

HONG KONG

Free press under existential threat

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Introduction

Hong Kong is a global metropolis with a population of around 7.5 million people that is located just south of mainland China on the eastern side of the Pearl River Delta (South China Sea). Hong Kong's Basic Law states that Chinese and English are the official languages; however, most of the population speaks Cantonese. According to the 2016 Population By-census, 96.7 per cent of the overall population aged 5 years or older could speak Cantonese, 51.9 per cent could speak English, and 50.6 per cent could speak Putonghua. Therefore, Hong Kong media companies compete in the Chinese-language market, which is one of the largest media sectors in the world.

The role and performance of a country's media depends on its political system, economic structure, and media environment. In a democratic and free society, in which the government is accountable to the people, the press serves as a watchdog and provides a platform for citizens to exercise their freedom of expression. This is unlike in an authoritarian state, where the press is the mouthpiece of the state, often deployed to exercise control through propaganda. In this regard, Hong Kong is a special case and demands close attention. Hong Kong was a colony of the United Kingdom until 1997, after which it was handed over to China under the principle of "one country, two systems". Hong Kong is officially designated as the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC).

Freedom in the World 2021: status "partly free" (Score: 52/100, down from 61 in 2017). Since the previous ratings were published in 2017, six points have been deducted in the Freedom of Expression and Belief (Civil Liberties) category. These were based mainly on increased levels of censorship and pressure placed on the media and universities in the wake of recent events, which included the demonstrations against the extradition bill and the implementation of a New Security Law (NSL) (Freedom House, 2021).

EIU Democracy Index 2020: Hong Kong is ranked 87 of 167 surveyed countries, down from 75 in 2019. It was downgraded from a “flawed democracy” to a “hybrid regime” (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2019, 2020).

Liberal Democracy Index 2020: Hong Kong is placed in the bottom 30–40% bracket – ranked 115 of measured countries, down from a ranking of 107 in 2018 (Varieties of Democracy Institute, 2021).

2020 World Press Freedom Index: ranked 80 of 180 countries, down from 73 in 2019 (Reporters Without Borders, 2020).

Under the Basic Law adopted as a condition of the handover, Hong Kong has its own government and constitutional protection of civil liberties. This accords it power to retain its autonomy from the PRC until 2047. However, Hong Kong has been undergoing rapid political changes since the 2019 anti-government protests and demonstrations of social unrest. In June 2020, the central government bypassed the local legislature and directly implemented national security law. Many key political activists in Hong Kong are now either in jail or living in exile. The chief executive of HKSAR and half of the Legislative Council have not been elected through universal suffrage, but selected through a unique committee-based electoral process that favours the appointment of pro-Beijing candidates (Freedom House, 2020). A recent proposal endorsed by The National People’s Congress of the People’s Republic of China gives more power to the Election Committee. It has new power to nominate lawmakers and send some of its own representatives to the Legislative Council. Three hundred loyalists will be added to the existing committee. Their addition will ensure that candidates who run for chief executive or the legislature will be loyal to the authorities.

Since the United Kingdom’s 1997 handover of Hong Kong to PRC under the “one country, two systems” principle, the politics of Hong Kong have reflected this unique framework. There are two main political camps:

1. The first is pro-democracy. It promotes democratic ideals, including universal suffrage for the election of the Chief Executive and members of the Legislative Council. The more progress this camp makes toward development and enhancement of democratic practices, the higher the degree of autonomy Hong Kong enjoys. Prominent parties in this camp include the Democratic Party, the Civic Party, and People Power.
2. The pro-China (or pro-Beijing) camp, in contrast, places low emphasis on the democratisation process, the rule of law, and human rights; much higher priority is given to the welfare and stability of Hong Kong, or, as it is officially known, the HKSAR of the PRC. The pro-China camp therefore seeks closer collaboration between HKSAR and PRC. Prominent parties in this camp include the Liberal Party, the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong, and the Federation of Trade Unions.

However, 47 pro-democracy activists and politicians were recently charged with conspiracy to commit subversion under the national security law. The maximum penalty is life imprisonment. The authorities may try to eradicate all dissenters under the new national security law.

Sino-British Joint Declaration and HKSAR's Basic Law guarantees Hong Kong's press freedom. Under colonial governance, the press in Hong Kong enjoyed a high degree of freedom and adopted a liberal model that resembled Western journalistic practices (Chan & Lee, 1989). Since the handover in 1997, however, freedom of the press has seen a steady decline, and Freedom House rated the Hong Kong press as "partly free" in 2020. A countervailing trend has been the emergence of online news sources as alternative media outlets. This has played a key role in helping to empower Internet users by providing a means of avoiding censorship and social control (Luqiu, 2017).

The PRC central government does not have direct control over the Hong Kong press, but its indirect interference has been increasing due to the purchase of media outlets by a group of businessmen with significant business interests in mainland China (Fung, 2007). Rather than taking control of daily newsroom operations, these media owners have tended to exert control by making personnel decisions and allocating resources (Lee, 2018). Nevertheless, the Hong Kong media operates in a context of the central government increasingly exerting direct political control over Hong Kong citizens in recent years. This is supplemented by a decline in the autonomy and political freedoms stipulated in the handover agreement (HKJA, 2017). Such a situation has intensified since the 2014 Umbrella Movement and forms a backdrop for the ongoing protests involving millions of Hong Kong citizens that were sparked in 2019 by the Hong Kong government's attempt to pass a controversial amendment bill related to extradition (Kaeding, 2017; Lim, 2017; Ngok, 2012). Such activism helped propel the pro-democratic camp to a landmark win in the 2019 Hong Kong district council elections. This was boosted by record participation (71% of registered voters), as a result of which the pro-democracy camp took nearly 90 per cent of the seats (Sanchez Manzanaro & Jamieson, 2019).

The media environment in Hong Kong bears the marks of this political divide. Nonetheless, the widely popular public broadcasting service Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) is rated the most-trusted media brand. Through its seven mobile apps, RTHK makes most of its television and radio broadcasts accessible as podcasts, contributing to the service's popularity.

RTHK has contributed to the popularity of podcasts in Hong Kong, in general. The newspaper market has struggled in recent years, and two well-known newspapers, *The Sun* and *Hong Kong Daily News*, have shuttered. Currently, the two most-circulated newspapers are *Apple Daily*, aligned with the pro-democratic camp, and *Oriental Daily*, aligned with Beijing, although it generally eschews an engagement with political issues. Both newspapers are

published in Chinese. The only English-language paid daily newspaper in Hong Kong is the *South China Morning Post*, which was acquired by the Alibaba Group in 2016. This acquisition raised questions about Beijing's influence over the news landscape, given Alibaba's strong association with Beijing (Chan et al., 2017, 2019; Luqiu, 2017).

Hong Kong's predominant free television channel is Television Broadcasts Ltd. (TVB). It owns various media and news platforms, including streaming services. Like other media companies in Hong Kong, TVB is well known for its pro-China stance. A notable recent entrant to the news landscape is the *Hong Kong Free Press* (HKFP), an independent online newspaper founded in 2015. HKFP, which has covered significant incidents in the region, earned USD 220,000 through a crowd-funding campaign in 2017. Despite this, since it is an English-language website, HKFP does not reach a broad audience (Chan et al., 2017, 2019; Luqiu, 2017).

News media are widely available to all citizens in Hong Kong, but the media landscape in Hong Kong has undergone significant changes over the past decade. According to The Hong Kong Journalists Association (HKJA), of twenty-six mainstream media outlets in Hong Kong, nine are controlled by entities linked to the mainland Chinese government. This number continues to increase (HKJA, 2017). However, 84 per cent of the Hong Kong survey respondents said that they sourced news from the Internet (including social media), and 43 per cent said that online media is their main source of news (Lee, 2018). Many news media organisations are undergoing a digital transformation and now endeavouring to operate within a model providing free online content.

Anti-extradition bill movement and the news media

In the summer of 2019, Hong Kong witnessed some of the largest demonstrations in its history. These were triggered by the introduction of the so-called Fugitive Offenders Ordinance Amendment Bill. In what came to be known as the Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill (Anti-ELAB) movement, one million of the seven million Hong Kongers took to the streets on 9 June to demonstrate against the bill. A few days later, the government announced the suspension of the bill; however, this action did not quell protests. On the contrary, the crowds grew quickly and the protests continued, as Hong Kongers became determined to show their will for the further democratisation of Hong Kong. Almost two million citizens filled the streets, demanding the release of detained activists and calling for investigations into police brutality (Lee et al., 2019). The movement remains active more than a year later.

The media has played an essential role in the movement. According to a study by Lee and colleagues (2019), almost all surveyed protesters (93.8%) reported that they relied heavily on online news outlets to collect information about the

events. A smaller share of protesters (58.6%) indicated that they depended on mainstream media. Hong Kong's alternative and independent media organisations were viewed as more reliable than the mainstream outlets, which was due to the latter's close association with the government and Beijing. Protesters also sensed that restrictions on the protest's coverage had become stricter and that censorship could grow still more severe if the extradition bill was implemented. Thus, journalists and other organisations argued that the protection of press freedom was an important element of the movement (Quackenbush, 2019).

New national security law and freedom of the press

At the end of May 2020, notwithstanding fierce opposition to the Fugitive Offenders Ordinance Amendment Bill, the PRC government submitted a blueprint decree stating that it can bypass HKSAR's legal procedures, such as the so-called Basic Law, in the implementation of a new form of national security law in Hong Kong. Beijing has indicated that it will consider criminally punishable actions that 1) undermine the central government (subversion), 2) lead to a breakaway from the country (secession), 3) intimidate and incite violence against people (terrorism), or 4) are orchestrated by foreign forces aiming to interfere in Hong Kong (Dupre, 2020; Tsoi & Wai, 2020).

The national security law has proved much tougher than the expected set of rules. Under this, Beijing can exercise jurisdiction to handle "complicated" cases. Mainland agents can operate freely in Hong Kong without falling under local jurisdiction. The maximum penalty for each crime is life imprisonment (HKSAR, 2020b).

