

HONG KONG MEDIA IN THE CHANGING POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

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In 1996, the outgoing British governor of Hong Kong high-lighted press freedom as one of the benchmarks by which the “one country, two systems” policy would be judged after China regained sovereignty over the colony. “Is the Hong Kong press still free,” he asked, “with inhibited coverage of China and of issues on which China has strong views?” The question underlined one of the major concerns in Hong Kong prior to the 1997 handover. In light of the sharp differences between the two political systems and the two societies, many feared that the Communist regime would use direct and indirect political pressure to rein in the freewheeling Hong Kong media.

More than four and a half years after the transfer of power, there has been no serious erosion of press freedom in Hong Kong, and Beijing has not overtly interfered with the Hong Kong press.¹ Nevertheless, the issue of press freedom has become more complex, as conflicts have emerged between different conceptions of the media’s proper role. On several occasions, remarks on the media by senior mainland officials have created anxiety among journalists and society at large about the media’s ability to function independently of government influence. In April 2000, a senior official at the central government’s Liaison Office in Hong Kong, Wang Fengchao, warned the Hong Kong media not to portray views that advocate Taiwan independence as “normal.” The media, Wang said, is obligated to support China’s sovereignty and integrity. The controversy underlined the sharp differences in the role of the media in the two societies.²

The media’s watchdog role against the abuse of official power is particularly important in Hong Kong, where the possibility of full democracy remains remote. Tung was chosen in 1996 by a 400-member Selection Committee composed mainly of local business leaders and the professional elites for a five-year term beginning July 1, 1997. The second Chief Executive Election will be held on March 24, 2002. The new leader will be elected by a 800-member Election Committee composed of Hong Kong citizens elected from designated organizations such as business associations, labor unions and professional bodies. In the present legislature, only 24 of the 60 members are elected by the public through geographic constituencies. The remaining 36 are chosen through “indirect elections.” Of these, six are chosen by the 800-member Election Committee. The other 30 come from “functional constituencies” including associations of lawyers, doctors, architects and businesspeople. According to the Basic Law, the earliest possible date for the full public election of both the Chief Executive and the legislature is 2008, subject to a set of strict requirements including consent of the Chief Executive, two-thirds of the legislature and two-thirds of the Hong Kong deputies to the Chinese National People’s Congress in Beijing. Most analysts believe that the possibility of full democracy by 2008 remains remote.

THE GOVERNMENT AND THE MEDIA

As in most free societies, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region's (SAR) government and media have a love-hate relationship. It is true that there has been no direct interference with the press since the handover. No newspaper has been closed down because of political pressure. Nor has there been new legislation that undermines press freedom. Beijing's self-restraint with respect to Hong Kong's internal affairs since the handover has helped reduce fears about media freedom, and as a result the line between pro-China and pro-Hong Kong media has become somewhat blurred.³ Public perceptions of the Communist government have also gradually improved, with most people largely satisfied that Beijing has honored its promise to give the SAR a high degree of autonomy. Top Hong Kong government leaders have also underlined press freedom as one of the four pillars of the city's success. Chief Secretary Donald Tsang has said there was "no room for compromise" on press freedom.⁴ Both Tsang and his predecessor Anson Chan, described by Newsweek magazine as "the conscience of Hong Kong," are known as strong defenders of a free press. Top SAR officials, including Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa, have acknowledged the importance of a free press to the preservation of a free and open society.

On the other hand, SAR government leaders have on several occasions expressed concern over what they see as the Hong Kong media's shortcomings. Faced with the worst economic recession in decades, government and business leaders have blamed the media for spreading unnecessary pessimism and for being overly critical, arguing that this has fueled public discontent with the government and deepened the negative public mood. Secretary for Justice Elsie Leung, who serves as the government's top legal adviser, has accused the media of fabricating news, disguising wild speculation as fact and attempting to foster discord among civil servants.⁵ Secretary for Civil Service Joseph Wong has urged the media to emphasize positive news about the civil service, rather than focusing on its failures and the deficiencies, such as laziness and low productivity in some government departments.

