

Press and Politics in Hong Kong

Case Studies from 1967 to 1997

Edited by

Clement Y. K. So and Joseph Man Chan

**Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies
The Chinese University of Hong Kong**

Press and Politics in Hong Kong

Case Studies from 1967 to 1997

Edited by
Clement Y. K. SO
Joseph Man CHAN

Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

1999

Research Monograph No. 48

© The Chinese University of Hong Kong 1999

Chapter 3 © Andrew Arno 1984, Chapter 8 © *Media Asia* 1989

All Rights Reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system without permission in writing from the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies.

ISBN 962-441-548-X

Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies
The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Shatin, New Territories
Hong Kong

Printed in Hong Kong by Authentic Advertising & Printing Company

Preface

Political communication in Hong Kong constitutes a significant portion of the research projects by both students and teachers in the School of Journalism and Communication at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. Studies in this area can be traced to the late 1970s when the school (then as a department) established its Graduate Division of Communication. It was at a time when political communication was relatively simple and quiet. Politics was made up of pressure group activities, colonial administrative controls, and some indirect influence from mainland China and Taiwan. Hong Kong has come a long way since it has established its own political parties during the political transition and has transformed itself from a colony into a Special Administrative Region of China in 1997. The political scene has become much noisier as more players join the contest for attention. Mass communication has been an integral part of all these political changes, shaping and being shaped by such changes.

It is a pity that the research reports on the interaction between media and politics are not readily accessible to the local and international community. The purpose of publishing this collection of articles is therefore to let more people share these works. The editing process has taken much longer than it was originally planned. We started collecting articles in the early 1990s. Preoccupation with other duties and commitments on our part has delayed its completion. The compensation for this delay is that we can include a few studies that were done right before the hand-

over. We are pleased to find this publication to be on time to witness and celebrate the 35th anniversary of the school.

Most of the articles in this book are based on the undergraduate theses of the school and Master's theses in the Division of Communication at the Chinese University. There are three and a half exceptions. One is the article contributed by Profs. Kuan Hsin-chi and Lau Siu-kai, who nevertheless had some ties with the school. Kuan once served as acting chairman of the school, and Lau was occasionally invited as member of thesis panels. The second is the article by one of us, Joseph Man Chan, and Prof. Yiu-ming To. Chan is a graduate of the school's M. Phil. programme whereas To is familiar to colleagues within the school. The third is the article by Profs. Eric Ma and Anthony Fung. Both Ma and Fung are also graduates of the school. The other half exception is a reprint of a book chapter by Joseph Man Chan and Chin-Chuan Lee. It was based on Chan's master's thesis, with Lee as the advisor. Thus, we can say that the articles chosen here were written by former students and staff of the school.

Space consideration has limited us to include only a small number of the many studies done in the area of political communication by the school. Other thesis titles can be found in the appendix of this book. Readers of this book are encouraged to go to the small library of the school for a reference to other works. To make our task manageable and focused, we have adopted the following criteria of selection: (1) The thesis has to deal with political communication in Hong Kong in general, and in the area of press and politics in particular. (2) The thesis focuses on a significant case or is a survey which summarizes some prominent political phenomena in Hong Kong. (3) The article can contribute to our understanding of the political and media changes in the past 30 years, especially during the 1980s and 1990s when Hong Kong experienced a political roller-coaster ride to 1997.

Finally, we would like to thank all the contributors to this book. Not only did they kindly agree to let their work appear in this book, they took time to rewrite and condense their original theses. Collectively, these articles represent serious efforts to doc-

ument the changing political and press landscapes in Hong Kong, and they serve as a unique sample of the academic works done by former students of the School of Journalism and Communication before 1997. Hopefully, in the not too distant future, another anthology may be compiled to show the saga of Hong Kong media and politics which takes the year of 1997 as the watershed. We are also grateful to Profs. Lars Willnat and Pang Ka-fat for their thoughtful review and to Profs. Lau Siu-kai and Yue-man Yeung for their support in having this book published by the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies.

