Audience's Favorite</b>	Sketch Comedy 'Such Packaging' (Performed by Zhao Lirong, Gong Hanlin)
<b>Pre-recorded Material</b>	Under the New Year music, the pre-recorded video of overseas Chinese giving New Year greetings in foreign countries was played: Presenter, pop singer, the former UN secretary sent greetings from the U.S. This was followed by the greetings from the Chinese people in France and Brazil, etc. Greetings were also given by celebrities in HK and Taiwan.
<b>Presenters' Costumes</b>	Presenters were all dressed in formal ceremonious evening suits/dresses. Ni Ping changed her outfits three times, Xu Gehui changed twice, and Zhao Zhongxiang changed once.
<b>Presenters' Speeches</b>	Presenters spoke to the camera. Upon the first appearance, presenters made speeches one after another with happy facial expressions and exciting tone. They gave New Year wishes to the audience and finished the last words together. The emotional and expressive gestures such as up and down intonations, pauses, and hand gestures were often used. Presenter used the poetic words with soft tones to link the performance.
<b>Other Features of Presenters</b>	Names of the presenters were provided at the bottom of the screen. Presenters made the Chinese couplets with the big red couplets in hands among the audience seats. Presenter gave the magician's dumplings to audiences and other presenters and they started eating.
<b>Performers' Features</b>	Song and dances were divided into groups. Very tightly arranged one after another, the new group came to take over the stage before the last group finished the performance. Singers were either dressed in fashionable clothes or the traditional clothes. They also made modern dance moves with the background dancers.
<b>Old Faces in Show</b>	Zhao Zhongxiang, Ni Ping, Huang Hong, Zhao Lirong, Gong Hanlin, Guo Da, Cai Ming, Feng Gong, Niu Qun, Zhao Benshan, Yin Xiumei,
<b>Celebrities in Show</b>	(Mainland): Tao Jin, Yang Yuying, Chen Hong, Lao Lang, Yin Xiangjie, Gao Linsheng, Mao Amin, Ji Ming, (Taiwan): Meng Tingwei (HK): Liu Dehua
<b>Presenters in Show</b>	Presenter joined studio game (*17) to make challenges to the human copying machine. Presenter participated in comedy (*19) as the judge.
<b>Kids in Show</b>	The Song and dances (*3) (*9) (*12) (*18) (*20) (*37) were given by kids who were dressed in different costumes to match the theme of the song, singing and dancing collectively. Kids made the loud and happy scene to express the celebration with jumping, head shaking, big smiles, and acting for story-telling with dramatic facial expressions.
<b>Background Dancers</b>	Background dancers were widely used in almost all song and dances. They were dressed in different costumes and danced collectively with props. Moderate acting was added.
<b>Regional /Chinese Folk</b>	Two studio audiences spoke for both the Northern and the Southern Chinese in their different ways of celebrating the New year. Singers and dancers in (*20*21) (*9) were dressed in traditional folk costumes and danced with props to the folk music. Comedians in (*5) (*10) (*15) played the role of farmers and spoke with regional dialects.
<b>Performance Genres</b>	27 Song and Dances; 3 Stand-up Comedies; 6 Sketch Comedies; 2 Chinese Operas; 1 Studio Game; 1 Magic Show; 1 Acrobatics; 1 Opera Show.
<b>Set Design</b>	A big screen was put on the wall of the auditorium. Lanterns and Chinese paper cuts were decorated around the studio. The stage was a bit plain with only two posts at the back. Colorful lighting. Much more studio audiences were included. Round tables were placed at the first two rows. Various props were used for song and dances to match the theme.
<b>Television Production</b>	Clip microphones were used by performers. The production skill was much better. Lyric was provided for the song. Props were better prepared in details. The scrolling text was provided to remind the audience the coming up performances. Performance titles appeared with different animations. Scrolling texts of 'New Year's Gala' and 'live broadcast' appeared once in a while at the corner of the screen with different animation patterns.
<b>Significant Absence</b>	There was no special address for the year of pig.

	<b>New Year's Gala 1996</b>
<b>Total Length</b>	04h 14m 46s
<b>Presenters</b>	Zhao Zhongxiang, Ni Ping; Cheng Qian, Yuan Ming; Zhang Xiao, Zhou Tao;
<b>Director(s)</b>	Zhang Xiaohai
<b>No. of Items</b>	38
<b>Themes</b>	National football appeared in each venue, singing to the same song, while waving to the audience with the big flag. Presenters asked the audience (professional comedians) in each venue to give opinions and suggestions to NYG.
<b>Special Greetings to</b>	After the opening song and dance, presenters made their first appearance by giving New Year greetings to all the Chinese in mainland, HK, Taiwan, Macau and Overseas on behalf of NYG. The great spirit of the Chinese army soldiers were glorified in song (*19) in which the singer was dressed in army uniforms as he was an army officer himself. The Chinese army badge was displayed on the digital screen at the back of the stage. The dancers were also dressed in army uniforms, doing the army parade by holding Chinese national flags. After the army song, the presenters gave greetings to the factory workers and farmers.
<b>Ethnic Minority Features</b>	(*10) (*31) (*34) were song and dance combinations featuring ethnic minorities in China. Both singers and background dancers were dressed in the ethnical costumes. All ethnicities singing and dancing together showed the happy united scene in China.
<b>HK, Taiwan, Macau &amp; Overseas</b>	By mentioning the good relationship between the mainland and Taiwan in recent years, the presenter introduced the next song (*33) performed by a Taiwanese singer.
<b>Chinese Zodiacs</b>	The Chinese zodiac paper cuts were decorated on the big board standing on the both sides of the stage.
<b>Beginning</b>	Under the traditional folk music, the performers were doing folk dances with flags and drums. The text of '1996 NYG' appeared on the screen. A group of kids were running happily and cheering 'Happy New Year' together. The performances took place in three different venues. The camera cut to different venues where the presenters and performers in each venue sent greetings from location.
<b>New Year Midnight Countdown</b>	The screen showed a big clock. Presenters counted down together with the audience and announced the arrival of the New Year. Then, the camera cut to other two venues where the presenters, performers and audience were all cheering and sending greetings. Glitters were falling from the sky and the audience rose up from their seats to welcome the New Year. A pre-recorded video was played to show the greetings from the overseas Chinese.
<b>Ending</b>	Under the same music, the ending scene of each venue was shown on the screen. All the performers and presenters gathered together on stage in each venue and they gave New Year wishes to the audience. At the end, presenters announced the end of NYG and mentioned to see the audience next year.
<b>Studio Audiences</b>	The studio audience responded in active and exciting voices. The audience had balloons and streamers in their hands to wave and cheer. National football players and foreign guests were filmed watching the show among the audience seat. Some audience were filmed wiping tears as they were touched by comedy (*16).
<b>TVAudiences</b>	None
<b>Audience's Favorite</b>	Sketch Comedy 'Job Adventure' (Performed by Zhao Lirong, Gong Hanlin, and Jin Zhu)
<b>Pre-recorded Material</b>	During the Countdown, pre-recorded videos were played to show the New Year greetings from the Chinese abroad during the song. In comedy (*12), the big screens played the video of football games. During song (*18), big screens played video to match the theme.

<b>Presenters' Costumes</b>	They were dressed in suits and evening dress. Ni Ping changed her outfits twice. Zhao Tao changed her outfit once. Presenters changed clothes at different times.
<b>Presenters' Speeches</b>	The presenters were more experienced as they spoke to the camera. Upon their first appearance, presenters gave New Year greetings in the regional dialects from the different venues. Presenters introduced the patriotic song with strength to show the patriotic spirit.
<b>Other Features of Presenters</b>	By making a poem to describe the traditional New Year activities, presenters introduced the next performance. The presenters did not appear very often between the performances. Presenters introduced the next performance taking place in other venues.
<b>Performers' Features</b>	The performers were dressed in ceremonious evening dresses and fashionable clothes. At the end of the song (*2), the performers came off the stage and gave sweets to the studio audience to increase the interaction. Comedians were dressed in suits and started the performance by appearing from the audience seats. In song (*37), performers were holding glasses of champagne while singing to celebrate the New Year. Close-up features were used to capture rich facial expressions of the dancers.
<b>Old Faces in Show</b>	Zhao Zhongxiang, Ni Ping, Zhou Tao, Zhang Ye, Tang Jiezhong, Cai Ming, Guo Da, Pan Changjiang, Jiang Kun, Zhao Lirong, Gong Hanlin, Huang Hong, Guo Donglin, Yan Weiwen, Zhao Benshan, Niu Qun, Feng Gong, Cai Guoqing, Xiao Xiangyu, Ma Ji, Yu Junjian, Guan Mucun, Jiang Dawei, Yin Xiumei, Li Guyi.
<b>Celebrities</b>	Yuan Ming, Zhang Xiao (Mainland); Ye Qianwen (HK); Tong Ange (Taiwan)
<b>Presenters in Show</b>	The comedy (*5) ended up with the comedian shouting out presenter's name to give this robot wife to him as present for free.
<b>Kids in Show</b>	In the opening song and dance, many kids were cheering loudly 'Happy New Year' together. Song and dance combination (*4) was performed by kids in three venues.
<b>Background Dancers</b>	Background dancers were almost in all song and dances, and they were in big groups. There were 20 background dancers in song (*6) alone.
<b>Regional /Chinese Folk</b>	The children's performances in Shanghai venue (*4) was sung in Shanghai dialect. Singers and dancers in song and dances (*7) (*8) (*15) were dressed in folk costumes and danced to the folk music in folk styles with props. The regional dialects, typical characters and dressing styles were all included in comedy (*9) in different venues to show the differences in their regional cultures.
<b>Performance Genres</b>	19 Song and Dance; 4 Stand-up Comedy; 6 Sketch Comedy; 3 Chinese Opera; 1 Magic Show; 1 Musical Comedy; 2 Pure Dance; 1 Instrument Playing; 1 Ping Tan singing
<b>Set Design</b>	The stage was decorated with a big red lantern at the back. Big screens were placed on the both sides of the stage. The props were better equipped for each comedy. Sometimes smoke was created on stage for special effect. The red Chinese platform was split up into two automatically when the singer appeared. By cutting between the two big screens, the show managed to present the performances from three venues at the same time to the audience. There were big red posts on the both sides of the stage, which were decorated with red, dragon, lantern, and zodiac paper cut. There was a long stair case on the side of the stage. Round tables were placed at the front row audience seats with drinks provided.
<b>Television Production</b>	The texts of 'Live Broadcast' and the venue name were shown on the side of the screen. In each venue, they had two big screens showing the performances taking place in the other two locations. In this way, the performers in different venues were able to interact simultaneously by joining their performances together. Sometimes the cutting between the three venues was too quick. The production skill such as camera, lighting and editing was more experienced. Animated screen graphic was used to display the performance title. Laser digital lighting created many different effects.
<b>Significant Absence</b>	Firework

	<b>New Year's Gala 1997</b>
<b>Total Length</b>	04h 14m 00s
<b>Presenters</b>	Zhao Zhongxiang, Ni Ping, Cheng Qian, Zhou Tao, Zhu Jun, Ya Ning.
<b>Director(s)</b>	Yuan Dewang
<b>No. of Items</b>	37
<b>Themes</b>	Presenters described the great achievements of the Chinese national team in the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games. The next performance was a Sports Comedy (*22) which was performed by the Olympic champions. One Olympic Champion gave a speech and greetings to the audience. To promote the Olympic theme, singers and the athletes were singing while the video of athletes' performances were shown on the big screen. Song (*29) was dedicated to HK's return to China. Several singers including a HK singer were singing together with many kids standing around. During the song, a video was played to show the historical event regarding HK.
<b>Special Greetings to</b>	At the end, the comedians(*6) gave the New Year wishes to all the Chinese in mainland, HK, Taiwan, Macau and all over the world.
<b>Ethnic Minority Features</b>	Song (*19) was a Tibetan song dedicated to its highest peak Everest. This song was sung in Mandarin. Presenters introduced the performance (*35) by stressing '56 ethnic groups are like brothers and sisters in one united family in China'. One group of song with dance followed tightly after another, featuring different ethnic minorities. Most of the singers and dancers were majority Han Chinese dressed in ethnic minority costumes. The songs mainly expressed the great country China, and the successful leadership of the Party.
<b>HK, Taiwan, Macau &amp; Overseas</b>	The HK pop singer performed two songs (*28) (*29) which were dedicated to the theme of 'HK's return to motherland'. She was dressed fashionably. A video of HK Victoria Harbour was played on the big screen during the song. Patriotic song (*2) (*36) were the theme song of this NYG to dedicate HK's return to China.
<b>Chinese Zodiacs</b>	In (*1), dancers were dressed in the ox costumes. The performers threw the ox toys to the audience. Several people dressed in ox costumes pushed a big clock to the stage close to midnight. The word game to include the word 'ox' were used in comedy (*14). Most props were brought by the people dressed in ox costumes.
<b>Beginning</b>	Under the glorious music, the animated red lanterns, Chinese couplets and Chinese paper cuts were spinning over the words '97 NYG'. Then the first performance on stage appeared. All performers gathered on stage and sang the folk song together in front of the background dancers. The performers threw ox toys to the audience. Several people dressed in ox costumes pushed a big clock to the stage with 'Beijing Time' written on it. Presenters walked to the stage, made patriotic speeches and gave greetings to the people.
<b>New Year Midnight Countdown</b>	In poem reading featuring 'Beijing Time', presenters made emotional and poetic speech to welcome the New Year which will bring HK back to China. With a close up shot on a big clock, all the people in the studio were cheering, applauding and jumping happily under the sound of the bell ringing. Then a pre-recorded video was played to show the overseas Chinese giving greetings from different parts of the world.
<b>Ending</b>	All the performers and presenters gathered on stage. Presenters announced the end of NYG and encouraged the Chinese people to hold hands and share the ups and downs of the country by standing closely around the Party's leadership. All the performers sang the closure song together and waved to the camera happily.
<b>Studio Audiences</b>	Ethnic minority audiences and the CEO of Phoenix TV were filmed watching the show from the front row audience seats as special studio guests. The audiences were clapping collectively with the song while the singer was singing.
<b>TVAudiences</b>	None

<b>Audience's Favorite</b>	Sketch Comedy 'Shoe Nail', (Performed by Huang Hong and Gong Hanlin)
<b>Pre-recorded Material</b>	None, except the theme related videos played on the big screen during the song.
<b>Presenters' Costumes</b>	Four young presenters were dressed in colourful evening suits and ceremonious dress. Old face presenters were dressed in black suit and formal dress. Presenters changed their outfits three times into different formal suits and evening dress.
<b>Presenters' Speeches</b>	Old face presenters spoke in an excited way with head nodding and hand waving. They used many rhetorical words and sentences. Young presenters briefly introduced the performance without poetic acting.
<b>Other Features of Presenters</b>	Important opening and closure speeches were handled by old face presenters. Not many presenters' links between the performances. All the presenters spoke to the camera and did not read from a piece of paper in hand. Presenters presented among the audience seats.
<b>Performers' Features</b>	The comedians often appeared among the audience seats and interacted with the studio audience with humorous conversation. Sometimes comedians performed among the audience seats. Singers and dancers were dressed in fashionable clothes and ceremonious dresses. Many singers shared one song together. One group followed tightly after another.
<b>Old Faces in Show</b>	Feng Gong, Niu Qun, Tang Jiezhong, Wei Ji'An, Gao Xiumin, Guo Da, Cai Ming, Guo Donglin, Xie Xiaodong, Jiang Kun, Huang Hong, Gong Hanlin,
<b>Celebrities in Show</b>	(Mainland): Lin Yilun; Li Ning, Li Dashuang, Li Xiaoshuang (Olympic Champions). (HK): Peng Ling; Ma Jiashi. (Taiwan): Zhang Yu
<b>Presenters in Show</b>	Presenters did poem reading at the New Year Countdown. Presenters performed a short stand-up comedy before introducing the next comedy (*16) under the same theme.
<b>Kids in Show</b>	Two kids were dressed in the folk costumes and shouted out 'New Year is coming' in opening song and dance. Many kids surrounded the presenters who were poem reading. Chinese opera (*3) was performed by kids who were dressed in opera costumes and doing the opera sing and dancing professionally. Kids were dancing and acting in (*21).
<b>Background Dancers</b>	All song and dances had background dancers except two (*28)(*33). Different groups of dancers were dancing on the stage at the same time to create the happy and busy scene. Even background dancers started to use props such as fake violins and flowers while dancing. Many background dancers were included in each song.
<b>Regional /Chinese Folk</b>	Under the Chinese folk music, the dancers (*1) (*10) (*24) (*31) were dressed in the folk costume and doing the folk dance with props such as ribbons, drums and lanterns, featuring different regions in China. Comedies (*7) (*9) (*11) (*27) were performed in Northern Chinese dialect to portray farmers' new lives after reform.
<b>Genres &amp; Quantities</b>	18 Song and Dances; 6 Stand-up Comedies; 6 Sketch Comedies; 1 Mini-Musical; 3 Chinese Operas; 1 Magic Show; 1 Poem Reading; 1 Sports Comedy.
<b>Set Design</b>	There were stair cases at the back of the stage which was decorated with two red dragon sculptures. There was a traditional Chinese arch on the side. Big red lanterns were hung on both sides of the stage. Four microphones were attached from the ceiling. There was an automatic spinning stage rising up and down at the centre.
<b>Television Production</b>	Different lightings were used to match with the colour of the performers' costumes. The camera shots were steady, but also not so experimental and interesting. The audience hotline was provided at the bottom of the screen. The words '1997 NYG live broadcast', lyrics and performance titles were provided with animated graphics. Behind-the-scene details were captured: the cleaner wiping the floor, the performers getting ready, and production crew running around with the equipment.
<b>Significant Absence</b>	Firework

	<b>New Year's Gala 1998</b>
<b>Total Length</b>	03h 55m 06s
<b>Presenters</b>	Zhao Zhongxiang, Ni Ping, Zhu Jun, Zhou Tao, Ya Ning, Wang Xuechun.
<b>Director(s)</b>	Meng Xin
<b>No. of Items</b>	35
<b>Themes</b>	Presenter made patriotic speech before introducing the classic patriotic song (*11) which expressed the great achievement and progress in China under the great leaderships. Two big screens also displayed the historical footages of the Chinese leaders and their great contributions. The dancers were waving red flags while the audiences were waving pom poms. The presenter invited the Taiwanese students who brought a jar of water from Taiwan Sun Moon Lake. Under the expressive music, presenter asked them to pour the water from Yellow River, Yangtze River and Sun Moon Lake together in a big jar to mix, to show the closeness and reunion of the mainland Chinese and Taiwanese.
<b>Special Greetings to</b>	Presenters from CCTV programme were dressed in the animal costumes and gave greetings to all the kids in China. Presenters dedicated the performance (*17) to the elderly people in China with New Year wishes. The national athletes gave greetings to the people by signing their autography. Presenters showed the greetings cards sent from the army soldiers and dedicated the next performance (*25) to the army soldiers.
<b>Ethnic Minority Features</b>	In song and dance (*2) (*35), dancers were dressed in different ethnic minority costumes and danced together happily. Some dancers were majority Han Chinese and some were ethnic minority. The words 'Big union of all the ethnicities' was written on the big red banner on both sides of the stage. In (*26), three ethnic minority songs were performed by original ethnic minority singers dressed in their costumes. Some songs were the patriotic.
<b>HK, Taiwan, Macau &amp; Overseas</b>	The pop song (*13) was performed in Cantonese by a HK star. Song (*14) (*19) were performed by famous singers from mainland, HK, and Taiwan. The patriotic song 'Big China' was performed by pop singers from mainland, HK and Taiwan to promote the ideology of 'We are all Chinese and we are one big family'. The singers were shaking hands with the audience while singing. The Chinese flag was displayed on the big screen.
<b>Chinese Zodiacs</b>	In the opening scene, two animated tigers dressed in Chinese clothes set off the firework. Performers were dressed in tiger costumes and interacted with the audience. Two animated tigers appeared at the corner of the screen once in a while.
<b>Beginning</b>	Under the glorious symphony music two animated tigers dressed in Chinese clothes brought the animated old face performer. The golden texts of 'CCTV NYG' appeared over the red lantern background, before the NYG studio was revealed. The big posts were automatically moving apart to reveal the performers. Different groups of singers and dancers with different music styles followed tightly one after another. Presenters made opening speeches with greetings while the audiences were cheering with pom pom.
<b>New Year Midnight Countdown</b>	Under the graceful music, presenters recited the poem in solemn and emotional style to describe the important events in the upcoming year. All performers gathered on stage while the screen cut promptly to the digital clock. The sound of the bell ringing was mixed up with the cheering and laughter from the studio. The streamers were falling from the sky and all the performers were jumping and waving happily to the camera.
<b>Ending</b>	Right after the ethnic song and dance, all the performers gathered together on stage. Under the closure song, presenters expressed the exciting and happy feeling by making poetic speeches one after another. Many kids were standing at the front, laughing happily. Bird's eye view was used to cover the whole studio.
<b>Studio</b>	Some audiences were filmed walking around freely during the performance. American Chinese entrepreneur and army officers were filmed sitting at the front row audience seats.

<b>Audiences</b>	The studio audiences were waving the pom poms to welcome the performance.
<b>TV Audiences</b>	None
<b>Audience's Favorite</b>	Sketch Comedy 'Duck and the Postman' (performed by Zhu Shimao and Chen Peisi)
<b>Pre-recorded</b>	None, except the theme related videos played on the big screen during the song.
<b>Presenters' Costumes</b>	Old face presenters were dressed in Chinese traditional dress and black evening suit. The four young presenters were dressed in formal suits and Chinese traditional dresses. Presenters changed their outfits twice and they changed at different times, not all together.
<b>Presenters' Speeches</b>	Old face presenters spoke in a solemn and rigid way by citing poems with emotional expressions, different intonations, and rich body languages. This style formed a big contrast with the young presenters who behaved calm, relaxed and lively, but still formal.
<b>Other Features of Presenters</b>	Presenters introduced the next performance by mentioning its theme. Presenters did not appear often between the performances to do the linking. Sometimes the presenters appeared in pairs and sometimes alone. Under the expressive background music, old face presenter recited a famous poem to introduce the next performance with the same theme.
<b>Performers' Features</b>	Many singers shared one song, leaving each singer can only sing a few lines. The singer was dressed in exaggerate costumes such as Chinese paper-cut dress. One group of singers and dancers followed tightly one after another. The comedians started the comedy by appearing among the auditorium and giving NY greetings to the studio audience with humorous interactions. The acrobatic performer performed on a round automatic stage.
<b>Old Faces in Show</b>	Niu Qun, Feng Gong, Xiao Xiangyu, Huang Hong, Song Dandan, Zhao Benshan, Gao Xiumin, Cai Guoqing, Li Guyi, Zhang Ye, Gong Hanlin, Xie Xiaodong
<b>Celebrities in Show</b>	(Mainland): Jiang Xiaohan, Deng Yaping, Jiang Shan, Ju Ping, Wang Fuli, Qu Ying; (HK): Zhou Haimei, Faye Wong, Liu Dehua; (Taiwan): Fan Xiaoxuan, Zhang Xinzhe;
<b>Presenters in Show</b>	Presenter introduced the old generation film actors onto the stage. She explained each actor and their roles in the early films. She gives special thanks to the film actors.
<b>Kids in Show</b>	In the opening song and dance, there were many kids dancing dressed in tiger costumes. Chinese opera, martial art, acrobatics and folk songs performed by kids professionally.
<b>Background Dancers</b>	Background dancers were in almost every song and dance. There were different groups of background dancers in (*2), dressed and danced differently from each other at the same time on the stage. Background dancers were dressed in colorful exaggerated costumes.
<b>Regional /Chinese Folk</b>	Comedians in (*7) (*25) spoke in Northeast Chinese regional dialect. Chinese opera (*4) featured three different regional styles. Songs (*13) was performed in Cantonese by a HK star. Many dancers were dressed in Chinese folk costumes and danced to the folk music with props. Song and dance combination (*2) (*29) featured regional performances from all parts of China and were performed in regional dialects.
<b>Genres &amp; Quantities</b>	15 Song and Dances; 3 Stand-up Comedies; 7 Sketch Comedies; 2 Chinese Operas; 3 Pure Dances; 1 Magic Show; 1 Acrobatics: (*18) 2 Stage Shows; 1 Studio Activity.
<b>Set Design</b>	The big posts were moving apart automatically from centre to both sides to reveal the performers on stage. There was a huge mental shell rising up and down automatically to reveal and hide the underground fountain below the stage. Big ancient Chinese posts and red lanterns were placed at the back of the stage. Performers usually performed on a small round stage which can rise up and down automatically at the centre.
<b>Television Production</b>	The NYG hotline was provided at the bottom of the screen. The texts of 'live broadcast' and '1998 NYG' with animations appeared on the corner of the screen. The lighting and sound recording were more professional and stable. A man was filmed walking pass the camera. The big screen at the back of the stage displayed the related theme of the performance on stage. Different lighting effects totally transformed the stage appearance.
<b>Absence</b>	Firework