In April 1999, speaking at a lunch hosted by the Newspaper Society of Hong Kong – an organization representing newspaper proprietors – Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa expressed his concern over developments in the media: "In the past six to twelve months, there have been a lot of views expressed in society. Many people have asked me, why has the media become more market-oriented? Has it given top priority to making profits and increasing sales? It is true that everybody, every business organization needs to make money, but apart from press freedom, should the media also shoulder some social responsibility?" Tung's question implies its own answer: the press should assume social responsibility when exercising its freedom.

One target of political pressure was Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK), a public broadcaster funded by the SAR government and given full editorial independence in its operations. While the government has refrained from criticizing the public broadcasting organization, some pro-China conservatives have stepped up criticism of the station in the past few years. According to them, the RTHK – as a government-funded broadcaster – should operate in a different way from commercial broadcasting companies.⁶ Specifically, they think it is obliged to explain and promote government policies. It is

hardly surprising that there have been calls from some pro-China politicians for Tung to step up control over the RTHK if he is re-elected in March 2002 for a second five-year term. Among the fiercest critics was Xu Simin, a veteran Hong Kong delegate of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. They were infuriated by RTHK programs that sharply criticized and ridiculed SAR leaders, including Tung. One major controversy erupted in September 2001, when the program "Headliner" likened the Tung government to the Taliban regime in the way it treated the people and held on to power. Tung commented that the program was in "bad taste." The government-appointed Broadcasting Authority, whose functions include handling public complaints against broadcasting organizations, found the program lacking in impartiality. It gave its most lenient form of reprimand, "advising" RTHK to strike a fair balance among different viewpoints. Under the law, the Broadcasting Authority can impose a fine for any breach of guidelines in broadcasting programs.⁷

The media and political analysts rightly observe that some senior SAR officials have a somewhat adversarial view of the media and that they are inclined to support more government regulation. Jonathan Fenby, the former editor of the English-language *South China Morning Post* (SCMP), wrote in *The New York Times* in July 1999 that "there's been a much stronger reaction to the newspaper, from officialdom, from business circles, from members of the establishment, than at any time since the handover." Margaret Ng, a barrister who was elected through the legal functional constituency to sit on the Legislative Council, observed in the same issue that "As a whole, newspapers have become steadily more pro-government since the handover."

Official criticism of the media has given rise to fears among some journalists that the government was searching for an excuse to rein in the media for political purposes. Some journalists are adamant that Tung, certain senior SAR officials and politicians who have the ear of the central government are always looking for opportunities to tighten their grip on the media. Others have observed a degree of government favoritism towards newspapers that show more sympathy for the administration, granting these newspapers exclusive interviews and leaks.⁸ Some are also concerned that media owners' substantial mainland investments, and their subsequent dependence on good relations with Beijing, may lead to self-censorship on topics likely to offend the central government. As a result, the anxiety of journalists about press freedom remains deep, especially with regard to self-censorship. A 2001 survey of journalists conducted by the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) revealed that 14% of respondents believe the problem of self-censorship exists and is serious. Sixty-one percent say the problem exists but is not serious. Twenty-two percent say there is a "little bit" of self-censorship, and only 3% say there is none at all.

On the other hand, the survey also showed that a lack of press freedom and political interference in the media were not among journalists' major concerns. When asked to choose and rank the five main reasons that might make them quit their profession, 44% of journalists cited low pay and 36% mentioned the pressure of the job. Other top reasons include lack of opportunities for further study (32%), irregular work hours (30%), and lack of opportunities for promotion (28%). The prospect of reduced press freedom (21%) and political interference with journalistic work (18%) ranked ninth and tenth. CUHK pollster Clement So commented that the seemingly contradictory findings showed that

while journalists feel that the overall political situation has improved, they do not yet feel completely comfortable with the situation.

FROM POLITICS TO ECONOMICS

People are frustrated with Hong Kong's economic recession, rising unemployment and a spate of government blunders since the handover. Many blame Tung for the problems. According to a poll conducted by the University of Hong Kong (HKU) Public Opinion Program, public confidence in the SAR government has fallen below that in the central government. Confidence in the central government rose from 43.5% in October 2001 to 51.5% in November, a record high since the survey was first conducted in July 1997. The confidence rating of the SAR government in November was 44.1%.

