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Problematics, Discoveries And Directions**

By

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Joseph Man Chan

Synopsis

This paper first analyses the communication research environment in Hong Kong in regard to four major factors: (1) financial-institutional support, (2) incentive system, (3) trained personnel and (4) social needs. While the overall environment is facilitative, the small size of the communication research community in Hong Kong is limiting the volume of research output and scope of specialization. This paper also reviews the problematics and discoveries of researches about Hong Kong or by Hong Kong researchers in the last decade. Commercial researches are generally more concerned about opinion distribution and media consumption. Government policy researches centre around media evaluations, preferences, program standards and other regulatory issues. Academics pay most attention to the subjects of political communication, communication and social change and, less so, information technology.

In suggesting directions for future research, the author argues for more frequent use of longitudinal and comparative methods, the search for communication phenomena unique to Hong Kong and China, the study of dependent communication development, an urban research agenda in developmental communication, the study of mass media's influence on political formation and the investigation of regional cultural integration. Advertising, media management and information technology, important as they are to Hong Kong, are relatively underresearched. They deserve more academic attention. The establishment of a communication policy forum is also called for to facilitate exchanges between academics, policy-makers, media practitioners and interest groups. The expansion of the research community in Hong Kong hinges on successful faculty recruitment, the establishment of a doctoral communication program and the relief of some staff's teaching overload.

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Introduction

Through interviews and citation analysis, Chaffee, Carlos and Rogers (1990) found that Latin America communication researchers's dependence on European and North American scholarship is being replaced by a pattern of citing one another in recent years. In contrast, a self-sufficient Asian community of communication researchers has not come into existence yet. Communication research in Asia is uneven in development. Some nations are teemed with communication scholars and have their own national journals while others suffer from the lack of research personnel and publication outlets. Nevertheless, the Asian research community is growing and becoming more active in the last two decades. International interactions among these scholars have become more frequent as well. The inaugural publication of the regional communication journal, the *Asian Journal of Communication*, can be read as a sign of the embryonic Asian identity among communication researchers in this part of the world.

At this juncture, it is perhaps befitting to assess the state of communication in Asia. Reports of individual nations are essential for this assessment. It is in this light and at the initiation of the organizers of the Singapore Seminar on Communication Research Needs in Asia that I write this paper which has three purposes: The first is to provide an analysis of the research environment in Hong Kong. The second is to review the problematics and discoveries of its communication research. The third is to identify some future research directions.

In reviewing the communication research in a certain place one has to make an important decision at the outset: What is the criterion of inclusion -- by the geographic context of the studies or by the residential site of researchers? If the geographic context is adopted, in my case, all studies about Hong Kong, regardless of the researchers' whereabouts, will be included. On the contrary, taking researchers' residence as the organizing principle, all studies done by Hong Kong researchers, be they about Hong Kong or elsewhere, should fall within the scope of review. As communication researchers are very few in Hong Kong and studies about Hong Kong by outside scholars are scanty, I have decided to include both the context and residence as the criteria of inclusion. However, they do not carry equal weight. In order not to step too

far into the turfs of Taiwanese and Chinese scholars, I shall place greater emphasis on those studies contextualized in Hong Kong.

The Research Environment

Like all social activities, research has a sociology to it too. Research activities in Hong Kong, where a high degree of academic freedom exists, are shaped primarily by four factors: (1) financial-institutional support, (2) incentive system, (3) trained research personnel and (4) social needs. The influence of each factor varies with the types of research which can be identified by purpose as: (1) commercial research, (2) government research and (3) academic research.

Commercial researches are those initiated and performed by and for commercial firms, including those by the mass media themselves. Many marketing and audience surveys belong to this category. The expanding economy and communications industry of Hong Kong are conducive to the development of commercial research in general. In a place where advertising and marketing form an integral part of corporate strategies, the communication patterns of the people need to be constantly monitored. This need is reinforced by the keen competition among the mass media for audience and advertising. As more international marketing companies are opening offices in Hong Kong, one needs not worry about their desire and capability to carry out audience surveys. For them, the question is how to ensure the reliability and validity of the survey results because they are sometimes noted for poor quality control.