<b>New Year's Gala 1999</b>	
<b>Total Length</b>	02h 49m 11s
<b>Presenters</b>	Zhao Zhongxiang, Ni Ping, Zhou Tao, Zhu Jun
<b>Director(s)</b>	Liu Tiemin, Zhu Tong, Huang Haitao, Chen Yulu, Zhou Xiaodong
<b>No. of Items</b>	36
<b>Themes</b>	The flood victim gave thankful words for the help and support from the government, the people, and the army. Presenter gave greetings to the families of the flood heroes. The army representative also gave greetings to the people with salute. A song (*15) was dedicated to the army soldiers with the video playing the flood rescue scenes with Party leaders' instructions on the big screen. In the end, the presenter emphasized the theme with an emotional and patriotic speech. Upon Macau's return to China, a headmaster of a high school in Macau expressed her wish of China's unity. A patriotic song was later performed by kids to dedicate Macau's return.
<b>Special Greetings to</b>	Presenter introduced the next performance by giving his new year greetings to the elderly people in the whole country, and wished all of them a healthy and pleasant life. At the beginning, presenters gave greetings to the people, army soldiers and the people from HK, Taiwan and Macau.
<b>Ethnic Minority Features</b>	9 songs were performed in (*34): Singers and dancers from the minority groups dressed in their traditional costumes gave their performances one after another in a tight order. Some of them sang the regional songs in Mandarin and some sang in their own dialects with lyrics. Most themes of their songs were glorifying the country and the happy united life.
<b>HK, Taiwan, Macau &amp; Overseas</b>	In Stand-up comedy (*2), four foreigners dressed in Chinese traditional clothes and gave their performance in fluent Chinese. They introduced themselves and sent greetings to the audience. They shared their experience in the rapid development in the Chinese society in recent years. Taiwanese pop singer gave greeting to the audience. Audience applauded with the song. HK pop singer was introduced by two famous HK presenters. They gave their New Year greetings to the audience in humorous chatting style. Kids from Macau sang the patriotic song to celebrate Macau returning to China (*26). A speech was made by the head master of a High School in Macau. Celebrities from Mainland, HK, Taiwan and Macau sang the song (*28) together to stress big family of China.
<b>Chinese Zodiacs</b>	The Opening Scene was two animated rabbits running all the way from the streets to the NYG studio; Rabbit toys were given to the singers on stage; Rabbits were displayed on the big screen at the back of the stage; the rabbit paper cut was placed on the automatic stage.
<b>Beginning</b>	The opening scene started with two animated rabbits dressed in Chinese traditional clothes, running all the way through the streets until they arrived at the NYG studio, where the fully-seated auditorium was filled with cheers and applause. In the opening song and dance, many kids were dressed in bunny suits and danced on the stage. The whole studio was covered with glitters and two big bunny balloons. Presenters stressed the live broadcast of the NYG and gave greetings to the people.
<b>New Year Midnight Countdown</b>	Presenters made poetic speech to welcome the arrival of the New Year and gave wishes to the country. Many kids were singing the New Year song together. By standing by a big Chinese bell especially made for NYG, presenters and four kids from Beijing, Taiwan, HK, and Macau rang the bell together at the midnight after the studio countdown. People dressed in ethnic minority costumes were applauding by the side. Audiences were catching the balloons falling from the sky. The studio was filled with cheering, bell ringing, music and the sound of the balloons breaking.
<b>Ending</b>	Under the closure song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight', presenters and performers gathered on stage and gave wishes to the audience. Performers waved to the camera and the whole

	studio was covered with flying streamers and glitters. Audiences were waving to the camera.
<b>Studio Audiences</b>	The size of the auditorium was much bigger. There were several standing rows to take extra audiences. The front audience rows had the round tables. The scene of studio audience watching the show happily was often filmed. The special guests included 'Macau representative' and 'anti-flood hero', as indicated by their name tags.
<b>TV Audiences</b>	During the programme, fast scrolling texts informing the NYG websites and audience hotlines appeared twice on screen. 1999 lucky audiences were chosen from the hotline.
<b>Audience's Favorite</b>	Sketch Comedy 'Yesterday Today and Tomorrow' (Performed by Zhao Benshan, Song Dandan, and Cui Yongyuan)
<b>Pre-recorded Material</b>	Only singers' MTV videos during their songs.
<b>Presenters' Costumes</b>	Presenters changed their outfits twice. They were all dress in suits and evening dresses.
<b>Presenters' Speeches</b>	The scripts written for the presenters were very emotional and poetic, which inevitably influenced the speech style of the presenters.
<b>Other Features of Presenters</b>	Except the beginning and the end of the gala, the presenters hosted the show in two groups separately. Presenters always stood at one corner of the stage to link the performances.
<b>Performers' Features</b>	At the important moment, performers also talked in an emotional and poetic speech style with body languages. Singers did moderate dance moves while singing to match the lyrics.
<b>Old Faces in Show</b>	Gao Xiumin, Fan Wei, Zhao Lirong, Gong Hanlin, Feng Gong, Niu Qun, Yan Shunkai, Cai Guoqing, Huang Hong, Yu Junjian, eng Liyuan, Zhang Ye, Jiang Dawei, Jiang Kun, Guo Da, Cai Ming, Guo Donglin, Xiao Xiangyu, Zhao Benshan
<b>Celebrities in Show</b>	(Canada): Dashan (Taiwan): Ren Xianqi; Su Rui (Macau): Huang Weilin (HK): Mei Yanfang; Wen Zhaolun; Zeng Zhiwei; Feifei (Mainland): Lin Yilun
<b>Presenters in Show</b>	None
<b>Kids in Show</b>	Kids as background dancers in (*1)(*14)(*33); Kids singing in songs (*26) (*29); Four kids from mainland, HK, Macau and Taiwan in countdown.
<b>Background Dancers</b>	In most song and dances.
<b>Regional / Folk</b>	(*13) (*17) (*22) were performed in Northern Chinese dialect.
<b>Performance Genres</b>	22 song and dances; 2 Chinese operas; 1 Musical; 7 Sketch Comedies; 3 Stand-up Comedies; 1 Acrobatics.
<b>Set Design</b>	There was a traditional red door decorated with the Chinese spring couplets at the side of the stage. The two big automatic sliding shields were actually digital screens. As most sketch comedies portrayed the funny stories from daily lives happened at home, detailed props such as vases, TV sets, calendars, cups and curtains were provided to transform the empty stage into a private family household for the story environment.
<b>Television Production</b>	Many new advanced technologies were applied to create many rich changeable effects. The head of an audience blocked the view of the camera. During the show, the text '1999 NYG' was written at the bottom of the screen. Singers still had hand-held microphones, but the comedians used clip-microphones mostly. Most song and dances applied the carnival style--the feathers flying in the sky, the smoke on the stage, changeable lighting effects, the eye-catching props and costumes, and the automatic moving stage and screens.
<b>Absence</b>	Firework

<b>New Year's Gala 2000</b>	
<b>Total Length</b>	03h 42m 32s
<b>Presenters</b>	Niu Qun, Feng Gong, Bai Yansong, Wen Qing, Zhao Lin, Cao Ying, Li Xiaomeng, Ju Ping, Cui Yongyuan, Wen Xingyu, Yang Lan, Zhao Wei, Jiang Kun, Zhao Zhongxiang, Ni Ping, Zhou Tao, Zhu Jun.
<b>Director(s)</b>	Zhao An, Zhang Xiaohai
<b>No. of Items</b>	37
<b>Themes</b>	Many performances had the theme of nation building, patriotism and the value of the traditional Chinese culture, even in the international modern society. The performances were divided into different chapters with each chapter representing a particular theme shown in each chapter's performances. Comedy (*18) revealed the good ethical standards that are promoted in the Chinese society such as respecting the elderly, return the lost money back to the owner, and being honest and responsible in making businesses.
<b>Special Greetings to</b>	Presenters reminded the audience to give new year greetings by calling their parents and relatives. The song and dace (*3) was performed by the female army soldiers and dedicated to the female army soldiers. Presenters gave New Year greetings to the mainland Chinese of all ages, on behalf of the Chinese in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macau. The performances in the fourth chapter gave wishes to newly married couples.
<b>Ethnic Minority Features</b>	In song and dance combination (*16), singers and dancers from different ethnicities performed tightly one group after another. They were all dressed in various minority costumes and performed their traditional song and dance. Some of them were from the Performing Art Academies in the ethnical minority regions. The big screen displayed the picture of the symbolic royal post in Beijing. All performers featuring different ethnicities gathered on stage at the end and performed the song 'I Love China' together.
<b>HK, Taiwan, Macau &amp; Overseas</b>	The mainland star and the celebrities from Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan gave New Year wishes to the audience together. Stars from HK, Macau and the mainland were singing together the song (*17) 'Macau, I Bring You Home'. They were all dressed in fashionable clothes. On the big screen, a video was played to show the former president attending the ceremony of Macau's hand-over back to China. In comedy (*18), The Taiwanese expressed his hope for the reunion of mainland and Taiwan. In Musical (*19), a little girl from Taiwan was very sad because she lost the dragon paper-cut from her mainland friend, which brought hopes to her family to go through the Taiwan earthquake.
<b>Chinese Zodiacs</b>	The words 'live broadcast' in the animated dragon shape often appeared on screen. A big dragon balloon was above the auditorium. The Chinese word for 'Dragon' was often used in performances' titles. The big screen sometimes displayed the word 'dragon'.
<b>Beginning</b>	Under the symphony music, the image of the CCTV building was merging into the picture of people from different ethnical regions dancing in their traditional costumes. A plane with the 'CCTV' logo was flying over each province by showing the landscapes and the names of the provinces. In the end, the plane brought the image of the live studio with the loud cheering from the studio audience. Presenters/comedians interacted with the studio audience humorously before introducing the opening song and dance.
<b>New Year Midnight Countdown</b>	Poem reciting by TV drama star Pu Cunxi and child star Zhang Yijing. Under the expressive music, the performers recited the poem with beautiful rhetoric words to address the bell ringing upon the arrival of the New Year. With the countdown, the audiences were clapping and cheering. Glitters were falling from the sky. A big dragon balloon was sailing towards the stage in the sky and the red dragon flag was swinging on stage. Presenter Zhao Zhongxiang and Ni Ping read out the New Year messages from the former president in exciting and ceremonious manner. They suggested the Chinese take the encouragement and welcome the New Year with confident and cheerful attitude.

<b>Ending</b>	Presenters joined the stage with all performers, announcing the end of this year's NYG. Performers were cheering and jumping on the stage happily under the falling glitters. Many studio audiences were waving happily to the camera.
<b>Studio Audiences</b>	Army officers and ethnical minorities were filmed sitting among the audience. Shots of audience laughing and cheering happily were often captured during the show. On the upstairs of the auditorium, around six senior production personnel were sitting at the 'instruction desk' while viewing the show in front of the pre-view screens.
<b>TV Audiences</b>	The voting means of 'My Favorite NYG Performance' was announced by the hotline presenters, but the interaction with TV audience was not included in NYG.
<b>Audience's Favorite</b>	Sketch Comedy 'Hour-Paid Worker' (Performed by Zhao Benshan and Song Dandan)
<b>Pre-recorded Material</b>	In the mini sit-com (*22), old face presenters Zhao Zhongxiang and Ni Ping were dressed up like elderly people and reflecting their good old days as NYG presenters in thirty years. This was a good transition for their roles to be gradually replaced by young presenters.
<b>Presenters' Costumes</b>	Presenters were dressed in fashionable clothes. As there were so many of them and each only appeared few times, they did not change their outfits throughout the evening gala.
<b>Presenters' Speeches</b>	Chinese old sayings, idioms, couplet, and traditional values were often used in stand-up comedies and presenters' speeches. Consistent story plots were applied in presenters' linking to make the performances naturally and interestingly connected with each other. Presenters appeared in pairs. Presenters' names were provided upon their each appearance.
<b>Other Features</b>	Much more presenters were included in this NYG. Apart from the NYG presenters, there were comedians, film stars, CCTV presenters and pop singers who were celebrities.
<b>Performers' Features</b>	Many performers shared one performance together. More than five Chinese operas were compressed into one performance. Therefore the singers can not sing the complete length.
<b>Old Faces in Show</b>	Niu Qun, Wen Qing, Zhao Zhongxiang, Ni Ping, Zhou Tao, Zhu Jun, Feng Gong, Guo Donglin, Pan Changjiang, Gong Hanlin, Li Guyi, Zhao Benshan, Song Dandan, Cai Ming,
<b>Celebrities in Show</b>	(Mainland): Zhang Ziyi, Pu Shu, Zhao Wei, Lin Yilun, Dong Jie, Pu Chunxi, Cao Ying (HK): Wen Zhaolun, Liang Yongqi, Li Ming, Xie Tingfeng. (Taiwan): Lin Xinru, Ling Feng, Lin Zhixuan (Macau): Huang Weilin
<b>Presenters in Show</b>	Feng Gong in comedy (*2); Cui Yongyuan in song (*12); Wen Xingyu in comedy (*13); Zhao Wei in song (*16)and musical (*19); Jiang Kun in stand-up comedy (*29);
<b>Kids in Show</b>	Many kids jumping and cheering in opening song and dance to create the loud, happy and busy scene. Special talent show (*6) was performed by 5-year-old kids.
<b>Background Dancers</b>	They acted different roles with props to perform the story plot to match the theme. Close-ups on their dramatic facial expressions. They were dressed in shiny-floor costumes.
<b>Regional /Chinese Folk</b>	In folk songs (*8) (*24) (*33) (*25), singers and dancers were dressed in the folk costumes (in Red and golden) and performed with folk instruments and props. The songs described the happy scene of the New Year. They portrayed the Northern Chinese folk culture.
<b>Performance Genres</b>	25 Song and Dances; 5 Sketch Comedies; 2 Stand-up Comedies; 1 Poem Reciting; 2 Chinese Operas; 1 Musical; 1 Mini sit-com.
<b>Set Design</b>	Big screens were placed at the back of the audience seats and the back of the stage, playing the videos to match the theme of the performance. There was a ladder on stage, where the dancers performed. There was a small platform rising up and down automatically.
<b>Television Production</b>	The text 'live broadcast' with an animated dragon often appeared on screen. The lyrics were provided. The camera work was steady and slow. The lighting was changed frequently to match different performances. Fading in/out and overlapping editing effects were used. The websites to watch the live NYG online was provided.
<b>Absence</b>	Firework; The NYG closure song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight' was not performed.

	<b>New Year's Gala 2001</b>
<b>Total Length</b>	03h 56m 20s
<b>Presenters</b>	Zhu Jun; Zhou Tao; Cao Ying; Zhang Zheng
<b>Director(s)</b>	Jin Yue, Wang Xianping, Wang Xiansheng
<b>No. of Items</b>	38
<b>Themes</b>	Patriotic song was dedicated to the motherland. There were many (around 50) background dancers dressed in red dresses and waving red silks while dancing. The video of the important events in the Chinese history was played on the big screen. At the end, presenters stated the Chinese athletes' great achievement in the Sydney Olympic Games. Olympic Champions were also invited to give greetings to the people. The comedy followed was about the passion and hope of the Chinese people in hosting the next Olympics. The song coming next promoted the Olympic spirit, with many kids dancing.
<b>Special Greetings to</b>	Presenters made poetic speeches and gave New Year greetings to all the ethnicities in mainland China, Chinese from Taiwan, HK and Macau, and the overseas Chinese all over the world. Performed by military singers, song (*34) expressed the great spirit of the army soldiers. Many background dancers dressed in army uniforms were doing the army parade and salute. At the countdown, presenters also gave greetings to all the foreigners who had given support to all the Chinese enterprises.
<b>Ethnic Minority Features</b>	In song and dance combination (*10) (*18)(*38), the singers and dancers were dressed in ethnic minority costumes and performed in their different traditional ways one group after another. All the singers came from minority background and they sang in the regional dialects (lyrics were provided on screen). In the end, all singers and dancers gathered on stage to perform the last part together to show the united spirit, as introduced by presenters.
<b>HK, Taiwan, Macau &amp; Overseas</b>	(*6) was a famous song from a Taiwanese pop star. The singer was dressed fashionably. During the song, she came off the stage and shook hands with the audience while singing. In song (*16), the music video of the song was played on the big screen, as the popular songs were already widely known in the market. Song 'Hope to Reunion' (*28) was performed by the singers from mainland and Taiwan. Presenters mentioned the reunion of China's territory was the biggest dream of the Chinese people. The singers were dressed in Chinese folk costumes and the performance was full of the Chinese traditional culture. The song described the same root and origin of the Chinese people everywhere.
<b>Chinese Zodiacs</b>	None
<b>Beginning</b>	The screen showed the globe, different Chinese ethnicities, and the CCTV building where the NYG took place. The scenes followed in which Chinese people from different locations and from different background were getting ready for the Chinese New Year. Finally, the text of 'CCTV NYG' appeared before the live studio was shown. Under the music, many performers danced out of the Chinese ancient doors loudly, happily and full of energy.
<b>New Year Midnight Countdown</b>	Under the music, presenter made a poetic speech about the arrival of the New Year. Ten seconds before the midnight, presenters led the audience to shout out the seconds downwards while the screen cut to a digital clock. Once the clock pointed at the midnight, all the people in the studio were cheering and jumping happily under the streamers and balloons flying in the sky. Studio audiences were greeting each other while the next song and dance was performed on stage.
<b>Ending</b>	The NYG closure song was performed with many singers and dancers dressed in evening suits and evening dresses. During the song, all the performers gathered on the stage. The presenters gave short speeches to welcome the New Year by embedding good wishes. With the streamers falling from the sky, the people in the studio audience were cheering, hugging each other and waving to the camera.

<b>Studio Audiences</b>	The audiences gave big applauds after each greeting and presenters' speeches.
<b>TV Audiences</b>	The activity of generating 'Lucky Audience' with different prizes.
<b>Audience's Favorite</b>	Sketch Comedy 'Selling Walking Stick' (Performed by Zhao Benshan, Fan Wei)
<b>Pre-recorded Material</b>	Sometimes the music videos of the songs were played on the big screen while the singers were singing.
<b>Presenters' Costumes</b>	Male presenters were dressed in formal suits while the female presenters were dressed in evening dresses. Presenters changed their outfits twice, but at different times.
<b>Presenters' Speeches</b>	Presenters stood among the audience seats and introduce the next performance by discussing its theme. By making Chinese couplets, presenters introduce the performance.
<b>Other Features of Presenters</b>	Most of the time two presenters (instead of four) appeared to do the linking. Presenters' linking was more often between the performances and also more briefly.
<b>Performers' Features</b>	Pop singers were dressed in fashionable clothes and sang with clip-microphones. Sometimes singers performed among the audience seats. Song (*8) was shared by six singers as each singer was singing two sentences. Many background dancers in every song. The singers were dressed in evening suits and ceremonious evening dresses. The comedians were dressed in suits and sometimes performed opera to impress the audience.
<b>Old Faces in Show</b>	Sun Yue, Guo Da, Cai Ming, Feng Gong, Guo Donglin, Cheng Fangyuan, Jiang Kun, Dai Zhicheng, Huang Hong, Yu Junjian, Jiang Tao, Tang Jiezhong, Gong Hanlin, Xiao Lin, Zhao Baole, Liu Huan, Yan Weiwen, Zhao Benshan, Gao Xiumin.
<b>Celebrities in Show</b>	(Mainland) Yu Quan (Band), Zhang Ziyi, Li Yundi; (HK) Chen Xiaodong, Zheng Yijian; (Taiwan) Jiang Yuheng, Cai Qin; Li Wen
<b>Presenters in Show</b>	None
<b>Kids in Show</b>	At the beginning of the NYG, Kids were standing at the front with flowers in their hands. Kids dressed in different costumes performed martial art and background dancing.
<b>Background Dancers</b>	All song and dance performances had Background Dancers, except in (*25). There were many background dancers (around 50) in (*4). Their costumes were colourful and exaggerated. They also acted different scenes from daily life with different props while dancing to match with the song theme.
<b>Regional /Chinese Folk</b>	Comedian (*14) spoke the Northern Chinese dialect. In (*23) (*28) (*37), singers and dancers were dressed in folk costumes and danced to the folk music in folk style with traditional Chinese props such as red lanterns.
<b>Performance Genres &amp; Quantities</b>	23 Song and Dances; 5 Sketch Comedies; 4 Stand-up Comedies; 1 Pure Dance; 1 Motion Effect Drama; 1 Musical Comedy; 1 Acrobatics; 1 Instrument Playing; 1 Chinese Opera
<b>Set Design</b>	Two big balloons in human shape were standing on the both sides of the stage. There was a big screen at the back of the stage. Chinese ancient posts were decorated along the isle of the auditorium. There were sliding stairs which brought the dancers from the make-up room to the stage. The staging was very complicated and multi-functioned.
<b>Television Production</b>	The camerawork was more skillful and experienced. Some audiences were filmed passing in front of the camera. The lighting was more sophisticated with different layers to create different effects. The names of the upcoming performers were written at the bottom of the screen. Soap bubbles were created and blown to the stage.
<b>Absence</b>	Firework; No indication of the Chinese zodiac of the year.

	<b>New Year's Gala 2002</b>
<b>Total Length</b>	03h 55m 20s
<b>Presenters</b>	Ni Ping, Zhu Jun, Wen Qing, Li Yong, Zhou Tao, Wang Xiaoya; Cao Ying, Zhang Zheng
<b>Director(s)</b>	Chen Yulu
<b>No. of Items</b>	36
<b>Themes</b>	After the acrobatic performance, presenter introduced the performer who grew up as an orphan and he wanted to return the love he received from the society by devoting his talent to China rather than earning money abroad. A patriotic song 'my home is in China' was followed. Presenters announced the great news on China's success in bidding to host the 2008 Olympics. As China goes to the world with WTO and hosting the Olympic Games, the next song and dance showed the widespread English learning in China.
<b>Special Greetings to</b>	Presenters gave special greetings to the Chinese in HK, Taiwan, Macau and overseas with a poem. Presenters gave greetings to the migrant workers and remind them to take care away from home. Presenter greeted the audience happy new year with the idiom of 'horse'.
<b>Ethnic Minority Features</b>	All the performers in (*20) were farmers in Tibet and they travelled a long way to Beijing. Presenters mentioned we are all brothers and sisters construction a nice life in the beautify country China. The song and dance combination featured a few ethnic minorities. Some singers and dancers were majority Han Chinese, but dressed up like minorities. The song was performed in Chinese. Some Tibetan dancers threw grains to the audience as blessing.
<b>HK, Taiwan, Macau &amp; Overseas</b>	Song (*6) was performed by singers from mainland and Singapore separately in each venue. The big screen joined their performances at the same time. The fans of the Taiwanese pop singer were shouting and cheering during his performance. Comedy (*30) was performed by a Taiwanese comedian.
<b>Chinese Zodiacs</b>	The performers and presenters gave New Year wishes to the audience by including the word 'horse'. The animated horse appeared at the opening scene and during the show. The word 'horse' was written on the auditorium wall in Chinese calligraphy. Comedians (*8) were dressed in horse costumes and made Chinese couplets with the word 'horse'.
<b>Beginning</b>	Under the music, an animated golden horse was flying into the screen with an animated clock with the words '2002 NYG' written on it. The horse entered a household where the whole family was watching the NYG. The screen cut to the NYG studio, where all the studio audiences were clapping with the opening song and dance. Then young girls and boys dressed fashionably were dancing to the pop music with almost 100 background dancers on stage. Presenters from both venues gave greetings.
<b>New Year Midnight Countdown</b>	Each presenter said a few sentences one after another for the countdown speech. The screen cut to an animated clock with red and golden horses at the background. Once the clock pointed at the midnight, the bell started to ring and the cheers filled the whole studio. Colourful streamers, balloons and glitters were falling from the sky. All the performers on stage were jumping happily and waving to the camera. Then the screen showed the live celebrating scenes in different parts of China. The presenters gave greetings on stage.
<b>Ending</b>	Under the closure song, performers and presenters gathered on stage with kids at the front. All presenters from both venues gave New Year wishes. Then the streamers were falling from the sky. All the audiences rose up applauding while the performers were waving and cheering to the camera. The screen cut to the celebrating scenes in different parts of China.
<b>Studio Audiences</b>	(NYG studio): The studio audiences stood up from their seats and clapped with the opening song and dance with the hands up in the air. In response to presenters' question, the studio audience shouted out the answers collectively in clear order. The magicians (*28) taught the magic tricks to the audience by asking them to follow step by step. (Shenzhen Venue): Several thousand audiences were sitting outside at the theme park. Some waved to the camera and some recorded the performance with their own camcorders.

<b>TV Audiences</b>	During the performance, a question appeared on screen, regarding the successful events happened in past year. The audience can text their answers through mobile phones.
<b>Audience's Favorite</b>	Sketch comedy 'Selling Wheelchair' (Performed by Zhao Benshan, Fan Wei and Gao Xiumin)
<b>Pre-recorded</b>	A group of elderly people were singing an old song together on a ship.
<b>Presenters' Costumes</b>	Presenters were dressed in simple day outfits, not ceremonious evening dresses and suits. Presenters from both venues changed their outfits twice.
<b>Presenters' Speeches</b>	Each presenter said a few sentences one after another to complete the speech with exciting, happy and formal manner. The presenters used the term 'dear (audience) friends' to address the audience. Poems and couplets were usually cited by presenters during the speeches. Performances followed one after another without many presenters' links. Presenters from two venues interacted with each other live through big screens.
<b>Other Features of Presenters</b>	Presenters started the show by joining the performers on stage, dancing while shouting out interactive questions to the audience. The style of the young presenters was more exciting, energetic and light-hearted. The presenters from both venues challenged each other by brining good performances from their venue. Presenters chatted with audience with humor.
<b>Performers' Features</b>	The comedians started the comedy by giving greetings to the audience. They were playing guitar and keyboard to show their special talents to the audience. In song and dance combination, there were both old face and new face singers. The singers wore head microphones while singing. During the song, the singers gave greetings to the audience. Sometimes the performers stood on the automatic stage on top of the fountain.
<b>Old Faces in Show</b>	Feng Gong, Guo Donglin, Huang Hong, Gong Hanlin, Xie Xiaodong, Shi Fukuan, Zhao Benshan, Gao Xiumin, Fan Wei, Jiang Kun, Dai Zhicheng
<b>Celebrities in Show</b>	(Mainland): Wang Xiaoya, Ju Ping, Yu Quan, Li Yang, Sun Nan, Hu Bin, Li Qiong. (HK): Chen Huilin (Singapore): Sun Yanzi (American Chinese): Wang Lihong
<b>Presenters in Kids in Show</b>	Presenter Li Yong changed his outfit for his performance in comedy (*11). Song (*4) was played, sung and danced by kids. In comedy (*11), each kid gave a regional performance to show their talents. Kids as background dancers in (*16) (*20) (*32).
<b>Background Dancers</b>	Background dancers in all song and dances except (*12)(*24)(*27). They appeared in different groups and performed everywhere on stage: on the balcony, by the fountain, among the audience, on the footbridge and the staircases. There were around one hundred background dancers in each performance and they were dressed in the same costumes.
<b>Regional /Chinese Folk</b>	Song (*33) was performed in folk style which described the traditional customs on the Chinese New Year that is shared by all the Chinese around the world. The patriotic theme of 'we are all Chinese' was celebrated. Many dancers in minority costumes were dancing.
<b>Performance Genres</b>	19 Song and Dances; 5 Sketch Comedies; 4 Stand-up Comedies; 2 Magic Shows; 1 Music Story-telling; 1 Fashion Show; 1 Acrobatics; 2 Chinese Operas
<b>Set Design</b>	NYG studio: Many red lanterns and Chinese paper-cuts were decorated around the studio. The front part of the stage floor can open and close automatically, which revealed the underground fountain below. There was a small round platform rising up and down automatically at the centre. Shenzhen venue: at the outdoor theme park 'Window of the World'. A big screen on stage to show the live performance from NYG studio.
<b>Television Production</b>	The names of the presenters were provided on screen upon their first appearance. Fading in/out effect was used often when cutting between the shots. The names of the venue and the animated horse with words '2002 NYG' were provided on screen. Big screens were provided for the audience to watch the performance taking place at the other venue. Many stage effects such as snowman, flying bubbles, fake snowflakes, and smoke.
<b>Absence</b>	Firework; folk culture-based performances;

<b>New Year's Gala 2003</b>	
<b>Total Length</b>	04h 20m 40s
<b>Presenters</b>	Ni Ping, Zhang Zhongxiang, Zhu Jun, Zhou Tao, Li Yong.
<b>Director(s)</b>	Jin Yue
<b>No. of Items</b>	42
<b>Themes</b>	Under the glorious music, 34 boxes of soil from 31 provinces in mainland China and 3 boxes from Taiwan, HK and Macau were poured one after another into the big container to mix, together with a handful of soil which was put in the Shenzhou IV Spaceship on 30th Dec 2002 and returned back successfully. The video footage was played on the big screen to show the people collecting the soil from different regions in China and the spaceship engineers putting the soil into the spaceship. Presenter expressed the special meaning of this event as 'the mixing of soil is like the mixing the blood of the Chinese sons and daughters and the close unity/bond of different places in China'. Presenter also promoted the theme further by reciting poems with exciting and emotional manners. At the end, the next song (*31) was called 'love for the home land' to develop this patriotic theme.
<b>Special Greetings to</b>	At the end of the comedy (*18), the family of the elderly army officer stood in a line and gave New Year greetings to 'all the retired army soldiers who have dedicated their life to the country', with formal army salute and tears in their eyes. The army officers were also filmed sitting in the audience seats. To promote the theme further, song (*19) (*20) were dedicated to the elderly soldiers, in which the singers and dancers were dressed in army uniforms and performed army parade.
<b>Ethnic Minority Features</b>	(*37) was a song and dance combination featuring the ethnic minority. Each group of singer with background dancers followed tightly one after another. The singers and dancers were dressed in different ethnic minority costumes. The China reunion song was put at the end to stress the theme. Some singers were ethnic minorities and some were Han majority. Some songs were sung in regional dialects with the translated lyrics provided.
<b>HK, Taiwan, Macau &amp; Overseas</b>	Song (*4) was performed by two famous pop singers from mainland and HK. The singers were dressed in fashionable clothes. There were many background dancers dressed in designed shiny stage costumes and dance in pop style. Songs (*13) (*22) given by HK stars were already popular in the market before its performance in NYG.
<b>Chinese Zodiacs</b>	At the countdown speech, the presenters included the word 'Year of Goat' in their couplets. There were many animated goats in the opening scene. Many kids were dressed in goat costumes in song and dance. Song and dance (*3) was dedicated to all the Chinese zodiacs. Performers threw goat toys to the studio audiences.
<b>Beginning</b>	Under the Chinese folk music, the goat appeared on the Chinese paper-cut, before the screen showed the New Year celebration scenes in both countryside and urban cities. The words '2003 NYG' appeared in golden text over the red background, before the screen cut to the NYG studio. Singers dressed in Chinese traditional dresses sang the folk song together with many background dancers. Presenters made the opening speeches with exciting manner and gave New Year greetings.
<b>New Year Midnight Countdown</b>	Each presenter made a Chinese couplet by including the words 'Year of Goat' to all the ethnicities in China, and all the Chinese people in HK, Taiwan, Macau, and abroad. The screen cut full to an animated clock which was running towards midnight. Once the New Year arrived, the bell was ringing while the streamers were falling from the sky. Everybody was cheering happily. After embedding the good wishes to the people in beautiful poetic words, the presenters shouted out lively and raising hands up in the air.
<b>Ending</b>	Under the performance of the closure song, presenters gathered on stage and made brief speeches with best wishes. The dancers on stage were jumping up and waving to the camera. Like in the countdown, the studio audiences were not shown.