This development has sparked fears over the suppression of free speech and potential interference in news companies' coverage of issues in Hong Kong. Coming on the heels of a new law that criminalises insulting the Chinese national anthem, the national security law is widely feared to be the straw to break the camel's back, finally dismantling all the freedoms Hong Kong has enjoyed since the 1997 handover. Many believe that Hong Kong's media landscape and news coverage will shift towards those in mainland China. In recent years, the public broadcaster RTHK has been handed several controversial orders that appear to be designed to suppress free speech, including demands that employees must align more closely with the government. Moreover, many media industry professionals have expressed concerns that the new security law will sound the death knell for the region's many independent media outlets (Palmer, 2020; Pomfret & Torode, 2020). The Hong Kong Journalists Association (HKJA) conducted a survey over the implementation of a new national security law. The findings indicated that 98 per cent of respondents opposed the implementation of the law and that more than half of those surveyed were worried about their personal safety with the implementation of the new law (HKJA, 2020b).

The authorities in Beijing have suggested that the new law will only affect a very small portion of people in Hong Kong. However, it has already been used as grounds to disqualify political candidates, prosecute students, arrest protestors, media tycoons, and pro-democracy figures, raid newsrooms of pro-democracy papers, and order arrest warrants for political activists overseas (Barron, 2020). Pro-democracy media tycoon Jimmy Lai was charged with collusion with a foreign country under the national security law. The maximum punishment is life imprisonment.

Covid-19

The Hong Kong government adopted a range of measures in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. These included the suspension of educational classes from early February to 27 May 2020, a ban on public gatherings of more than eight people, a restriction on the number of customers at catering businesses, and restrictions on arrivals from foreign countries. The revenue of news media organisations has been disrupted by the pandemic, with some interviewees reporting a significant drop in advertising revenue from many business sectors (e.g., the property market and luxury services). The revenue crisis is an open secret; for example, Jimmy Lai, the chairman of Next Media – one of the largest media companies in Hong Kong – made a video appeal to audiences to subscribe to *Apple Daily*, suggesting that almost all advertising revenue had been lost due to the long-lasting political suppression and the pandemic. People working for other media companies have also faced pay cuts or salary freezes, and some have been compelled to take unpaid leave for Covid-19.

The HKSAR government has provided a HKD 137.5 billion package of relief measures, including the HKD 80 billion employment support scheme designed to help employers retain their staff. Under this scheme, all employers in the private sector, including news media companies, are eligible to apply for a subsidy, which would last for a period of up to six months and is based on number of employees.

Leading news media sample

Our media sample for the Media for Democracy Monitor (MDM) 2021 consisted of nine leading news media representing different political standpoints, media types, and media characteristics: one public broadcasting service (RTHK), three daily Chinese newspapers with different political standpoints (*Apple Daily*, *Oriental Daily News*, and *Ming Pao*), one daily English newspaper (*South China Morning Post*), two television broadcasting companies (TVB and Cable TV), and two online news portals (*HK01* and *Stand News*). Among these, senior

staff (editors-in-chief or senior managing editors) and leading journalists have been interviewed, with the exception of seniors from TVB and *South China Morning Post* and the chairperson of the HKJA.

Indicators

Dimension: Freedom / Information (F)

(F1) Geographic distribution of news media availability 3 POINTS

Hong Kongers are kept informed by a wide variety of news media. High levels of public access and the efficient use of technology to gather and distribute news and information characterise the news media.

According to a 2019 report, there were 82 daily newspapers and 531 periodicals (including a number of electronic newspapers) available in Hong Kong. This included 53 Chinese-language dailies, 12 English-language dailies (including one in Braille), 13 bilingual dailies, and 4 Japanese dailies (HKSAR, 2019). Hong Kong is also a major international media centre in Asia and a regional base for international media organisations, including *Financial Times*, *Bloomberg*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *TIME*, and *CNN*.

The eleven most influential local paid newspapers are *Apple Daily*, *Hong Kong Commercial Daily*, *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, *Hong Kong Economic Times*, *Ming Pao*, *Oriental Daily News*, *Sing Pao Daily News*, *Sing Tao Daily*, *South China Morning Post*, *Ta Kung Pao*, and *Wen Wei Pao*; there are also five free newspapers, namely, *am730*, *Headline Daily*, *Lion Rock Daily*, *Sky Post*, and *The Standard* (The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2019). Free dailies are not new in Hong Kong, with the first free Chinese-language newspaper, *Metropolis Daily*, having been launched in 2002 and freely distributed at Mass Transit Railway stations. It reached a daily circulation of 400,000, with approximately one million readers among the population of seven million. *Headline Daily* and *am730* joined the free-daily market one year later, with *Headline News* later becoming the city's biggest free newspaper, with a circulation of 800,000 copies (SCMP, 2013).

However, Hong Kong's traditional paid and free newspapers have suffered from the availability of free online news content, with plunging circulation numbers and financial decline. Despite the extremely low online advertising revenues, only a few paid newspapers have moved to charge readers to access their website, and most only charging for a portion of their content. Some free newspapers, including *Sharp Daily* and *New Evening Post*, quit the market, while *Metropolis Daily* stopped the free distribution of printed copies and moved

online (Vines, 2019). The actual circulation figures for traditional newspapers are difficult to ascertain, as only two Hong Kong newspapers are independently audited. For example, *Oriental Daily News*, one of the largest newspapers in Hong Kong, made the impressive claim that it had a readership of over 3.54 million in 2018, but there was no way to prove the accuracy of these figures. Looking at the positive side of the current situation, an abundance of news content from a wide range of traditional news media is freely available online for Internet users, and 99.1 per cent of all households in Hong Kong had access to the Internet, either at home or on a mobile phone in 2018 – a proportion that continues to increase. Mobile subscriber penetration rate is 283.7 per cent (Census and Statistics Department, HKSAR, 2019).

Politically, the major newspapers can be categorised according to their pro-establishment or pro-democracy stance. *Apple Daily* was the most outstanding example of a newspaper aligned with the pro-democracy camp, while *Wen Wei Po*, *Ta Kung Pao*, and *Hong Kong Commercial Daily* represented the pro-establishment viewpoint. Newspapers sitting somewhere between these two stances were under intense political pressure (Lee, 2007a, 2007b).

In 2019, the household broadband penetration rate was 93.6 per cent in Hong Kong, and the percentage of persons aged ten and over who had used the Internet during the previous twelve months using a mobile phone or personal computer was 99.3 per cent and 87.7 per cent, respectively. The increase in smartphone usage was particularly remarkable among the elderly: approximately two in three persons aged 65 and over had a smartphone in 2019, compared to only around three in five persons in the same age group in 2018 (Office of the Government Chief Information Officer, 2020). This might indicate that the information gap between different generations is narrowing.

Regarding broadcast media, Hong Kong had three domestic free-television broadcasters, two domestic pay-television broadcasters, twelve non-domestic television service providers, one government-funded public service broadcaster, and two audio broadcasters (HKSAR, 2019). In 2017, penetration rate of domestic free television was around 99 per cent. Nearly 90 per cent (more than 2.2 million) of households in Hong Kong have switched to digital terrestrial television, representing a very high level of digital terrestrial television penetration (HKSAR, 2020a). Among the television broadcasters, TVB continues to dominate free television news and online news, despite constant criticism over self-censorship and ties to mainland China (Chan et al., 2019).

RTHK is the only public broadcaster in Hong Kong, and it is fully government funded. Since 2014, RTHK has added three new television channels and seven new radio stations and faces a challenge to fill the airtime with enough fresh media content. It has been criticised by a government audit for not creating enough new programmes, and thus repeatedly broadcasting the same content (Chan et al., 2019).

Fantastic Television Limited launched its Chinese channel in 2017 and a channel in English in 2018. However, TVB still has a very dominant role in the free-broadcasting market, and the new operators have been unable to break up the TVB monopoly. The Hong Kong government was criticised for the decision in 2013 not to issue a licence to HKTV, despite the popularity of their programmes among the general public. It is believed that the decision was politically motivated, with the government not wanting to promote competition in the free-television industry, fearing that it could lead to more critical coverage of the central government in Beijing (Kwak, 2018).

Nevertheless, Hong Kongers can access a large number of television channels, with more than 800 local and overseas television channels being delivered through free-to-air terrestrial and satellite reception or pay-television services. Commercial Radio Hong Kong and Metro Radio Hong Kong, together with RTHK, also offer 13 analogue radio channels.

Additionally, there is an abundance of online news media available in Hong Kong, featuring different political orientations. For example, *Speak Out HK* is on the pro-establishment side and *Passion Times* takes a pro-localist stance (The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2019). The English-language *HKFP* was founded in 2015 and is funded by public donations; despite its success in fundraising, it only reaches 3 per cent of the total Hong Kong population. This indicates that there is only a small market for English-language news in Hong Kong, and that the market remains dominated by international media, such as the BBC and CNN (Chan et al., 2019).

(F2) Patterns of news media use (consumption of news) 3 POINTS

90 per cent of the Hong Kong population consume news every day, with online and television being the main news media. Demographic factors contributed to different news consumption patterns.

According to the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2019*, around 82 per cent of the Hong Kong population consumed their news online, with 75 per cent and 44 per cent of the population consuming news on television and print media. Only 17 per cent were willing to pay for online news, and 51 per cent shared news items via social media, messaging, and e-mail.

A study by the University of Hong Kong (The University of Hong Kong, 2019a, 2019b) found that around 70 per cent of Hong Kongers consume news online, and 65 per cent consume news on television. Comparing the news consumption patterns over the past two decades, there has been a continual decline in the consumption of news on television and newspapers and an increase in online consumption; the trend for radio news consumption is quite steady (see Table 1).