Clement Y. K. So
Joseph Man Chan

Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| <i>Preface</i> | vii |
| 1. Research on Press and Politics in Hong Kong: An Overview <i>Clement Y. K. SO and Joseph Man CHAN</i> | 1 |
| 2. The Role of Newspapers in the 1967 Riot: A Case Study of the Partisanship of the Hong Kong Press <i>Alice Y. L. LEE</i> | 33 |
| 3. Journalistic "Paradigms" of Civil Protests: A Case Study in Hong Kong <i>Joseph Man CHAN and Chin-Chuan LEE</i> | 67 |
| 4. Dialectic of Journalistic Orientation: A Study of the Treatment of Government News by the Hong Kong Press <i>Clement Y. K. SO</i> | 95 |
| 5. Legitimizing the Power Establishment: How the Media Report the Legislative Council <i>Francis C. W. YIP</i> | 137 |
| 6. Sino-British Talks on 1997: A Case Study of Political Communication <i>Fanny L. K. WONG</i> | 179 |

| | | |
|-----|--|-----|
| 7. | The Role of the News in a Changing Power Structure: A Study of the Press Coverage of Political Reform in Hong Kong <i>TSANG Wai-sau</i> | 233 |
| 8. | Mass Media and Politics in Hong Kong <i>KUAN Hsin-chi and LAU Siu-kai</i> | 277 |
| 9. | Towards a Photographic Theory of Newsmaking: The Dynamic Mechanism of the "Four Lenses" <i>Alice Y. L. LEE</i> | 299 |
| 10. | The Daya Bay Opinion War: Analysis of a Multi-level Conflict <i>MA Ngok</i> | 335 |
| 11. | Framing a Social Crisis: The Case of the Tiananmen Square Crackdown <i>FUNG Tak-hung</i> | 373 |
| 12. | Changes in Hong Kong Media's Political Stance and News Paradigm: Case Study of the Political Reform Package <i>LEE Wai-fong</i> | 417 |
| 13. | Democratization, Reunification and Press Freedom in Hong Kong: A Critical Event Analysis of the Xi Yang Case <i>Joseph Man CHAN and Yiu-ming TO</i> | 465 |
| 14. | Re-sinicization, Nationalism and the Hong Kong Identity <i>Eric K. W. MA and Anthony Y. H. FUNG</i> | 497 |
| | <i>Appendix: List of CUHK Theses and Reports on Hong Kong Political Communication</i> | 529 |
| | <i>About the Authors</i> | 535 |

Research on Press and Politics in Hong Kong

An Overview

Clement Y. K. SO
Joseph Man CHAN

Geographically, Hong Kong is only a small place in southeastern China, but its political and economic influence is disproportionately enormous. From a former British colony to a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China, Hong Kong has become a test case of the notion of "one country, two systems," engaged in an interesting experiment where capitalist and socialist systems intermingle. Hong Kong is also a global financial centre with one of the world's most dynamic economies.¹ Its per capita GDP has already surpassed Britain's and many Western developed countries'. The long political transition that ensued after the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984 and the final return of Hong Kong's governance to China's sovereignty in 1997 have catapulted Hong Kong onto the world's stage.

Hong Kong is a city of contradictions. It is an amalgamation of tradition and modernity, capitalism and socialism, East and West. These pairs of elements, while contradictory, co-exist peacefully.

The Hong Kong press is both a part of and a reflection of these contradictions. With a population of about 6.6 million, Hong Kong has 50 daily newspapers (14 are comprehensive dailies), 693 periodicals, two commercial terrestrial television companies, one cable television service, a regional satellite television service, one government radio-television station and two commercial radio stations (Howlett, 1998). The political spectrum of the press spans from left to right, and the taste strata range from elitist to sensationalist. Publications rise and fall in tandem with the changes in the social, political and economic situation of Hong Kong. The limited democracy that Hong Kong has enhances the media's role as a forum for the contentions of various interest groups and the public. Hong Kong society is always in a state of flux. This not only provides us with enough dynamic material for the study of the interaction between the media and politics, but it makes political communication in Hong Kong all the more interesting.

There were only a few, mainly descriptive, early studies. Research on political communication in Hong Kong did not really start until the 1970s, because there were no academic institution dedicated to the study of communication. As a colonial university modeled on the British tradition, the University of Hong Kong does not have a department of journalism or communication.² The New Asia College, established by Chinese intellectuals who had fled from the mainland around 1949, did have a programme in journalism (Chan, Lee and Lee, 1996). However, this programme was neither recognized nor funded by the Hong Kong government, and it remained a small and financially strained teaching unit. The first journalism department at the university level was founded only when the New Asia College was integrated with two other colleges to form The Chinese University of Hong Kong in the mid-1960s. With more funding and personnel growth, this department began to develop a better teaching programme and was able to conduct some communication research.

As for other Hong Kong teaching and research institutions, the Hong Kong Baptist College also established a department of journalism in the 1960s. However, its primary focus was as a

teaching department.³ Baptist College was not recognized by the government until the 1990s and consequently received little funding. As a teaching college, research activities were not stressed. This began to change after it was upgraded to full university status in the early 1990s, and after it subsequently established its graduate programmes. The other private post-secondary institutions offering journalism and communication programmes include Hong Kong Shue Yan College and Chu Hai College. These institutions concentrate on teaching however and seldom engage in research activities.