<b>Studio Audiences</b>	At the countdown, the studio audiences did not rise up from their seats and cheer for the New Year. Two female national footballers sitting at the round table audience seats were introduced by the presenter who encouraged the audience to give them good luck.
<b>TV Audiences</b>	Presenters announced that NYG had received many New Year wishes from the audience during the public campaign on 'My New Year Wishes' and she also read out their wishes.
<b>Favorite</b>	Sketch Comedy 'Psychological illness' (performed by Zhao Benshan)
<b>Pre-recorded</b>	The music videos were played on the big screen as background of the songs.
<b>Presenters' Costumes</b>	All presenters were dressed in Chinese traditional dresses and suits most of the time. All presenters changed their costumes twice.
<b>Presenters' Speeches</b>	Presenters made a small oral mistake. Chinese idioms and poems were often used in giving New Year greetings by the presenters. The young presenters behaved more lively and happy with light and relaxed style. The old face presenter behaved friendly and formal.
<b>Other Features of Presenters</b>	Presenters' names were provided at the bottom of the screen upon their appearance. Presenters all spoke to camera. To make the linking natural, the presenters introduced the next performance by commenting the last performance in the conversation style. Li Yong brought the audience closer through his light-hearted and humorous way of presenting.
<b>Performers' Features</b>	The comedians used clip-microphone. The singer were dressed in ceremonious evening dresses with heavy accessorize while the background dancers were dressed in shiny-floor costumes with props. Comedies (*9) (*28) were performed by new face performers. Many old face comedians work in the same partnership in the NYG comedies.
<b>Old Faces in Show</b>	Xie Xiapdong, Feng Gong, Zhou Tao, Guo Donglin, Huang Hong, Guo Da, Cai Ming, Jiang Tao, Zhao Benshan, Fan Wei, Gao Xiumin, Zhang Ye
<b>Celebrities in Show</b>	(Mainland): Luo Jing (CCTV News Presenter); Ju Ping (CCTV Children's presenter); Sun Xiaomei (CCTV Lifestyle presenter). (HK): Zhang Baizhi, Lin Yilian, Guo Fucheng;
<b>Presenters in Show</b>	Presenter changed outfit to perform in comedy (*5). Presenter organized a studio game with the TV audience by playing a magic trick with cards.
<b>Kids in Show</b>	There were many kids dressed in goat costumes in the opening song and dance. Kids dressed in different costumes to dance in (*2) (*3) (*35), and opera singing in (*14).
<b>Background Dancers</b>	No background dance in song and dance (*13)(*31)(*30)(*34)(*36)(*40). They dressed in shiny-floor costumes and danced tightly one group after another to create busy scene.
<b>Regional /Chinese Folk</b>	In the opening song and dance, singers were dressed in Chinese traditional dress and sang this folk song together. The song described the New Year traditions (for Northern Chinese). Many background dancers were dressed in colorful folk costumes. Folk songs (*2) (*11) (*35) (*17) expressed the celebration together and the dancers' props were all traditional folk symbols of the New Year. Pure dance (*29) featured the dragon dance as a traditional folk custom. Comedian in (*9) spoke regional Northern dialect in the comedy.
<b>Performance Genres</b>	27 Song and Dances; 4 Sketch Comedies; 3 Stand-up Comedies; 2 Magic Shows; 1 Musical; 1 Acrobatics; 1 Theatrical Play; 1 Chinese Opera; 1 Pure Dance;
<b>Set Design</b>	A small round platform rose up and down automatically at the centre. There was a water curtain around the stage to create the rainy environment. Several posts also rose up and down automatically during performance. A big round glass building was at the back of the stage in the centre, where dancers were dancing. A variety of computer generated images were projected on the big boards at the back of the stage. Props were provided in detail.
<b>Television Production</b>	Background dancers were filmed removing the props from the stage. The lighting and sound recording was much more stable with good quality. The words '2003 NYG' often appeared at the corner of the screen with animations. More creative camera shots were used. Subtitles of the comedy were provided.
<b>Absence</b>	Firework

	<b>New Year's Gala 2004</b>
<b>Total Length</b>	04h 15m 40s
<b>Presenters</b>	Ni Ping, Zhu Jun, Li Yong, Zhou Tao
<b>Director(s)</b>	Yuan Dewang
<b>No. of Items</b>	39
<b>Themes</b>	The man who carried the Shenzhou V spacecraft into space the first time gave a short speech at the countdown; Song (*31) (*32) expressed that the People is the lifeline of the Party; Song (*19) described the Overseas Chinese missing home in Chinese new year. The ideological themes are scattered at different places throughout the show; Every theme is often followed by a performance under the same topic to promote the theme further.
<b>Special Greetings to</b>	Presenter suggested the audience give the special new year's greetings to the Chinese Army by giving applauses and a song (*37) to glorify the Army spirit; Presenters gave greetings to the people, the audience, the Chinese in HK, Taiwan, Macau and overseas.
<b>Ethnic Minority Features</b>	Ethnic song and dance was usually performed at the end of the show. In (*36), ten different minority groups were dressed in their cultural costume, singing and dancing to their traditional music one after another. They all gathered in a row and sang together in the end.
<b>HK, Taiwan, Macau &amp; Overseas</b>	Acrobatics (*7) was performed by Argentina magician. Ireland Dancing (*18) performed by Irish dancers. Song (*29) was performed by celebrities from HK, Taiwan and Mainland.
<b>Chinese Zodiacs</b>	Animated monkeys were shown at the opening scene, on stage digital screen, and at the bottom of the screen; Performers dressed in monkey costumes danced at the beginning of the show; Monkey was the subject of stand-up comedy (*2) and Chinese opera (*34).
<b>Beginning</b>	Under the folk music, the animated Chinese zodiacs were spinning over the Chinese Paper-cut background before the NYG title appeared. The opening song and dance was given by celebrities, background dancers and performers dressed in monkey costumes. As all performers gathered on stage, presenters gave speeches on the country's achievement and special New Year greetings. A busy, loud and crowded scene as usual.
<b>New Year Midnight Countdown</b>	Presenter made a speech to portray the great achievement of the national hero as the first Chinese sent into the space. Under the patriotic song, the national flag was swinging while the crowd was cheering with flowers. He gave New Year wishes to the country. Presenters took the lead to count down with the audience. The studio was filled with the mixed sound from the clock running, audience counting down, the cheering and bell ringing.
<b>Ending</b>	Under the NYG closure song, all performers and presenters stood together and sang the song together, waving flowers and cheering to the audience. Glitters were falling from the sky. Presenters announced the ending of the show and give best wishes to the people.
<b>Studio Audiences</b>	Soft drinks and flowers were provided on the round tables in the first row audience seats. The reactions of the audiences (laughing, crying) were often filmed. The auditorium was semi-circle structured with big red lanterns and posts around it. The CCTV logo and Chinese couplets were put up on the wall at the back of the auditorium.
<b>TV Audiences</b>	Two Presenters explained five times the voting methods of the 'My Favorite NYG Performance' to the audience throughout the show. They also read out the new year's greetings from the Chinese embassies abroad and the enterprises.
<b>Audience's Favorite</b>	Sketch Comedy 'Water Delivery Man' (Performed by Zhao Benshan, Fan Wei and Gao Xiumin)
<b>Pre-recorded Material</b>	Only music videos of the songs were played on the big screen while the singers were singing. In song and dance (*32), historical videos of Chinese presidents making speeches.
<b>Presenters'</b>	The four main presenters changed their outfits for three times, into different suits and evening dresses (traditional and fashionable styles); two presenters in charge of the

<b>Costumes</b>	audience voting did not change their outfits.
<b>Presenters' Speeches</b>	Presenters addressed the audience as 'Dear audience friends. They made minor oral mistakes. Presenters mentioned several times about the live broadcast of the NYG.
<b>Other Features of Presenters</b>	Li Yong's presenting style was more humorous, light-hearted and relaxed. There were many poetic and rhetorical words designed in presenters' lines in order to make the sentence sounds more beautiful.
<b>Performers' Features</b>	Many performers gave their new year's greetings to the audience at the beginning/end of or during their performances; Performers were dressed in suits and evening dresses most of the time, except for folk, pop and Chinese opera performances. Singers were lip-syncing.
<b>Old Faces in Show</b>	Xie Xiaodong, Hou Yaowen, Shi Fukuan, Feng Gong, Guo Donglin, Guo Da, Yang Lei, Yan Shunkai, Huang Hong, Zhao Benshan, Cai Ming
<b>Celebrities in Show</b>	(Mainland): Zhao Wei, Lin Yilun, Jiang Qinqin, Huang Yi, Mei Ting, Chen Lao, Liu Mei, Liuxiao Lingtong, Sha Baoliang, (HK): Mo Wenwei, (Taiwan): A Du, Zhou Jielun,
<b>Presenters in Show</b>	Ni Ping in Countdown Ceremony; Li Yong in Sketch comedy (*27); Zhou Tao and Zhu Jun in Stand-up Comedy (*4).
<b>Kids in Show</b>	Kids were singing and dancing in the popular cartoon songs (*6); Many kids were doing background dance at the beginning and the end of the show.
<b>Background Dancers</b>	In almost every song and dance; The number of background dancers in each song and dance increased.
<b>Regional /Chinese Folk</b>	Song (*30) was performed in Sichuan dialect; Comedians in sketch comedy (*20) spoke Shandong and Canton dialects.
<b>Performance Genres &amp; Quantities</b>	24 Song and Dances; 6 Sketch up Comedies; 3 Stand-up Comedies; 2 Chinese Operas; 1 Fashion show; 1 Magic tricks; 2 Acrobatics; 1 Musical; Every couple of song and dance performances are followed by a Sketch or Stand-up Comedy; Many sketch comedies are not just for fun, but contain educational meanings with touching plots and music to develop the theme.
<b>Set Design</b>	As the traditional New Year colour, the theme colour of the stage was red and gold. More props were provided in detail to create better effects. The whole stage was covered under a huge red lantern and the show was held inside this gigantic red lantern. There was a footbridge at the back of the central stage. Two big screens were placed on stage to display videos and animations. There were two staircases which can close and move apart automatically. There was also a small stage at the centre to rise up and down automatically.
<b>Television Production</b>	Animations were added to the performance titles, as well as the text 'Live Broadcast' and '2004 New Year's Gala' appearing at the corner of the screen during the show. The camerawork was more skillful, smooth and steady. The camera shots were more interesting with different angles and styles. Fading in/out and overlapping were often used in editing.
<b>Significant Absence</b>	Firework

	<b>New Year's Gala 2005</b>
<b>Total Length</b>	04h 56m 30s
<b>Presenters</b>	Zhou Tao, Dong Qing, Li Yong, Zhu Jun; (Hotline Presenters: Wen Qing, Zhang Zequn )
<b>Director(s)</b>	Lang Kun, Chen Weiya
<b>No. of Items</b>	38
<b>Themes</b>	Presenter glorified the great achievements of the Chinese athletes in the 2004 Olympics. This comedy (*13) showed the great enthusiasm of the Chinese people in the Olympics. Olympic champions also joined the comedy. The Chinese women's volleyball team threw the volleyballs to the studio audience. Presenters expressed the great work on the construction of Qing Zang Railway. They discussed the difficulty in building it. Presenters gave greetings to the workers who were still working on the building site in the New Year.
<b>Special Greetings to</b>	Presenters gave New Year greetings to all the ethnicities in China and the Chinese in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau, and overseas. Presenters gave New Year wishes to all the elderly people, wishing them happy, healthy, and long life. Presenters suggested the audience give greetings and regards to the army soldiers and policemen who had to work on this special day, and they bowed to show respect by saying 'You've been working hard'.
<b>Ethnic Minority Features</b>	In ethnic song and dance combination (*6) (*31), singers and dancers representing different ethnicities performed in their regional styles in their traditional costumes. It projected the united harmonious China over a big cultural diversity. To express the spirit of the hard working builders in Tibet Qing Zhang Railway, song (*20) was dedicated to them. The singer and dancers were dressed in Tibetan costumes and danced in front of the Chinese flag. The song described the railway transformed Tibet and Tibetan people's life.
<b>HK, Taiwan, &amp; Overseas</b>	Pop singers from HK and Taiwan performed together. They were dressed in fashionable clothes. The couplet making activity by TV presenters from HK, Taiwan, and Macau.
<b>Chinese Zodiacs</b>	An animated golden rooster was presented in the opening scene. The lucky audience of 'My Favorite NYG Performance' will receive the souvenir of the golden rooster sculpture. Toy roosters were placed on the round tables of the front row audience seats. Comedy (*33) was based on the phrases and idioms which included the word 'rooster' in Chinese.
<b>Beginning</b>	An animated golden phoenix was flying from the sun, and then across the city with different celebrating scenes and finally into the CCTV building. The title '2005 CCTV NYG' was shown. The screen cut to the live NYG studio where the audiences were cheering and applauding. With the big red curtain rolling up, the stage revealed many dancers dressed in golden phoenix costumes. Presenters appeared by standing on a platform rising up automatically from the underground. They made the opening speeches.
<b>New Year Midnight Countdown</b>	After the patriotic song and dance with the video showing the new image of China and the Chinese leaders visiting people, all performers and presenters gathered on stage. Each presenter made a short speech. Ten seconds before the midnight, the presenters shouted out the countdown with the audience. Then, an animation of a clock was shown, with the sponsor's name and greetings written on the clock. Once the bell was ringing, everybody cheered in the studio. Presenters and performers greeted to each other and to the audience.
<b>Ending</b>	At the end of the patriotic song with the video showing the modern China with great landscapes, all performers and presenters gathered on stage. Studio audiences were waving to the camera. Presenters made closure speeches briefly. The closure song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight' was played at the end. With everybody singing to this song together, all the people in the studio stood up, cheering and jumping under the streamers and glitters.
<b>Studio Audiences</b>	Studio audiences were waving to the camera when they were captured. Special guests such as the Olympic champions and army officers were sitting at the round tables with juices and water provided. Several senior staffs were sitting at the instruction desk among the

	audience seats, watching the gala through small TV sets.
<b>TV Audiences</b>	The voting means of 'My Favorite NYG Performance' was explained by the hotline presenters, but no interaction from TV audience was included in NYG.
<b>Audience's Favorite</b>	Sketch Comedy "Kong Fu" (performed by Zhao Benshan, Fan Wei, Cai Weili and Wang Xiaohu)
<b>Pre-recorded Material</b>	It was a video about the working scene of the Qing Zang Railway in Tibet, prior to the Chinese New Year. The reporter interviewed the builders at the building site and asked them to give New Year greetings to their parents over the camera. They were portrayed as heroes and the presenter expressed that it was her honour to hug these workers.
<b>Presenters' Costumes</b>	Presenters were dressed in evening suits/dresses and Chinese traditional clothes. They changed their outfits twice throughout the evening gala.
<b>Presenters' Speeches</b>	The presenters made the speeches with full energy, excitement, and intonations with emphasis on the key words, in the formal ceremonious manner. Each presenter expressed the happiness of the Chinese New Year with Chinese poems, life philosophies, idioms and Chinese couplets. Presenters addressed the audience as 'Dear audience friends'.
<b>Other Features of Presenters</b>	The young presenters spoke and behave in a more relaxed, fun and light-hearted way. Presenters linked the performances independently. Chinese traditional culture and ethic standards were frequently promoted by presenters. Presenter Li Yong hosted the show in a humorous and lively way. They used rhetoric words to make the speech sound like poems.
<b>Performers' Features</b>	The combination of new and old face performers in one performance was applied, with the old face performers playing the leading roles. Singers were dressed in evening suits and ceremonious prom dresses. The old face comedians even worked in the same partnerships. Comedian interacted with the studio audience with humorous conversations which received collective answers. The busy and loud scenes were created for song and dances with performers dressed in shiny-floor costumes and performed tightly one after another.
<b>Old Faces in Show</b>	Zhu Jun, Zhou Tao, Li Yong, Dong Qing, Wei Ji'An, Huang Hong, Gong Hanlin, Guo Donglin, Niu Li, Mei Jia, Cai Guoqing, Yang Hongji, Pan Changjiang,
<b>Celebrities in Show</b>	(Mainland): Olympic Champions, Chinese Women's Volleyball Team, (HK): Cheng Long, Pang Zuming, Rong Zu'Er (Taiwan): Cai Yilin,
<b>Presenters in Show</b>	NYG presenters made Chinese couplets with provincial TV presenters. Presenter Zhu Jun played a role in situation comedy (*21). Presenter Li Yong played a role in comedy (*36).
<b>Kids in Show</b>	In opening song and dance, kids were dressed in the rooster costumes and waved props.
<b>Background Dancers</b>	In the opening scene, many background dancers were dancing around the presenters. They were dressed in shiny-floor costumes and danced with props in clear order. To create the loud busy scene, sometimes different groups of dancers with different styles and costumes were dancing at the same time to the same music on stage. Some were 'flying' in the sky.
<b>Regional /Chinese Folk</b>	Some comedians spoke Northern Chinese dialects. In couplet making activity, provincial TV presenters performed with distinctive regional culture, dialect and specialty of their province. Folk songs such as (*27) expressed the happiness of life.
<b>Performance Genres</b>	24 Song and Dances; 7 Sketch Comedies; 3 Stand-up Comedies; 1 Chinese Opera; 1 Couplet Making; 1 Situation Comedy; 1 Acrobatics.
<b>Set Design</b>	The main colour of the stage was golden and red, as the traditional New Year colour. The studio was decorated with paper-cut and traditional symbols. All the floors can move automatically and there were small platforms rising above stage. More props were provided. Many pictures and videos were projected on stage to create different effects.
<b>Television Production</b>	Many interesting creative camera shots were used with smooth and steady operation. The reminder of the upcoming performances was provided on screen. The texts 'live broadcast' and '2005 NYG' were shown on screen.
<b>Absence</b>	Firework

<b>New Year's Gala 2006</b>	
<b>Total Length</b>	04h 17m 53s
<b>Presenters</b>	Zhu Jun, Dong Qing, Li Yong, Zhou Tao; (Hotline: Zhang Zequn, Liu Fangfei)
<b>Director(s)</b>	Lang Kun
<b>No. of Items</b>	30
<b>Themes</b>	Two cosmonauts from Shenzhou VI Manned Spacecraft were invited to NYG. They showed a video recorded from the space which contained a short speech by them. They thanked the people for their support. Then two heroes from daily life were interviewed among the audience seats, as the ordinary people doing extraordinary things. Presenters suggested we should pay more care and love to the migrated workers.
<b>Special Greetings to</b>	The performers in (*4) gave wishes to all the grandmas, grandpas and children. Army singers (*22) gave greetings to Members of the People's Liberation Army, the armed police and the public security police. Presenters suggested the audience give greetings to the ordinary people who touched our heart in daily life, and people working in all professions.
<b>Ethnic Minority Features</b>	In ethnic song and dances (*7), the dancers were dressed in all kinds of ethnic costumes to present different ethnicities in China. They were all majority Han Chinese. All the ethnic minorities were put together dancing in one performance, with each ethnic only performed for few seconds. Song (*11) was performed by Mongolian singers in their own language. It portrayed the Mongolian culture and life. Song (*17) was performed by ethnic minority.
<b>HK, Taiwan, Macau &amp; Overseas</b>	The 'Voting For Pandas' Names' activity was held throughout the NYG, where audiences vote for the best names for two pandas to be given to Taiwan as presents from the mainland. The final voting results were announced by the presenters. Three TV presenters from HK, Macau, and Taiwan gave riddle questions which represented their regional culture. Presenters gave greetings to the Chinese people in China and abroad to show the sons and daughters enjoying the New Year together.
<b>Chinese Zodiacs</b>	In the opening scene, an animated puppy appeared at the start of NYG. In (*1), the dog pattern was shown in the dancers' costumes in one way or another. An animated dog was often shown on screen together with the text '2006 NYG live broadcast'.
<b>Beginning</b>	Under the symphony music, animated firework formed the pattern of 'Happy New Year' in Chinese and a dog. The animated old face performers appeared to greet the audience. Then the screen cut to the NYG studio with golden text '2006 NYG live broadcast'. With the red curtain rolling up, the busy and loud opening song and dance started with almost 100 dancers doing all kinds of dances in shiny-floor costumes. Presenters appeared at the centre of the stage surrounded by the dancers. They made brief opening speeches.
<b>New Year Midnight Countdown</b>	Presenters stood together with the provincial TV presenters. Presenters each gave poetic a few words to express how exciting to welcome the New Year. They gave blessing to the country and to the people after the 10 seconds countdown with the studio audience. The screen showed an animated clock with its sponsor company. Once the bell was ringing, the studio was filled with cheers and applause. Many red balloons were falling from sky.
<b>Ending</b>	Each presenter said a few words in the closure speech, before the closure song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight' was performed. The performers were waving their hands to the camera behind the presenters. The glitters were falling from the sky to the stage.
<b>Studio Audiences</b>	Some audiences were filmed talking during the performance. A branded juice was often filmed on the round table, as one of the sponsors. Studio audiences were making responses collectively to the comedian on stage. During the riddle games given by provincial TV presenters, studio audience participated by shouting out the answers from their seats.
<b>TV</b>	Two hotline presenters explained the voting means and procedure of 'My Favorite NYG Performance' and the 'Voting For Pandas' Names' activity throughout the gala. Also, lucky

<b>Audiences</b>	audiences would also get prizes. The voting results were announced by the presenters.
<b>Audience's Favorite</b>	First Prize: Song and Dance (*4); Sketch Comedy (*26); (*3) Second Prize: Song and Dance (*6) (*11); Sketch Comedy (*13)(*16); (*18)(*29)(*10) Third Prize: Song and Dance (*15)(*20)(*9); Sketch Comedy(*8)(*5); (*24)
<b>Pre-recorded Material</b>	In 'Pandas going to Taiwan' activity, footages were played to show the two pandas enjoying themselves in the zoo, and the interviews with the kindergarten kids from both mainland and Taiwan. A video recorded the greetings from the two cosmonauts when they were in sitting in Shenzhou VI Manned Spacecraft in the space. During the patriotic song (*25), the video displayed the historical footages of the Chinese leaders visiting the people.
<b>Presenters' Costumes</b>	The presenters were dressed in evening suits and evening dresses, but not the ceremonious style with heavy make-up and jewelries. All presenters changed their outfits twice.
<b>Presenters' Speeches</b>	During the opening/closure speeches, presenters each said a few sentences in turn before finishing the last part together. Their manner was exciting, happy, solemn and energetic. Presenters often mentioned 'on this special night' to stress this special occasion. Presenters reminded the audience by announcing 'You are watching the live broadcast of the 2006 CCTV NYG'. All the presenters spoke to camera. Presenters made small oral mistakes.
<b>Other Features of Presenters</b>	The four presenters always appeared in pairs during the performance linking. Presenters held a formal performance list in hand without looking at it. The linking was more straight-forward and brief, rather than carefully designed with story plots in the early times. The presenters had less emotional and promotional speeches than the old face presenters. But the poetic words were still there in the speech.
<b>Performers' Features</b>	Dance (*4) was performed by ordinary people rather than professional performers or old face celebrities. Comedies (*8) (*10) were performed by new faces from Southern China. Five singers shared the song (*14) together.
<b>Old Faces in Show</b>	Feng Gong, Zhu Jun, Cai Ming, Guo Da, Niu Qun, Huang Hong, Gong Hanlin, Jiang Dawei, Cai Guoqing, Guo Donglin, Yin Xiumei, Zhang Ye
<b>Celebrities in Show</b>	(Mainland): TV presenters from 35 provincial TV stations all over China; Lang Lang. (HK): Xie Tingfeng, Twins. (Taiwan): Yu Chengqing, Lin Junjie, Zhu Degang.
<b>Presenters in Kids in Show</b>	Presenter Zhu Jun played a role in comedy (*3). He spoke regional Chinese dialect. Kids of all ages performed martial art professionally in (*2). Kids danced as background in song (*11). Kids performed in comedy (*13).
<b>Background Dancers</b>	Background dances were in every song and dance. They were all dressed in the same shiny-floor costumes. They were in groups following tightly one after another.
<b>Regional /Chinese Folk</b>	Under the Chinese folk music, the dancers (*4) were dressed in folk costume and danced based on a Chinese traditional art form—shadow puppet. Comedy (*27) was performed by new face comedians from Southern region. Some part was performed in Southern dialect. Folk song (*26) showed the happy celebrating scene of the Chinese New Year.
<b>Performance Genres</b>	14 Song and Dances; 6 Sketch Comedies; 2 Stand-up Comedies; 1 Chinese Opera; 4 Pure Dances; 1 Piano Playing; 1 Acrobatics.
<b>Set Design</b>	There was a big digital screen at the back of the stage. Several layers of big boards were above and on both side of the stage. The stage looked as if it was inside a big red lantern. There were red posts and red lanterns on both sides of the stage. The signers sometimes appeared from several small platforms rising up and down automatically. There was an underground fountain below the stage. The props for the comedy were well equipped.
<b>Television Production</b>	The lighting was colorful and changeable to match with the costumes and the themes of the performances. All kinds of computer generated images and videos were projected on these boards. In this way, totally different visual effects were created efficiently for different performances. The upcoming performances were displayed on screen.
<b>Absence</b>	There were relatively less patriotic themed performances.