The mainland economy has also become increasingly important to Hong Kong, which currently faces a double economic challenge: accelerated economic restructuring towards a knowledge-based economy, and a sharp deterioration of the global economy since the September 11 terrorist attacks. With the further opening up of the mainland economy after its accession to the World Trade Organization, Hong Kong has to reposition itself to cope with increased competition for investment in China. While it remains unclear how Hong Kong can benefit from a more open Chinese economy, the mainstream view is that the momentum of capital and human movement to the mainland is irresistible. As a sign of this trend, a large-scale job fair organized by mainland-based firms in Hong Kong – the first of its kind – attracted thousands of professionals who have their eyes on the mainland's greener pastures.⁹

Amid this trend – captured in the popular phrase “go north” – and softening attitudes towards the mainland, the CUHK survey of journalists showed a significant change in their views about the news media's political inclinations. Compared with a similar survey conducted in 1996, the new survey indicates that journalists believe the media has become more politically homogeneous. The mass-oriented Chinese-language *Apple Daily* was rated the most pro-Hong Kong, with 6.51 points out of a possible 10 (the higher the number, the more pro-Hong Kong the media source; the lower the score, the more pro-China). Asia Television received the lowest score at 4.54, followed closely by the Beijing-funded newspaper, *Ta Kung Pao* at 4.63 points. The gap between the highest and the lowest score in 2001 was 1.97 points. The corresponding figure in the 1996 survey was 4.65 points.¹⁰ According to the scholars who carried out the survey, the results show that the concepts of “pro-China” and “pro-Hong Kong” have lost their clarity, and are no longer seen as mutually exclusive. The ideological differences among the media have correspondingly become smaller.¹¹

The subtle change of political identity among the Hong Kong media is part of the growing influence of the “one country” factor in post-handover Hong Kong. The pride in being Chinese has manifestly grown stronger in light of positive developments in China over the past few years. There are some clear cases of strong nationalist feelings in Hong Kong. The whole community reacted with enthusiasm and hope to news of China's formal entry to the World Trade Organization, Beijing's successful bid for the 2008 Olympics and China's victory in the qualifier match for the World Cup Finals in 2002. Battered by the worst economic crisis in decades, businessmen and professionals are increasingly aware of the importance of China's vast market and of greater integration between the two economies. The new economic dynamic is bound to have an impact on

the balance between the “one country” and “two systems” components of the Hong Kong-mainland relationship.

Accordingly, the Hong Kong media has stepped up its coverage of development in China, especially the opportunities and challenges in the new economic synergy. In stark contrast to the coverage of China in the aftermath of the bloody 1989 crackdown in Tiananmen Square, the media has recently portrayed a more positive picture of China. Reports on human rights and democracy in China are receiving conspicuously less attention from the media, which has become fascinated instead by the rapid economic growth of Shanghai and the Pearl River Delta cities. The notion of a “Shanghai vs. Hong Kong” economic contest has become entrenched in the minds of the public thanks to the media’s sanguine, and at times over-zealous, reports about Shanghai’s progress combined with overly pessimistic forecasts of Hong Kong’s future.

Another example of the Hong Kong media’s new interest in China is its coverage of the so-called “go west” campaign. In the summer of 2001, Hong Kong media organizations joined a top-level delegation led by SAR government officials and comprised of leading businessmen and professionals to visit the underdeveloped western region of the mainland. The trip was organized following a decision by the central government to speed up development in the western part of the country to help bridge the gap of economic development between the western and coastal regions. Some media professionals and the Hong Kong Journalists Association criticized the media for its failure to report objectively and comprehensively about the development of the region. Most of the reports, they commented, resemble propaganda trumpeting the positives of the remote region such as abundant natural resources, without equal emphasis on its backwardness in transportation, infrastructure and legal system.