Research on political communication in Hong Kong has so far focused on the newspapers, not the electronic media. The nature of the two media in Hong Kong is sharply different. The broadcasting media, especially television, are essentially entertainment-oriented, with their primary goal to provide entertainment rather than information. Television and radio news programmes are in general shallow with very limited time to report events and virtually none for analysis of those events or other issues. Also, due to the electronic media's huge reach and influence, they are closely regulated and monitored by the government. News programmes tend to avoid partisan politics or taking an obvious political stance.

By comparison, the press enjoys more freedom and faces fewer restrictions. They are subject to different types of control that range from partisan ties to commercial considerations, but, in effect, they can take a stronger position on political controversies. In addition, there are more players in the newspaper field, which is conducive to the expression of diverse views. Nowadays running a newspaper is a multi-million dollar business that only a few tycoons can afford. But in the past, the print media was relatively less capital intensive, and entering the market was thus easier. There is also a Chinese tradition for intellectuals to voice their opinions in the papers; a few indeed have set up their own newspapers. The Hong Kong press has been a residual microcosm of Chinese politics (Chan, 1981). It has formed an extension of the political struggles between the Beijing government (or the Chi-

nese Communist Party, CCP) and the Taipei government (or the Kuomintang, KMT). The press also reflects social changes in Hong Kong, serving as a major battleground for public opinion wars during controversies. Different newspapers represent the interests of different parties and serve different social sectors.

Finally, there is a practical reason that explains why political communication research in Hong Kong has focused on the press, and that has to do with the tangibility of newspapers. The content of the electronic media is elusive. Videotapes and film footage of news events are not readily available for study while newspapers are frequently catalogued and stored in libraries. This imbalance in the attention paid to newspapers will only be corrected when documentation of the electronic media can be more easily retrieved.

This chapter is an overview of political communication research in Hong Kong, with an emphasis on the relationship between the press and politics. First is a brief delineation of the history of the press in Hong Kong. This will be followed by an explication of the press structure and its changes in recent years. We shall then summarize the articles selected in this book in order to highlight the research footprints in Hong Kong's political communication. Finally, we shall discuss the lessons learned from these case studies that span the 30 years from 1967 to 1997.

Evolution of the Press in Hong Kong

The press is basically a reflection of the social situation. To examine the development of the press, we have to take the larger social context into consideration. The Hong Kong press can be traced back to the 1840s, when Hong Kong was ceded to Britain. From that point on, the Hong Kong press largely served as a meeting point between China and the West and as a support base for various Chinese political interests. While the early press of Hong Kong were closely tied to the colonial and business élites, the newspapers that cropped up around the turn of this century

served as the propaganda tools of various Chinese parties and interests (Lee, 1997). Commercial newspapers in Hong Kong firmly established themselves as the mainstream newspapers when the *Wah Kiu Yat Pao* and the *Kung Sheung Daily News* started publication in 1925 (Chan, Lee, and Lee, 1996). Over the decades, these newspapers were joined by the *Sing Tao Jih-Wen Pao*, the *Sing Pao Daily News*, the *Oriental Daily News*, the *Ming Pao Daily News* and so on to make up the major newspapers of Hong Kong. Instead of focusing on partisan politics in China, the primary concern of the commercial papers was to provide the public with information about local affairs and daily entertainment. This is not to say that all these papers did not have ideological inclinations. However, they can be distinguished from the partisan press that was owned and controlled by parties.

The decline of partisan newspapers and the rise of the commercial press were most noticeable during the decades from the 1960s to the present. One of the major factors that accounted for this phenomenon was demographic. The proportion of the locally born population increased as all Hong Kong's population expanded (Chan and Lee, 1991). Between 1961 and 1981, the proportion of those born locally rose from 47.7 per cent to 57.2 per cent, as the population grew from about 3 million to almost 5 million. In the 1950s, many citizens were refugees from mainland China. Many of these refugees, including journalists, thought of Hong Kong as merely a temporary home. They expected to return to China eventually, although some aspired to move elsewhere. By the 1960s, more people, especially those locally born, came to the realization that they would have to call Hong Kong their new and permanent home. Localization as such tended to fuel the commercial press and inhibited the political press (Choi, 1975; Lee, 1997). The second major reason for the expansion of the commercial press was the growth of the formidable Hong Kong advertising industry (Chan, 1981; Chan and Lee, 1992; Lee, 1997). Between the mid-1970s and the 1980s, total advertising revenue is estimated to have increased at a rate of over 20 per cent per year. In fact, the growth of the commercial base for the Hong Kong press can be

traced to the late 1940s when rich Shanghai people migrated to Hong Kong together with their business skills and capital (Lee, 1997). In short, the growth in population, specially those born in Hong Kong, and increased business activity were conducive to the rise of a commercially based press.