Table 1 Different media nominated as the main news source, 2000–2019 (per cent)

Media type	2000	2009	2019
Newspapers	70.9	71.6	51.6
Television	81.1	84.5	64.0
Radio	26.2	34.5	30.2
Internet	5.7	37.6	69.4

Source: The University of Hong Kong, 2019a, 2019b

According to a further study conducted by Hong Kong Baptist University (2020), 90 per cent of the population consumed news every day, but 90 per cent of the population did not pay for access to news. Education was found to be an important factor in influencing the use of different news platforms. A survey suggested that 46.5 per cent and 52.1 per cent of participants using websites or mobile apps had a tertiary education background (Wang & Wong, 2018). However, the importance of age, education, and political background is not declining: government statistics suggested that over 90 per cent of young people use social media, and the penetration rate among people aged 45 and above was 78 per cent in 2018 (Information Technology and Broadcasting, 2019). A recent study conducted by The Chinese University of Hong Kong (2020) about the anti-extradition bill movement also found that age and educational background led to a difference in news consumption patterns. It suggested that people who gathered information from traditional media are more likely to be seniors, lower income, lesser educated, unemployed, or take pro-establishment stances. In contrast, people who were younger, better educated, higher income, or supporters of the pro-democracy camp tended to get their news from social media, *LIHKG*, and *Telegram*.

With only two Hong Kong newspapers being independently audited, it has been difficult to examine the loss of newspaper readership. However, Reuters Institute's 2019 *Digital News Report* on Hong Kong (Chan et al., 2019) placed TVB news as the top news media outlet in terms of audience, despite controversies over its editorial independence. *Apple Daily* came second among online portals and third among television, radio, and print media. *Yahoo! News*, which purchases content from other sources, had the third-largest online news media readership in Hong Kong.

RTHK, the sole public service broadcaster, displayed the highest level of news credibility and was very popular among the public, although there were continual controversies over government interference and editorial independence. RTHK also makes audio and video podcasts available for online access and through mobile apps, which has contributed to the high penetration of podcasts in Hong Kong.

(F3) Diversity of news sources

2 POINTS

The respondents stressed that they performed independent research on publicity materials and did not rely on news agencies over local news sources. However, there were serious issues relating to political censorship, especially through the selection or omission of sources, among some media organisations.

The respondents were unanimous in stating that publicity materials did not play a significant role in news reporting. Although they sometimes used publicity materials as part of their daily routines, they researched the content and only adopted it as a secondary source for stories. In Hong Kong, international news relies heavily on news agencies. However, the journalists interviewed for this study worked on local news, and none of them mentioned news agencies as a source.

Content exchange with other news media outlets is not a common practice in Hong Kong, although some media organisations did exchange video content, especially while covering the anti-extradition movement. The respondents suggested that, with the protests being widespread and many newsworthy events taking place simultaneously, it was impossible for a single organisation to have reporters everywhere and, even if they did have reporters at the scene, many events could be missed. When important shots were lacking, this was compensated for by using visuals obtained by other news media. They emphasised that they did give acknowledgement to other news media for the video content and research adopted for news stories.

The interviewees said they usually worked on their own stories, and that there was rarely any content syndication. In Hong Kong, online news media and free newspapers made heavier use of content syndication, due to their limited resources and the short news cycles involved in responding to the needs of Internet users.

There were some reports of outlets occasionally collaborating with other local news media, especially on major political topics. International journalism networks have been established over recent years, and some newspapers, such as *Ming Pao*, have worked with the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists on important investigative stories, such as the *Panama Papers*.

Some interviewees admitted to self-censorship over the selection or omission of sources on political grounds. This situation was more evident among the news media with a pro-establishment stance. For example, a number of experts with pro-democracy stances were blacklisted, and reporters were asked to interview pro-establishment experts. Editors justified these practices as airing a range of voices on the stories or avoiding extreme and irrational comments.

(F4) Internal rules for practice of newsroom democracy 1 POINT

Democratic practices in newsrooms varied between different media organisations. Generally speaking, newsroom journalists did not have a say in appointing the editor-in-chief or other positions. However, some newsroom journalists had a greater role in portraying and framing political issues than others.

In Hong Kong, only a few local news media organisations have their own labour unions, such as *Ming Pao*, Next Media, and RTHK. The respondents admitted that journalists generally did not have a say in the appointment of an editor-in-chief or the senior management team. Only one respondent suggested that newsroom journalists had replaced their editor-in-chief because of the threat of a strike, along with some other reasons. Newsrooms do not have any guidelines to ensure democratic practices. The situation became worrisome only after 1997, when Beijing began to exercise indirect control rights over Hong Kong newsrooms via allocative control, such as the appointment of staff. At present, media critics are questioning the appointment of a former head of the China news division of the well-known pro-Beijing media organisation TVB as the head of the Now TV news department, which had been recognised as the most-credible television news organisation. It has been alleged that the appointment was a political manoeuvre (Mingpao, 2020).

Regarding the framing of political issues, democratic practices in newsrooms are less common in organisations that are more inclined towards the pro-establishment camp. In the most extreme case, political news framing is rarely discussed; in other cases, permission to discuss framing depended on the political sensitivity of the news story and the political stance of the media outlets.

(F5) Company rules against *internal* influence on newsroom/editorial staff 2 POINTS

The separation of newsrooms from management is not practiced by any of the media organisations sampled, and there is a diversity of relationships between media owners and the newsroom. In Hong Kong, generally speaking, newsrooms are totally separated from the advertising department.

Not all leading Hong Kong news media practiced a strict separation between newsroom and owners. In the most extreme case, an owner was appointed as editor-in-chief. In some other cases, owners of media organisations gave direct instructions to newsroom editors and journalists and could potentially intervene across the full range of news sectors.

Some organisations did exercise a total separation of their newsrooms from owners, with the owners rarely visiting the newsroom or intervening in editorial

matters. One online media portal is operated by a trust fund to guarantee that the board members stay out of editorial decisions.

Although Hong Kong has a free market economy, and “freedom of speech, of the press and of publication” is enshrined in article 27 of the Basic Law, a 2017 survey of journalists conducted by the HKJA and The University of Hong Kong found that 30 per cent of newsroom workers practiced self-censorship. This was consistent with the result of our interviews, in which five out of twenty interviewees confirmed that self-censorship was a common practice in their companies (HKJA, 2017).

The freedom of newsroom workers is subject to the approaches of their owners. The central government, in full realisation of how commercial interests are deeply linked to political interests, exerted indirect influence by co-opting media owners or advertising pressure.

Since Hong Kong became a part of China in 1997, the Chinese government has exerted indirect influence on Hong Kong news outlets by the co-option of media owners. A large proportion of them have significant interests linked to, and close connections with, China. A third of these news media owners have been awarded political titles or awards (see Table 2). Scholars suggest that the central government has indirect interference on the Hong Kong newsrooms via allocative control, rather than operational control (allocative control is control via allocating basic personnel and resources, while operational control refers to direct control of newsroom daily operations). Such allocative control might result in self-censorship. The most recent example of allocative control is the replacement of the retiring head of Now TV news with a former management staff member of TVB, which is recognised by many as one of the most influential pro-government media outlets. Another example is the replacement of i-CABLE Executive Director, Mr. Fung Tak Hung, with former journalists from ATV (Asia Television Limited), which is also widely recognised to be a pro-government media outlet. The replacement of the news department heads in two credible broadcast media outlets after the enactment of the new national security law has worried media scholars and critics, since these appointments are suspected to be political (Standnews, 2020).

On the one hand, a third of media owners in Hong Kong have been granted political appointment or awards. They have been appointed to the national People’s Congress and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) (HKJA, 2013; see also Table 2). On the other hand, the Chinese government also exerted pressure on media organisations by rewarding or withholding business opportunities.

Table 2 *Selected list of past or present owners or major shareholders of media organisations*

Name	Origin	Media position	Titles in political society
WANG Jing	Mainland	Major shareholder, ATV (until 2015)	CPPCC (2003–2013)
LIU Changle	Mainland	Major shareholder, ATV (until 2007)	CPPCC (2003–2023) / GBS 2016 / SBS 2010
CHAN Wing-kee	Hong Kong	Major shareholder, ATV (until 2016)	CPPCC (2003–2018) / NPC (1993–2003) GBM 2016 / GBS 2000
LI Ruigang	Mainland	Vice-Chairman, TVB (since 2016)	Deputy secretary general of the Communist Party in Shanghai (2011–2012)
Henry CHENG	Hong Kong	Major shareholder, Cable TV (since 2017)	CPPCC (1993–2018) / GBS 2001
David YAU	Hong Kong	Major shareholder, Cable TV (since 2017)	CPPCC (2013–2023)
Douglas WOO	Hong Kong	Major shareholder, Cable TV (until 2017)	Member of Beijing Municipal People's Political Consultative Conference (2013–2023)
Peter WOO	Hong Kong	Founding Chairman, Cable TV (until 2017)	CPPCC (1998–2018) / GBS 1998
LI Ka Shing	Hong Kong	Owner, Metro Broadcast (under CK Hutchison Holdings)	GBM 2001
Victor LI	Hong Kong	Owner, Metro Broadcast (under CK Hutchison Holdings)	CPPCC (1998–2023)
Richard LI	Hong Kong	Owner, NOW TV Chairperson, HK Economic Journal	Member of Beijing Municipal People's Political Consultative Conference (2013–2018)
Charles HO	Hong Kong	Chairperson, Sing Tao News Corporation	CPPCC (1998–2023) / GBM (2014)
FUNG Siu Por	Hong Kong	Chairman, HK Economic Times	GBS (2003)
MA Ching-kwan	Hong Kong	Honorary Chairperson, Oriental Press Group Ltd.	CPPCC (2003–2013)
MA Yun	Mainland	Major shareholder, SCMP (since 2016)	Zhejiang Province People's Political Consultative Conference (2008–2012)

Source: Lee, 2018

In the case of public service broadcasting, the situation appears to be more complicated. In the past, RTHK has enjoyed a high degree of editorial independence, the editor-in-chief gives only general directions to their staff, and intervention from commercial interests is prevented. RTHK, the public broadcasting service, was founded in 1928 and is sometimes compared to the BBC, as it has guaranteed editorial independence. Nevertheless, RTHK faces many challenges because of its willingness to take a critical stance against the government and the police.

The board of advisors can potentially interfere with editorial independence, and the government has already been criticised for drying out RTHK by setting up a very tight budget and allocating scant resources for their productions, as a kind of political suppression. However, interviewees suggested that RTHK still maintains a high degree of editorial independence. Recently, all RTHK staff working at the Education Television Centre were asked to vacate, along with their equipment. RTHK therefore needs to find additional office space, without being provided with additional resources (Ma, 2020).