	<b>New Year's Gala 2007</b>
<b>Total Length</b>	04h 29m 26s
<b>Presenters</b>	Zhu Jun, Zhou Tao, Li Yong, Dong Qing; (Hotline: Liu Fangfei, Zhang Zequn)
<b>Director(s)</b>	Jin Yue
<b>No. of Items</b>	33
<b>Themes</b>	The presenters praised the contribution from the immigration workers who constructed the new looks of China. Poem reciting (*24) was dedicated to the immigration workers and performed by their kids. The kids were described the poor studying environment in the countryside under the expressive music. Several studio audiences were filmed wiping tears due to the touching poem. The kids expressed they were proud of their parents and gave New Year greetings. The presenters commented how grateful the farmers were to the Central Party who decided to terminate the farmer's agricultural tax since 2006. The presenters promoted the close bond between the people and the Central Party government before introducing the next patriotic folk song. The big screen displayed the historical footages of the Chinese leaders visiting the people. The scenery of the Chinese beautiful landscape and Chinese national flag were also displayed on screen.
<b>Special Greetings to</b>	Hotline presenters read out the New Year greetings sent from the Chinese embassies abroad and the sponsor companies. Presenters gave greetings to the old artists who created those classic songs in the next performance. Song (*21) was dedicated to the army officers and soldiers who were still working on the New Year. The comedians (*28) gave New Year wishes to all the elderly people with a cake and suggested we give more love and care to them. Presenters gave greetings to the audience and reminded them to send NY greetings to their families and friends. They also wished the country a prosperous year.
<b>Ethnic Minority Features</b>	The song and dance combination (*2) (*13) featured different ethnicities in China. Singers and dancers were dressed in different traditional costumes and performed one group after another. The songs were sung in Mandarin. Some singers were from minority background. Song and dance (*20) was performed by a group of Tibetans who travelled all the way from Tibet and wanted to express their grateful thanks to the newly built railway on the Tibetan Plateau and the fundamental improvements due to the great socialism and leadership in the new era. The video was played to show the Qinghai-Tibet Railway and their journey to Beijing. They were dressed in the Tibetan costumes, singing and dancing in Tibetan language, which was translated on screen.
<b>HK, Taiwan, Macau &amp; Overseas</b>	The pop singers from Taiwan and HK were dressed in fashionable clothes. There were many background dancers dressed in ceremonious shiny-floor costumes dancing around.
<b>Zodiacs</b>	This NYG hardly had any Chinese zodiac related performances.
<b>Beginning</b>	The title 'CCTV 2007 NYG' was spinning over the red and gold colored Chinese paper-cuts with traditional Chinese folk symbols and drawings. With the sound of the applause, the screen cut to the NYG studio. The stage curtains rolled up automatically to reveal the first performance in which many dancers dressed in shiny-floor costumes danced to the music. The presenters made the openings speeches by announcing the live broadcast of the CCTV NYG, followed by New Year greetings to all the Chinese people.
<b>New Year Midnight Countdown</b>	The presenters started their speech to welcome the New Year, but none of their speech was fluent or complete due to the total chaos caused by their oral mistakes, wrong orders, and interruptions. There was three minutes of blank silence and awkward moment on stage. The awkward faces of the presenters were captured. After the midnight, many balloons were falling from the sky and the audiences were catching them happily.
	The closure song was performed with many background dancers. Presenters made

<b>Ending</b>	speeches by embedding good wishes to the upcoming year in poetic words and style. The dancers were filmed jumping up and waving happily behind the presenters. The studio audiences were waving the balloons. The golden glitters were falling on the stage.
<b>Studio Audiences</b>	Some studio audiences were filmed taking pictures of the performance with their mobile phones. During the comedy, the audience shouted out 'good' with applauses and cheers.
<b>TV Audiences</b>	The hotline presenters explained several times the voting means of 'My Favorite NYG Performance' and the presents for the lucky audience. Presenters explained an online activity in which the audience can send their self-made Chinese couplets with the theme 'harmonize' to the CCTV Websites with prizes reward. The scrolling texts explained the ways to receive the live broadcast of the NYG on the mobile phone and internet.
<b>Audience's Favorite</b>	(Sketch Comedy): 'Strategy Planning'; 'Present Giving'; 'Love Testing' and 'Keep the Love Going'. (Song and Dance): 'Town Street in the Rain'; 'Harmonized Chapter' and 'Entering the City'; 'pop music group', 'The Place Far Away' and 'In Return'.
<b>Pre-recorded</b>	The videos were played on the big screen during the song to match the theme.
<b>Presenters' Costumes</b>	All presenters were dressed in evening suits and evening dresses. All presenters changed their outfits twice.
<b>Presenters' Speeches</b>	Presenters interrupted each other's speech with wrong orders and oral mistakes at the countdown. The presenters spoke in relaxed and humorous chatting style to be intimate to the audience. They spoke to camera.
<b>Other Features of Presenters</b>	Presenters appeared in pairs to do the linking between the performances. Presenter commented on the last performance while introducing the topic of the next performance. Presenters announced the result of the online couplet making activity by the audience.
<b>Performers' Features</b>	Singers and dancers were all dressed in ceremonious evening dresses/suits and shiny-floor costumes. The comedians started the comedy by giving greetings to audience. They also interacted with the audience in humorous conversations and throwing presents to them.
<b>Old Faces in Show</b>	Feng Gong, Cai Ming, Yu Junjian, Cai Guoqing, Pan Changjiang, Huang Hong, Guo Donglin, Zhang Ye, Zhao Benshan, Song Dandan, Niu Qun
<b>Celebrities</b>	(Taiwan): A Niu, Tao Ji, Cai Yilin, Zhang Shaohan; (HK): Rong Zu'Er
<b>Presenters in Show</b>	None
<b>Kids in Show</b>	Song and Dance (*9) (*16) was dedicated to kids and performed by kids with toy props. It was a patriotic song which promoted good virtue of Chinese nation such as helping the young. The cartoon pictures were projected on the stage to match the theme. Primary school kids recited poem with rich facial expressions in (*24).
<b>Background Dancers</b>	Background dancers in all song and dance except (*15)(*27); Many background dancers dressed in colorful shiny-floor costumes & danced with props and rich facial expressions.
<b>Regional /Chinese Folk</b>	In (*6) (*10) (*32), singers and dancers were dressed in folk costumes and danced to the folk music with props. The folk songs featured different regions in China and expressed the happy simple life. The big screen displayed folk paintings. In (*8) (*14) (*26), comedians spoke Northern Chinese dialect, as they played the role of the farmers.
<b>Performance Genres</b>	17 Song and Dances; 6 Sketch Comedies; 3 Stand-up Comedies; 1 Chinese Opera; 2 Pure Dances; 1 Acrobatics; 1 Martial Art; 1 Poem Reciting.
<b>Set Design</b>	There was a red arch covering the stage on the top, as if the stage was inside a big red Chinese lantern. There was an underground fountain and a water curtain from the ceiling.
<b>Television Production</b>	There were different layers of boards around the stage, on which the computer generated images were projected to create different background for each performance. Greetings appeared in scrolling texts on an animated Chinese card with traditional symbols.
<b>Absence</b>	Firework; Chinese zodiac related performances.

<b>New Year's Gala 2008</b>	
<b>Total Length</b>	04h 30m 56s
<b>Presenters</b>	Dong Qing, Zhu Jun, Li Yong, Zhou Tao, Bai Yansong; (Hotline Presenters: Zhang ZequnLiu Fangfei)
<b>Director(s)</b>	Chen Linchun, Zhang Xiaohai
<b>No. of Items</b>	37
<b>Themes</b>	Presenter expressed the snow storm brought the Chinese people closer with the help of the Chinese Central Party, the National Congress and the Army soldiers. Hence, a poem reading was given by the TV presenters and film stars. Under the expressive music, the video of the snow storm rescuing scenes were played. Then a song (*14) was performed. The video of the Chinese leaders visiting the victims and helping the affected areas was played. The poem was dedicated to the Beijing Olympics, as China was getting stronger within the past few decades. The historical pictures of the first Olympics the Chinese participated were displayed. Ten national athletes read the poem. The videos of the great performance of the Chinese athletes and the Olympic arena in Beijing were also played. Then international singers were singing the Olympic Song (*24) together, with many dancers dancing with Chinese flag and Olympic flag.
<b>Special Greetings to</b>	Throughout the NYG, the presenters gave thanks and greetings: to the people who gave support and care in the snow disaster, and the soldiers and heroes who fought to save people's lives; to all the ethnicities in China and all the Chinese in HK, Taiwan, Macau and overseas; to the model workers; to those still working during the New Year; to all the army soldiers, officers, and policemen; to the immigration workers (farmer labors); to the elderly people; to the national athletes competing in Olympics; to the young people.
<b>Ethnic Minority Features</b>	Song and Dance Combination (*22) featured different ethnic minority groups. The regional songs were sung in Mandarin. Some singers were the ethnic minority. The singers and dancers were dressed in minority costumes and performed tightly one group after another. Some songs glorified the great leadership from the Party which brought fundamental improvement to their lives.
<b>HK, Taiwan, Macau &amp; Overseas</b>	The singers from the Olympic Song (*25) were from international background. The song 'Chinese Language' (*9) was performed by pop girl's band from Taiwan. The song described the thirty years' open-up policy made China and the rest of the world better connected. Song (*20) 'Far Away from Home' was performed by a Taiwanese singer.
<b>Chinese Zodiacs</b>	The prize for the lucky audience from the voting of the 'My Favorite NYG Performance' was a golden mouse statue. The zodiac was not included in the performances.
<b>Beginning</b>	Under the Chinese music, different animated Chinese cultural symbols were spinning over the golden Chinese paper-cut with the title 'CCTV 2008 NYG'. The screen then cut to the NYG stage where the big red curtain rose up to reveal the performers. Many dancers (almost a hundred) were dressed in shiny-floor costumes and danced tightly one group after another. Presenters arrived by standing on a deck bringing them down from sky. Each presenter spoke one sentence in turn to complete the poetic opening speech.
<b>New Year Midnight Countdown</b>	Under the patriotic song, the presenters walked to the stage in front of the big Chinese flag displayed on the big screen. After a short speech, the presenters counted down together to the midnight in loud and exciting voices with animated red clock running. Once the New Year arrived, the presenters gave greetings while the streamers were falling from the sky. The sounds of the bell and firework were played. The studio audiences were not filmed.
<b>Ending</b>	All presenters announced the end of the NYG by making poetic speeches. The singers of the closure song were dressed in ceremonious prom dresses while the 200 background dancers were waving collectively around them.

<b>Studio Audiences</b>	The studio audience were clapping and cheering with song (*12). Close-up shots were used to film the teary studio audience touched by comedy (*10). Presenter introduced six model workers by explaining their award titles and the contribution they had done for the society.
<b>TV Audiences</b>	Presenter Li Yong asked the TV audiences as well as the studio audience to participate in this interactive magic trick (*32). Two hotline presenters explained the voting means and procedure of the ‘My Favorite NYG Performance’. Presenter announced that NYG had received many messages from the audience who were touched by the model workers.
<b>Audience’s Favorite</b>	(Special Award): Poem Reciting ‘Warm 2008’; (First Prize): Comedy ‘Olympic Torch Bearer’; Pure Dance ‘Flying into the Sky’; Comedy ‘A Story on the Bus’. (Second Prize): Comedy ‘Lock Opening’; etc. (Third Prize): Comedy ‘Soldiers’ Wives Visit’; etc.
<b>Pre-recorded Material</b>	During the Poem Reciting, a news report was played on the big screen, which was recorded thirty minutes ago. The CCTV reporter interviewed the immigration workers in Guangzhou who could not go back home for the New Year due to the snow storm.
<b>Presenters’ Costumes</b>	The presenters were dressed in evening suits and evening dresses. All presenters changed their outfits twice throughout the evening gala.
<b>Presenters’ Speeches</b>	Presenters all spoke in friendly, formal and exciting manner, but not too rigid, emotional or solemn. They spoke to camera. Presenters introduced the performance in chatting style.
<b>Other Features of Presenters</b>	The presenters appeared much more often to link the performance in between. Each presenter spoke one sentence in turn to complete the speech and finished together. Except the beginning, end and countdown, presenters appeared in pairs.
<b>Performers’ Features</b>	Singer and the many background dancers were dressed in ceremonious evening dresses with heavy make-up and accessorizes. The props of the background dancers were well equipped. The comedians used clip microphone. The comedian (*10) spoke with Northern dialect. All performers (*16) were amateur singers who were immigration workers.
<b>Old Faces in Show</b>	Cai Ming, Guo Da, Feng Gong, Guo Donglin, Zhou Tao, Cai Guoqing, Yu Junjian, Jiang Dawei, Huang Hong, Gong Hanlin, Dong Qing, Yin Xiumei, Zhao Benshan.
<b>Celebrities in Show</b>	(Taiwan): S.H.E; Fei Yuqing; Zhou Jielun. (HK): Chen Yixun; Liang Yongqi. (Mainland): Ten Olympic Champions; Huang Shengyi; Zhang Ziyi.
<b>Presenters in Show</b>	Presenter Zhou Tao played a role in comedy (*19). Presenter Dong Qing played a role in comedy (*23). Presenter Li Yong played the magic trick (*32).
<b>Kids in show</b>	Kids as background dancers in song (*22); Kids performed opera professionally in (*28).
<b>Background Dancers</b>	No background dancers in (*7)(*12)(*20)(*29); They were dressed in shiny floor costumes, while singers in ceremonious prom dresses.
<b>Regional /Chinese Folk</b>	The folk song (*2) expressed the happiness to celebrate the New Year with most traditions coming from the Northern regions. Many background dancers were dressed in folk costumes and danced with folk props. The comedians (*10) (*27) spoke Northern dialect.
<b>Performance Genres</b>	19 Song and Dances; 6 Sketch Comedies; 2 Stand-up Comedies; 1 Chinese Opera; 1 Pure Dance; 2 Acrobatics; 2 Poem Reciting; 1 Magic Show; 1 Martial Art.
<b>Set Design</b>	The different staging effects for each performance were mainly achieved through different lighting effects and the computer generated images projected on the big boards on the stage. It transformed the stage immediately and no other props were necessary. Sometimes background dancers danced on a small platform rising up automatically from the stage.
<b>Television Production</b>	Interesting camerawork was used. The words ‘2008 NYG’ with an animated red Chinese couplet appeared at the corner of the screen during the show. Animations were added to the performance titles. The coverage of the live performance was displayed on the animated CCTV building in the night scenery.
<b>Significant Absence</b>	Not many signs of the Chinese Zodiacs; The studio audiences were not filmed during the countdown and at the end of gala, not shown what they were doing at important moments.

## ***Appendix B: New Year's Gala Performance Lists (1984-2008)***

### **1984 New Year's Gala:**

- (\*1) Opening: the introduction of the performers
- (\*2) New Year greeting's song
- (\*3) Acrobatics
- (\*4) Studio game for kids
- (\*5) Pre-recorded performance for kids (basketball game between monkeys and bears)
- (\*6) Stand-up comedy
- (\*7) Acrobatics
- (\*8) Patriotic songs
- (\*9) Regional folk songs
- (\*10) Popular songs (mainland)
- (\*11) Chinese regional opera
- (\*12) Silent comedy
- (\*13) Chinese regional opera
- (\*14) Chinese regional opera
- (\*15) Chinese regional opera
- (\*16) Sketch comedy
- (\*17) Chinese regional opera
- (\*18) Silent comedy
- (\*19) Popular songs (mainland)
- (\*20) Popular songs (mainland)
- (\*21) Popular and ethnic minority songs (HK)
- (\*22) Story-telling (a Chinese traditional art form)
- (\*23) Studio game (table tennis match)
- (\*24) Chinese regional opera
- (\*25) Studio game (by studio audience)
- (\*26) Stand-up comedy
- (\*27) *New Year midnight countdown*
- (\*28) New Year song chorus
- (\*29) Ethnic Minority Song
- (\*30) Chinese regional opera
- (\*31) Popular songs (HK)
- (\*32) Qing Gong performance
- (\*33) Popular songs (Taiwan)
- (\*34) Popular song (HK)
- (\*35) Stand-up comedy
- (\*36) Army glorifying songs
- (\*37) Popular songs (mainland)
- (\*38) Chinese regional opera
- (\*39) New Year's Gala closure song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight'

## 1985 New Year's Gala:

- (\*1) Chinese regional opera (featuring New Year zodiacs)
- (\*2) Traditional Instrument playing
- (\*3) Regional folk song
- (\*4) Patriotic song (HK), followed by studio New Year greetings from the Chinese national women's volleyball team to former coaches, former team members, their family and service staffs
- (\*5) Patriotic and popular songs (HK)
- (\*6) Studio game
- (\*7) Patriotic song
- (\*8) New Year song
- (\*9) Chinese regional opera
- (\*10) Acrobatics
- (\*11) Stand-up comedy
- (\*12) Chinese regional opera
- (\*13) Ethnic minority song
- (\*14) Patriotic song (American Chinese)
- (\*15) Studio game (basket ball playing)
- (\*16) Popular song (HK)
- (\*17) Sketch comedy
- (\*18) Popular songs (mainland)
- (\*19) *New Year midnight countdown (with pre-recorded greetings video)*
- (\*20) Chinese regional opera
- (\*21) Ancient dance
- (\*22) Qi Gong performance
- (\*23) Patriotic song (HK)
- (\*24) Popular song (HK)
- (\*25) Martial Art performance
- (\*26) Patriotic songs
- (\*27) Stand-up comedy
- (\*28) Chinese regional opera
- (\*29) Popular and patriotic song (HK)
- (\*30) Studio game
- (\*31) Pure dance

## 1986 New Year's Gala:

- (\*1) Song combination featuring patriotic, regional folk, classic and New Year songs
- (\*2) Stand-up comedy featuring Chinese zodiac
- (\*3) Magic tricks
- (\*4) Chinese regional opera
- (\*5) Pre-recorded video featuring dolphin performance
- (\*6) Riddle game for TV audiences (with no interaction)
- (\*7) Patriotic song
- (\*8) Popular song (mainland)
- (\*9) New Year folk song
- (\*10) Popular song (mainland)
- (\*11) Violin playing
- (\*12) Stand-up comedy
- (\*13) Sketch comedy
- (\*14) Ancient dance
- (\*15) Studio wedding ceremony
- (\*16) Riddle game for TV audiences (with no interaction)
- (\*17) Army glorifying and folk songs
- (\*18) Popular songs (mainland)
- (\*19) Chinese regional opera
- (\*20) Chinese regional opera
- (\*21) Pure folk dance
- (\*22) Stand-up comedy
- (\*23) Magic tricks
- (\*24) Regional clapper ballad
- (\*25) Riddle game for TV audiences (with no interaction)
- (\*26) Popular and ethnic minority songs (HK)
- (\*27) Popular songs (HK)
- (\*28) Regional folk song
- (\*29) Popular song (mainland)
- (\*30) Stand-up comedy
- (\*31) Popular and patriotic songs (mainland)
- (\*32) Riddle game for TV audiences (with no interaction)
- (\*33) Sketch comedy
- (\*34) Stand-up comedy
- (\*35) *New Year midnight countdown*
- (\*36) Revealing answers to the riddle games

## 1987 New Year's Gala:

- (\*1) Opening song and dance featuring folk and New Year
  - (\*2) Stand-up comedy
  - (\*3) Chinese opera comedy
  - (\*4) Popular song (mainland)
  - (\*5) Ethnic minority song
  - (\*6) Pre-recorded Animal comedy
  - (\*7) Western opera song
  - (\*8) Popular songs (HK)
  - (\*9) Sketch comedy
  - (\*10) Stand-up comedy
  - (\*11) Patriotic song
  - (\*12) Shuang Huang (a Chinese traditional art form)
  - (\*13) Stand-up comedy
  - (\*14) Studio award ceremony for 'Top Ten Athletes'
  - (\*15) Sports performance by Olympic Champions
  - (\*16) Magic tricks
  - (\*17) Classic song
  - (\*18) Sketch comedy
  - (\*19) Middle school student fashion show
  - (\*20) Sketch comedy
  - (\*21) Popular song (mainland)
  - (\*22) Folk song dedicated to ordinary pioneer workers in the development of Northwest China
  - (\*23) Short comedy insert
  - (\*24) Folk song
  - (\*25) Stand-up comedy
  - (\*26) Studio game 'music guessing' (studio audience)
  - (\*27) Pre-recorded noodle making show
  - (\*28) Popular song (mainland)
  - (\*29) Short comedy insert
  - (\*30) Popular songs (Taiwan)
  - (\*31) Stand-up comedy
  - (\*32) Ethnic minority song and dance
  - (\*33) Popular song (mainland)
- New Year Countdown at the midnight*

## 1988 New Year's Gala:

- (\*1) Opening song and dance combination featuring New Year
- (\*2) Story-telling (a Chinese traditional art form)
- (\*3) Sketch comedy
- (\*4) Comedic acrobatics
- (\*5) Patriotic song
- (\*6) Popular youth song (mainland)
- (\*7) Stand-up comedy
- (\*8) Pre-recorded cartoon
- (\*9) Patriotic song (HK)
- (\*10) Chinese regional opera
- (\*11) Chinese regional opera
- (\*12) Popular song (mainland)
- (\*13) Patriotic song
- (\*14) Folk pure dance
- (\*15) Popular song (mainland)
- (\*16) Popular song (mainland)
- (\*17) Stand-up comedy
- (\*18) Pre-recorded music video and live interaction in Guangdong vice venue
- (\*19) Folk song
- (\*20) Chinese opera comedy
- (\*21) Studio game 'film soundtrack guessing' (studio audience)
- (\*22) Army glorifying song
- (\*23) Pre-recorded music video and live interaction in Heilongjiang vice venue
- (\*24) Stand-up comedy
- (\*25) Opera comedy
- (\*26) Martial art performance
- (\*27) Ethnic minority song (Taiwan)
- (\*28) Patriotic song with Chinese zodiac (Taiwan)
- (\*29) Stand-up comedy
- (\*30) Patriotic song
- (\*31) Ethnic minority song
- (\*32) Popular song (Taiwan)
- (\*33) Sketch comedy
- (\*34) Magic tricks
- (\*35) Pure dance, followed by New Year midnight countdown with pre-recorded greeting videos from the chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and the Chinese students in the U.S.
- New Year Countdown at the midnight* (\*36) Sketch comedy
- (\*37) Pre-recorded music video on behalf of Sichuan vice venue
- (\*38) Ethnic minority song (\*39) Acrobatics (\*40) Stand-up comedy
- (\*41) Studio interaction with TV series stars (\*42) Closure song

## 1989 New Year's Gala:

- (\*1) Opening New Year symphony with all performers
- (\*2) Stand-up comedy in making Chinese couplet
- (\*3) Folk song
- (\*4) Folk song
- (\*5) Chinese regional opera
- (\*6) Sketch comedy
- (\*7) Qi Gong performance
- (\*8) Popular song (mainland)
- (\*9) Studio speed calculation by kids
- (\*10) Popular song (mainland)
- (\*11) Acrobatics
- (\*12) Chinese regional opera
- (\*13) Popular song (mainland)
- (\*14) Chinese regional opera
- (\*15) Popular song (mainland)
- (\*16) Sketch comedy
- (\*17) Popular song (mainland)
- (\*18) Army glorifying song
- (\*19) Army glorifying song
- (\*20) Stand-up comedy
- (\*21) Ethnic minority dance
- (\*22) Shuang Huang performance (a Chinese traditional art form)
- (\*23) Popular song and dance (mainland)
- (\*24) Special talent studio show
- (\*25) Patriotic song
- (\*26) Riddle contest studio game
- (\*27) Popular song (HK)
- (\*28) Stand-up comedy
- (\*29) Chinese regional opera by a Yugoslavian
- (\*30) Popular song (mainland)
- (\*31) Folk song
- (\*32) Sketch comedy
- (\*33) Chinese regional opera
- (\*34) Popular songs (Taiwan)
- (\*35) Famous western film soundtracks
- (\*36) Film clip mix as an entertainment insert
- (\*37) Popular song (mainland)
- (\*38) Song dedicated to the ordinary model workers from all fields
- (\*39) Sketch comedy
- (\*40) Folk song
- (\*41) Stand-up comedy
- (\*42) Patriotic song
- (\*43) *New Year midnight countdown*
- (\*44) Ethnic minority song
- (\*45) Human Dictionary studio talent show
- (\*46) Stand-up comedy
- (\*47) Ethnic minority dance
- (\*48) Patriotic song

## 1990 New Year's Gala:

- (\*1) Songs combining the NYG opening songs from the past seven years
- (\*2) Presenters' introduction of the judge and team leaders of the NYG performance contest
- (\*3) Song combination featuring the Chinese zodiac
- (\*4) New Year and popular songs (mainland)
- (\*5) Stand-up comedy
- (\*6) Puppet show
- (\*7) Couplet making from the three competing teams
- (\*8) Studio challenge of 'One Minute Humor'
- (\*9) Comedic dance
- (\*10) Popular songs (Taiwan)
- (\*11) Stand-up comedy
- (\*12) Ethnic minority songs
- (\*13) Sketch comedy
- (\*14) Chinese opera disco dance
- (\*15) Popular songs (HK)
- (\*16) Stand-up comedy
- (\*17) Folk songs
- (\*18) Chinese opera comedy
- (\*19) Sketch comedy
- (\*20) Folk dance
- (\*21) Stand-up comedy
- (\*22) Army glorifying and New Year songs
- (\*23) Popular song (Taiwan)
- (\*24) Sketch comedy
- (\*25) Painting presents given to NYG by famous artists, featuring patriotic, zodiac and New Year
- (\*26) Gymnastic performance
- (\*27) Silent comedy
- (\*28) Western classic and Chinese folk songs
- (\*29) Sketch comedy
- (\*30) Popular and folk songs (mainland)
- (\*31) Chinese regional opera
- (\*32) *New Year midnight countdown* with the studio speeches by President Jiang and Premiere Li
- (\*33) Folk song
- (\*34) Folk and patriotic song
- (\*35) Contest result revealed by the judge
- (\*36) NYG closure song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight'