The shift of emphasis in reporting on human rights issues to economic issues reflects a gradual change of public attitude towards China after the 1989 Tiananmen protests. As China continued its open door policy and economic reform, more people came to accept Beijing’s desire to achieve “stability above everything”, even at the expense of human rights and democracy. While some believe that the Hong Kong media exercises self-censorship on topics that might offend Beijing, there has been no concrete evidence of this.

With growing media coverage of the mainland, the gap between the two societies has been further narrowed in recent years, as evidenced by the noticeable change of public perceptions of the mainland. According to the HKU survey, public confidence in China’s economic development has been rising. A survey conducted the SAR government’s Planning Department found that more than 40,000 Hong Kong citizens now live on the mainland and nearly 190,000 homes have been bought across the border by SAR residents. The trend towards a mobile cross-border population will continue, the department says, with more than 300,000 Hong Kong citizens expected to live or work in southern China by 2030. Over the past two years, local media has also given prominent coverage to lifestyles in major cities including Shenzhen and Shanghai. Overall, these reports carry the message that Hong Kong faces stiff competition from some Chinese cities, where the cost of living is lower and quality of life comparable, if not higher.

The realities, however, are far more complex. The improvement of economic conditions in the mainland has been impressive, but human rights and political liberties have been largely neglected. Leading cities such as Shanghai and Shenzhen have seen

rapid economic growth, but they lag behind Hong Kong in important areas such as rule of law and press freedom. The central government has not overtly interfered with the internal affairs of Hong Kong, but it has asserted its influence on crucial issues such as the candidacy of the chief executive. Since the handover, Hong Kong's relationship with the mainland has become more subtle and complex, and in the future it will only become more so. As the clarity of old divisions gives way to bonds based on economic ties and nationalistic sentiments, the challenge for the media will be to strive for more balanced, comprehensive, enlightened and independent coverage.

THE MEDIA AND THE PUBLIC

At the level of public opinion, perceptions of the media have worsened in the past few years due to persistent bad publicity. The *Apple Daily*, a leading newspaper, published a front-page apology on November 10, 1998 after it was revealed that one of its reporters had paid a laborer to pose in bed with a prostitute in order to illustrate the infidelity which drove his wife to push her two sons out of their high-rise public housing flat window before jumping to her death. Another reporter from the *Apple Daily* was jailed after being convicted of bribing police officers for confidential information on police cases in 2001.

Various public opinion polls show a fall in the media's credibility. They include a survey conducted by CUHK in late 2001 and a survey among journalists conducted by four groups in October 1999.¹² The surveys indicated that the public is concerned about the problem of sensational reporting, inaccuracy, indecency, and emphasis on sex and violence. In his annual Policy Address delivered on October 6, 1999, Tung warned that press freedom should not become a pretext for disregarding media ethics, saying that "it is inexcusable for any media operator to resort to pornography, violence, libel or misrepresentation simply for profit." He also said that the media's disregard of its social responsibilities and professional ethics "is an issue of prime public concern which deserves the government's due attention."¹³

According to the CUHK poll conducted in 2001, the self-image and social status of journalists have declined compared with other occupations. In 1997, journalists ranked third, after engineers and doctors. In 2001, they ranked seventh. The list was topped by university professors, followed by doctors, engineers, nurses, secondary school teachers and the police. Journalists' ratings of their own social status are even lower. In 2001 they ranked themselves ninth, compared with fifth in the 1997 survey.¹⁴

The two CUHK journalism scholars who conducted the survey attributed the decline to three factors. First, there has been more negative news about the media's sensationalism, unprofessionalism and decline of ethical standards. Second, journalism has been unable to enhance its professional expertise and retain talented people. Third, the profession has yet to establish an effective self-regulation mechanism.¹⁵