RTHK recently found itself at the centre of a political storm. The broadcaster's guaranteed funding holds ground only for a short period, and its finances can change from one year to the next. The interviewees admitted that RTHK lacked the resources to produce news stories, and no additional human resources are being added, despite applications continuing to be filed. An RTHK reporter was arrested over a programme about a mob attack in Yuen Long. Several scholars worry that this event has had a chilling effect on investigative journalism. Leung Ka-Wing, the editor-in-chief of RTHK and an experienced journalist, departed his role prematurely. A senior civil servant took over Leung's post. This appointment indicated the tightening of the government's control over RTHK. Several programmes were removed during the first few months of his appointment.

Moreover, all the interviewees suggested they still try their very best to maintain journalistic professionalism, including having hot debates with their superiors and insisting on adding opposing views to their news reports. As Hong Kong is still an open market, journalists generally see themselves as an autonomous agent serving the public and monitoring the powerholders. Market concerns and professionalism are at odds, with the former acting as a counter force to compel self-censorship in the newsroom (Lee, 2018; see also Indicator E2 – Media ownership concentration regional (local) level).

Internet technology provides an opportunity to increase the diversity of the media and to counteract the control of political power and capital. However, the central government also exerts influence on online media by co-opting with media owners (see Table 3) or personal threats.

Tony Choi, one of the founders of *House News*, supported the Occupy Central movement publicly. He suddenly asked to close down the *House News* website and wrote publicly, "I am scared. I made the wrong judgment. I feel guilty". Tony Choi and others established *Stand News*, another online media house. Learning from previous experience, a single legal holder does not own online media. A trustee committee owns *Stand News* with eight board members (Steger, 2014).

Table 3 *Ownership of the major digital news media in Hong Kong*

Online news media	Founder	Funding
HK01	Yu Pun-hoi: born in Hong Kong, this entrepreneur has invested in China and has a PhD in Marxism from Beijing University	Private investors: the company does not disclose its ownership structure. According to its chief editor, its estimated annual operation costs are more than HKD 60 million
FactWire	Ng Hiu-tung: this former journalist was born in Hong Kong	Crowdfunding
Initium	Will Cai Hua: born in Mainland China, Cai is a former judicial clerk for the Chinese Supreme Court and currently a partner at the US law firm Skadden (in Hong Kong)	Private investors: the company does not disclose its ownership structure
Bastille Post	Lo Wing Hung: born in Hong Kong, Lo is a former chief executive officer of Sing Tao News Corporation Limited and is currently its executive director	Private investors: the company does not disclose its ownership structure
Post 852	Yau Ching Yuen: Yau was born in Hong Kong and is a former deputy chief editor of the Economic Journal	Public donations
Orange News	Joint Publication: the company is fully owned by the Central Government Liaison Office in Hong Kong	Chinese government funding
CitizenNews	Group ownership: the site is owned by veteran Hong Kong journalists	Crowdfunding
Hong Kong Free Press	Tom Grundy: Grundy is a British freelance writer and activist	Crowdfunding
Inmediahk	Ip lam-chong: born in Macao, Ip is an assistant lecturer at Lingnan University	Public donations
Speakout	Barry Cheung Chun Yuen: born in Hong Kong, Cheung is a businessman and a former unofficial member of the Executive Council of Hong Kong	Private investors: the company does not disclose its ownership structure
HKGpao	Robert Chow Yung: born in Hong Kong. He is a former RTHK radio host and a pro-government activist. He is a co-founder of Silent Majority for Hong Kong and the Alliance for Peace and Democracy	Private investors: the company does not disclose its ownership structure
The Stand News	Group ownership: the site is owned by a board of trustees with eight members	Public donations

Source: Luqiu, 2017

All the interviewees admitted there was occasional collaboration with the advertising department in some news sectors, such as culture, finance, and tourism. However, they stressed that this type of article or video was always explicitly marked as sponsored, to notify the audience. Staff is rarely mixed across these departments.

(F6) Company rules against *external* influence on
newsroom/editorial staff

1 POINT

The external influence on newsrooms varies among news media organisations. Some respondents reported no direct influence of external parties on their newsroom work and content, although advertising boycotts due to political concerns have affected revenues.

With the exception of the public broadcaster, which is free from the pressure of advertisers, the leading news media outlets in Hong Kong are financed by subscription fees or donations, on the one hand, and advertising and sponsorship, on the other.

With regard to the relationship between advertisers and the newsroom, most media companies do not disclose their advertising income. There is no database containing such information, neither could any statistical data be obtained during the interviews. A survey conducted by the market research company NielsenIQ projected that expenditure on digital advertisements would equal that of traditional media campaigns in 2019, as a budget shift from offline to online advertising continued. Nielson further reported that 13 per cent of overall advertising budgets were spent on television advertising, while 11.7 per cent was spent on print (NielsenIQ, 2019).

The withdrawal of advertisements as well as boycotts of several news companies for political reasons or as a protest against their reporting is a public secret in Hong Kong. This has been occurring for more than a decade. In fact, interviewees suggested that the conglomerate controlled by Asia's richest man, Li Ka-shing, had stopped placing advertisements in Next Media company, which publishes *Apple Daily*, long before 2003. Other companies followed suit due to an anti-Beijing political stance. A similar situation was also faced by other media organisations, such as *Stand News*.

Respondents from other media organisations also recalled the occasional withdrawal of advertisements because of their investigative reporting, although this was less frequent for outlets other than *Apple Daily*. Despite these challenges, most respondents said they stood firm against any interference from advertisers over their editorial independence, and only very few respondents admitted they had chosen self-censorship over news content due to advertising pressures.

The government has also used public funding to advocate political views. For example, the Hong Kong government spent HKD 245 million on front-page advertisements in seven daily newspapers to promote a positive image of the enactment of the new national security law. After months of protests, when the government asked international public relations firms to help restore its image in 2019, they rejected the project.

(F7) Procedures on news selection and news processing 1 POINT

Only a few media organisations have formal rules or training on news selection and news processing. Most of the respondents emphasised that new journalists learn through experience and by following the newsroom practices of senior staff.

Formal rules or training are rare in Hong Kong newsrooms, with respondents stating that their newsrooms relied mainly on the individual professionalism of journalists. Professional practices are imprinted in the working process, and new staff usually learn by observation and experience. A few media organisations do provide occasional in-house journalistic training for their staff, but the more usual practice for self-motivated newsroom workers is to voluntarily join courses offered outside their companies.

The respondents emphasised that the discussion of news value is part of their work routines. Reporters or editors may initiate story ideas, and three to five individuals sometimes check the articles or videos before publication. More checks and edits are run on print versions than online news stories. Although the already-cited article 27 of the Basic Law states that “Hong Kong residents shall have freedom of speech, of the press and of publication; freedom of association, of assembly, of procession and of demonstration; and the right and freedom to form and join trade unions, and to strike,” some respondents suggested that senior reporters tended to intervene in their editorial decisions if they touched on politically sensitive issues.

(F8) Rules and practices on internal gender equality 2 POINTS

Employment conditions, including salaries, are equal for male and female journalists.

According to a speech by the Chief Executive of HKSAR (Lam, 2020), females fill around 35 per cent of managerial positions in Hong Kong, and the work-force participation rate for women (51%) is much lower than that of men (68.5%). This rate is behind those of Hong Kong’s regional neighbours, including Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore. However, in newsrooms, the gender

equality situation appears to be better than the overall employment pattern in Hong Kong.

According to an HKJA study conducted in 2011, the ratio of female and male newsroom staff was almost balanced at 51/49. While there is no updated data available, the current ratio appears to be similar. There was a general impression among the respondents that there were more female journalists present in the newsroom than male journalists. There is believed to be no difference between male and female journalists in terms of promotion opportunities and salaries, although there are no formal rules or regulations that enforce equal standards. Female journalists have equal opportunities to take on leading positions in the newsroom, and many female journalists have gone on to hold leading positions, such as editor-in-chief or managing editor, within leading news companies. However, almost all the editors-in-chief of the leading companies are male, reflecting a continuing trend of men holding most managerial positions in Hong Kong news media.

Equality in pay might be due to the generally low salaries paid to journalists in Hong Kong. The 2011 HKJA survey found that the monthly salary of 75 per cent of the respondents was below HKD 20,000, with a median salary range of HKD 12,000–15,000, despite around 60 per cent of the respondents holding degrees, and 16 per cent holding postgraduate qualifications. For comparison, the median monthly income of the general working population in 2011 was HKD 11,000. 40 per cent of the senior editors – a group that includes team leaders, assignment editors, and deputy assignment editors – were considering changing jobs (HKJA, 2011). Our interview with the chairperson of the HKJA suggested that the situation has not improved, and many new reporters quit the industry within a year or two.

All interviewees reported challenges for new mothers in the newsroom. Maternity leave has only recently been increased to 14 weeks, which is still a lot less generous than in the neighbouring Singapore and Australia. The newsrooms may accommodate new mothers with a temporary breastfeeding room, but do not have a fixed breastfeeding space.

(F9) Gender equality in media content

1 POINT

Past research has found that media construction of gender stereotypes remained prevalent in Hong Kong. The respondents accepted the importance of gender equality, but they did not see it as a serious concern and were not particularly aware of gender equality when reporting news.

Unlike many other developed countries, Hong Kong does not track the media portrayal of women and men. A study by the Equal Opportunities Commission (2009) suggested that the image of females presented in the local print

media was generally negative, with the portrayal of female artists even being sexualised. Women were also usually portrayed as staying at home (Furnham & Chan, 2003), while men were more likely to be depicted as working professionals (Moon & Chan, 2006).

Studies of gender portrayals in Hong Kong news media have been rare. One study conducted in 2004 found that female officials were depicted in a highly positive light in Hong Kong newspapers. Female leaders were assessed on whether they mixed masculine and feminine traits, that is, whether they were equally successful at work and as mothers and wives (Lee, 2004).

Respondents accepted the importance of gender equality but denied that it is a serious problem. Some appeared not to be particularly aware of gender inequality when reporting news, while only one news media organisation was reported as working consciously on promoting gender equality. An interviewee explained, “I don’t see gender inequality as a big problem in Hong Kong, and we rarely pay attention to it”.