## 1991 New Year's Gala:

- (\*1) Opening song and dance featuring regional folk songs and Chinese operas
- (\*2) Ethnic minority song and dance featuring New Year
- (\*3) Chinese regional opera combination by kids
- (\*4) Sketch comedy
- (\*5) Ethnic minority song
- (\*6) Acrobatics combination
- (\*7) Chinese opera with fashion show
- (\*8) Stand-up comedy
- (\*9) Popular song (HK)
- (\*10) Regional songs and performances featuring folk and ethnic minority
- (\*11) Pre-recorded animal performance
- (\*12) Patriotic song
- (\*13) Stand-up comedy
- (\*14) Song glorifying the spirit and achievement of the Chinese athletes competed in Asian Games
- (\*15) Folk song
- (\*16) Studio special talent show from different fields
- (\*17) Folk song combination featuring different working scenes
- (\*18) Sketch comedy
- (\*19) Western classic song and dance
- (\*20) Patriotic song
- (\*21) Chinese opera silent comedy
- (\*22) Popular song (HK)
- (\*23) Popular song (mainland)
- (\*24) Folk song
- (\*25) Popular song (Taiwan)
- (\*26) Sketch comedy
- (\*27) Popular song (mainland and HK)
- (\*28) Sketch comedy
- (\*29) Folk song combination featuring different regional hometowns
- (\*30) Patriotic song
- (\*31) Chinese regional opera
- (\*32) Army glorifying song
- (\*33) Song dedicated to the disabled
- (\*34) Chinese regional opera
- (\*35) Sketch comedy
- (\*36) Chinese regional opera in English
- (\*37) Popular song (Taiwan)
- (\*38) Patriotic song
- (\*39) Stand-up comedy
- New Year Countdown at the midnight* (\*40) New Year song featuring Chinese zodiacs
- (\*41) Popular song
- (\*42) Stand-up comedy
- (\*43) Special talent show
- (\*44) Popular song (HK)
- (\*45) Stand-up comedy with Westerners
- (\*46) Popular song
- (\*47) Acrobatics with magic tricks
- (\*48) Folk song and dance

## 1992 New Year's Gala:

- (\*1) Song combination featuring popular songs in previous NYG (1984-1992)
  - (\*2) Stand-up comedy
  - (\*3) Folk song and dance
  - (\*4) Sketch comedy
  - (\*5) Ethnic dance
  - (\*6) Chinese opera comedy
  - (\*7) Chinese classic song
  - (\*8) Stand-up comedy
  - (\*9) Ethnic song and dance
  - (\*10) Popular song (HK)
  - (\*11) Sketch comedy
  - (\*12) Stand-up comedy
  - (\*13) Popular song and dance (mainland)
  - (\*14) A song performed by well-known TV presenters and professionals from CCTV as well as provincial TV stations
  - (\*15) Chinese opera
  - (\*16) Popular song (Taiwan)
  - (\*17) Pre-recorded New Year greetings from famous TV drama stars
  - (\*18) Folk song performed by ordinary country girl
  - (\*19) Animal comedy
  - (\*20) Pre-recorded New Year song
  - (\*21) Pre-recorded folk dance
  - (\*22) Pre-recorded hand shadow performance
  - (\*23) Song dedicated to all the scientists in China and the development of the Northwest China
  - (\*24) Outdoor game provided by Shanxi Provincial TV Station
  - (\*25) Pre-recorded song glorifying army soldiers
  - (\*26) Pre-recorded song dedicated to army soldiers
  - (\*27) Theatrical play to give special thanks to the people who have helped the victims overcome the natural disaster in the past year
  - (\*28) Pre-recorded patriotic song
  - (\*29) Stand-up comedy performed by ethnic minority comedians
  - (\*30) Ethnic song and dance with patriotic theme
  - (\*31) Popular song performed by stars from mainland, HK and Taiwan
  - (\*32) Sketch comedy
  - (\*33) Popular song (Taiwan)
  - (\*34) Stand-up comedy
  - (\*35) Sketch comedy
  - (\*36) Chinese opera
  - (\*37) Stand-up comedy
- New Year Countdown at the midnight*
- (\*38) Song and dance featuring Chinese zodiacs
  - (\*39) Stand-up comedy
  - (\*40) Patriotic song performed by overseas Chinese
  - (\*41) Sketch comedy
  - (\*42) Song and dance with western classic style
  - (\*43) Closure song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight'

## 1993 New Year's Gala:

- (\*1) Opening New Year poem reciting by kids
- (\*2) Folk song and dance featuring New Year
- (\*3) Magic tricks
- (\*4) Chinese opera performed by kids
- (\*5) Sketch comedy
- (\*6) Folk song and dance featuring New Year
- (\*7) Chinese opera comedy
- (\*8) Song glorifying army soldiers
- (\*9) Popular song (HK)
- (\*10) Pre-recorded popular song (Taiwan)
- (\*11) Pre-recorded martial art performance (HK)
- (\*12) Popular song (mainland)
- (\*13) Sketch comedy
- (\*14) Folk dance with fashion catwalk show
- (\*15) Sketch comedy
- (\*16) Ethnic song and dance
- (\*17) Stand-up comedy
- (\*18) Patriotic song and dance
- (\*19) Folk song and dance
- (\*20) Ethnic dance
- (\*21) Sketch comedy
- (\*22) Popular song (Taiwan)
- (\*23) Popular song and dance combination (HK)
- (\*24) Chinese opera comedy
- (\*25) Popular song (mainland)
- (\*26) Song dedicated to the great mothers
- (\*27) Stand-up comedy
- (\*28) Popular song (mainland)
- (\*29) Chinese regional opera
- (\*30) Sketch comedy
- (\*31) Pre-recorded outdoor song and dance performance in Singapore
- (\*32) Patriotic song
- New Year Countdown at the midnight*
- (\*33) Folk music playing
- (\*34) Folk song featuring Chinese zodiacs
- (\*35) Sketch comedy
- (\*36) Stand-up comedy            (\*37) Chinese opera
- (\*38) Chinese opera            (\*39) Sketch comedy with Italian comedian
- (\*40) Pure dance featuring Chinese zodiacs
- (\*41) Pre-recorded dram play by famous director Zhang Yimou
- (\*42) Patriotic song (popular singers from mainland, HK, Taiwan and Singapore)

## 1994 New Year's Gala:

- (\*1) Folk song and dance featuring the Chinese New Year
- (\*2) Folk song and dance featuring New Year performed by kids
- (\*3) New Year song
- (\*4) Western song and dance
- (\*5) Folk song and dance by kids with martial art performance
- (\*6) Chinese opera by famous opera singers from mainland and Taiwan
- (\*7) Sketch comedy
- (\*8) Western classic songs
- (\*9) Variety performance with international awarded piano playing, violin playing and ballet
- (\*10) Special talent in playing hula hoops
- (\*11) Song glorifying army soldiers
- (\*12) Sketch comedy
- (\*13) Popular song and dance (mainland)
- (\*14) Ethnic song
- (\*15) Ethnic song and dance
- (\*16) Group stand-up comedy
- (\*17) Studio interview with themes
- (\*18) Patriotic song
- (\*19) Sketch comedy
- (\*20) Song dedicated to all the teachers
- (\*21) Sketch comedy
- (\*22) Sketch comedy
- (\*23) Popular song (mainland)
- (\*24) Sketch comedy
- (\*25) Folk song
- (\*26) Chinese opera combination
- (\*27) Stand-up comedy
- (\*28) Folk song
- (\*29) Folk song
- (\*30) Patriotic song dedicated to national athletes and coach who make achievement in Olympics
- (\*31) Folk song and dance
- (\*32) Comedic magic show
- (\*33) New Year song and dance
- New Year countdown at the midnight*
- (\*34) Song and dance
- (\*35) New Year song
- (\*36) Sketch comedy
- (\*37) Ethnic song and dance

## 1995 New Year's Gala:

- (\*1) Opening folk song and dance featuring New Year
  - (\*2) Pop song and dance (mainland)
  - (\*3) Song and dance featuring New Year
  - (\*4) Folk song and dance
  - (\*5) Sketch comedy
  - (\*6) Popular song and dance combination (mainland)
  - (\*7) Sketch comedy
  - (\*8) Pure folk dance
  - (\*9) Popular song and dance combination (mainland)
  - (\*10) Stand-up comedy
  - (\*11) Western classic song
  - (\*12) Western classic song
  - (\*13) Western classic song
  - (\*14) Popular song (Taiwan)
  - (\*15) Sketch comedy
  - (\*16) Song combination featuring folk and army soldiers
  - (\*17) Comedic magic show
  - (\*18) Chinese opera combination
  - (\*19) Stand-up comedy
  - (\*20) Folk song and dance
  - (\*21) Popular song combination (mainland)
  - (\*22) Sketch comedy
  - (\*23) Folk song
  - (\*24) Popular song (mainland)
  - (\*25) Sketch comedy
  - (\*26) Pure dance featuring spring
  - (\*27) Classical song
  - (\*28) Magic tricks
  - (\*29) Popular song (HK)
  - (\*30) Sketch comedy
  - (\*31) Song combination glorifying army soldiers
  - (\*32) Chinese opera
  - (\*33) Acrobatics combination
  - (\*34) Patriotic song featuring the New Year greetings from Chinese in HK, Taiwan, and overseas
  - (\*35) Group stand-up comedy
  - (\*36) Ethnic song and dance
  - (\*37) Kids talk on 'what is New Year'
- New Year countdown at the midnight*
- (\*38) Ethnic dance
  - (\*39) Patriotic song
  - (\*40) Folk song featuring New Year
  - (\*41) Musical by ethnic performers featuring patriotic theme
  - (\*42) Ethnic dance
  - (\*43) Classic song

## 1996 New Year's Gala:

- (\*1) Opening patriotic song and dance
- (\*2) Song and dance featuring New Year
- (\*3) Stand-up comedy from three venues
- (\*4) Kids' song combination
- (\*5) Sketch comedy
- (\*6) Popular song (mainland)
- (\*7) Musical comedy
- (\*8) Song and dance featuring army soldiers
- (\*9) Sketch comedy from three venues
- (\*10) Ethnic song and dance
- (\*11) Chinese opera song
- (\*12) Stand-up comedy
- (\*13) Popular song (HK)
- (\*14) Sketch comedy
- (\*15) Folk dance
- (\*16) Sketch comedy
- (\*17) Sketch comedy
- (\*18) Patriotic song
- (\*19) Song glorifying army soldiers
- (\*20) Sketch comedy
- (\*21) Chinese regional opera
- (\*22) Stand-up comedy
- (\*23) Laser harp playing
- (\*24) Pop song combination (mainland)
- (\*25) Pure dance
- (\*26) Chinese regional opera combination
- (\*27) Story-telling and ballad singing (a traditional art form)
- (\*28) Patriotic song
- (\*29) Stand-up comedy
- (\*30) Old classic song combination
- New Year countdown at the midnight*
- (\*31) New Year song and dance combination from three venues
- (\*32) Patriotic song
- (\*33) Popular song (Taiwan)
- (\*34) Ethnic song and dance combination
- (\*35) Magic tricks
- (\*36) Song dedicated to the heroes who have selflessly devoted to the country
- (\*37) Patriotic song and dance combination from three venues
- (\*38) Closure song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight'

## 1997 New Year's Gala:

- (\*1) Opening folk song and dance featuring reunion on the New Year
  - (\*2) Patriotic song featuring motherland
  - (\*3) Chinese regional opera by kids
  - (\*4) Stand-up comedy
  - (\*5) Popular song and dance (mainland)
  - (\*6) Stand-up comedy featuring giving New Year wishes
  - (\*7) Sketch comedy featuring the greatly improved life quality in Chinese society after reforms
  - (\*8) Patriotic song and dance
  - (\*9) Sketch comedy featuring the farmer immigration workers in the city
  - (\*10) Patriotic folk song and dance praising the unique culture of the Chinese origin
  - (\*11) Sketch comedy featuring army soldiers' life
  - (\*12) Popular song and dance combination
  - (\*13) Mini-Musical describing the meaning of marriage in life
  - (\*14) Stand-up comedy featuring making New Year couplets
  - (\*15) Song and dance combination featuring all old classic songs performed by original singers
  - (\*16) Stand-up comedy about exploring special rules in making popular songs
  - (\*17) Chinese opera combination
  - (\*18) Stand-up comedy ironically criticizing the losing ethical standard in the highly business-oriented Chinese society nowadays
  - (\*19) Ethnic song and dance
  - (\*20) Stand-up comedy promoting that the workers are the most beautiful people
  - (\*21) Chinese regional opera combination
  - (\*22) Sports comedy performed by Olympic Champions
  - (\*23) Song dedicated to the Chinese athletes' achievements in the Olympics
  - (\*24) Folk song and dance featuring the Yellow River
  - (\*25) Sketch comedy glorifying the great spirit of the communist Party at war-time
  - (\*26) Song and dance combination featuring regional folk songs from each part of China
  - (\*27) Stand-up comedy featuring how the farmers celebrate the Chinese New Year
  - (\*28) Popular song (HK)
  - (\*29) Song dedicated to the return of HK, performed by mainland and HK singer
  - (\*30) Presenters' poem reciting featuring HK's hand-over back to China
- New Year Countdown at midnight*
- (\*31) Folk song and dance giving best New Year wishes
  - (\*32) Magic tricks by mainland and HK magicians
  - (\*33) Popular song (Taiwan)
  - (\*34) Stand-up comedy based on the wide usage of beeper in China at that time
  - (\*35) Ethnic song and dance combination
  - (\*36) Patriotic song dedicated to the HK's return to China
  - (\*37) Closure song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight'

## 1998 New Year's Gala:

- (\*1) Opening song and dance featuring the Chinese New Year
- (\*2) Folk song and dance combination featuring regional performances from different parts of China, including ethnic minority performances
- (\*3) Stand-up comedy
- (\*4) Chinese regional opera combination with kids' opera dance
- (\*5) Sketch comedy promoting the good virtue of returning the pick-up money back to the owner
- (\*6) Popular song and dance (mainland)
- (\*7) Sketch comedy featuring the farmer's New Year
- (\*8) Folk song and dance featuring the good life in China
- (\*9) Pure dance by ethnic minority dancer
- (\*10) Sketch comedy about the farmers' paying New Year visit to their boss
- (\*11) Patriotic song promoting the new era that China has entered
- (\*12) Studio interview with the early time film stars and their war-time movies
- (\*13) Popular song and dance combination (HK and mainland)
- (\*14) Popular song featuring the year 1998 (HK and mainland)
- (\*15) Stand-up comedy featuring the Chinese zodiac
- (\*16) Folk dance
- (\*17) Stand-up comedy
- (\*18) Acrobatics
- (\*19) Popular song (mainland and Taiwan)
- (\*20) Stand-up comedy featuring the home-sick emotion of the Taiwanese in missing the mainland
- (\*21) Patriotic song of loving China (Taiwan)
- (\*22) Studio activity of mixing the water from Yellow River, Yangzi River and Sun-Moon Lake to express the bond and emotions between the mainland and Taiwan
- (\*23) Patriotic song featuring we are all Chinese in one big family (HK, Taiwan and mainland)
- (\*24) Chinese opera combination
- (\*25) Stand-up comedy dedicated to and on behalf of all Chinese army soldiers
- (\*26) Old classic songs combination featuring ethnic, folk and patriotic
- (\*27) Folk song and dance combination performed by TV, film and comedic stars to give New Year greetings to the audience s
- (\*28) Stand-up comedy featuring the memory of the old school time
- (\*29) Song and dance combination featuring the Chinese opera and folk songs from different regions
- (\*30) Sketch comedy
- (\*31) Song and dance
- (\*32) Theme song from popular TV drama series (mainland)
- (\*33) Magic tricks
- New Year Countdown at midnight*
- (\*34) Song featuring New Year celebration
- (\*35) Ethnic song and dance

## 1999 New Year's Gala:

- (\*1) Folk opening song and dance featuring Chinese zodiac and New Year
  - (\*2) Stand-up comedy performed by foreigners who speak good Chinese, describing their experience of the Chinese New Year as well as the great change in China
  - (\*3) Sketch comedy
  - (\*4) Folk song
  - (\*5) Popular song (Taiwan)
  - (\*6) Sketch comedy
  - (\*7) Folk song
  - (\*8) Acrobatics
  - (\*9) Stand-up comedy
  - (\*10) Folk song and dance
  - (\*11) Sketch comedy about encouraging people to show love to the elderly parents
  - (\*12) Popular song and dance (mainland)
  - (\*13) Sketch comedy glorifying the army soldiers
  - (\*14) Popular song (mainland) encouraging the people to visit their parents
  - (\*15) Song dedicated to the great spirit of the army soldiers in 1998 flood
  - (\*16) Sketch comedy in portraying the life of laid-off workers with positive messages
  - (\*17) Sketch comedy promoting the great progress in China
  - (\*18) Song combination featuring folk, patriotic, army soldiers and ethnic minority
  - (\*19) Stand-up comedy
  - (\*20) Pure dance featuring spring
  - (\*21) Song and dance featuring dumpling making tradition on the New Year
  - (\*22) Sketch comedy featuring football fans
  - (\*23) Chinese opera combination
  - (\*24) Pre-recorded patriotic song performed by Overseas Chinese singers
  - (\*25) Popular song (HK)
  - (\*26) Patriotic song dedicated to the Macau's return to motherland China
  - (\*27) Folk song
  - (\*28) Patriotic song performed by high-profiled singers from mainland, HK, Taiwan and Macau to express they are all the sons and daughters of the Chinese root
  - (\*29) Folk song and dance with kids playing drums
  - (\*30) Popular song and dance (mainland)
  - (\*31) Musical featuring new version of the children's tale 'Hare and Turtle'
  - (\*32) Folk dance
  - (\*33) Song featuring the bell of the spring
- New Year Countdown at midnight*
- (\*34) Ethnic song and dance combination
  - (\*35) Patriotic song dedicated to the great motherland China
  - (\*36) Closure song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight'

## 2000 New Year's Gala:

- (\*1) Opening song and dance featuring spring
  - (\*2) Stand-up comedy
  - (\*3) Song and dance dedicated to the female army soldiers
  - (\*4) Situation song and dance featuring calling friends and family on the New Year
  - (\*5) Sketch comedy
  - (\*6) Kids song and dance performed by kids
  - (\*7) Song and dance featuring New Year performed by mainland stars
  - (\*8) Song and dance featuring New Year's Eve (mainland and HK singers)
  - (\*9) Chinese opera
  - (\*10) Sketch comedy
  - (\*11) Song (mainland)
  - (\*12) Folk song performed by Taiwanese star and mainland CCTV presenter
  - (\*13) Sketch comedy
  - (\*14) Song and dance combination featuring popular songs (mainland)
  - (\*15) Folk song featuring the family reunion on the New Year occasion
  - (\*16) Patriotic song and dance featuring United China theme performed by mainland Han singers
  - (\*17) Patriotic song dedicated to the return of Macau back to the mainland, performed by stars from HK, Macau and mainland
  - (\*18) Sketch comedy portraying the One United China theme performed by famous comedians from Taiwan and mainland
  - (\*19) Musical performed by mainland pop singers
  - (\*20) Pop song and dance featuring the New Year (HK)
  - (\*21) Chinese regional opera
  - (\*22) Mini-comedy
  - (\*23) Patriotic song glorifying the Chinese history, culture and identity
  - (\*24) Chinese folk song featuring the happy life
  - (\*25) Song and dance combination featuring Chinese folk music
  - (\*26) Song featuring spring
  - (\*27) Song featuring giving wishes to the people we love on the New Year
  - (\*28) Sketch comedy
  - (\*29) Stand-up comedy
  - (\*30) Song and dance combination featuring old classic songs
  - (\*31) Popular song (HK)            (\*32) Western classical song
  - (\*33) Chinese folk song featuring the New Year
  - (\*34) Poem reciting featuring the New Year bell
- New Year Countdown at midnight followed by presenters reading out President Jiang Zemin's New Year wishes to all the Chinese around the world in calligraphy*
- (\*35) Song dedicated to the Chinese zodiac with ethnic minority dances
  - (\*36) Song and dance featuring the New Year's Eve
  - (\*37) Closure song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight'

## 2001 New Year's Gala:

- (\*1) Opening song and dance (mainland and HK singers)
- (\*2) Patriotic song
- (\*3) Sketch comedy
- (\*4) Song and dance featuring pop music
- (\*5) Stand-up comedy
- (\*6) Pop music (American Chinese singer)
- (\*7) Chinese opera comedy
- (\*8) New Year song
- (\*9) Stand-up comedy
- (\*10) Ethnic song and dance
- (\*11) Sketch comedy
- (\*12) Song dedicated to mothers
- (\*13) Folk song
- (\*14) Stand-up comedy
- (\*15) Chinese opera
- (\*16) Pop song (mainland and HK singers)
- (\*17) Sketch comedy
- (\*18) Song and dance combination featuring pop music
- (\*19) Patriotic song
- (\*20) Standup-comedy
- (\*21) Song dedicated to the Olympics
- (\*22) Pure dance featuring spring
- (\*23) Folk song
- (\*24) Sketch comedy
- (\*25) Pop song (Taiwanese singer)
- (\*26) Sketch comedy
- (\*27) Chinese song
- (\*28) Song featuring the theme 'we are all Chinese' (mainland and Taiwanese singers)
- (\*29) Acrobatics
- (\*30) Sketch comedy
- (\*31) Patriotic song
- (\*32) Chorus
- (\*33) Drum playing
- (\*34) Song dedicated to army soldiers
- (\*35) Song featuring New Year  
*New Year Countdown at midnight*
- (\*36) Song dedicated to the whole family
- (\*37) Ethnic song and dance
- (\*38) Song and dance combination featuring old classic songs, ended with the closure song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight'

## 2002 New Year's Gala:

- (\*1) Song and dance featuring spring
- (\*2) Folk song
- (\*3) Stand-up comedy
- (\*4) Song and dance combination featuring spring
- (\*5) Sketch comedy
- (\*6) Pop song (mainland and Singaporean singers)
- (\*7) Magic tricks
- (\*8) Group stand-up comedy
- (\*9) Pop song and dance
- (\*10) Song and dance combination (mainland and HK singers)
- (\*11) Sketch comedy
- (\*12) Music Ballad
- (\*13) Sketch comedy
- (\*14) Pop song (mainland and Taiwanese singers)
- (\*15) Acrobatics
- (\*16) Patriotic song
- (\*17) Song featuring English learning practices
- (\*18) Stand-up comedy
- (\*19) Song promoting life philosophies
- (\*20) Ethnic song and dance combination
- (\*21) Sketch comedy
- (\*22) Song featuring relationships among the neighbours
- (\*23) Chinese opera
- (\*24) Song dedicated to friends
- (\*25) Song featuring army soldiers
- (\*26) Sketch comedy
- (\*27) Song featuring national unity
- (\*28) Magic tricks with audience interactions
- (\*29) Song featuring the New Year
- (\*30) Stand-up comedy (mainland and Taiwanese comedians)
- (\*31) Fashion show
- (\*32) Patriotic song
- New Year Countdown at midnight*
- (\*33) Folk song and dance featuring the theme 'we are all Chinese'
- (\*34) Chinese opera
- (\*35) Western classical music
- (\*36) Patriotic song and dance combination including the closure song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight'

## 2003 New Year's Gala:

- (\*1) Song and dance combination featuring the New Year
- (\*2) Song and dance combination featuring festival celebration
- (\*3) Song and dance featuring Chinese zodiacs
- (\*4) Pop song (mainland and HK singers)
- (\*5) Stand-up comedy
- (\*6) Song and dance
- (\*7) Sketch comedy
- (\*8) Song written and performed by a family
- (\*9) Stand-up comedy
- (\*10) Acrobatics
- (\*11) Folk song and dance
- (\*12) Sketch comedy
- (\*13) Pop song (HK singer)
- (\*14) Chinese opera
- (\*15) Sketch comedy
- (\*16) Song and dance to promote the harmonious society
- (\*17) Folk song with patriotic theme
- (\*18) Sketch comedy featuring army soldiers
- (\*19) Song and dance dedicated to army soldiers
- (\*20) Song and dance featuring the soldiers' wives
- (\*21) Iconic CCTV presenters gave greetings with their special talent performances.
- (\*22) Pop song (HK star)
- (\*23) Magic tricks combination
- (\*24) Song
- (\*25) Sketch comedy
- (\*26) Song and dance combination
- (\*27) Musical featuring a love story
- (\*28) Stand-up comedy
- (\*29) Folk pure dance
- (\*30) Song featuring festival celebration
- Studio Activity: Mixing the soil from everywhere together to promote patriotic theme*
- (\*31) Folk song featuring patriotic theme 'we are all Chinese'
- (\*32) Song and dance featuring spring
- (\*33) Magic tricks (American magician)
- (\*34) Song dedicated to the women's football team
- (\*35) Folk song and dance
- New Year Countdown at midnight*
- (\*36) Song featuring spring
- (\*37) Ethnic song and dance combination
- (\*38) Song and dance
- (\*39) Pop song and dance
- (\*40) Song
- (\*41) Song and dance combination featuring New Year (Folk and Opera)
- (\*42) Closure song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight'

## 2004 New Year's Gala:

- (\*1) Song and dance featuring spring
- (\*2) Group stand-up comedy featuring Chinese zodiacs
- (\*3) Pop song and dance featuring spring
- (\*4) Stand-up comedy
- (\*5) Folk song and dance
- (\*6) Song and dance combination featuring popular children's songs from cartoons
- (\*7) Acrobatics (Argentina)
- (\*8) Sketch comedy
- (\*9) Folk song and dance
- (\*10) Sketch comedy
- (\*11) Song featuring parents
- (\*12) Acrobatics
- (\*13) Song dedicated to the Chinese athletes competing in the Olympics
- (\*14) Stand-up comedy
- (\*15) Pure dance with Chinese opera
- (\*16) Sketch comedy
- (\*17) Song promoting the traditional ethics should still be valued in the rich urban life
- (\*18) Irish dance (Irish Dance Academy)
- (\*19) Song and dance featuring the Chinatown
- (\*20) Sketch comedy
- (\*21) Song and dance featuring the New Year
- (\*22) Song and dance dedicated to all the Chinese people fighting against SARS
- (\*23) Song and dance dedicated to the doctors and nurses in rescuing SARS patients
- (\*24) Musical featuring gym training
- (\*25) Sketch comedy
- (\*26) Folk song and dance combination
- (\*27) Sketch comedy
- (\*28) Chinese opera combination
- (\*29) Pop song and dance combination (mainland, HK and Taiwan stars)
- (\*30) Song and dance featuring Chinese opera talent
- (\*31) Song and dance featuring close relationship between the Party and the people
- (\*32) Patriotic song and dance dedicated to those who have devoted themselves to the country, including Chinese leaders
- (\*33) Magic tricks
- (\*34) Chinese opera featuring the Chinese zodiacs
- (\*35) *New Year Countdown, featuring space hero & scientists from 'Shenzhou No. 5'*
- (\*36) Ethnic song and dance combination
- (\*37) Song and dance dedicated to the army soldiers
- (\*38) Fashion show
- (\*39) Closure song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight'