The survey results are hardly surprising. The proliferation of sensational, dramatized and even fictional reporting has blurred the line between information and entertainment. In 1996, for example, a weekly magazine ran a cover story claiming that a local multi-millionaire was dying of cancer. It turned out to be a hoax perpetrated by a 19-year-old, and the magazine was forced to apologize publicly.¹⁶ On January 22, 2002, a tabloid newspaper, *The Sun*, was convicted of contempt of court over a report on a kidnapping case. The newspaper's chief editor admitted in court that remarks made by an interview

in the story were fabricated, and that the subject did not exist.¹⁷ Increasingly, people no longer necessarily regard the news they read in newspapers as information, but more as “info-tainment” – half-truth, or re-invented reality. The damage to the credibility of the media in its role to inform could be serious. There are fears that people no longer see the media as a watchdog against government wrongdoings and official abuse of power. Rather, the public will perceive of the media as an industry run by money-hungry businessmen and peopled by half-professionals with few ethical and professional standards and no awareness of their social role.

This trend, ironically, continues despite an emerging understanding that the public demand for a greater political voice makes a strong and independent media more important than ever. Since the channels for political participation remain limited, people have high hopes that the media will function as an effective fourth estate, bridging the gap between the public and the seats of power.

REGULATING THE MEDIA

Views are divided over how the media can be regulated without compromising press freedom. The joint survey conducted by the four journalists’ groups in October 1999 showed that less than 5% of journalists were satisfied with the media’s ethical standards, while 52% were dissatisfied and 42% have mixed feelings. Fifty-two percent of respondents supported strengthening industry self-regulation, while 35% preferred the establishment of a non-government statutory body to monitor the press. The four journalists’ groups later jointly issued a non-binding Code of Professional Ethics covering general guidelines for journalists and editors in carrying out their work. News organizations have been urged to adopt the code, but actual implementation has been inconsistent. Some have adopted it in its entirety, some have taken it as a reference, and others have stuck to their own code.

The proliferation of paparazzi reporting among some mass-oriented Chinese-language newspapers and periodicals has prompted the government-appointed Law Reform Commission to issue a consultation paper on the intrusion of privacy by the media in 1999. One major proposal is to set up a statutory press council to handle and initiate investigations of public complaints. The proposal drew mixed reactions from the public. Pessimists fear that the new body will deal a severe blow to press freedom by opening the door to government control, and it was against the backdrop of fear that the Code of Ethics was issued.

In addition, eleven newspapers and the News Executives Association and Federation of Journalists Workers took the initiative of forming the Press Council of Hong Kong in 2000 to handle complaints against media intrusion of privacy. This marked the first, albeit small, step towards the independent promotion of professionalism in the Hong Kong media. The three popular Chinese newspapers – the *Oriental Daily News*, its sister daily *The Sun*, and the *Apple Daily* – did not take part. According to its Constitution, the Press Council will be composed of both media professionals and other citizens such as educators and lawyers, and will investigate complaints against its member newspapers concerning intrusions of privacy. If the complaint is substantiated, the Council will require the newspapers involved to issue a public apology and correction. However, the Press Council has no power to impose penalties. Meanwhile, the Law Reform Commission and the government are watching how the media’s self-regulation

mechanism works, and the Commission's proposal for an official press council is still on the table.

The infamous Article 23 of Hong Kong's Basic Law, which calls for laws prohibiting subversive and seditious activities, continues to loom as a threat to freedom of the press.¹⁸ Many journalists fear that reporting on issues such as pro-independence activities in Taiwan and Tibet could be banned under an anti-subversive law. In June 1996, the then head of the Chinese State Council's Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, Lu Ping, said that the Hong Kong press would not be allowed to advocate "two Chinas" after 1997.¹⁹ In the wake of the controversy over media coverage of the "special state-to-state relationship" advocated by the then Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui, the deputy director of the central government's Liaison Office in Hong Kong Wang Fengchao said in April 2000 that the drafting of Article 23 should be accelerated.