(F10) Misinformation and digital platforms (alias social media)

2 POINTS

There are no formal defence mechanisms or regular training for defeating fake news, although all of the respondents admitted that misinformation on digital platforms is a serious problem, particularly in times of social unrest and the Covid-19 pandemic.

All of the interviewees from leading news media outlets in Hong Kong acknowledged the potential threat posed by the large amount of misinformation and fake news circulating on digital platforms. They emphasised their great concern over this issue and that they ensured news was accurate before publication. The defence against misinformation generally relied on journalistic professionalism, such as locating the original sources and a practice of double-sourcing. None of the news media organisations collaborated with external fact-checking institutions, nor did they have any internal departments for fact checking. Likewise, algorithms are not used in fact-checking.

The battle against misinformation online has intensified since the anti-government protests started in June 2019, with fake news becoming prevalent. Misinformation and rumours have deepened the division of society and polarisation of public opinion. The situation has been worsened by the waning confidence in the Hong Kong government amongst the public (Banjo & Lung, 2019). A study conducted by The University of Hong Kong (2019a) found that 46 per cent of respondents distrusted the Hong Kong government. An injunction recently granted by HKSAR’s High Court bans the “disseminating, circulating, publishing or re-publishing” of online materials that incite violence.

(F11) Protection of journalists against (online) harassment 1 POINT

Journalists generally rely on the support and protection of their employers in cases of harassment. The HKJA and other news worker groups have made a joint declaration against police harassment of journalists.

Harassment of Hong Kong journalists was an exception in the past, but both physical and verbal harassment have become a lot more commonplace since the anti-government movement broke out in June 2019. Journalists rely on the support and protection of their employers, the HKJA, and labour unions.

All of the respondents mentioned that their own media companies had invested more in safety gear to protect journalists, with one company even procuring bulletproof jackets. Editorial departments of some media outlets condemned the police for brutality against their reporters. Some respondents mentioned that their management teams promised to discuss police harassment with the police at the managerial level, and many had even boycotted police press conferences. Many interviewees believed there was nothing more their organisations could do for them, although some urged their senior colleagues to speak out for them.

At the same time, the HKJA and other news worker groups have issued numerous statements and written an open letter to the HKSAR Chief Executive urging the police to stop their harassment of reporters. Reporters also protested against police brutality at a police press conference, despite which, it has not abated throughout the continuing protests.

Some respondents mentioned that their companies had reminded their staff about the need to regulate and ensure the privacy of their social media accounts to avoid doxing. Some outlets had also avoided the use of bylines on articles over sensitive issues or chosen not to show reporters' faces on camera to prevent their identities being disclosed. *Apple Daily* successfully applied for a court order to protect their journalists from doxing activities.

Dimension: Equality / Interest Mediation (E)

(E1) Media ownership concentration national level 2 POINTS

Hong Kong is a city; therefore, this indicator is not applicable.

(E2) Media ownership concentration regional (local) level 2 POINTS

The Hong Kong government has a restrictive licensing policy that results in a broadcasting oligopoly in Hong Kong. TVB has long held a virtual monopoly on the free-television market. Across all media organisations, there is no major concentration of ownership under a single giant media conglomerate. However, there is another form of ownership concentration, that of a small number of businessmen with vested interests in mainland China. They have operated across the news media with the same political and economic constraints, although the situation is currently in the process of being challenged by the rise of online and alternative media.

For a long period before the opening of the television market in 2013, there were only two domestic free-television broadcasters in Hong Kong: TVB and ATV. TVB has long been dominant in free-television services. The introduction of three pay-television broadcasters did not break this near-monopoly. However, on April 2016, ATV finally ceased its 58 years of broadcasting with a reputation for poor production quality (Cheung, 2016).

In 2013, to open the market, the Hong Kong government granted two additional free-to-air television licences to HK Television Entertainment – (a subsidiary of PCCW) and i-Cable's fantastic TV, the dominant pay-television companies. However, this too had little impact on TVB's dominance (Chan et al., 2019). The rejection of HKTV for a free-to-air television licence also roused suspicion regarding political suppression (Cheung, 2016).

Two commercial broadcasters (Hong Kong Commercial Broadcasting Company Limited and Metro Broadcast Corporation Limited) provide thirteen local radio channels and one public service broadcaster (RTHK). Five of these channels have secured 80 per cent of the radio audience (Cheung, 2016).

In contrast to broadcasting, the Hong Kong newspaper market is highly competitive. Serving a population of seven million are around 15 well-known paid daily newspapers and free newspapers in Hong Kong. An intensely competitive newspaper market is supposed to lead to a more liberal, democratic, and diversified media environment; however, the media do not always work in accordance with commercial logic. Many newspapers are under the control of a small number of businessmen with vested interests in mainland China. These media outlets share similar political and economic constraints, and have formed a part of a political united front (Chan & Lee, 2007). According to the HKJA, 26 mainstream media outlets are closely related to Chinese interests, being either under Chinese control or having stakes in mainland China. Over 85 per cent of media owners or top newsroom managers have been incorporated in various ways into the Chinese or Hong Kong establishments (HKJA, 2017; see also Indicator F6 – Company rules against *external* influence on newsroom/editorial staff).

The concern over media ownership concentration and Chinese control has grown continuously, as more Chinese money has been invested in Hong Kong media. Two significant television broadcasters, TVB and i-Cable, recently came into the ownership of individuals or companies with close connections to mainland China. The pay-television provider i-Cable almost went bankrupt in 2017, but received an injection of funds from a group of investors, resulting in mainland Chinese investment making up 35 per cent of its ownership. There has also been a report suggesting that the buyer of TVB is a mainland Chinese tycoon, although the transfer took place through cross-holdings and partnerships.

However, certain pro-democracy news media outlets continue to remain, and these help to push the boundaries of political discourse (Lee, 2018). Digital media has also opened a door to break the media ownership concentration of businessmen with close mainland China connections. As stated above, a large majority of the Hong Kong population consumes news online (including through social media), and over 40 per cent said that online media is their main source of news. Legacy media represents just one of the many forms of media content providers, and digital media provides an opportunity for the emergence of alternative small-scale media outlets. There are more than twelve major digital news media outlets in Hong Kong, mostly supported by private investors or crowdfunding. Although online alternative media face various limitations, such as lack of resources, they somehow continue to sustain a resistance to central government control (Luqiu, 2017).

Alongside the Chinese language and local news media outlets, many international news media organisations have also been set up in Hong Kong. For example, the *Financial Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *TIME*, and *The New York Times* are all available in the Hong Kong market (HKSAR, 2019).

(E3) Diversity of news formats

3 POINTS

Hong Kong has a large variety of different news formats covering different regions of focus, including local news, Chinese and Asian news, and world news, as well as all news sectors, such as politics, finance, culture, entertainment, and sports. With regard to news formats, other than traditional long-form and feature stories, many new media formats are now emerging in what is becoming a small and competitive market. These include animated news, virtual-reality news, and live-streamed news broadcasting.

A large variety of news formats are available in Hong Kong, including news video highlight packages, long-form news, and feature stories, news forums, and news-based satire programmes. However, the variety in television news formats has recently come under threat with the decline in press freedom. RTHK decided

to briefly suspend its long-running satirical show *Headliner*, which came under attack for insulting the police. The Communication Authority issued RTHK with a warning, and the government asked for a full review of RTHK's programming, prompting fear among newsroom workers over increasing political pressure (Pomfret & Torode, 2020).

The post-1997 Hong Kong media market is highly competitive. Private media outlets face challenges from the 24-hour news cycle of international and local news media accessed via cable or satellite, Internet broadcasting, and various other news media. The media have become highly market-oriented and present news in sensationalist forms, such as infotainment, news with sexual and violent content, and celebrity news (Ngok, 2007). One such example is the animated news produced by *Apple Daily*. Launched in 2010, animated news reconstructs stories through a mode of mixing news footage with melodramatic animation. While certain practitioners argue that the animation format fills missing scenes in covering a news event, media critics worry that such a practice may compromise the objectivity and accuracy of news stories (Lo & Cheng, 2020). To appeal to their audience, many new media formats have also now emerged in what is a small and competitive market. In addition to animated news, this includes virtual-reality news and live-streamed news broadcasting. Media outlets also cover a wide range of topics, including politics, finance, culture, tourism, current issues, and weather. Phone-in talk shows also serve as a form of political infotainment (Lee, 2002).

(E4) Minority/Alternative media

1 POINT

Minority ethnicities are generally under-represented and negatively portrayed in Hong Kong. The sole public service broadcaster has worked on programmes for the purposes of cultural diversity and produced programmes for ethnic minorities. The rise of the Internet provides an opportunity for ethnic media and for platforms on which minorities can interact.

The demographic composition of Hong Kong is quite complicated, despite 92 per cent of the population being ethnic Chinese. The city has a long history of immigration and has long been a magnet for immigrants, refugees, and workers from all over the world. In particular, the Cultural Revolution sparked a large-scale migration of Chinese into Hong Kong (Erni & Leung, 2014). Only 60 per cent of the population was born in Hong Kong, in addition to there being nearly 600,000 non-Chinese residents. When the term “ethnic minorities” is used in Hong Kong, it usually refers to residents who have moved from South or Southeast Asian countries, such as Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, and Nepal. Over 75 per cent of the members of ethnic minority groups who are in work perform simple and routine tasks, with the most common example being

that of domestic workers. Despite the large number of domestic helpers, there are now larger numbers of young people of ethnic minorities who were born in Hong Kong and are able to read and write Chinese (Census and Statistics Department, 2016). Caucasians are not referred to as an ethnic minority: they usually have a higher socioeconomic status, and are considered expatriates (Yeo, 2018). All of this, in combination, results in a postcolonial-Chinese multicultural city straddling the cultures of British colonialism, Chinese immigrants, and ethnically non-Chinese populations (Erni & Leung, 2014).