## 2005 New Year's Gala:

- (\*1) Song and dance featuring New Year celebration
  - (\*2) Stand-up comedy
  - (\*3) Song and dance
  - (\*4) Sketch comedy
  - (\*5) Chinese couplet-making by provincial TV presenters
  - (\*6) Ethnic song and dance combination
  - (\*7) Sketch comedy
  - (\*8) Pure dance
  - (\*9) Song dedicated to the disabled people
  - (\*10) Sketch comedy
  - (\*11) Song promoting a harmonious society with the neighbours
  - (\*12) Song featuring martial art (HK star)
  - (\*13) Sketch comedy
  - (\*14) Pop song and dance combination (mainland, HK and Taiwanese singers)
  - (\*15) Acrobatics
  - (\*16) Folk song and dance
  - (\*17) Sketch comedy
  - (\*18) Song featuring romance
  - (\*19) Song and dance featuring love in life
  - (\*20) Ethnic Song and dance dedicated to the patriotic theme about the newly built railway that improves the life in Tibet
  - (\*21) Stand-up comedy
  - (\*22) Song and dance featuring coming home on the New Year
  - (\*23) Chinese opera
  - (\*24) Pop song (mainland and HK singers)
  - (\*25) Sketch comedy
  - (\*26) Pure dance embedding traditional New Year wishes
  - (\*27) Folk song and dance featuring festival celebration
  - (\*28) Folk song and dance featuring different kinds of flowers
  - (\*29) Song and dance dedicated to the army soldiers
  - (\*30) Patriotic song and dance
- New Year Countdown at midnight*
- (\*31) Song and dance combination featuring New Year celebration
  - (\*32) Pop song and dance featuring giving New Year greetings by mobile phones
  - (\*33) Group stand-up comedy featuring Chinese zodiacs
  - (\*34) Sketch comedy
  - (\*35) Song dedicated to the army soldiers
  - (\*36) Sketch comedy
  - (\*37) Patriotic song and dance
  - (\*38) Patriotic song and dance, ended with the closure song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight'

## 2006 New Year's Gala:

(\*1) Song and dance featuring spring

(\*2) Patriotic song and dance featuring the theme 'we are all Chinese' (mainland, HK, Taiwan and Macau singers)

(\*3) Stand-up comedy

(\*4) Folk pure dance

*Voting the names for the two pandas given to Taiwan, as presents from mainland*

(\*5) Sketch comedy

(\*6) Classic song performed in different music styles

(\*7) Ethnic dances

(\*8) Sketch comedy

(\*9) Song and dance embedding New Year wishes

*Riddle games given by TV presenters from all provincial TV stations in China*

(\*10) Stand-up comedy

(\*11) Ethnic song and dance

*Patriotic theme: cosmonauts from Shenzhou VI Manned Spacecraft as national heroes*

(\*12) Pop song and dance combination (mainland, HK and Taiwanese singers)

(\*13) Sketch comedy

*Voting the names for the two pandas given to Taiwan, as presents from mainland*

(\*14) Song and dance

(\*15) Pure dance featuring the art of the Chinese paper-cut

(\*16) Sketch comedy

*Riddle games given by TV presenters from all provincial TV stations in China*

(\*17) Song and dance combination featuring the old classic songs

(\*18) Acrobatics

(\*19) Sketch comedy

(\*20) Pure dance

(\*21) Song and dance featuring the arrival of the New Year in wintery spring season

(\*22) Song and dance dedicated to the army soldiers

*Riddle games given by TV presenters from all provincial TV stations in China*

(\*23) Piano playing

(\*24) Stand-up comedy (Taiwanese comedians)

(\*25) Patriotic song and dance

*Voting the names for the two pandas given to Taiwan, as presents from mainland*

*New Year Countdown at midnight*

(\*26) Folk song and dance featuring the New Year celebration

(\*27) Sketch comedy

(\*28) Chinese opera combination

(\*29) Song and dance combination featuring spring

(\*30) Closure song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight'

## 2007 New Year's Gala:

- (\*1) Song and dance featuring the New Year
  - (\*2) Ethnic song and dance combination
  - (\*3) Stand-up comedy
  - (\*4) Pop song and dance combination (mainland and Taiwanese singers)
  - (\*5) Stand-up comedy
  - (\*6) Patriotic song and dance with folk style
  - (\*7) Acrobatics
  - (\*8) Sketch comedy
  - (\*9) Song and dance combination including ethnic, patriotic, folk and army themes
  - (\*10) Pure dance with folk style
  - (\*11) Sketch comedy
  - (\*12) Pop song and dance
  - (\*13) Song and dance featuring four seasons
  - (\*14) Sketch comedy
  - (\*15) Old classic song (mainland and Western singers)
  - (\*16) Song and dance dedicated to children
  - (\*17) Pop song and dance combination (HK and Taiwan stars)
  - (\*18) Martial art performance
  - (\*19) Sketch comedy
  - (\*20) Ethnic dance by Tibetans with patriotic theme
  - (\*21) Stand-up comedy
  - (\*22) Song and dance combination featuring army soldiers
  - (\*23) Pure dance featuring farmers entering city for the first time
  - (\*24) Poem reciting featuring the children of the migrated farmer workers in cities
  - (\*25) Song and dance featuring New Year celebration
  - (\*26) Sketch comedy
  - (\*27) Patriotic song and dance with folk style
  - (\*28) Sketch comedy
  - (\*29) Song and dance promoting the Chinese virtue of treating parents nicely
- New Year Countdown at midnight*
- (\*30) Chinese opera
  - (\*31) Folk song and dance combination
  - (\*32) Song and dance combination featuring old poplar songs
  - (\*33) Closure song and dance 'I Will Never Forget Tonight'

## 2008 New Year's Gala:

- (\*1) Song and dance featuring spring
- (\*2) Folk song and dance featuring New Year celebration
- (\*3) Sketch comedy
- (\*4) Song and dance featuring spring
- (\*5) Acrobatics
- (\*6) Sketch comedy
- (\*7) Song featuring the traditional Chinese fairytale
- (\*8) Stand-up comedy
- (\*9) Pop song with patriotic theme (Taiwan)
- (\*10) Sketch comedy featuring army soldiers
- (\*11) Song and dance dedicated to army soldiers
- (\*12) Song dedicated to the disabled people
- (\*13) Poem reciting dedicated to the people fighting in the snow storm
- (\*14) Song and dance dedicated to the people fighting in the snow storm
- (\*15) Stand-up comedy
- (\*16) Song performed by and dedicated to the migrated farmer workers in the city
- (\*17) Hand shadow show
- (\*18) Pure dance with ancient style
- (\*19) Sketch comedy
- (\*20) Song featuring the patriotic theme of 'missing motherland' (Taiwanese singer)
- (\*21) Acrobatics
- (\*22) Song and dance combination featuring old classic songs
- (\*23) Sketch comedy
- (\*24) Poem reciting with patriotic theme on China's great progress in the Olympics
- (\*25) Song featuring the Olympic spirit (singers from different parts of the world)
- (\*26) Patriotic song and dance featuring the rapid development in China under the Party's great leadership
- (\*27) Sketch comedy featuring the Chinese getting ready for the Beijing Olympics
- (\*28) Chinese opera combination
- (\*29) Pop song (Taiwanese singer)
- (\*30) Studio activity of passing on the national flag to seven astronauts who are about to walk on the moon with Shenzhou-7 spacecraft for the first time
- New Year Countdown at midnight*
- (\*31) Song and dance promoting a harmonious society
- (\*32) Magic tricks
- (\*33) Song and dance embedding New Year wishes
- (\*34) Martial art performance
- (\*35) Pop song and dance combination (mainland and HK singers)
- (\*36) Song with Er'Hu playing
- (\*37) Closure song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight'

## ***Appendix C: Interview Transcript of Mr. Yang Bo***

### **Interview Transcript: Yang Bo (Translated by Pengpeng Xu)**

1. *How do you think of the relationship between the mise-en-scene and the content in a TV programme?*

**Clip 1 (00:26—01:54)** I think the mise-en-scene is an important part of a TV programme nowadays. During the development of the Chinese television in the past twenty to thirty years, the audiences care a lot about the mise-en-scene. However, the mise-en-scene does not represent the whole programme. The mise-en-scene needs the support of the content. A programme must have both the mise-en-scene and the content. Only by combining the two together can a programme win the popularity among the audience.

2. *In your opinion, what is the mise-en-scene of New Year's Gala like? It is said that New Year's Gala is considered to be old-fashioned and over-familiarised by the audience. What are the reasons behind its particular mise-en-scene?*

**Clip 1 (02:07—03:54)** New Year's Gala is a unique programme in China, which has lasted for the past two decades. Certainly it has formed its own characteristics over time. The audience group which New Year's Gala looks after is huge. China has the population of more than 1.3 billion, from city to countryside, across all age groups, cultural backgrounds and professions, but they all need to find the part they like in this one single New Year's Gala. Therefore the New Year's Gala has its own ways to achieve this. In recent years, different directors have worked on New Year's Gala, and they all tried their best to keep up its quality. Because, as I said, New Year's Gala has a huge audience group. Those people who criticise New Year's Gala live in a different environment with different lifestyles and influences. However, seventy percent of the Chinese population is farmers, and what attracts farmers in a television programme can be something beyond your imagination. Therefore, it is not appropriate to say that New Year's Gala is old-fashioned, because its role requires it to take care of a bigger audience group. The audiences of the New Year's Gala come from different cultural backgrounds. What we have now in New Year's Gala is to carry on the experience gathered from the past decades, to make sure most of the audiences can accept the programme.

3. *How is the Chinese media policy reflected in New Year's Gala?*

**Clip 1 (03:58—05:39)** My understanding of the Chinese media policy is that, variety and diversity has been encouraged in China. As long as a TV programme gives positive message, it is encouraged to be presented to the audience. This is especially shown in New Year's Gala. As long as a performance is positive and good, it will be accepted in New Year's Gala and shown to the audience. There are many good performances out

there, but New Year's Gala only lasts for a limited amount of time. It is not possible to present all the good performances to the audience. Therefore, the best ones and classic ones will be presented to the audience through careful assessment and selection.

**Clip 1 (05:39—07:26)** As a matter of fact, the mise-en-scene of New Year's Gala has been changed a lot, if you compare today's New Year's Gala with the ones made ten years ago. There are already many small changes. However, New Year's Gala has to consider the interests and preferences of the audience. That is to say, New Year's Gala is a show made for the Chinese Spring Festival, when all families get together on this special occasion. It is therefore a good way to express the happiness by having many kids dancing and singing loudly on stage. Other forms and styles may not be able to fit into this special occasion, for example, putting Elton John and Lady Gaga together on the same stage in Grammy Awards Ceremony. It is the specific context, the specific audience group and the specific festival occasion that make New Year's Gala choose certain mise-en-scene over others.

**Clip 1 (07:26—08:48)** Yes, we do consider making some changes to its mise-en-scene according to the different critics. However, television programmes are continually progressing. To satisfy the need and taste of a more diversified audience group, we have expanded the varieties in the evening gala, from the plain folk singing and operatic singing in the early times, to the pop music and street dance performances from HK, Taiwan and overseas later on, especially some creative trials such as bringing rap into Chinese folk songs. Some experiments are welcomed, while some need improvement. As for the background dancing, it is suitable in some songs, as it can better express the theme of the song. This is up to the directors to decide. Different cases have to be analysed differently.

4. *How are the mise-en-scene constructed and performed to become a made-for-TV product that seems natural? What is the purpose behind this application?*

**Clip 1 (09:06—10:58)** Uhh....There are many ways and techniques to achieve these effects. In the rehearsal of the New Year's Gala, the procedure involves selecting performances, producing the individual performances, and finally putting all the performances on the stage. Because New Year's Gala is not only an evening gala, but also a communication process between the show, the camera and the television audience. For example, to film an important prop such as a pen on a table, the early New Year's Gala may have ignored it by taking a different camera angle. In the case of today's New Year's Gala, the production team would give a close-up feature on this important prop. This is something prepared before-hand, and thus a technique.

**Clip 1 (10:58—12:07)** On this matter, my opinion is that, different people have different tastes and preferences. As New Year's Gala has been progressing for all these years, and it is understandable that we all want it to be a perfect show. I am sure it is progressing towards a good direction. As I mentioned before, New Year's Gala is not made for a particular audience group. It is not an evening show only for the studio

audience, but an evening show for all the TV audiences in China. Therefore, everything needs to be rehearsed, prepared and pre-arranged. The good thing about this preparation is to allow the TV audiences to see what it looks like in the live studio.

5. *Over the past twenty years, presenters have become an important icon of New Year's Gala. Regarding their presenting style, what aspects have (or have not) changed and why?*

**Clip 1 (12:24—14:29)** Presenters play a crucial role in the evening gala. Hmmm..., in the early New Year's Gala, television was an important part of our life ten or fifteen years ago. At that time, the Chinese society was lack of information, TV programmes and media varieties. Hence New Year's Gala became a very important thing to the Chinese people, with its presenters standing right at the centre of the evening gala. Their outfits, personalities, and gesture always represented what was considered to be fashionable and good at the time. In this way, presenters attract lots of attention. But after ten to twenty years, we have experienced more information and varieties from different kinds of media, and today's New Year's Gala cannot represent the whole fashion and overall development of our society. New Year's Gala is not the only place to find these things. This changing environment may have influenced the presenting styles of the New Year's Gala presenters.

**Clip 1 (14:29—15:47)** In terms of presenting style, it should be polite, natural, good mandarin and other professional standards, etc. Maybe in the early times, presenters were more cautious, strict and rigid under the fixed programme order. Nowadays, presenters may have more diverse styles and get more involved in the programme interaction. During the production of the New Year's Gala, the studio audience is a co-operative part of the show. For example, presenters nowadays prefer to walk down from the stage to the audience seats and make a short interaction with the studio audience, or to communicate with the TV audience through mobile texts and hotlines. This brings the presenter closer to the audience.

6. *New Year's Gala has experienced the audience rating decline in recent years. How do you understand this situation? Is CCTV concerned? What actions have been carried out to improve its audience rating?*

**Clip 1 (16:01—18:09)** I think the decline is very normal. New Year's gala used to be the spiritual food for the Chinese ten or twenty years ago. Watching New Year's Gala was considered more important than the New Year itself. Because, at that time, the social economy in China was not as advanced as today, and television was a crucial part of people's life. New Year's Gala was certainly important to the people at that time. At present, we are exposed to all kinds of information and various life styles, including the evening parties and holiday tours we have. In this sense, watching New Year's Gala is not the only way to spend the New Year. However, New Year's Gala is still indispensable for many Chinese. It is still an important dish for the New Year, yet it is

not the only dish available. With the improvement of life standard, it is easy to understand that the Chinese have more choices of entertainment nowadays.

**Clip 1 (18:09—19:32)** Hmm... In terms of the decline in audience rating, I would like to discuss from two perspectives. One perspective is that New Year's Gala is not the only dish available for the Chinese on the New Year's Eve, and the other perspective is that every year the production team will compare and assess the New Year's Gala carefully on what audiences like and dislike, so certainly there are various ways to measure. Thus every year the production team tries hard to meet the audience's expectations through many adjustment and selection. All the people in the production team, from the senior leaders to the performers, every one of them are showing their best spirit. They pay lots of effort and certainly they want New Year's Gala to be the best.

**Clip 1 (19:32—21:08)** I have witnessed many actions carried out by CCTV to improve New Year's Gala. First of all, the well-known stars and celebrities are usually invited to perform on the New Year's Gala stage. For example, the pop singer Zhou Jielun from Taiwan was popular, so he was included in New Year's Gala; later the comedian Xiao Shenyang from mainland was popular, so he appeared in New Year's Gala. At the same time, old face performers who are widely liked by the audiences such as the comedian Zhao Benshan are often invited to perform in New Year's Gala in every year. Apart from feedbacks, the audiences are also asked to vote for their favourite performances, which is not up to the director to decide which performance is the best. Every year there is such voting activity to find the popular performances among the audience and award them the winner, the runner-up and the third place titles. This is a way of feedback. All these means are used to give helpful suggestions to the next year's New Year's Gala.

7. *Due to the mass educational function, the sketch comedy and stand-up comedy in New Year's Gala have established their unique characteristics, which is different from other comedies on TV. What is your understanding towards it?*

**Clip 1 (21:46—22:37)** Yes, yes, you are right. I think it is good that the comedies in New Year's Gala give some positive and encouraging messages while entertaining. It is very good. It would achieve good effect when the audiences share the same feeling and opinions during watching.

8. *What do you think are the fixed themes that are included in almost every year's New Year's Gala? Why are they considered to be important? By whom?*

**Clip 1 (23:10—25:42)** Let's put it in this way, in my impression, the common themes that often appear in New Year's Gala... There would be the praise of the army, which is the first thing that comes to my mind. This is because many army soldiers are not able to go home and spend the New Year with their family like the Christmas in the West. Instead, they have to stay at their position during this time. This is a special group of

people which attracts the attention of the artists and New Year's Gala. Every year there are performances especially dedicated to the army soldiers, but they are different from year to year, in terms of materials and storylines. This is one of the reasons why New Year's Gala pays special attention to the army soldiers.

**Clip 1 (25:42—29:15)** There are many positive topics in New Year's Gala, but it is a bit hard for me to list all of them at the moment. As far as I am concerned, the positive topics normally are good in moral and ethical sense. Generally speaking, New Year's Gala directors visit different places in China and select the potential performances to put on the show, which are produced and made by the artists across the country. The artists will then need to hand in their work to New Year's Gala to compete with other candidates during the selection process. The reason why there are certain fixed themes appearing in almost each year's New Year's Gala is because the performance containing these topics will touch the audiences' hearts. Therefore the artists usually research on these certain themes and make performances around them. More and more performances include these certain topics because they are meaningful and touching. Hence the directors of New Year's Gala will choose these fixed themes. These topics come from our daily life, from our daily life and they accumulate the good essence of life. It does not work in a way that we have some particular ideas in mind first, and then make the show accordingly. A performance like that will not be interesting, as a good piece of work has to come from real life. These fixed themes do not come from the instructions of the government. The country's media policy does not give specific regulations on a particular programme like New Year's Gala.

9. *From the programme observation, it is found that some aspects of mise-en-scene have changed over the years (such as production techniques and costumes), while some aspects have not (such as the fixed themes and presenter's style). What do you think are the reasons behind this finding?*

**Clip 1 (30:50—32:28)** In my opinion, this is because the target audience group of New Year's Gala is different from other entertainment shows. Entertainment programmes from Hunan TV station and Taiwan, for example, are made for the young audience. The mise-en-scene which attracts the young audience may be more lively, fashionable and fresh looking. However, New Year's Gala is aiming at the audience from all age groups and background. Therefore New Year's Gala has formed its own mise-en-scene, which cannot be compared with other entertainment programmes due to the different context. This also explains that different performance genres in New Year's Gala that are made for different audience groups, such as Chinese opera for the elderly and pop songs for the young.

10. *The critics suggest that the early New Year's Gala seems to be personal and intimate to the audience, while New Year's Gala in recent years appears to be distant and rigid. How has the production focus been shifted over the years in New Year's Gala?*

**Clip 1 (34:12—36:23)** As for the audience interaction, New Year's Gala has made lots of effort. Through letters, phone calling and other means, New Year's Gala hopes to be close to the audience. However, China has experienced a big change in its cultural awareness. Sometimes it is not up to New Year's Gala to decide, such as being blamed for being too distant to the audience. This...this is not something that I can explain in a few sentences. It is a deep topic. For sure, New Year's Gala wants to be close to the audience, the closer, the better. I cannot say which year's gala is most interactive and intimate to the audience. These are just public opinions, not the final judgment. Therefore we cannot say whether it is good or not. But the principal of getting close to the audience will not be changed in New Year's Gala.

*11. What do you think is important in the audience survey? Are you concerned with the audience's feedbacks on the New Year's Gala's mise-en-scene?*

**Clip 1 (36:46—37:42)** Hmm...The audience's preferences are very important. It is crucial to have the feedbacks on these. To achieve it, New Year's Gala investigates by ranking which performance is the best, the second and the third. This procedure is carried out every year. Each performance is different from one another. One performance needs a certain kind of costume, and others need another kind. One performance expresses one thing, and others express another. But which performance the audience prefer will be found out through survey. According to the feedbacks from the audience, the New Year's Gala team studies the reason why certain costumes receive better effect.

**Clip 2 (00:00—03:21)** I am not very clear about how exactly the feedbacks on mise-en-scene are handled in the New Year's Gala surveys. But...The newspaper critics and online articles are comparatively more exposed to the common people. The New Year's Gala team will get more information on that, as they have the full scale feedbacks on New Year's Gala. Also, they have feedbacks especially on mise-en-scene, from the very early times till today. Over the years, New Year's Gala has quite a few changes in its mise-en-scene, but not major dramatic changes. Maybe the Western media can make the programme more eye-catching and attractive to the audience, but it has its own reasons behind it, as I have explained before.

*12. When auto-cue/computer generated images/live transmission/phone-in activity/audience voting/fashionable pop music was introduced in New Year's Gala? Was New Year's Gala the first programme to try it out at that time? What were the difficulties encountered? What are their development and changes over the years? What has New Year's Gala learnt from using these new things?*

**Clip 2 (04:58—05:24)** To be honest, I am not sure about these technical details in the production of New Year's Gala, in those specific cases.

13. *How do New Year's Gala presenters make the audience feel that they are together on this special occasion? How are the ideological promotions embedded in presenters' speeches, performances and body languages?*

**Clip 2 (06:12—08:10)** First of all, each presenter has his/her own different presenting style. Compared with their styles in the early time, the presenters nowadays do not act as rigid as before. Instead, they appear more natural and intimate to the audience. Their speeches and body languages may look more similar to those in daily life. This is to bring the audience closer to the show. The direct interpersonal communications such as talking to the audience, reading their text messages, and interacting with them in studio games are a kind of experiment, which will be carried on if they work out well. Hmm...I think 'more formal and more dignified' are the better words to describe the presenting style of the presenters nowadays. There are two reasons for this particular style: One reason is that they have different target audience groups, as some audiences are older while some are younger. Therefore they have to show basic respect to all of them. The other reason is that the Chinese New Year is a very important festival in China, and it is more appropriate to present in this way on this special occasion.

14. *Do you see the local New Year's Gala from provincial TV stations as a rival? It is said that the competition between the CCTV New Year's Gala and local New Year's Gala marks the arrival of the Post-New Year's Gala Age. Do you agree?*

**Clip 2 (09:10—12:01)** I think, I think, that our country has the diversity policy on the artistic work. As long as the artistic work is good, we will encourage and welcome it. New Year's Gala is not uniquely produced in CCTV anymore, as almost all provincial TV stations make their own New Year's Gala nowadays. Local New Year's Galas may have their own ways in making the show, for example, by selecting the performance online. What makes the CCTV New Year's Gala important is its special status as the very first New Year's Gala. At present, I personally think that all of us would switch on TV to have a look at the CCTV New Year's Gala on the New Year, or at least know about it. I think the perception that local New Year's Gala is influential and challenging the CCTV New Year's Gala is a bit over-stated by the media critics. CCTV New Year's Gala has been with us for a long time and still attracts lots of attention now. It is part of the New Year celebration for the Chinese, but not the whole.

15. *What is New Year's Gala's mise-en-scene influenced by? How is the media policy related to the ideological themes in the evening gala?*

**Clip 2 (13:08—15:40)** I think this aspect is not influenced or instructed by anybody. Heroes who fought in the flood appearing in New Year's Gala is because their great action touches us; Soldiers who rescued lives in the earthquake were praised in New Year's Gala is because their deeds are worth learning from; and those Olympic Champions who were invited in New Year's Gala is because their achievements for the

country. Audiences would like to pay attention to the high-profiled performers, and that is why those people are on the stage of New Year's Gala. The cultural awareness of a country is the big frame. This is something that is not influenced by the government. It is however instructed by the cultural awareness of the people. In other words, we want to show what is considered to be good by bringing a positive touch to the New Year's Gala performances and the topics. For example, if pornography is considered to be a good thing, then New Year's Gala will be full of pornography. This...this is just common sense. In specific cases, in this process, the directors of New Year's Gala are certainly the most important part.

*16. Is there any other live entertainment show running at the same time as New Year's Gala? How is New Year's Gala different from other entertainment variety show?*

**Clip 2 (16:00—17:02)** Hmm...Actually New Year's Gala has several versions. For example, CCTV New Year's Gala was broadcast on CCTV1, while Chinese Opera Evening Gala and Song and Dance Evening Gala was broadcast on other CCTV channels simultaneously. Therefore, people who are interested in Chinese opera can watch the special edition of the New Year's Gala on CCTV3. Do you like the Chinese opera? No, I do not like it. However the Chinese Opera Evening Gala exists because there is a group of audience who likes it. CCTV offers a big variety and hence it tries to meet the needs of all audience groups.

*17. What is the particular presenting style of the New Year's Gala presenters? Why this presenting style is carried on for decades? How is this presenting style related to the ideologies in New Year's Gala?*

Question answered in other questions.

*18. What is the reason for keeping using the same group of performers and presenters in New Year's Gala for decades?*

**Clip 2 (17:56—22:10)** In my impression, there are new faces in every year's New Year's Gala. Whether the performers are new faces or old faces, they must be either very famous or very popular among the audience. From the audience point of view, I like comedies performed by Zhao Benshan and that is why he is in New Year's Gala every year, because I want to see him every year. Of course there are new faces on stage as well. I also welcome the new faces if they are good. For example, comedian Xiao Shenyang received good responses from the audience. Whether old faces or new faces, the good ones are kept in New Year's Gala. I think the old face performers remain in the gala is because their performances are good, which receive recognition from the audience. This is the reason why they are selected every year. There is a 'My Favorite New Year's Gala Performance' voting activity every year and old face performers such as the sketch comedian Zhao Benshan often wins the highest vote. That is how we know

the old face performers are popular among the audience. Similarly, in the U.S., old faces like George Clooney are kept on screen as well, because they are...they are good. And also, even for some very famous stars, if their performances are not good enough, they will not be selected to perform in New Year's Gala.