As shown in Table 1.1, in 1956 the newspapers with high circulations were all commercial, including the *Wah Kiu Yat Pao* (also known as the *Overseas Chinese Daily News*), the *Wah Kiu Man Pao*, the *Kung Sheung Daily News* and the *Sing Pao Daily News*. Although they were not free from political inclinations, their major concern was to run a successful business by meeting the desires of their readership. In 1957, total daily press circulation reached 583,000 copies. Hong Kong's newspaper readership recorded an impressive 226 copies per 1,000 people, which in Asia was second only to Japan. By 1966, newspaper circulation had increased to 1.5 million copies per day. The *Sing Tao Wen Pao*, the *Ming Pao Daily News* and the *Express Daily News* rose to become top circulation newspapers along with the *Sing Pao Daily News* and the *Kung Sheung Daily News*. The newspaper scene continued to evolve, with the rise and fall of newspapers. The *Oriental Daily News* proved to be a remarkable success after it became the best selling newspaper in the late 1970s. Other more traditional papers lost vitality, and eventually a few of them folded (such as the once popular *Wah Kiu Yat Pao*, *Kung Sheung Daily News* and the *Sing Tao Wen Pao*).

While the commercial papers dominated the market, the political papers were squeezed into a fringe position serving only as the mouthpiece for either the CCP or the KMT. Their circulation was so low that they did not even reach the threshold of 1 per cent (of the population) in order to be included in the annual Hong Kong Media Index. The KMT ideological flagship, the *Hong Kong Times*, was closed in 1993 and was unable to survive to witness the sovereignty change in 1997. With financial backing from Beijing, the pro-CCP papers maintained a presence in Hong Kong, but in recent years they have had to make some adjustments. Two second-tier papers of this camp, namely the *Ching Pao* and the *New*

Table 1.1 Newspaper Circulation in 1956 and 1966

| 1956 | | | 1966 | | |
|------|---------------------------------|-------------|------|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| Rank | Newspaper | Circulation | Rank | Newspaper | Circulation |
| 1 | <i>Wah Kiu Yat Pao</i> | 63,000 | 1 | <i>Sing Tao Wen Pao</i> | 130,000 |
| 2 | <i>Wah Kiu Man Pao</i> | 40,000 | 2 | <i>Sing Pao Daily News</i> | 120,000 |
| 3 | <i>Kung Sheung Daily News</i> | 30,000 | 3 | <i>Ming Pao Daily News</i> | 80,000 |
| 4 | <i>Sing Pao Daily News</i> | 25,000 | 4 | <i>Express Daily News</i> | 65,000 |
| 5 | <i>Freedom Yat Pao</i> | 22,000 | 5 | <i>Kung Sheung Daily News</i> | 64,000 |
| 6 | <i>Sing Tao Wen Pao</i> | 17,000 | 6 | <i>Hong Kong Commercial Daily</i> | 60,000 |
| 7 | <i>South China Morning Post</i> | 15,000 | 7 | <i>Ching Pao</i> | 55,000 |
| 7 | <i>New Evening Post</i> | 15,000 | 8 | <i>Hong Kong Daily News</i> | 40,000 |
| 9 | <i>Sing Tao Jih Pao</i> | 12,000 | 9 | <i>Tin Tin Daily News</i> | 36,000 |
| 9 | <i>Hsin San Man Pao</i> | 12,000 | 10 | <i>Sing Tao Jih Pao</i> | 32,000 |
| 11 | <i>Hong Kong Times</i> | 10,000 | 10 | <i>Ching Ng (Noon) Pao</i> | 32,000 |
| 11 | <i>Kung Sheung Man Pao</i> | 10,000 | 10 | <i>Chiu Yin Pao</i> | 32,000 |
| | | | 10 | <i>Red Green Pao</i> | 32,000 |

Notes: In 1956, the circulation figures for *Ta Kung Pao* and *Wen Wei Po* were respectively 7,000 and 5,000.

In 1966, circulation figures for other newspapers were: *Yuet Wah Pao* (31,000), *South China Evening Post* (30,000), *Wah Kiu Yat Pao* (29,000), *New Evening Post* (28,000), *Wah Kiu Man Pao* (22,000), *Hong Kong Times* (21,000), *South China Morning Post* (20,000), *Ta Kung Pao* (20,000), *Wen Wei Po* (18,000), *Hong Kong Standard* (10,000).

Sources: 1956: Choi (1975).