To appeal to the majority of the population, ethnic minorities are under-represented or presented negatively in mainstream media. When people from ethnic minorities appear in news stories, it is usually in relation to negative incidents, such as fights, robberies, and sex crimes (Erni & Leung, 2014). Stereotypical images of ethnic minorities also appear frequently in advertisements and in school textbooks (Yeo, 2018). A survey in 2014 found that only 25 per cent of Hong Kong Chinese respondents believed there was discrimination against ethnic minorities, yet over 60 per cent said they held a negative impression of ethnic minorities (Ku et al., 2005). Even if indirectly, this is indicative of prevalent negative portrayals of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong's mainstream media. The survey also suggested that over 40 per cent of respondents did not have any acquaintances from ethnic minorities.

On the other hand, South Asian youth do not rely greatly on local mainstream media, preferring international imported programmes via cable and satellite television networks. The recent rise of the Internet provides even more opportunities for them to access programmes from other countries in addition to their capacity to consume local news being dependent on their Chinese language literacy.

RTHK, modelled on the BBC, is the one of the few exceptions in Hong Kong in terms of catering to the needs of minority ethnicities. As a public service broadcaster, it has the mission “to provide a platform for free and unfettered expression of views, [to] serve a broad spectrum of audiences and cater to the needs of minority interest groups, [and to] contribute to the openness and cultural diversity of Hong Kong” (Radio Television Hong Kong, 2020). Accordingly, RTHK aims to use its platform to promote cultural diversity; for example, five radio programmes are produced in minority languages, including Bahasa Indonesia, Hindi, Nepali, Thai, and Urdu. RTHK also produces radio programmes depicting the lives of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, and television news documentaries that show the problems that people from ethnic minorities face in Hong Kong (RTHK, 2020).

The rise of the Internet, including that of social media, provides opportunities for ethnic minorities to develop alternative media, and combined, these counterbalance mainstream media hegemony. For example, *HKNepal.com* provides news about Hong Kong, Nepal, and local community organisations, and on recent important global events and issues: “They attract discussion from

Nepalese netizens from Hong Kong and overseas who have relatives in Hong Kong or are interested in Hong Kong affairs” (Erni & Leung, 2014: 73), and foster a global network of the ethnic community.

With regard to the printed media, there are newsletters and magazines in minority languages, including Urdu, Nepali, and Hindi. These are used to report on local Hong Kong news and news about the home countries or about what occurs within the communities of ethnic minorities (Ku et al., 2005).

Other minorities in Hong Kong face similar problems with media portrayals. LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people are among them. In many societies, LGBT people are thought to make up around 5–10 per cent of the population, although there are no official data. There are no laws in Hong Kong to protect LGBT people from discrimination based on sexual orientation. A study conducted in 2006 suggested that homosexuality was then generally not accepted by the general public in Hong Kong (Yeo, 2018), although a more recent study found that attitudes towards LGBT people have since changed. A study carried out by The Chinese University of Hong Kong suggested that only twelve per cent of Hong Kongers were opposed to legal protections for LGBT people, and more Hong Kongers had become supporters of same-sex marriages and developed an increased level of understanding and support for transgender rights. This, perhaps, is representative of an increasing number of Hong Kongers coming into contact with homosexual people (Suen et al., 2020).

As with ethnic minorities, LGBT people are generally under-represented in the Hong Kong media and negatively portrayed in films, magazines, and television programmes. Again, the rise of the Internet and social media provides an opportunity for the LGBT population in Hong Kong to interact online (Yeo & Fung, 2018).

Several media outlets remain that represent political minority views and take controversial stances, such as In-Media. However, with the implementation of the new Hong Kong national security law, it has become almost impossible to discuss most politically sensitive topics. For instance, the Hong Kong democracy party Demosisto, founded by former student activists, has been disbanded under the new security law.

(E5) Affordable public and private news media

3 POINTS

Newspapers, online news outlets, and television broadcast news can be accessed at low prices in relation to the average monthly income. In fact, most media outlets’ news content is freely available online, and Hong Kong has very high Internet and mobile phone penetration rates.

In 2019, Hong Kong’s median monthly household and individual income stood at HKD 35,500 and HKD 18,200, respectively. This was up from HKD 24,890

and HKD 15,500, respectively, in 2016. The two lowest-income groups largely comprise seniors, with a median monthly household income of HKD 5,650, while the two highest-income groups have a median monthly household income of HKD 79,000 (Census and Statistics Department, 2016, 2019).

Hong Kong's newspapers generally sell for HKD 10, in addition to most of them making news content freely available online. Moreover, all major private local television broadcasters and public service broadcasters provide free news content online via websites or mobile apps. News outlets also share content via social media platforms. A survey conducted in 2016 found that 77 per cent of people aged over 18 accessed news through social media (Huang & Song, 2018).

As mentioned previously, Hong Kong has very high Internet and mobile phone penetration rates. As of January 2020, the mobile subscriber penetration rate stood at 283.7 per cent, and the household broadband penetration rate stood at 93.6 per cent (Office of the Government Chief Information Officer, 2020). Broadband services are affordable, often coming in at less than HKD 100 per month. Given the accessibility of online news, Hong Kong's general public has widespread and affordable access to local news media (Telcocheck, 2020).

(E6) Content monitoring instruments

1 POINT

Independent media monitoring instruments and institutionalised regulation of media are rare in Hong Kong.

The Communication Authority is a statutory body with a mandate of regulating the broadcasting and telecommunication industries in Hong Kong. All television programme service licensees are obliged to act in accordance with relevant laws, including the Broadcasting Ordinance (Cap. 562), the Broadcasting (Miscellaneous Provisions) Ordinance (Cap. 391), and the related subsidiary legislation (Communications Authority, 2020). These regulations set out standards related to programming, advertising, and technical issues for the licensees. Programming codes relate to issues of taste and decency, sex and violence, and impartiality and fairness, while advertising codes deal with issues related to advertising and sponsorships on broadcast outlets. Technical codes are concerned with technical quality.

Other key laws relevant to telecommunications include the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (Cap. 486), which regulates the protection of personal data, and the Competition Ordinance (Cap. 619), which regulates competitive behaviour. There are few regulations applicable to the Internet, aside from copyright law and the regulation of pornographic content.

Hong Kong has no media content monitoring instruments, although The Chinese University of Hong Kong and The University of Hong Kong conduct

regular surveys to gauge the public's evaluation of media credibility. No universities or independent supervising bodies have undertaken research to measure the quality of Hong Kong media content.

(E7) Code of ethics at the national level

2 POINTS

There exists a self-governed code of ethics, yet not all media organisations adhere to it. Interviewees stressed that they respect the code of ethics, although its details generally escaped them.

The Hong Kong Press Council is a self-governing body founded by professional journalists in Hong Kong in 2000. It is an independent, non-profit organisation that aims to enhance the professional and ethical standards of journalism by handling complaints against local newspapers from the general public. This organisation's code of ethics was drafted by four major journalist bodies: the Hong Kong Journalists Association, the Hong Kong Federation of Journalists, the Hong Kong News Executives' Association, and the Hong Kong Press Photographers' Association. However, the two most popular newspapers, *Apple Daily* and *Oriental Daily*, are not members of the Hong Kong Press Council, while many of the complaints the organisation receives actually concern these two papers. In 2018, the organisation began to handle complaints about online media. The number of complaints received in 2017 totalled 32. When complaints are found to be justified, the organisation issues a public statement critical of the media organisation in question. However, the Hong Kong Press Council is not legally protected from defamation laws (Hong Kong Press Council, 2020), and the HKJA has established its own code of ethics in an effort to raise professional standards.

While most interviewees stressed that they respected the codes of ethics set out by the aforementioned bodies or by their companies, they generally were unable to recall or recount their details. However, they reported that they adhered to the professional journalistic principles they learned at their universities or observed in their newsrooms.

(E8) Level of self-regulation

1 POINT

Self-regulation occurs rather informally; institutionalised or codified rules and procedures are rare.

Most interviewees admitted they did not remember the mission statements of their media companies and rarely read their companies' handbooks on ethical principles. They said they relied more on the informal, internal culture of

self-critiques and newsroom standards. Some stressed that they abided by the journalistic principles of fairness, balance, and objectivity; some of those working in the pro-establishment media said their superiors used this principle to ensure the pro-establishment camp's voice is represented. Despite these self-censorship practices, all interviewees emphasised the importance of accuracy. In political stories, they said they strove to present a balance of views, but that this was sometimes impossible. No formal system for hearing complaints about alleged violations of ethical standards in their newsroom was reported, yet some interviewees indicated that journalists who violate ethical standards are liable to be – and have been – sanctioned.

(E9) Participation

2 POINTS

Hong Kong newsrooms are not open to participation by the general public. Audience participation in the newsroom is very limited.

All of the interviewees admitted that their newsrooms' decisions were not open to citizen participation. This reflected the general approach to media in Hong Kong, although news outlets did use various means to involve citizens, such as inviting letters to the editor and organising regular focus groups to provide critical comments on the performance of the news media. Interviewees indicated that they valued audience comments and regarded the audience reaction as a key success metric. As an example, one interviewee said that their organisation had begun to do more live-streaming, and that this was based on audience comments. Nevertheless, newsroom decisions are not open to citizen participation. If requested, newsrooms welcome group visits (such as school field trips). In one case, a media company operated a cafe for a year for the purpose of interacting with its audience, but the cafe had to close after it proved unsuccessful as a business model.

The interviewees also indicated that their organisations provided avenues for audience crowdsourcing for important stories. All of them said they incorporated user-generated content into their news stories, such as video and audio materials, as well as comments left on social media. They reported that they did so based on their own journalistic judgment. Their social media handles are open to Internet users' comments on their news stories. Some news media columns also accepted articles from their audiences.

Since 1980, RTHK has organised a public forum called City Forum, which is a live broadcast programme that invites prominent political actors, professors, and scholars from different leanings to comment on current affairs. This forum also invites citizens to discuss and debate issues. Radio broadcasters also make various efforts to invite audience comments during talk-show pro-

grammes. However, a small number of leading media companies reported that they never use Internet users' comments and materials, as they believe them to be unreliable; their employees criticise this practice as a form of self-censorship.

(E10) Rules and practices on internal pluralism

1 POINT

Some Hong Kong newsrooms, including public service broadcasting stations, have codified rules on internal pluralism, but they do not necessarily follow the rules. A large majority of leading newsrooms are making efforts to extend the range of voices represented by the media. However, a third of respondents suggested that their companies engaged in self-censorship and did not give experts from all sides equal chances to present their case.