In tandem with democratization and political transition in Hong Kong, research appears to take on a greater role in the government's policy-making process. The government set up a think tank in 1988 to coordinate researches on transitional policies. The government being torn by diverging group demands, policy researches are functional in providing itself with more room for manipulation and for defending itself as being objective in decision-making. Of course, they sometimes do provide the government with well-conceived options and analysis. With regard to telecommunication policies and other knowledge-dependent policies, the Government usually hire international consultancy firms to do the research. On policies that require public input, it has been a practice to commission the government's Census and Statistics Department or marketing firms to do opinion surveys. In effect, research as such is an administrative activity of the Government which has all the national resources at its disposal.

Academic communication research in Hong Kong before the late seventies were scanty. The seeds of communication research in Hong Kong were sown in the late seventies when the research-oriented graduate division of the Department of Journalism and Communication at the Chinese University of Hong Kong was established with the help of Wilbur Schramm. The seeds sprouted in the eighties when some young

American-trained scholars, originally from Hong Kong, returned home to join the faculty, which, together with their colleagues at the University and the graduate students in communication form the core of communication researchers in Hong Kong. The majority of the earlier faculty were Taiwanese who received their graduate training from America universities. They were generally more concerned about Taiwan and China than Hong Kong. This began to change as the faculty and students originated from Hong Kong produced more researches. At present, active academic communication researchers in Hong Kong, as far as I can tell, do not number more than fifteen. The small size of the research community poses severe limitation on the volume of research outputs and the scope of specialization.

Academic research is not administered as it is in the government or the commercial sector. It is based on individual initiatives. The incentive system is therefore an important factor. Even though the pressure to publish in Hong Kong academia is not as severe as that in the United States, publication in refereed journals is a major criterion for substantiation and promotion at the Chinese University of Hong Kong with which most communication researchers are affiliated. This does provide some incentive for the faculty to do research. Given the relatively small size of the academic community in Hong Kong and the general lack of academic competition, the research atmosphere is not as intense as it is in some American research universities. Being relatively young, the communication researchers in Hong Kong have to strive to establish themselves academically in spite of the dragging effect of this inactive atmosphere.

Although university staff are relatively well-paid, Hong Kong universities were notorious for short of research money in the past. At the urge of academic leaders, the government has been more generous in funding university research. Meanwhile, the universities saw the need to establish closer links with the business world in search for research funding as well. Special administrative units are established for this purpose. Although the funds cannot meet the needs of all who submit an application, it is not difficult for well-conceived projects costing less than US\$10,000 to acquire support. In fact, communication research, and for that matter, social science research in general, is not expensive in Hong Kong. For instance, a self-administered questionnaire survey of about 700 journalists in Hong Kong, with full-time research assistance for several months, costs only about US\$7000. Researches using non-survey methods usually cost much less.

The institutional support for research in Hong Kong is improving too. The last decade has witnessed the establishment of numerous research centres in universities and polytechnic institutes. At the Chinese University of Hong Kong, for instance, the Centre For Hong Kong Studies and the Centre for Contemporary Asian Studies, had not just sponsored research projects but also provide overhead research assistance in data collection, data analysis and other tasks. While there is still room for improvement, the

teaching workload at the university compare favourably with some western universities. Research is still possible. However, not all tertiary educational institutes have the same advantages. At Baptist College which houses the biggest communication department in Hong Kong, for instance, the teaching load is so heavy that the staff has little time for research even if they so desire.

In assessing communication research needs, we have to be clear of whose needs are being discussed. For the research community as a whole, basic data about people's media consumption are needed. For the mass media and commercial firms, audience feedbacks form the focus of attention. For the government and the public, the burning questions relate to the evaluations, preferences, effects and regulations of mass media and new information technologies. To the academic, what is theoretically interesting in the field is the most attractive. However, academic researchers cannot and should not dissociate from the society at large. Research needs are to some extent determined by the social-economic-political environment which, in fact, affect the research agenda of the government and commercial firms as well.