1966: USIS Press Section, Hong Kong (1966).

Evening Post, ceased to exist in 1991 and 1997, respectively. Only the *Ta Kung Pao*, the *Wen Wei Po* and the *Hong Kong Commercial Daily* have managed to survive.

Since the 1970s, Hong Kong has gradually become a major financial centre. The need for financial news coverage led to the birth of several financial newspapers, such as the *Ming Pao (Financial) Evening News* (in 1970), the *Hong Kong Economic Journal* (1973) and the *Hong Kong Economic Times* (1988). A flourishing economy in addition to a maturing reading public enabled the newspaper industry to differentiate into papers for the masses (led by the *Oriental Daily News* and the *Apple Daily*) and for the élites (notably the *Ming Pao Daily News*, the *South China Morning Post* and the two financial papers). In the 1990s, some newspapers were born but could not survive the competition. They included the *Hong Kong Today*, the *Hong Kong United Daily*, the *South China Economic News* and the English-language *Eastern Express*. The launch of the *Apple Daily* in 1995 unexpectedly led to a cut-throat price war, which forced several financially weak papers to leave the market and ended the unified retail price for newspaper copy (So, 1996). The *Express Daily News* took a hiatus right after the price war, resumed publication in late 1996 but was finally shut down in 1998. The closing of the *Sing Tao Wen Pao* in late 1996 also triggered the closure of the other afternoon newspaper, the *New Evening Post*. In the mid-1990s, the Hong Kong press lost several traditional, well-known newspapers, and of those remaining only a handful enjoyed a healthy share of readership (see Table 1.2). In fact, from the 1980s onwards, the top two newspapers have had a combined readership of more than 50 per cent of the reading population, with the remaining dozen trailing behind. The concentration of readership in a few papers is evident, as in 1996 only nine newspapers reached the 2 per cent readership mark. With Hong Kong hit by the Asian financial crisis of 1997, economic prospects are grim with even the usually upbeat Hong Kong government forecasting recovery at least two years away. With the economy in a slump, many expect the number of daily newspapers in Hong Kong to drop further.

Table 1.2 Newspaper Readership in 1966, 1976, 1986 and 1996

| 1966 | | | 1976 | | |
|------|-----------------------------------|-------------|------|-----------------------------------|---------------|
| Rank | Newspaper | Readership* | Rank | Newspaper | Readership |
| 1 | <i>Sing Tao Wen Pao</i> | 21% | 1 | <i>Sing Pao Daily News</i> | 649,000 (19%) |
| 2 | <i>Sing Pao Daily News</i> | 18% | 2 | <i>Sing Tao Wen Pao</i> | 519,000 (15%) |
| 3 | <i>Kung Sheung Daily News</i> | 10% | 3 | <i>Oriental Daily News</i> | 470,000 (14%) |
| 4 | <i>Ming Pao Daily News</i> | 8% | 4 | <i>Sing Tao Jih Pao</i> | 354,000 (10%) |
| 4 | <i>Hong Kong Commercial Daily</i> | 8% | 5 | <i>Ming Pao Daily News</i> | 298,000 (9%) |
| 6 | <i>Sing Tao Jih Pao</i> | 7% | 6 | <i>Express Daily News</i> | 235,000 (7%) |
| 6 | <i>Wah Kiu Yat Pao</i> | 7% | 7 | <i>Wah Kiu Yat Pao</i> | 226,000 (7%) |
| 8 | <i>Ching Pao</i> | 6% | 8 | <i>Hong Kong Daily News</i> | 190,000 (5%) |
| 8 | <i>Express Daily News</i> | 6% | 9 | <i>Kung Sheung Daily News</i> | 130,000 (4%) |
| 10 | <i>Tin Tin Daily News</i> | 5% | 10 | <i>Hong Kong Commercial Daily</i> | 127,000 (4%) |
| 11 | <i>South China Morning Post</i> | 4% | 11 | <i>South China Morning Post</i> | 125,000 (4%) |
| 12 | <i>Wah Kiu Man Pao</i> | 3% | 12 | <i>Ching Pao</i> | 104,000 (3%) |
| 12 | <i>Star</i> | 3% | 13 | <i>Chinese Star</i> | 69,000 (2%) |
| 14 | <i>Hong Kong Standard</i> | 2% | 14 | <i>Ming Pao Evening News</i> | 45,000 (1%) |
| 15 | <i>China Mail</i> | 1% | 15 | <i>Star</i> | 32,000 (1%) |
| (N) | | (3,036,000) | 16 | <i>Hong Kong Standard</i> | 31,000 (1%) |
| | | | (N) | | (3,460,000) |