Different newsrooms have diverse rules and practices on internal pluralism. A large majority of interviewees suggested that there were internal debates on how the news should be presented, but some interviewees said that they were unable to go against the opinions of their supervisors. Most of the interviewees indicated that they made a serious effort to present the voices of experts or actors from different perspectives; at least half of the interviewees, however, admitted it was difficult to achieve an internal plurality of voices practically. First, some indicated that their interview invitations were often rejected. Second, there was self-censorship in media organisations, with one interviewee expressing the view that seeking balanced viewpoints is abnormal in a political story (but not necessarily in a non-political story). In another example of self-censorship, one media outlet maintains a blacklist of pro-democracy experts who are banned from interviews. Third, some interviewees who work in organisations aligned with a certain party or ideology indicated that – while they were free to use information and views from the other side in the course of their reporting – the final product was subject to cuts and edits to bring it in line with the organisation's ideology. Fourth, most respondents admitted they were rarely able to seek out new voices due to tight editorial deadlines.

Dimension: Control / Watchdog (C)

(C1) Supervising the watchdog “control of the controllers” 1 POINT

There are no institutionalised mechanisms for scrutinising the performance of leading news media, although universities, media bloggers, and professional journalists' bodies serve as independent observers monitoring their performance, especially in terms of self-censorship and news credibility. The performance of the media is always subject to debate.

There have been continuing efforts from academics and professional bloggers to scrutinise the performance of media outlets, with self-censorship and news credibility usually being their core concerns. They engaged in such scrutiny by conducting regular surveys of the public on media credibility and analysing the political pressure faced by practitioners. However, no regular mechanism of media content surveillance or reporting was reported.

In addition, political key opinion leaders, experienced reporters, the HKJA, and other media observers organise irregular public forums on media performance. Between 1990 and 2008, RTHK produced a programme called Media Watch, the only programme in Hong Kong devoted to monitoring the local media's performance and discussing recent developments in the media landscape. Media organisations have occasionally criticised one another and reported on related controversies.

The interviewees also suggested that they received complaints from the general public about their news content or presentation. Television and radio broadcasters faced greater pressure, because the Communication Authority allows the public to lodge complaints against broadcasting service providers, and such complaints have an influence on their broadcasting licences. On the one hand, this type of feedback can facilitate improvement in broadcasters' performance, while on the other, harsh attacks also act as a form of political suppression. In one instance, a satirical show by RTHK recently came under fierce attack.

(C2) Independence of the news media from powerholders 1 POINT

By law, the freedom of the press is protected, but press freedom continually deteriorates because of political pressure.

The Basic Law, with its promise of “one country, two systems”, is a mini-constitution that guarantees Hong Kong citizens' rights to freedom of speech and a free press. Since the handover, however, Beijing has exerted political pressure and indirect influence on Hong Kong's media via political, economic, and physical threats (HKJA, 2017).

The chairperson of the journalists' association admitted that attempts to directly influence journalists or newsrooms are sometimes made by politicians or their seniors. This generally reflects the current situation of Hong Kong news media.

There is further political pressure on RTHK from complaints lodged over news programmes from the pro-establishment camp. Two recent examples are the controversy over an interview with a World Health Organization advisor and the reaction of the Hong Kong police to a satirical programme. In the first

case, RTHK's reporters interviewed Dr. Bruce Aylward of the World Health Organization and asked if the organisation would reconsider Taiwan's membership. Dr. Aylward refused to answer the question and then ended the call. Edward Yau, the Secretary for Commerce and Industry, criticised the interview on the basis that it would endanger a sense of identity (Hamlett, 2020). In the second case, police chief Chris Tang wrote a public letter addressed to the director of RTHK following the screening of a satirical programme mocking the Hong Kong police. Production of the show was suspended in response (Gunia, 2020). The interviewees from RTHK acknowledged they had put a lot of effort into dealing with complaints from pro-establishment viewers alleging anti-government coverage during the anti-extradition bill movement, despite their news programmes winning local and international journalism awards. Several times, interviewees reported becoming more "cautious" and trying to maintain their "professionalism" as strategies to combat the political pressures they were facing.

The interviewees suggest that commercial interests are highly related to political interests. They said that Hong Kong news media experiences other types of political pressure by experiencing advertising boycotts due to their political stands, and they cannot access sources from pro-establishment parties or political actors. Most of the interviewees denied intervention from the advertisers.

The news media outlets also experienced political pressure in a more flagrant way. In 2018, the *Financial Times* Asia Editor Victor was denied entry to Hong Kong. This was because, when he worked as vice president of the Foreign Correspondents' Club, it held a talk by a pro-independence activist. HKFP's staff and the editors' families received threatening letters. Hong Kong Causeway Bay booksellers were abducted or lured from Hong Kong because they published and sold politically sensitive books. One of the publishers, Lam Wing-kee, escaped and told the public they were detained in China.

New laws with a potential to threaten the freedom of press were introduced, and a national anthem law was passed amid controversy and opposition. A Hong Kong extradition bill was proposed to transfer suspects to mainland China, despite the totally different judicial systems, provoking the largest mass protest in Hong Kong's history. Almost all the interviewees admitted that they or their colleagues have experienced brutal acts by the police (HKJA, 2020a).

The enactment of the Hong Kong national security law also threatens the press freedom in Hong Kong. A recent survey of journalists found that 98 per cent disagreed with the plan to enactment the law. Almost 90 per cent of respondents in the survey are afraid of the deterioration of press freedom, and over half of them were very worried that the passage of the national security law would pose a threat to their personal safety. Over 70 per cent suggested their media will cut or avoid reporting sensitive topics, such as Hong Kong Independence, after the enactment of the law (HKJA, 2020b).

The ownership of Hong Kong media is not highly concentrated, and yet, many Hong Kong media organisations have similar interests in terms of their alliance with the Central Government (see Indicator E2 – Media ownership concentration regional (local) level). Luckily, there are still a plenty of local and international media organisations with different political stands, allowing journalists to change from one media company to another. There is also public outcry about self-censorship from news media workers and the general public.

Since June 2019, another external influence has been police brutality against journalists and attacks by supporters of different political camps. A study conducted by the HKJA revealed that only 28 out of 222 surveyed journalists said they had not experienced police violence while covering the recent protests, and over half said they had been treated violently by the police on five or more occasions. The attacks included “physical and verbal abuse and the deliberate obstruction of journalists’ reporting, such as pushing reporters, and pulling off their gas masks, and aiming pepper spray, rubber bullets, as well as water cannon at them”, with frontline reporters saying they had developed skin conditions, such as rashes, redness, or itchiness, after tear gas exposure (HKJA, 2020a). Dr. Kwong, a district councillor who also works as a doctor, interviewed more than 170 reporters in August 2019 and found that over 96 per cent of respondents said “they had difficulty breathing, persistent coughing or coughed up blood” (Chan, 2019).

In the same HKJA study, 82 of the 222 journalists said they had been violently attacked by supporters of different political stances while covering the anti-extradition movement. Half of these reported being subject to attacks from supporters of the police and 37 per cent from protestors. Most of these attacks involved verbal abuse, pushing, and deliberate obstruction of reporting, although a few said that they had been attacked by triad gang members (HKJA, 2020a). Recently, police had unreasonably forced reporters to kneel or squat down.

Alongside the physical abuse suffered while covering the protests, the interviewees suggested that their colleagues in the same newsroom or other news organisations had become doxing targets, experiencing online harassment, and having their personal data leaked. The leaking of data resulted in harassment by phone, and online threats by “little pink thumbs”.

The implementation of the new national security law also has profound impact on news media. Jimmy Lai, the 71-year-old media tycoon and prominent pro-democracy figure, was arrested on 10 August 2020 and was accused of committing foreign collusion crimes in breach of Beijing’s national security law and conspiracy to defraud. Nine others were also arrested, including Lai’s two sons and four senior executives at his company Next Digital Media, the publisher of pro-democracy *Apple Daily*, Hong Kong’s largest daily tabloid. Hundreds of police stayed at the *Apple Daily* building, and in an unprecedented hour-long raid, they searched the news materials without court permission. Later,

police barred news organisations – including Reuters, Agence France-Presse, the Associated Press, and the public broadcaster RTHK – from attending a press conference about the search.

Eight press associations, including the HKJA, Hong Kong Press Photographers Association, Independent Commentators Association, and Journalism Educators for Press Freedom, as well as Hong Kong Citizen News Union, Ming Pao Staff Association, Next Media Trade Union, and RTHK Program Staff Union, issued a joint statement urging the police to explain the purpose and legal basis of the search.

(C3) Transparency of data on leading news media 2 POINTS

Not all news media outlets have disclosed their ownership structures, circulation information, and advertising revenues. Only the media organisations listed on the stock market have disclosed this information under the Securities and Future Ordinance.

In Hong Kong, most traditional leading news media outlets are listed corporations or have listed corporations as their parent companies. They are obliged to disclose their interests and issues of substance to their shareholders and report their financial performance annually under the Securities and Future Ordinance. Such information can be found easily online. Some media organisations, such as *Stand News* and HKFP, have disclosed their leadership structure, although they are not legally required to do so.

Table 4 A sample of listed corporations

Name	Stock code
Sing Tao News Corporation Ltd (<i>Sing Tao Daily</i> , <i>Headline Daily</i> , and <i>Standard</i>)	1105
Television Broadcasts Ltd (TVB)	51
Next Digital Ltd. (<i>Apple Daily</i> and <i>Next Magazine</i>)	282
Nan Hai Corporation Ltd. (<i>HK01</i> and Duowei Media (HK Limited))	680
Oriental Press Group Ltd. (<i>Oriental Daily</i>)	18
i-CABLE Communications Ltd. (<i>i-Cable</i>)	1097
Hong Kong Economic Times Holdings Ltd. (<i>Hong Kong Economic Times</i> , <i>Sky Post</i>)	423
Media Chinese International Ltd. (<i>Ming Pao</i>)	685
PCCW Ltd. (Now TV, Viu TV)	8
Alibaba Group Holding Ltd. (<i>South China Morning Post</i>)	9988
Sing Tao News Corporation Ltd (<i>Sing Tao Daily</i> , <i>Headline Daily</i> , and <i>Standard</i>)	1105

(C4) Journalistic professionalism

2 POINTS

Reporters generally have strong educational backgrounds and hold similar professional ethics and principles. About half of the interviewees believed that their companies allot satisfactory time and resources for investigative research.