Given the sensitivity of the issue, the SAR government has so far delayed its consideration. It has yet to initiate the legislative process such as a public consultation on the issue, but it has not ruled out the possibility of invoking Article 23. More importantly, pro-democracy and human rights activists are worried about the Tung administration's growing intolerance of political dissent. This attitude is manifested in the way that police officers handled protests and in how Tung and his top aides have responded to criticism, particularly from the media. Human rights activists and lawyers have cited the tightening of regulations governing protests, such as restrictions on the use of loudspeakers and the designation of areas for public demonstrations as a case in point. Citing the controversy over the program that compared Tung's administration to the Taliban regime, former chairman of the Bar Association Ronny Tong urged the SAR government to learn to "respect our right to criticize."²⁰

CONCLUSION

The Hong Kong media has not undergone any major changes since the PRC regained sovereignty in 1997. It remains healthy, diverse and independent. Subtle changes, however, are quietly underway in Hong Kong's political ecology, as it looks for new direction in a rapidly changing region. Despite a general consensus that a new economic partnership will evolve between Hong Kong and the mainland, few have the crystal ball to tell how it will shape the overall relationship between the SAR and the mainland, or how this will affect life in the SAR. It is clear, however, that the media will not be exempt from these changes. The challenge for the media is to play the role of an independent voice in the effort to maintain the SAR's unique identity while achieving closer integration with the mainland.

The sharp economic downturn and corresponding decline in the quality of life, including a drop in wage levels, consumption and asset value, have undermined the authority of the Chief Executive and the SAR government. Rightly or wrongly, people blame the SAR leadership for these problems. At the same time, demand for political accountability from the undemocratically constituted government has soared.

Yet, despite Tung's low popularity, central government leaders and most of the 800 Election Committee members have indicated some support for his re-election.²¹ All signs point towards an uncontested victory for Tung. In his annual Policy Address in 2001, Tung announced the introduction of a "new accountability system" if he is re-elected in 2002. Under the system, a new layer of political appointees will be created by Tung to

hold political responsibility for major policies. Senior civil servants will assume the administrative role in policy implementation. The introduction of a Hong Kong-style ministerial system following Tung's re-election would bring about drastic changes to the political landscape. Having learned from his failures, Tung and his ministers will be determined to lead a more powerful government with an aggressively proactive public relations strategy. In an election speech delivered on December 13, 2001, Tung also announced plans to establish a more effective public opinion survey system in his second term. Tung and other ministers have said they would continue to make more efforts to meet the people and hear their voices directly. Top government leaders are keen to take greater initiative by going directly to the people to win support for their policies. The government Information Services Department will launch its own e-newspaper in the summer of 2002 to help ensure that messages about the government are directly conveyed to the public.

There are both positive and negative implications to these proposed changes. On the positive side, senior government leaders will make themselves more accessible to explain their thoughts to the public. The downside is the Hong Kong media could be played into the hands of government PR strategists who are manipulative in their dissemination of information. Given the truism that information is power, the watchdog role of the media will be circumvented if the government goes too far in manipulating public opinion to their own advantage. Already faced with the challenge of balancing information and entertainment, the media will have to manage a more delicate relationship with the government without compromising its independence and integrity.

Regardless of the depth of frustrations about the media's excesses and abuses, there is still strong support for its freedom. This has been particularly true in the past few years, when the media has exposed a spate of political scandals. In the summer of 2000, the *South China Morning Post* carried a report quoting the accusation made by University of Hong Kong pollster Robert Chung that Tung attempted to influence his opinion surveys via a third party. At that time, Tung's popularity hit a low point, and the event triggered a political storm that led to an independent inquiry. After weeks of public hearings, an independent panel ruled that the university vice-chancellor and his deputy had put pressure on Chung. The university's vice-chancellor, Cheng Yiu-chung, resigned to take responsibility for the scandal. In late 2000, the *Apple Daily* ran confidential documents showing that popular legislator Gary Cheng failed to declare business interests to the legislature as required. It later emerged that Cheng sought economic gains by abusing his status as a legislator, and he was eventually convicted and sentenced to prison in December 2001.