*19. Who is considered to be the centre of New Year's Gala? How is it shown in New Year's Gala?*

**Clip 2 (22:48—24:10)** Hehehh...on this matter, certainly the entire New Year's Gala is made for the mass audience. It is made for the people who watch New Year's Gala. Whether they are government leaders, or people like us from different part of society, as long as they watch New Year's Gala, then they are the audience of New Year's Gala. In terms of how the audience focus is shown in New Year's Gala, all the performances appreciate and express the little things from life, whether comedies or song and dances. All the materials come from real life and from different aspects of our society. These little things from life will be reflected in New Year's Gala, sometimes they make audiences laugh and sometimes they make audiences cry.

*20. Everything is prepared, pre-arranged, and performed as if it is true and natural, in order to accomplish the perfect show with no mistakes. What is the disadvantage of this 'made-for-TV' style, if any?*

**Clip 2 (24:56—26:02)** Hmmm...I think it depends on the level of this 'made-for-TV' style. For instance, if I am an actor, and I am about to play a role, there is nothing wrong to perform as the audiences know I am an actor. In another case, if a person is introduced as a member of public to the audience, yet as a matter of fact he is a professional actor, then this is cheating and does not respect the viewing intelligence of the audience. This will certainly not receive any good results. I am sure the competent and experienced television personnel in New Year's Gala production team know better than anybody else on what to do and what not to do. This is why New Year's Gala is doing a good job.

## ***Appendix D: Interview Transcript of Mr. Zhao Yuhui***

### **Interview Transcript: Zhao Yuhui (Translated by Pengpeng Xu)**

1. *How do you think of the relationship between the mise-en-scene and the content in a TV programme?*

**Clip 1 (00:12—01:29)** This is a broad topic. It is widely recognised that the perfect mise-en-scene should match coherently with the rich programme content. In the case of a specific programme, for example, the mise-en-scene for the news programme should not be as colourful as for an entertainment programme. Rather, it should appear to be formal, serious, objective, and accurate to show the characteristics of news programmes. Hence the mise-en-scene for the news programme is relevantly simple and brief. Hmm...The other opposite example would be the entertainment programme, which looks colourful and fun. Certainly there are other types of mise-en-scene between these two extremes, such as documentaries and children programmes. Different kind of programmes should have different mise-en-scene to match their content.

2. *In your opinion, what is the mise-en-scene of New Year's Gala like? It is said that New Year's Gala is considered to be old-fashioned and over-familiarised by the audience. What are the reasons behind its particular mise-en-scene?*

**Clip 1 (01:36—06:29)** The New Year's Gala bears a strong sense of traditional Chinese culture heritage. It has many Chinese audiences all over the world. Apart from its festival celebration function, it also has the ceremony characteristic. Therefore, celebrating Chinese New Year is not only a traditional custom in China which has lasted for hundreds of years, watching New Year's Gala on the New Year's Eve has also become an integral part of the celebration. In this sense, the content of New Year's Gala has to include the Chinese people all over the world, but mainly those from the mainland. To show the atmosphere of a happy, harmonious and wishful New Year, hmmm...I think the staging of New Year's Gala is getting more and more gorgeous and spectacular in order to create the effect of a happy, harmonious and optimistic New Year. Due to the big amount of human, material and financial resources that CCTV put in, the staging and set design have made big technical progresses, from the simple tea table setting in the early times to the big-scale multi-media studio which can contain several hundred people nowadays. Most of the people performing on stage are the celebrities from the mainland and Hong Kong, Taiwan, and overseas. Therefore its mise-en-scene brings together various kinds of entertainment in China. The song and dance performance in New Year's Gala uses a great number of people as background dancers, because the size of the stage is so big that a small number of people on stage would look empty. Other kinds of performances in New Year's Gala which are popular among the audiences are stand-up comedies and sketch comedies. The stand-up comedy has both traditional and contemporary forms. The costumes for the stand-up comedians have traditional Chinese robes, and fashionable clothes nowadays. Comedies in New

Year's Gala usually last for 3 to 5 minutes, maximum 10 minutes. Sometimes female comedians also participate in the stand-up comedy, but it is mainly performed by male comedians. There is no fixed number of comedians in one stand-up comedy, as it can be one person, a group of comedians, or a pair as the main form. As for the sketch comedy, it is the highlight of each year's New Year's Gala. There is a group of sketch comedians which are widely known by the audiences, such as Zhao Benshan, Huang Hong, and Gao Xiumin from the early years. They often appear on the stage. Hmm... Apart from these performances, there are some new performance genres each year, such as a mixture of the Chinese opera and folk songs. Hmm... In addition, there are talent shows such as martial arts, acrobatics, and magic tricks. I think there is rich content and diversified mise-en-scene in every year's New Year's Gala. Every performer is giving their best spirit to compete on this stage. This makes New Year's Gala a traditional Chinese cultural feast on this special occasion.

**Clip 1 (06:29—08:34)** In recent years, as you mentioned, there are different voices and opinions when it comes to the comment on New Year's Gala. It is very common to have diverse views. Nowadays, there are more entertainment means than before. In the early times, the only thing to do on the New Year's Eve was to watch New Year's Gala. At present, there are many other ways to spend the New Year apart from watching New Year's Gala. People can go travelling, go skiing and surfing on the Internet, etc. In addition to the CCTV New Year's Gala, local New Year's Gala is produced by different provincial TV stations and there are also many other programmes dedicated to the Chinese New Year. However, despite all other ways to spend New Year, they do not pose challenges to the CCTV New Year's Gala. The production scale and difficulty is unique in the world, as the live broadcast of this big scale evening gala lasts for more than 4 hours, which makes it very difficult to manage without any mistakes. Also, CCTV only has three months' time to work and prepare for this project every year. It is the result of the non-stop day and night hard work of several hundred staffs in CCTV. Although there are many critics about New Year's Gala, it is still the most concerned gala for the 1.3 billion Chinese in mainland and thousands of Chinese living abroad. Yet those different critics are good, as they help New Year's Gala to keep improving and innovating.

### *3. How is the Chinese media policy reflected in New Year's Gala?*

**Clip 1 (08:46—10:32)** I think the Chinese media policy and New Year's Gala is not direct linked, because there is no such media policy specially made for New Year's Gala. The Chinese media policy is reflected more in news programmes under editorial instructions. The messages and instructions from the government do not belong to media policy. New Year's Gala receives big attention from the Chinese people who want to know the planning and direction from the government in the upcoming year, and also some conclusive comments on the past year. Therefore, hmm... New Year's Gala often applies positive ways to look back on the past year and look forward to the upcoming year. But New Year's Gala does not say these messages are from the

government, and the government officials do not appear in New Year's Gala to make these comments.

**Clip 1 (10:32—13:22)** As far as I am concerned, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) does not make specific policies and instructions for New Year's Gala. As a programme which receives big attention, New Year's Gala is expected to show positive things, like any other programmes in China. The same situation applies everywhere around the world. The New Year celebration in every country must be happy and harmonious. Good things should be expressed and prevailed on this occasion. I do not think there is such policy especially tailored for New Year's Gala. There is no rules for New Year's Gala in terms of what should do and what should not. Every year, the bidding method was used to decide the production team, including its chief director and production crews. There is more than one plan make New Year's Gala; instead, there are several plans from different production teams to compete with each other in making New Year's Gala. It is not a task assigned by the government bodies or the SARFT. New Year's Gala is produced every year, and the person who has the chance to make it a fantastic show is decided through bidding competition and strict assessments, like enterprises. The production team whose proposal is accepted by the panel judges, will undertake the job of the New Year's Gala. However, only the directors from CCTV can participate in the bidding competition, rather than collecting ideas and proposals from the nationwide scale. This is because CCTV is the organizer of the New Year's Gala, and it encourages creative ideas and proposals from its own employees. On the basis of equal competition, the team which wins the bidding will be responsible of the production of New Year's Gala. During the production procedure, the team will gather suggestions and ideas from all over the country.

4. *How are the mise-en-scene constructed and performed to become a made-for-TV product that seems natural? What is the purpose behind this application?*

**Clip 1 (14:25—17:00)** I think to a great extent, this technique is applied to make sure the evening show goes fluently. And also for the structure of the evening show, it creates natural links between the performances. If there is no rehearsal and practice beforehand, the show cannot continue when something goes wrong and it will be a very awkward situation. Whether for the studio audience or the television audience, it is a kind of disrespect. Hence, it is permitted and understandable to use these pre-arranged and rehearsed techniques. But a competent director will make all these seem natural and perfect as if they were real. Therefore the audience may not want to find out whether it is true or pre-organised. As long as it can fit into the logics of the programme development, the programme rhythm and make sensible links, like what we call 'TV grammar', audience do not have problems with it. The raw New Year's Gala from the early times may not be necessarily better than the pre-planned New Year's Gala nowadays. Different people have different opinions on this matter. If something goes wrong in a live programme, then it shows the director does not make a good preparation. But if an experienced director or performers can solve the problem in a

smart and smooth way, it can also bring credit to the show. A negative thing may bring positive results in the end. For the production team, they should not ignore the preparation work, and let the show develop on its own freely. Considering the big number of audience watching the show, this behaviour would be irresponsible.

5. *Over the past twenty years, presenters have become an important icon of New Year's Gala. Regarding their presenting style, what aspects have (or have not) changed and why?*

**Clip 1 (17:40—20:51)** Compared with the presenters in the early times, I think the young presenters nowadays do a better job than the old ones on some aspects. For example, Zhu Jun, in my opinion is a better presenter than Zhao Zhongxiang. This is because Zhao comes from the background of news reader. Zhao has been the presenter for New Year's Gala for all these years, because he was believed as the number one face of CCTV in the early times. However, Zhao is not the only presenter of New Year's Gala. In terms of managing an entertainment variety show, his has limited background knowledge and performing capability on presenting. Zhu Jun, on the other hand, is specializing in presenting entertainment programmes. He can sing not only pop songs but also traditional Chinese opera. He can also perform sketch comedies. Zhao Zhongxiang can not do any of these. Zhu Jun also has a good image and voice. In the case of Ni Ping, she has the professional background in performing art. She did not learn news reading or presenting. She is very good at making emotional speeches. However, it is not easy to co-present with Ni Ping. For some objective conditions, she is very tall and it is difficult to find someone who can stand next to her around the same height. At that time, Zhao Zhongxiang's height can match with hers. And therefore they present together for many years. Later on, Zhao stopped presenting New Year's Gala, and it is hard to find other male presenters to match with Ni Ping's height. Zhu Jun, for example, is even shorter than Ni Ping. It does not look good on stage if the presenters' statures are not on the same level. Nowadays, Zhu Jun and Dong Qing are main presenters, and they match as a good team. They are more flexible in presenting than Zhao Zhongxiang in the early times. That is to say, they are not there just to link the performances together throughout the evening gala, or mainly making serious speeches from beginning to end. Instead, they now blend into the performances and sometimes even participate in the performances themselves. This is a progress and it is also approved by the audience.

**Clip 1 (20:51—24:10)** I think the general framework of this formal and ceremonious presenting style has not changed these years in New Year's Gala. But there are changes in the specific programme linking and the structure of the programme. It changes to get even closer to the audience. The reason why the general framework has not changed is because some certain things cannot be changed. For example, the New Year bell cannot be changed, the happy loud opening scene cannot be changed, giving New Year's regard must be included, and giving New Year wishes to the Chinese all over the world cannot be taken away. All the things that cannot be taken away gradually form the general framework of the evening gala which does not bring major changes. The word

'ceremonious' has different implications in different contexts. For example, when used in the religious or conference context, the word has different meaning from New Year's Gala. Using the word 'ceremonious' to describe New Year's Gala is to show that there are some indispensable procedures and New Year's Gala aims to bring happiness to every household in China as part of the celebration on this special occasion. This is what we call 'ceremonious'. It is unlike the religious context, which means you have to carry out exactly the same old procedures in the temples and churches. The New Year's Gala is not ceremonious in that way.

**Clip 1 (24:10—25:38)** The target audience for the provincial TV station such as Hunan TV station is the young people, while the target audience for New Year's Gala is male, female, the old, and the young. If New Year's Gala borrows the same style and content from Hunan TV station, the young people will like it but the elderly and the middle-aged people may find it hard to accept, as it can be too noisy and inappropriate for them. Different age groups have different tastes, values and preferences. New Year's Gala has to find a neutral style which is acceptable and appealing to the audience from all different age groups, cultural and regional backgrounds. The audience group for New Year's Gala is far bigger than Hunan TV station. In this sense, they are not exactly the same. However, New Year's Gala also has some performances especially designed for young people. In recent years, more street dances and rap songs are included in New Year's Gala. These practices are all made for the young audience.

6. *New Year's Gala has experienced the audience rating decline in recent years. How do you understand this situation? Is CCTV concerned? What actions have been carried out to improve its audience rating?*

**Clip 1 (25:54—29:26)** In my opinion, every programme has its own golden period. New Year's Gala has lasted for several decades now, and this is a unique case in the television history in China. It is very natural that New Year's Gala has a declining audience rating and audience has different views on it. The only way to keep the audience is to create new things and make changes. In addition, audiences' tastes become more and more diverse. Nowadays people mainly consider the New Year's Gala as the background music, and watch it in a very brief way. They may watch New Year's Gala while making dumplings, surfing on the Internet and chatting with friends. Unlike the situation twenty years ago, many people watch New Year's Gala from beginning to end. Therefore, this makes significant differences on the audience rating. In other words, audiences have more choices in selecting TV programmes and more ways to spend the New Year. Hmm...I have not done the survey, but I am sure that more than fifty per cent of the Chinese population still watches New Year's Gala. But maybe there used to be almost eighty to ninety per cent of the Chinese population watch New Year's Gala. CCTV may not be very worried about this audience decline. But it will face and think through this problem. CCTV will try its best to keep the audience and to bring up the rating. As for their effort, they will keep innovating and making changes. There are different highlights and innovations in each year's New Year's Gala. The reason behind these practices is to solve the audience declining problem. However,

you cannot expect New Year's Gala to be as popular as twenty years ago, when almost eighty to ninety per cent of the people were watching it from beginning to end and doing nothing else. I think this era has passed and it is unnecessary to get worried about it.

7. *Due to the mass educational function, the sketch comedy and stand-up comedy in New Year's Gala have established their unique characteristics, which is different from other comedies on TV. What is your understanding towards it?*

**Clip 1 (29:54—31:12)** I myself have not noticed that there are special characteristic especially designed for the comedies in New Year's Gala. They usually last three to five minutes, and maximum ten minutes. The sitcom series such as 'I love my family', however, may contain dozens of episodes. In terms of the performing style, they are not on the same level for comparison. Comedies in New Year's Gala can be performed elsewhere, and New Year's Gala is not their only stage.

8. *What do you think are the fixed themes that are included in almost every year's New Year's Gala? Why are they considered to be important? By whom?*

**Clip 1 (32:02—35:01)** I believe fixed themes will be carried on in the future, since they have been kept in New Year's Gala for the past two decades. These are things that we have to or should do on this traditional festival. For instance, you are spending the New Year with your family when the soldiers are still guarding away from home. Many people from different fields are working regardless of the New Year. It is impossible for them to go home and get together with their families. Therefore, they should receive special greetings in New Year's Gala every year. In addition, Chinese living abroad also pay attention to New Year's Gala. Since they care about the show, it is very natural that New Year's Gala pays regards to the overseas Chinese, and the Chinese from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau and all other fifty-five ethnical minorities in China. Chinese New Year is the time when the family gets together. As the Chinese saying goes, we have a country before we have our family. In this sense, our country is like a big family and paying regards to the family members in this big family will not be changed. However, the way to pay regards may have changed. In the production process, I think the new directors will consult the style and experience from the previous years, and carry on the must-have parts. In the case of the old directors who have produced New Year's Gala for many times, such as Lang Kun and Jing Yue in recent years, they are very familiar with the whole thing, which makes them even more likely to follow these fixed patterns.

9. *From the programme observation, it is found that some aspects of mise-en-scene have changed over the years (such as production techniques and costumes), while some aspects have not (such as the fixed themes and presenter's style). What do you think are the reasons behind this finding?*

**Clip 1 (35:50—37:18)** There are mainly two aspects. One aspect is that the technical development brings progresses in set design, lighting, costume, and other outside appearances. In the early times, there were no big screens or digital lightings like nowadays. It is the technical development that makes a big improvement on set design and lighting. If you compare the very first New Year's Gala with today's New Year's Gala, the colour visions are totally different. This is the change that is brought by the technology development, I believe. For instance, the high definition programme is introduced and will be prevailed in the future. Also, there will be more technical changes in the future such as watching New Year's Gala on mobile phones and on the Internet. These are the technical changes on the outside appearance.

**Clip 2 (00:00—02:08)** The other aspect is what you refer to as the mise-en-scene, programme content and programme format, etc. Changes on this aspect are not concerned with technology. Rather, they are, to a great extent, concerned with the year. Each year's New Year's Gala has different feature, focus and highlights for that year. For example, we had Beijing Olympics in 2008, and certainly the Olympic topic was reflected in that year's New Year's Gala. The 2005 New Year's Gala would not include the Olympics theme. Year 2009 was the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of P.R.China and it was natural to include this subject in the 2009 New Year's Gala. As we can predict, the 2011 New Year's Gala will present something about XinHai revolution, because year 2011 is the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the XinHai revolution in the Chinese history. The content in New Year's Gala has the features of each year. There was earthquake in 2008, and therefore the 2008 New Year's Gala need to pay attention to the earthquake and the affected areas. But the earthquake is un-predictable and you do not know what will happen at what time. If it is a big event in the country, then New Year's Gala should pay some attention to it too. Just like the Christmas in the West, the elements in the Christmas do not change over a thousand years. Thus, what we have in the Chinese New Year will not change over a thousand years either. And these elements will not disappear in New Year's Gala. You always have to give New Year regards, celebrate it happily, and get together with your family. This is something that will not be changed.

*10. The critics suggest that the early New Year's Gala seems to be personal and intimate to the audience, while New Year's Gala in recent years appears to be distant and rigid. How has the production focus been shifted over the years in New Year's Gala?*

**Clip 2 (02:54—04:02)** I think there is no set answer to this question. The round-table sitting plan in the studio of the 1984 New Year's Gala may not necessarily be the best way to interact and get close to the audience. Some programmes do not have round-table sitting plan at all, but they still make the audience feel close. There are other ways to interact with the audiences, such as text messages, which is more effective to get close to them. I do not think there is any change or shift in the production focus and values of New Year's Gala over the years.

11. *What do you think is important in the audience survey? Are you concerned with the audience's feedbacks on the New Year's Gala's mise-en-scene?*

**Clip 2 (04:20—05:01)** I have not participated in the audience survey procedure, and therefore I do not know. But I am sure every year big programmes like New Year's Gala carry out surveys and statistics.

12. *When auto-cue/computer generated images/live transmission/phone-in activity/audience voting/fashionable pop music was introduced in New Year's Gala? Was New Year's Gala the first programme to try it out at that time? What were the difficulties encountered? What are their development and changes over the years? What has New Year's Gala learnt from using these new things?*

**Clip 2 (06:17—06:22)** I am not aware of these technical things.

13. *How do New Year's Gala presenters make the audience feel that they are together on this special occasion? How are the ideological promotions embedded in presenters' speeches, performances and body languages?*

**Clip 2 (06:42—10:09)** I think all the New Year's Gala presenters are competent, including Zhao Zhongxiang, who did not receive critical comments in the early times. But if you look at his presenting style now, you would feel it is a bit rigid. Nobody felt in this way in the early times. The young presenters in recent years are also very popular among the audience. They are all experienced from long-time training. Zhu Jun does not become the main presenter over night. Neither does Dong Qing, who used to work in Shanghai. They hosted many other small-scaled evening shows before they started hosting New Year's Gala. Regarding presenters' style in bringing audience closer, I think there are two aspects. One aspect is that the New Year's Gala director will select the presenter liked by the audience. Any experienced and capable director knows who is suitable and competent enough to host New Year's Gala. The other aspect is that those who are selected as the New Year's Gala presenters will try their best to do a good job and to consult how the previous presenters did the job. They will try to improve the previous practice to make sure audience like them. In a word, they will give their best effort to accomplish their task because the influence is big. Since they can be selected as the New Year's Gala presenters, I am sure they will treat the task seriously. I think the presenter's linking lines are pre-written beforehand. These lines are not their spontaneous statements on the scene, but something recited. The ability of the presenters is mainly about how to make the audience feel these recited pre-written lines are natural comments and spontaneous interactions. These presenters are professional in achieving this effect. They seldom do any spontaneous performance or interactions. Most of them act according to the scripts and they can not talk freely as the way they want. As for the emotional intonations and facial expressions, we need to refer to its particular occasion and context. Nowadays the presenters behave more natural and use

more spoken Chinese. Today it is difficult to use spoken Chinese for the emotional intonations and poetic speeches.

*14. Do you see the local New Year's Gala from provincial TV stations as a rival? It is said that the competition between the CCTV New Year's Gala and local New Year's Gala marks the arrival of the Post-New Year's Gala Age. Do you agree?*

**Clip 2 (10:20—12:30)** I do not watch the local New Year's Gala often. But I think, at least there is no harm to have the local New Year's Gala from provincial TV stations. It is a good thing that some people try to challenge CCTV New Year's Gala. The improvement only takes place when there is a competition. But I think they can hardly affect CCTV New Year's Gala, as they are not strong enough to pose challenges to CCTV New Year's Gala. I do not agree with the term 'Post-New Year's Gala Age'. New Year's Gala will always be there and will be carried on in the future. Whether it is made by CCTV or provincial TV stations, as long as there is Chinese New Year, there must be some programmes about the New Year to meet the audience demands. Therefore, TV stations will not stop broadcasting New Year's Gala. New Year's Gala will not disappear. In the predictable future, I do not see the end of CCTV New Year's Gala. CCTV is very difficult to be replaced. There is still a gap between the CCTV New Year's Gala and other local New Year's Gala produced by provincial TV stations. If you compare the local New Year's Galas with the CCTV New Year's Gala, none of them are on the same level as the CCTV New Year's Gala, in terms of content, style, lighting, costumes, and set design, etc. This is something to do with the investment. CCTV New Year's Gala may invest several times or even ten times more in the production than provincial TV stations. No provincial TV stations can achieve this. Hunan TV station, for example, does not have this much investment because it is not powerful enough to invite all the best performers from both China and abroad.

*15. What is New Year's Gala's mise-en-scene influenced by? How is the media policy related to the ideological themes in the evening gala?*

**Clip 2 (12:46—14:02)** The Chinese media policy on television accords with the messages from the state. The media policy will not go against the state ideology. It is the same in every country. The basic policy goes together with the national policy. However, the mise-en-scene of New Year's Gala does not equally reflect Chinese media policy or the state ideology. New Year's Gala is just an entertainment variety show. Hence it cannot reach that high level. Media policy in most cases is reflected in news programmes rather than entertainment programmes. New Year's Gala cannot reach the government level. The government is in charge of so many things, and New Year's Gala is not a big event for the government. For example, events such as earthquake, the Olympics, and the Shanghai World EXPO 2010, are much more important to the government than New Year's Gala.

16. *Is there any other live entertainment show running at the same time as New Year's Gala? How is New Year's Gala different from other entertainment variety show?*

**Clip 2 (14:09—17:28)** I think this has something to do with the marketisation. If the CCTV New Year's Gala has enough influence and audience rating, no single TV station will want to spend a big amount of money and produce another New Year's Gala that no one wants to watch. It would be a waste of money. But CCTV broadcasts three different New Year's Gala simultaneously. One is the entertainment variety gala, one is the Chinese opera gala and another one is the song and dance gala. I have not heard of any TV station which hosts the same kind of New Year's Gala at the same time as CCTV. Otherwise they must be crazy. Nobody would spend this money. But it is possible that they would broadcast the local New Year's Gala one day before or after the CCTV New Year's Gala. There are fifteen days in the Chinese New Year season. Provincial TV stations can choose any other days to broadcast their local New Year's Gala. Also, provincial TV stations cannot invite the celebrities to their local New Year's Gala on the New Year's Eve, because those celebrities are most likely performing in CCTV New Year's Gala. New Year's Gala is just an entertainment show. It is not straightly related to the media policy or the state ideology. New Year's Gala only reflects a tiny small part of the media policy. Like anywhere else in the world, the media policy is shown mainly in news programmes. A TV station is first of all a news agent. Just like the BBC, its main task is to broadcast news. The so-called censorship and editorial policy are all made for news, not entertainment programmes.

17. *What is the particular presenting style of the New Year's Gala presenters? Why this presenting style is carried on for decades? How is this presenting style related to the ideologies in New Year's Gala?*

Question answered in other questions.

18. *What is the reason for keeping using the same group of performers and presenters in New Year's Gala for decades?*

**Clip 2 (17:54—20:19)** Although there are new face performers every year, they cannot challenge the position of old face performers yet. We have to consider the audience rating. The audience rating will drop if there are no old faces on the stage. But if there are no new performers, experiences cannot be passed down, as the old performers will leave the stage sooner or later. For example, old face comedian Song Dandan was not in New Year's Gala last year. Maybe she will not appear in this year's New Year's Gala either. It is not that New Year's Gala has to use those old faces. It is because the old faces still have their popularity, charms and influence to attract the audience. They are used because they can improve the audience rating. But there are new faces every year, although the old faces still take the majority. The audience wants to see them in New Year's Gala and have expectations on them. The way audience watch New Year's Gala is like a kind of appointment, waiting to see their favourite old faces on stage. Directors

know best in terms of who is popular at the moment. I think it is not easy to find out which performers are popular among the audience in the marketisation era. Celebrities charge differently to perform in New Year's Gala according to their popularity. And some performers such as comedian Xiao Shenyang became very popular from last year's New Year's Gala. It is said that he will definitely be in this year's New Year's Gala because otherwise the audience will be disappointed. The media market in China is objective. Stars like Xiao Shenyang earned four billion Chinese Yuan on his box office despite the critical comments on him. This shows he has the influence. If the director does not invite stars like him, then the programme will lose many audiences.

*19. Who is considered to be the centre of New Year's Gala? How is it shown in New Year's Gala?*

**Clip 2 (20:26—21:02)** We should use the phrase 'service object' rather than the 'focus'. The service object is the audience. The stars on the stage are not the service object of CCTV. They are provided with a stage and an opportunity to perform in order to serve the audience eventually.

*20. Everything is prepared, pre-arranged, and performed as if it is true and natural, in order to accomplish the perfect show with no mistakes. What is the disadvantage of this 'made-for-TV' style, if any?*

Question answered in other questions.