On the whole, the social demand for communication research is on the increase. Politically, Hong Kong is being restructured and is scheduled for sovereignty exchange in 1997. Economically, Hong Kong is trying to maintain its status as a financial and information centre by internationalization on all fronts. Its economy is being integrated with that of China in general and the Southern provinces in particular. In communication, the advent of new information technology is restructuring the media scene and pose new challenges for policy makers. Some forms of dependent communication or cultural development have taken place in Hong Kong. As we shall see in later, all these changes help define the directions of future research.

Problematics And Discoveries

An examination of the literature in Hong Kong before the mid-seventies reveals that academic or formal communication research was sporadic.¹ Some studies of Hong Kong were incorporated as part of a larger study of China.² The few studies about Hong Kong itself were mostly historical descriptions of the press structure.³ Even the patterns

¹ For a bibliography of communication research about Hong Kong before the mid-seventies, see Yu (1976).

² The most remarkable example is Kung-chen Ko's book on Chinese journalism which brought Hong Kong into discussion throughout the chapters.

³ Yu-lan Lin (e.g. 1962, 1963, 1971) was the most active in this area of study. Also see Kuo-sin Chang and Charles Clayton (1971)

of media consumption were not investigated very often.⁴ Only one legal study of the media laws in Hong Kong had been registered.⁵ As mentioned earlier, with the establishment of the graduate division of communication at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in the late seventies, studies about Hong Kong and by Hong Kong researchers began to increase.

The majority of the researchers are trained in the United States and are empirical in orientation. However, they are by no means empiricists that use only quantitative methods. Being receptive to a wide range of methodologies, they have used historical, legal, documentation analysis, content analysis, participation observation, interviews and surveys alone or in combination. The choice is determined to a large extent by the research question and data availability. Unlike the United States where psychological studies at the individual level are prominent, Hong Kong researches primarily pertain to analyses at the societal or institutional level.⁶

In the forthcoming sections, I shall organize the review of past studies by the following subject areas: (1) media uses and evaluations, (2) political communication, (3) communication and social change, and (3) information technology and others. While research problematics and findings will be emphasized at this stage, comments will be reserved for the discussion of research directions. This review, not intended to be exhaustive, will cover studies about communication in Hong Kong and cut across geographic boundaries into China and Taiwan as deemed fit. To render my observations more relevant to future research directions, I have chosen to focus my attention on the studies that were done since the eighties.

Media Uses and Evaluations

The popularization of mass media often gives rise to heated debates over their social impact and how they should be regulated. Television and movies are two perfect examples. Concerned about the supposedly averse effects of television and movies on the youth of Hong Kong, parents, educators, social workers and religious people joined hands in demanding the government for a tighter supervision of the media. At the same time, the government had to face pressure from the media industries for relaxed control. The government admits that it changes its standards of regulation with the times. Surveying the audience has been a major way of monitoring this change of times. It also helps the regulatory agencies in fending off criticism of being biased.

⁴ One notable exception is done by Charles Allen (1970).

⁵ See James Shen(1972)

⁶ Pedro Ng (e.g. 1987) who has applied the "uses and gratifications" perspective in the study of adolescents' media consumption is a notable exception.

That explains why the institutions responsible for media regulation in the last ten years have commissioned a number of large-scale surveys of television and movie audience on their exposure patterns, evaluations and regulatory standards.⁷ For instance, a survey of people's attitudes towards movies was done in 1988 prior to the implementation of a three-tier movie classificatory system.⁸ The Broadcasting Review Board authorized the 1984 Television and Sound Broadcasting Survey to back up some of its policy recommendations to the government.⁹ The 1987 Survey on Television and Sound Broadcasting was used, among others, to let television stations to show "adult programs" after 11:30 p.m.¹⁰

Almost as a rule, media exposure questions, are asked in these surveys. They consequently provide valuable data about the consumption patterns of the mass media being studied. However, these data are restricted in three ways: (1) The questions are not standardized, making longitudinal comparison more difficult, if not impossible. (2) The media use questions are too general for deeper analysis and (3) The results are treated as confidential and barred from public access in some cases. This can be overcome to some extent if academics are invited to participate in the research process. Becoming more aware of the contributions that academics can make to survey research, the Broadcasting Authority in Hong Kong, among others, is inviting communication scholars to sit in its research committees. The academics are functional in standardizing the questions and improving the overall research quality. As a partial return for their services, the academics are also allowed access to the database.