As long as Hong Kong remains a free society, market forces will continue to operate in the media and newspapers will have to tell the truth if they want to keep their readers. Public aspirations for the media to strike a balance between freedom and social responsibility have grown. There has been a strong sense within some quarters that the media is so free that its power is unchecked. In the end, the media's intrusions of privacy, unethical practices and fabrication of facts could become ammunition for those who seek to curtail its freedom. Speaking at the Freedom Forum in November 2000, Anson Chan told journalists and other media professionals that the best way to protect their interests was to strive for excellence. But media proprietors, executives and journalists have yet to

reach a consensus on how to achieve this amidst the profound changes taking place both within and outside their industry.

ENDNOTES

¹ Despite its relatively small population of 6.8 million people, Hong Kong boasts 26 Chinese-language and five English-language daily papers. Except for the two dailies, *Ta Kung Pao* and *Wen Wei Po*, which have been described as pro-China, most print and electronic media are market-oriented and non-affiliated.

² Chris Yeung, "Hong Kong Under One Country Two Systems: Promises and Realities". Brookings Working Paper, June 2001.

³ The establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and the flight of the Kuomintang to Taiwan was paralleled by a division in the Hong Kong media. Through the 1970s, newspapers were broadly categorized as pro-China (*Ta Kung Pao* and *Wen Wei Po*), pro-Taiwan (the now-defunct Hong Kong *China Times*) or independent (*Ming Pao*). With the closure of Taiwan-affiliated newspapers in the 1980s as part of the gradual pull-out of Taiwan interests before 1997, the dividing line came to be between pro-China and unaffiliated/pro-Hong Kong. As the public sense of a Hong Kong identity grew in the 1980s and 1990s, the unaffiliated/pro-Hong Kong media emerged as the mainstream. As China and Britain clashed over issues concerning the transfer of power, the mainstream media and Hong Kong society as a whole were caught in the middle. In most cases the media sided with London, not because it supported colonial rule but because they shared common interests on most issues related to the handover.

⁴ *South China Morning Post*, October 25, 2001

⁵ *South China Morning Post*, August 26, 1999

⁶ On the other hand, journalists and analysts rightly fear that an erosion of RTHK's editorial independence will be a bad omen for press freedom in Hong Kong.

⁷ *South China Morning Post*, December 14, 2001.

⁸ Their observation, however, has not been independently ascertained.

⁹ *Ming Pao*, January 28, 2002.

¹⁰ According to the ACNelson report on newspaper readership in November 2001, *Oriental Daily News* has a readership of 1.95 million, followed by *Apple Daily* (1.43 million), *The Sun* (483,000), *SCMP* (340,000), *Ming Pao* (331,000), *Sing Tao* (158,000). Both *Oriental Daily News* and *The Sun* have not joined the Audit Bureau of Circulation. They claimed a circulation of 500,000-550,000 and 200,000-250,000 respectively. *Apple Daily*'s circulation is around 350,000. The three mass-oriented dailies took up about 70% of total circulation of all newspapers. The *SCMP* has a circulation of about 120,000. Pro-China newspapers including *Ta Kung Pao* and *Wen Wei Po* have a small number of circulation between 30,000 to 40,000.

¹¹ Media Digest published by RTHK, November 2001.

¹² The four groups are the Hong Kong Journalists Association, the Federation of Journalist Workers, the News Executives Association and the Hong Kong Photographers Association.

¹³ Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa, 1999 Policy Address.

¹⁴ *Ming Pao*, January 3, 2002.

¹⁵ *Ming Pao*, January 3, 2002.

¹⁶ Louise Williams and Roland Rich, ed. *Losing Control: Freedom of the Press in Asia*. Canberra: Asia Pacific Press, 2000.

¹⁷ *Ming Pao*, January 23, 2002.

¹⁸ Article 23 says the Hong Kong SAR Government shall enact laws on its own to prohibit any act of treason, secession, sedition, subversion against the Central People's Government, or theft of state secrets, to prohibit foreign political organization of bodies from conducting political activities in the SAR, and to prohibit political organizations or bodies of the SAR from establishing ties with foreign political organizations or bodies.

¹⁹ *South China Morning Post*, June 3, 1999.

²⁰ *South China Morning Post*, October 25, 2001.

²¹ Under the election law, a candidate needs to be nominated by at least 100 Election Committee members to be eligible for the race.