## ***Appendix E: Interview Transcript of Mr. Chen Yan***

### **Interview Transcript: Chen Yan (Translated by Pengpeng Xu)**

1. *How do you think of the relationship between the mise-en-scene and the content in a TV programme?*

**Clip 1 (02:40—04:54)** I think, whether it is style or content, in the case of television programmes such as New Year's Gala, what is important is to express its opinions and themes. As far as I am concerned, I have not found a routine between the two things. We should not get our mind stuck in one particular mise-en-scene or content, especially in the case of TV programmes. Television programmes do not require for the best or the worst style, but they require for the most suitable and accurate style for the content. Everything has to be based on its content. The style has to greatly promote the visuality of the television programme. This is enough. There is a certain format for a news programme, and a certain format for an entertainment programme. But very often, these certain formats make the audiences feel tired of them, very tired of them. Once the audiences are tired of watching these certain formats, they fail to bring up the curiosity level of the audiences in the process of media consumption. When there is a certain routine in a TV programme and once you are tired of watching it, this programme will become a trash.

**Clip 1 (04:54—06:05)** Therefore there are several things to bear in mind when it comes to mise-en-scene: First of all, it must be operative. Secondly, the theme you want to express. Thirdly, do not try to search for the so-called 'best angle', as you never know. But you have to find out the most accurate way to express the theme. Certainly, there is no fixed mise-en-scene for different content. The outcome is to find the most appropriate mise-en-scene to match the content. I personally do not think in a 'should be' way that there is only one style for each certain content. In other words, the reason why there is one certain format is because this format can at least accomplish the task when a medium is very difficult to operate. When this certain format becomes a routine and the live show can be delivered safely and smoothly, then we can try to be creative by breaking this certain format and style. However, breaking this certain format can be controversial. But we have to bear in mind that expressing the theme accurately is most important.

2. *In your opinion, what is the mise-en-scene of New Year's Gala like? It is said that New Year's Gala is considered to be old-fashioned and over-familiarised by the audience. What are the reasons behind its particular mise-en-scene?*

**Clip 1 (06:14—09:45)** Hmmm...The mise-en-scene of New Year's gala is very complicated, just like the content it expresses. In terms of the mise-en-scene, it comes with the programme content, from sketch comedy, to song and dance, to Chinese opera, to acrobatics, etc. up to more than twenty performance genres. The mise-en-scene of

New Year's Gala has two characteristics: firstly, it is decided by our country's current status; and secondly, it is decided by our traditional culture on the New Year's Eve. New Year's Gala is a special product that cannot be found by any certain routine. It gradually forms its own mise-en-scene over time. From the aesthetic perspective, New Year's Gala lasts too long that people feel tired from watching. However, people need to feel tired on the New Year's Eve because all the Chinese want to have a great celebration of the New Year by having fun throughout the night. New Year's Gala bears culture, entertainment and many other things. Although New Year's Gala is just a medium, it bears more than the medium can express. From the technical perspective, New Year's Gala breaks a routine. New Year's Gala contains many fixed signs and symbols which cannot be taken away despite of many critical comments. This is why many people criticise that New Year's Gala has many old elements. But it is a New Year celebration, a ceremony, which cannot be changed through innovation. For example, when you buy Chinese couplets to put up around the door frame, you get the couplets in red and golden colour like everyone else. If I give you a blue or green couplet, no matter how pretty it is, do you want it? Needless to say, when you buy Chinese couplets, you buy the ones in red and golden colours without thinking. Talking of red colour, it is widely seen in the New Year celebration, which comes from the Chinese traditional culture. Yet red colour brings technical problems in the production of New Year's Gala. Red is the most problematic colour for a television programme, as it is difficult to create the 3-D effect with red colour because of its sensitivity to lighting. Therefore it is not easy to manage the red colour. Yet red is the major colour of our traditional culture. This is something that we cannot change. In this circumstance, if the production team can cope with the red colour in a good way, then it is successful. From the technical point of view, it breaks the routines that we learn from the books about TV production. It is difficult to put New Year's Gala into any category, as it is special on its own. It is very, very difficult in this sense.

**Clip 1 (09:45—13:12)** Talking about old-fashioned, it depends on what you want to express. The so-called old-fashioned comes from the fact that the audience sees too often of these traditional symbols and signs. But as a matter of fact, they cannot be rejected. When you are put in an old environment every year, it is very easy to feel in this way, and as the New Year's Gala production team, we feel the same. But what can we change? Setting off fireworks on the New Year's Day is old-fashioned, but we still have to do it nowadays as a tradition dated back to ancient times. It is the same reason with the busy and loud opening scenes and the New Year midnight countdown, as all these features come from the tradition of the Chinese New Year celebration that has been carried on over hundreds of years. I think it is the same situation as in the Oscar award ceremony, which does not have other styles, either. There is a set operating procedure in every medium. In some cases, the style can be changed. But for a big scale live entertainment variety show like New Year's Gala, it is not an experiment. It does not allow you to try all the fancy things. What it needs most is being steady and reliable. I admit that New Year's Gala is criticised as old-fashioned. However, you cannot simply compare New Year's Gala with any other TV programmes. After all, New Year's Gala is just like another dish offered on the New Year's dinner feast. There is no need to care too much about it. For me, making New Year's Gala is like making thirty

thousand New Year greetings cards. You can pick any one you like, and leave the rest that you don't like. Relax; it is just a New Year. New Year's Gala is produced by all professionals. All the evening galas are made under the certain frameworks which are regulated by the national status. As for those critical comments on newspaper, I always want to have some suggestions, not just complaints. If you think New Year's Gala is old-fashioned, then show us something that is not old-fashioned. If you cannot show us, then we have no other ways. To some extent, the mise-en-scene of New Year's Gala is a routine, which is not conservative, but safe. After all, it is a live broadcast which is totally different from pre-recorded broadcast. In pre-recorded broadcast, you can choose one out of a hundred items to broadcast. In the case of live broadcast, if the mind of the director or the performer wanders somewhere else, it will lead to the failure of the show. New Year's Gala runs live for five hours in one go. In the case of the Hollywood movies, despite of their ambitious commercial goals, they normally only run two and a half hours. It is very difficult to handle a live show which lasts five hours.

**Clip 1 (13:12—16:46)** In terms of song and dance, it is one of the New Year customs. Apart from listening to the song or the Chinese opera, every family also needs the song and dance to express the New Year atmosphere at home. Every country and culture around the world expresses the festival celebration through song and dance. Give me an exception? For example, the samba dance in Brazil always keeps its own style, then why it is not criticised as old-fashioned? Actually all shows have their own routines. What is crucial is the particular format of your own country. The most important thing is to guarantee a safe broadcast. If I have to choose between innovation and security, I will not choose innovation no matter how creative I am. I would rather make sure the show is secured without bringing any inconvenience to the audience. In other words, be innovative on the basis of security. Innovation comes from the accumulation of time. If there has to be innovation in each year's New Year's Gala, how would it look like by now after these two decades? We cannot break the routine, but a revolution will take place after the accumulation of time. This does not happen according to our own will. Having watched Hollywood films for so many years, I would say the film AVATAR is revolutionary for its 3-D technology. The Hollywood production had waited for many years until this new technology became mature enough to practise. This is innovation. Therefore, I always believe we should respect science and technology. We should not give up the accumulated experience easily. Otherwise, losing experience for innovation may be even a bigger sacrifice.

**Clip 1 (16:46—19:36)** Different from the Western counterparts, we only have three months in total to make New Year's Gala, from planning to producing, and to rehearsal. This is not easy for us, as New Year's Gala is not a commercial entity yet. We are not a private company specializing in making television programmes. We have many other tasks to do everyday. It has become a routine for us to start making New Year's Gala three months before the Chinese New Year. Our tasks mainly involve finding the performances which can represent the standard of the year. This task on its own is very important. To find enough good performances to fill in the five-hour show is very difficult. A year passes quickly. Now it is March and soon we will have to start making New Year's Gala again in three months. In addition, it is the environment that requires

the change. If the stage looks the same, it becomes difficult for the audiences to accept. I think New Year's Gala is like a home-made dish. You stir-fry this dish every year, but you hope to see something new and different. You cannot compare New Year's Gala with the Olympics. The Olympics is a great visual feast. It takes three years to prepare for its opening ceremony alone. New Year's Gala is different, as it is a production by all the professionals who are familiar with the whole thing. To us, we just want to provide an alternative for the audiences to have a good New Year celebration. Sometimes the audiences give too much expectation on New Year's Gala. After all, it is just an evening show.

3. *How is the Chinese media policy reflected in New Year's Gala?*

**Clip 1 (21:04—21:50)** I am not the top leader, therefore I do not know much about the media policy. You seem to concern more things than I do. I am too busy to consider these things. There are different people working in different fields. I do not need to consult the media policy when making New Year's Gala. The government gives lots of space to us. Maybe there are some instructions to the management level, but not to the production people like us.

4. *How are the mise-en-scene constructed and performed to become a made-for-TV product that seems natural? What is the purpose behind this application?*

**Clip 1 (22:03—23:05)** On the live scene of New Year's Gala, all the studio audiences are in the mood of participation, including their applause and laughter. All these are to create certain atmosphere for the evening show. Some performances need to have this seemingly natural interaction, because that is where the performance starts. I think it is very normal to do that, which is nothing special. It depends on the requirement and does not have to be included in every year's gala. After all, some performances in this evening show are fictions. This practice is to make the audiences feel more relaxed and also to create certain atmosphere for the show.

5. *Over the past twenty years, presenters have become an important icon of New Year's Gala. Regarding their presenting style, what aspects have (or have not) changed and why?*

Question answered in other questions.

6. *New Year's Gala has experienced the audience rating decline in recent years. How do you understand this situation? Is CCTV concerned? What actions have been carried out to improve its audience rating?*

**Clip 1 (23:05—26:16)** Hmm...I would call the situation audience distributary rather than audience decline. There are more media and information available nowadays. In the early times, we had only one TV set for the whole neighbourhood and we all gathered together to watch TV programmes. At present, every household has at least one TV set. Also education and the development of the society make the preferences and tastes of the audiences more diverse. Therefore, New Year's Gala does not appear interesting to some young people, for example. But this does not stand for audience decline, as the audience group is only diverted. However, the level of attention has not dropped. You cannot expect New Year's Gala to be in the same position as in the old times. No one is worried about the audience distributary. Each channel has its own speciality. Even the most popular movie in the theatre does not have as many audiences as a television programme does. In this case, the audiences for films are taken away by TV programmes. When television was not available, we all used to watch movies. Technology has changed many things. This is not something that we can worry about. Something we need to bear in mind is that the producers of New Year's Gala have changed to another generation. Therefore the original format of New Year's Gala will change accordingly. After twenty years, I will not work for New Year's Gala any more and it is another new generation taking over the job. This will lead to another change. Besides, the audience rating shows that New Year's Gala is more popular among the Northern Chinese audience than the Southern Chinese audience. The different provinces in China are like different countries in Europe. There are big differences in their culture and custom. The dialect and culture of the Cantonese people are very much influenced by Hong Kong.

7. *Due to the mass educational function, the sketch comedy and stand-up comedy in New Year's Gala have established their unique characteristics, which is different from other comedies on TV. What is your understanding towards it?*

**Clip 1 (26:20—28:03)** I do not have much to say about the educational meaning of the New Year's Gala comedies. It has something to do with the people who create those comedies, and it has no direct relation with CCTV. The material of the comedy is selected by the local artists and it has to show the characteristics of our current society. Comedies are based on the stories that take place during a particular timeline, with its originality from news and entertainment. It is up to the creator to decide the material. It does not work in a way that New Year's Gala has to use the comedy which contains educational meanings. What if those educational comedies are not funny?

8. *What do you think are the fixed themes that are included in almost every year's New Year's Gala? Why are they considered to be important? By whom?*

**Clip 1 (28:35—30:42)** I think China is a big country with 56 different ethnicities. Our biggest wish is to hope people from all ethnic backgrounds celebrate the New Year together and have great fun on the New Year's Eve. This is a theme that we want to express greatly in New Year's Gala. For other common themes, we try to look for the

performance that is suitable for the evening gala from different angles such as artistic angle and entertaining angle. New Year's Gala has a structure. The reason why people pay attention to New Year's Gala at the same time criticising it is because New Year's Gala has a strict structure. This structure is so strong that it is not easily destroyed by harsh critics and comments. This structure is reasonable, and it shows its strength in the programme as well as in the production. Random ideas and critical suggestions cannot be realised easily in New Year's Gala. I think many of the fixed themes in New Year's Gala carry polite manners and traditions, for instance, the ringing of the New Year bell at midnight, giving New Year regards to the overseas Chinese, and the song 'I Will Never Forget Tonight' to end the evening gala. These things cannot be separated, and they all come from the Chinese traditional manners and moral standards. Giving New Year regards to people in the evening gala is just like giving thanks to people in Oscar or Grammy Awards Ceremony.

**Clip 1 (30:42—32:12)** To be honest, the fixed themes do not take a large part of New Year's Gala. All the large-scale successful programmes have this characteristic. For example, the Olympics Opening Ceremony is also fixed in terms of its total length, the appearance order of the athletes, the introduction of each country, and irreplaceable procedures such as displaying the five rings, flying pigeons, firing the Olympic torch, and singing the Olympic anthem while raising the Olympic flag. These things cannot be taken away, even though you may not like them. In the case of New Year's Gala, there is no need to break this set of patterns and routines. The past two decades have already enabled New Year's Gala to form its own tradition. I think we should leave the changes of New Year's Gala to our next generation, based on their new understandings and perceptions in the future.

9. *From the programme observation, it is found that some aspects of mise-en-scene have changed over the years (such as production techniques and costumes), while some aspects have not (such as the fixed themes and presenter's style). What do you think are the reasons behind this finding?*

**Clip 1 (32:29—34:05)** The observation shows the nation's current condition and status. Every country has its own way to express. Every country's cultural industry is closely connected with the country's social system and religion. The interest of the country is always bigger than the interest of the artist. As long as there is no change in the country's social system, New Year's Gala will stay the same. Let's put it in this way: we are a big country and it is a polite manner to greet the overseas Chinese living abroad and probably only people like them can feel the importance of these greetings. This is a Chinese manner in itself. There is nothing wrong that we greet the people and give best wishes to every one. New Year's Gala bears such a big audience group, and therefore we have to make sure all the audiences can be covered, such as the overseas students and army soldiers who cannot be home with the families on the New Year. To be honest, even if New Year's Gala does not give these greetings and wishes, your family and friends will give you anyway, which is common sense. The reason why the style of New Year's Gala has hardly changed over the years is because we want to cover

every aspect. In order to cover everything, each performance is made to target one certain audience group. New Year's Gala is a dish designed for the New Year feast and all the Chinese people with different backgrounds and preferences are expecting it. Therefore, we have to prepare the performances that attract each age group. On the New Year's Eve, there is no such evening gala that covers almost every aspect. Trying to cover every artistic form disturbs the order of evening gala, but it establishes its own style.

*10. The critics suggest that the early New Year's Gala seems to be personal and intimate to the audience, while New Year's Gala in recent years appears to be distant and rigid. How has the production focus been shifted over the years in New Year's Gala?*

**Clip 1 (34:20—36:22)** The production focus has changed with time and people, naturally. For example, in the 1980s, the production ability and condition was very limited, right? The kind of celebration in the early New Year's Gala does not exist any more nowadays. At present, there is hardly any work unit or company organising performances within the employees or communities. The old tradition in the early times such as wearing new clothes and making dumplings for the New Year has gradually declined nowadays. For instance, we buy the ready-to-eat New Year food such as frozen dumplings from supermarkets instead of making them by ourselves at home. Also, if you work away from your hometown such as in Beijing, you might spend the New Year in Beijing rather than in your hometown. There are so many changes brought by the mobility of the population and the change of lifestyle. Therefore, all these changes seem to be reasonable. When technology progresses to a certain level, the big scale activity becomes very normal. The size of the movie theatres in the old times cannot be compared with the multi-media 3-D movie theatres today. Everything changes with time and these changes cannot be determined. It is a natural process. Different times have different landmarks.

**Clip 1 (36:22—38:00)** In the case of New Year's Gala, nowadays it is not only broadcast on TV, but also on the Internet. There are many factors and technical means that bring natural changes to it. These changes do not take place suddenly, but are formed gradually. In the early times, we say the relationship between watching and performing is like a close communication. Nowadays, the relationship is more separated and independent from each other. This is a very common change which takes place everywhere in the world and is formed naturally over time. The same situation applies in local TV stations. However, I do not think this change will make the audiences feel distant. In addition to the CCTV New Year's Gala, local New Year's Gala is also produced everywhere by provincial TV stations and there are many other kinds of programmes about the Chinese New Year. All these programmes have a bigger scale than the early New Year's Gala in the 1980s, with many studio audiences and interactions.

**Clip 2 (00:00—02:03)** If someone feels more emotionally close to the early New Year's Gala in the 1980s, that may be because that people tend to miss the old times and things related to it. At that time, there were not so many things to do and watching New Year's Gala was a big thing on that night. The audience expectation on New Year's Gala, in terms of aesthetic appreciation and demand, was not too high. The attitude of the audiences was more relaxed because the information was not overflowing like today. It is a different situation nowadays. At present, it is more difficult to manage the whole situation. Whatever you do, there are people standing from different perspectives and explaining things from different angles. After a careful measurement and consideration, we want to make sure New Year's Gala is operative. Sometime if we look back at the things that belonged to our parents' generation, we feel more special and different, just like the way we appreciate the old movies. Some people may find the early New Year's Gala interesting, as they watch it with curiosity. But if you watch the early New Year's Gala every year like nowadays, you would prefer the mise-en-scene we have today.

*11. What do you think is important in the audience survey? Are you concerned with the audience's feedbacks on the New Year's Gala's mise-en-scene?*

**Clip 2 (02:16—05:18)** There is a special organisation in charge of the audience survey. I think the fact that audiences are still paying attention to New Year's Gala is most important. If you want to know the exact time of watching New Year's Gala, the royalty level, or the satisfaction level, no country or organisation can find out all these details. But paying attention to the programme equals to satisfaction. As long as the audiences pay attention to New Year's Gala, it shows they still like it or care about it. Imagine, if you think a person is annoying, would you bother to give suggestions to this person? Regarding the technical management of the audience survey, it is not my area of expertise. Certainly we care about the audiences' feedbacks on the mise-en-scene of New Year's Gala, otherwise why would CCTV bother to waste time and effort in making it? CCTV pays great attention to the mise-en-scene of New Year's Gala, which is the most representative in China. Some people complained that there were too many background dancers, but when I asked them if they have any better solutions, they all answered no. Having less background dancers means less cost on the costumes. It saves money for us, so why not? We want to celebrate the New Year in a generous and great way. Otherwise, we could have put the award winning violinists playing violin for three hours instead of all the effort. It does not work in this way. New Year's Gala has to be informative by offering a variety of performances. People born in different eras are all watching New Year's Gala at the same time. What you think is good may not be my favourite. Hence, I suggest our attitude should be more relaxed towards New Year's Gala.

*12. When auto-cue/computer generated images/live transmission/phone-in activity/audience voting/fashionable pop music was introduced in New Year's Gala? Was New Year's Gala the first programme to try it out at that time? What were the*

*difficulties encountered? What are their development and changes over the years? What has New Year's Gala learnt from using these new things?*

**Clip 2 (05:29—07:06)** As for the auto-cue, we have never used it in New Year's Gala. Presenters do not need auto-cue at all. They are professional presenters and reciting the lines is their main task. New Year's Gala is broadcast live, and it is also shown in presenting. There is no need to display the lines for the presenter, as there will be some temporary changes during the live transmission. (Coughing) We only use the auto-cue for the new singers as they are more likely to get nervous and forget the lyrics for the songs. Since the very first New Year's Gala, it always has been broadcast live. Again, New Year's Gala is not a place for experiments. For most of the new technology facilities, we always try it elsewhere first before using it in New Year's Gala, to make sure nothing goes wrong during this national live show.

*13. How do New Year's Gala presenters make the audience feel that they are together on this special occasion? How are the ideological promotions embedded in presenters' speeches, performances and body languages?*

Question answered in other questions.

*14. Do you see the local New Year's Gala from provincial TV stations as a rival? It is said that the competition between the CCTV New Year's Gala and local New Year's Gala marks the arrival of the Post-New Year's Gala Age. Do you agree?*

**Clip 2 (08:32—09:35)** No, it is not necessary to consider the local New Year's Gala as our rival. I think it is very natural and every one has his own choice and preference. It would make New Year's Gala more interesting if it becomes more localised. Audience would be glad to see some performances in New Year's Gala with local characteristics that fit into the local celebration. As far as CCTV is concerned, we are just making an evening gala and the idea of making competitions with other evening galas does not exist in our mind. You may like it and you may not. We do not mind about those critical comments and complaints. After all, we choose to do some work that bears responsibility. But the local evening galas do not pose any threat to CCTV New Year's Gala.

**Clip 2 (09:35—12:06)** However, I do believe the Post-New Year's Gala era has arrived and I have hoped for its arrival for a long time. I only think its arrival is too late. If every family member in a household all agree that the Post-New Year's Gala era has arrived, then I would believe so. There will always be new means to replace the old one. When the Post-New Year's Gala era arrives, it means more alternatives and choices for us. New Year's Gala bears a great cultural and traditional status in China. It is not up to us to decide its existence in the future. According to my prediction, I do not think New Year's Gala will disappear in the future. People can feel free to express opinions and suggestions. However, the show will go on even if there are objections. Some artists

may complain that New Year's Gala is old-fashioned and unnecessary. But what would be a good replacement of New Year's Gala? A music concert? I do not think so. On the New Year's Eve, every channel offers different forms of art. Some are specialising in Chinese opera, and some in pop music. However, people still watch CCTV New Year's Gala as a priority.

**Clip 2 (12:06—14:22)** Everything in New Year's Gala is up to the professional standard. For example, it makes a big difference between the professional football players and the amateurs. Regarding the complaint that the audiences cannot participate in the production of New Year's Gala, I also want to participate in the film production of AVATAR, but is it possible? Not all the work can be participated by every body. New Year's Gala is organised by TV professionals, and therefore the programme can only be done by them. However, we do hope there are other ways of making it. The non-professionals may have fantastic ideas in making TV programmes, but it is not that easy to realise the plan. I want to participate in many things such as the Oscar Award Ceremony and Hollywood productions, but I do not blame others for not letting me participate, because I am not professional in these areas.

*15. What is New Year's Gala's mise-en-scene influenced by? How is the media policy related to the ideological themes in the evening gala?*

**Clip 2 (14:54—19:00)** Unlike the situation abroad, there is no pure entertainment, pure art, or pure culture in Chinese television. In China, these three elements are closely connected and inseparable. New Year's Gala is a combination of entertainment, culture and art. The perception of aesthetics in China is different from that in any other country in the world, as it inherits the tradition and culture passed down from several thousand years ago. It is full of two-dimensional aesthetics. The state ideology is related with the channel, not the programme. Therefore it has no direct connection with New Year's Gala. In every country, the media bears the main-stream culture and direction of that country. Needless to say, the same situation applies in CNN and BBC. I think anybody who works in any media in the world, whether it is BBC or CNN, they do not have to be especially trained on the state ideology before doing the job. If a media person even needs to be taught on the common sense such as state ideology, then everybody can work in the media. We know what the word 'country' means. People give lots of expectation on state media, because it plays an important role in forming the national main-stream culture. That is, the media's power. For people like us, we understand the concept of a country. There is no need to give us a special lesson before we organise an activity. The fixed themes such as greetings to the overseas Chinese, army soldiers and inviting Olympic champions do not come from the instructions from the government. Just like in the Oscar Award Ceremony, all the award winners have to say special thanks to their parents, fans and managers. These are just the things that you should do and it is common sense. New Year's Gala bears the manner of the great traditional Chinese culture. We give regards to all the Chinese people from all background and professions on behalf of CCTV, just like the fixed speeches given by the people in the Oscar Award Ceremony. There is no need to change these cultural manners.

16. *Is there any other live entertainment show running at the same time as New Year's Gala? How is New Year's Gala different from other entertainment variety show?*

**Clip 3 (00:16—02:00)** Hmm...I am not so sure whether other channels also live broadcast evening galas on that night, but it is mainly the CCTV New Year's Gala. Most people go home to celebrate the New Year with their families. It is unnecessary to make a live programme which hardly has any audience. As far as I know, there is no other entertainment live show from other channels running at the same time as New Year's Gala, as CCTV is too big in the country. Regarding the difference between New Year's Gala and other entertainment variety shows, New Year's Gala is still powerful and influential. Other entertainment shows all belong to the magazine or specialised programme category, whereas New Year's Gala combines the essence of the whole year. It is the biggest in scale, representing the national standard as well as the professional standard, whether it is from the perspective of production or the programme itself. It is made by the top production team in the country composed of the most experienced television people.

17. *What is the particular presenting style of the New Year's Gala presenters? Why this presenting style is carried on for decades? How is this presenting style related to the ideologies in New Year's Gala?*

**Clip 3 (02:38—05:38)** I think New Year's Gala tends to continue the characteristics over the years. The current New Year's Gala still has the trace of the early New Year's Gala in the 1980s. For example, we still have the performance genres dominated by song and dance, sketch and stand-up comedies nowadays. These are the experience accumulated over the years. China is a big country. There are so many things happening and so many things needs to be known by the people. There are many factors and it is impossible to cover all of them. It is common for New Year's Gala presenters to use their feelings and emotions when expressing the theme. This is a means, which I think is also a style. Most of the audience with life experience can still accept this presenting style. However, this particular presenting style may not be understood easily by the young generation. But once they grow up, they will understand all these things. Different generations do different things and have different feelings on things. Within a particular age group, people will share the same feelings and opinions.

18. *What is the reason for keeping using the same group of performers and presenters in New Year's Gala for decades?*

**Clip 3 (06:17—08:42)** Regarding the old face issue, it is very paradoxical. Very often, we try to put new faces on stage, but only receive complaints from the audience that they are not good enough. Also, new performers tend to forget their lines on stage, while the old performers will never be in this situation because they are very

experienced. Problems like this do not have easy solutions and sometimes I also think about it myself. In Oscar Award Ceremony, the appearance of old face performers still win the respect and applause from the people. As a matter of fact, many new faces have been in New Year's Gala, although not in leading roles. Audiences often complain that there are so many good performers, why him/her? But the new faces that we put on stage are already the best and audiences just cannot realize it very quickly.

*19. Who is considered to be the centre of New Year's Gala? How is it shown in New Year's Gala?*

**Clip 3 (09:15—10:16)** Hmm...Needless to say, audience is the centre of New Year's Gala. For those special talents performing in New Year's Gala, firstly, they all come from ordinary family background. Secondly, having them on the stage is because very often they are related to the next performance. Showing off their talents is not the purpose behind it; rather, it is used as a link to connect the two performances together. It is not easy to create natural links throughout the five-hour live show. Actually it is a good way to take advantage of every minute of the show.

*20. Everything is prepared, pre-arranged, and performed as if it is true and natural, in order to accomplish the perfect show with no mistakes. What is the disadvantage of this 'made-for-TV' style, if any?*

Questions answered in other questions.