Journalists in Hong Kong have a high education level, with almost 60 per cent of Hong Kong reporters holding undergraduate degrees and 16 per cent having received postgraduate education. Men outnumber women in the profession; in 2016, the male-to-female ratio was 51/47 (HKJA, 2016). However, women outnumber men in terms of advanced education level; 58 per cent of all female journalists are college graduates, whereas only 42 per cent of men have post-secondary education.

Roughly half of the respondents said that their companies allot satisfactory time and resources for investigative research, and their companies have teams established to manage and contribute investigative reports. As the sole public service broadcaster, RTHK does not have sufficient resources to engage in investigative reportage. With its limited resources, RTHK can only handle regular programmes; however, a few of its journalists still manage to produce diligent, informative investigative reports.

The interviewees said that their workloads continue to increase and that they are required to have multimedia skills. There is no continuous education or training for journalists on professional ethics, but there is training on an ad hoc basis; for example, some media organisations provide training on the ethical coverage of large protests. The chairperson of the journalists' association stated that Hong Kong journalists maintain good professional standards, even though they work for media organisations with political stances differing from their own.

(C5) Journalists' job security

1 POINT

Journalists tend to work for their employers briefly, and the main reason is low wages.

The HKJA conducted a survey of 400 reporters in 2016 and found that more than 30 per cent of respondents had a monthly income of less than HKD 15,000. They generally had long working hours and strong educational backgrounds (see Indicator C4 – Journalism professionalism). The median monthly income in Hong Kong in 2016 was HKD 15,500. Low pay was the main reason for journalists remaining in the industry for only a short time. The reporters explained that journalists work under great pressure because of the short news cycle and political stress. More than 50 per cent of respondents predicted they would stay in the industry less than five years, and 40 per cent of management-level journal-

ists had considered leaving the news industry (HKJA, 2016). The chairperson of the HKJA admitted that low wages present a significant obstacle to retaining good, experienced journalists, an issue that deteriorates the quality of news. The interviewees generally found reporters' wages to be very unsatisfactory: "our staff worked very hard to report on the anti-government protests over the past year, yet they only received half of a monthly income as bonus", one stated.

There are no professional rules to protect journalists from dismissal or the termination of their contracts due to changes in ownership or political pressure. The chairperson of the HKJA rarely heard that journalists were fired because of their political stances; however, the rise of freelance journalism in the news field may signal otherwise. *Apple Daily* laid off many staff members in 2017 and rehired them as freelance reporters. This move affected a wide range of sections, including entertainment, sports, and features.

Once experienced news reporters leave the newsroom, junior staff members usually replace their positions. The obvious reason for this replacement is the considerably higher cost of experienced journalists in comparison with beginners.

(C6) Practice of access to information

1 POINT

Article 27 of the Basic Law guarantees Hong Kong residents freedom of speech, the press, and publication. It is becoming more difficult for journalists to access public information. There are significant differences between promises and practices.

Hong Kong citizens are guaranteed freedom of the press under the Basic Law; however, journalists are finding that in practice, it is very difficult to access information. A survey conducted by the HKJA in May 2020 found that Hong Kong press freedom had dropped to a record low in the eyes of the general public and newsroom practitioners (HKJA, 2020c). The HKJA offered three reasons for the plunge. First, Hong Kong does not have laws ensuring reporters' access to information, such as a freedom of information law or an archive law. Second, newsroom workers found it laborious to access information for their news reports. For example, the High Court granted an interim injunction to stop the publishing of the personal data of police officers (Hong Kong Police Force, 2019). Third, journalists have experienced verbal assault or physical violence when they report stories.

There are many examples of journalists being denied information in Hong Kong. For instance, when an Indonesian journalist was shot and her right eye injured, an Indonesian journalist wanted to know who had shot her and the police would not give her any information. Other reporters have been arrested for reporting on anti-government protests, and one group of reporters was asked

to kneel and stop filming the protests. Moreover, neither journalists nor first-aid providers were allowed access to the Prince Edward Mass Transit Railway station after the attack on 31 August 2019.

In addition to discussing the intimidation of reporters covering the protests, most interviewees expressed concern over difficulties in accessing government information on a daily basis. For example, the government has refused to disclose the names and titles of police officers. Some government officials have refused to provide any substantive information to the general public, and searching for public information, such as marital status, birth information, and voter information, is becoming more difficult.

(C7) The watchdog and the news media's mission statement

2 POINTS

The mission statements of news organisations do not contain provisions for acting as watchdogs. However, Hong Kong newsrooms value the watchdog function of media.

In our survey, a large majority of news media organisations agreed that the investigative and watchdog functions were important to Hong Kong journalists. Most interviewees explained that investigative reports were welcomed and supported by the public, and half of the newsrooms have established teams to engage in investigative reporting on a regular basis. Other members of the surveyed newsrooms have received extra funds and time for investigation when they demonstrated their commitment.

Only one editor-in-chief explained that his company did not allocate many resources for investigative reporting, because investigation was not the foremost duty in a partly free society. He felt that investigation could not lead to changes in the roots of societal problems or answer bigger questions. His company preferred special and analytical reports to investigation.

Recent Hong Kong investigative reports have won international awards and helped reveal police brutality during the protests. RTHK produced a programme called *721 Yuen Long Nightmare*, which showed how a triad member attacked citizens with steel rods and left hundreds of people injured – the police were accused of arriving too late.

Several news media outlets in Hong Kong have occasionally partnered with other international bodies such as the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) to conduct investigations. One of the most prominent examples was the investigation of the *Panama Papers*.

All the interviewees expressed to us that although mission statements on watchdog journalism did not exist yet, the importance of journalists' probing is self-evident.

(C8) Professional training

1 POINT

Most of the newsrooms in Hong Kong have not institutionalised continuing professional education. Most newsrooms neither regularly provide training nor request that their journalists take courses.

The interviewees admitted there was a need for further training on Big Data analysis and artificial intelligence due to the digital transformation. However, only the public service broadcaster and a few private news media companies in Hong Kong provided staff training, which, nonetheless, did not concern data analysis or machine learning. Most journalists must take the initiative to learn new skills via international journalistic institutions or universities, they added. Senior employees may encourage their staff members to join a training programme if they find it useful, but reporters are not required by law or by their employers to undergo further training – it is entirely voluntary, and financial support is usually not provided. Hong Kong does not have any institutions that regularly run any training courses for professional journalists, and the supply for journalistic courses in Hong Kong is insufficient.

(C9) Watchdog function and financial resources

2 POINTS

Over half of the interviewees stated that their media companies have provided specific and sufficient resources for performing investigative journalism.

According to our respondents, most leading companies have made resources available for investigative reports. About half of them have established teams for conducting investigations on a regular basis, although the exact figures are not publicly disclosed. The interviewees said that the investigative teams have more resources, such as time and funds, to work on the stories. They have more flexible schedules and are not required to submit stories daily. However, the calculation of resources is inevitable. More funds are also available for investigative teams to buy tickets to conduct research overseas.

Most of the respondents suggested that reporters in their companies are encouraged to engage in investigative reporting, even though they are not part of the investigative team. Resources and time could become available for them if they have a good story idea.

Conclusions

The 2020 research on the three dimensions of this MDM 2021 report documents a critical turning point in the deterioration of Hong Kong press freedom. Law in Hong Kong formally secures freedom of information; however, stark differences remain between principle and practice. Hong Kong press freedom has continually declined over the past decade, due to invisible political pressure from the Central People's Government, owners, and advertisers. They continue to influence the selection and processing of news, and their pressure is worsening the practices of newsroom democracy, particularly in the case of politically sensitive issues. The change in newsrooms has been subtle and gradual. Market forces and journalistic professionalism have helped to defend the freedom of press and democracy.

Hong Kong media has also experienced a fierce economic battle over advertising money and a rapid transformation due to digitalisation. News is available at an affordable cost, and Hong Kong citizens are exposed to a large variety of local and international media. These developments have lessened the self-censorship of media to some extent due to audience and market demands.

Until recently, large-scale police violence against journalists threatened reporters' personal safety and coverage of news even in front of a live camera. To protect journalists, personal protective gear has been upgraded, complaints over police activity have been lodged, and declarations and accusation letters have been issued. However, reporter intimidation continues to occur on a regular basis.

The plan to enforce national security in Hong Kong has further deepened the anxiety of Hong Kong journalists. More than 90 per cent admitted that they fear their personal safety will be threatened further and that media organisations will face political crackdowns.

A gender gap in newsroom working conditions is not evident, and journalists said they are treated equally, regardless of gender. Local media continues to dominate the Hong Kong media market, although alternative and minority media exist. Stereotypical images continue to prevail in media content in Hong Kong due to market demands and lack of awareness. Internal pluralism is subject to the media organisations, but concerned journalists in some newsrooms actively defend it.

The watchdog and investigative functions of the media are highly valued by Hong Kong journalists, though the commitment to investigative reporting is subject to the individual policies of media organisations. Some have a relatively high professional ethos. Hong Kong journalists are concerned with maintaining their independence from the powerholders. Recent investigative reports have served democracy quite well by exposing the problems of police brutality and unlawful acts.

Journalists have worked very hard to continue meeting their standards during the political turbulence, and based on our indicators, the Hong Kong news media serve democracy to some extent. The newsroom now faces a greater challenge with the enactment of the national security law, highlighted by the example of when the pro-democracy media tycoon was arrested, his organisations' newsroom was made to undergo an unprecedented hour-long raid and news organisations were barred from interviews about the search. Hong Kong's leading news media are finding themselves under unprecedented political pressure following the largest and longest anti-government protests in the history of Hong Kong.

When we started collecting data for this project, the anti-extradition movement had just started, and freedom of the press was declining rapidly. By the time we had finished collecting data, the newsroom was facing even greater challenges with the enactment of the national security law. We are afraid the worst is yet to come.

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