It is the marketing research companies and the mass media themselves that are the most interested in mapping the people's media consumption patterns.¹¹ Other than

⁷ Prior to 1987, mass media were regulated by the Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority (TELA) which is a government department. At the recommendation of the Broadcasting Review Board in 1985, the Government set up the Broadcasting Authority (BA) to formulate broadcasting policies for the final decision of the Executive Council. The majority of BA members are civilians appointed by the Governor. TELA consequently became the executive arm of BA.

Examples of such surveys include the Television Audience Survey in 1980 and 1982, the 1983 Television Audience Attitudes Survey, as well as the Television and Sound Broadcasting Surveys in 1984 and 1987. Two other major surveys will be completed in 1990.

⁸ Interview with an official from the Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority. The survey was entitled the Film Censorship Survey. The three-tier classificatory system divide movies into three types: (1) movies for adults only, (2) movies for audience below 18 and (3) movies for all ages.

⁹ Census and Statistics Department (1984) *Television and Broadcasting Survey*. Hong Kong: The Government Printer.

¹⁰ Interviews with three officials from the Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority.

¹¹ Social Research Hong Kong (SRH), for instance, surveys the media consumption of Hong Kong citizens at least once a year. The results are bought and circulated within limited circles.

the weekly television ratings produced by AGB, an international research company, the television stations themselves also engage in studies of the media tastes and life styles of the audience. While the ratings and other periodic surveys do provide clues as to the trends of media consumption, many commercial surveys are criticized for insufficient quality control that results in unreliable observations. Besides, they usually leave respondents' values, norms and media evaluations unexplored, thus rendering the surveys less useful. Research education and competition among marketing companies will help upgrade the quality of data with respect to reliability and comprehensiveness in the long run.

By virtue of the commercial and government reports, communication researchers have been able to piece together a rough picture of the people's media uses, evaluations and preferences. A more fundamental way to establish reliable and comprehensive data archives is for academics to take up the research themselves. Chan and Lee (1990), for instance, have engaged in a communication indicators survey which is part of a larger social indicators project at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.¹² The communication indicators study are designed to provide basic data about media uses, evaluations and preferences at the initial stage and to incorporate questions on cultural values and norms in later surveys. Being done on an annual basis, the study will form an extensive body of reliable and longitudinal data for further theoretical work and for informing policy discussion. As far as there is an institutional overhead and sufficient funding in support of the annual surveys, they will become useful routine exercises. Other communication researchers can thus free themselves from repeating the surveys for basic data and can have more time for more specialized studies.

Political Communication

Political communication is the most researched area in Hong Kong. Unlike western nations where political communication centres on the formation of opinions and campaign effects, Hong Kong communication researchers are more concerned about the institutional interactions between the mass media and political power centres. This is probably a result of the late introduction of election politics and the centrality of political power in Hong Kong. Hong Kong is a colonial city-state that had no parties of its own. The parties that are of some influence are the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Kuomintang (KMT) that are located in China and Taiwan respectively.

¹² The social indicators project, coordinated by S.K. Lau, will be done on an annual basis. The pilot study was done in 1986 and the first formal indicators study is started in 1990. Other academics have also included media use questions in surveys that are directed at specific social strata or geographic districts. For example, Pedro Ng and his colleagues at the Chinese University of Hong Kong surveyed the Hong Kong students to tap their leisure and media habits in 1984. Some results were later reported in Pedro P.T. Ng (1987) and Leung and Chu (1987).

The signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration 1984 has put Hong Kong into a process of power restructuring. By this accord, Hong Kong will be returned to China in 1997. A dualistic power structure is being formed with the once dominating British authority being challenged by the rise of China's influence in Hong Kong. Meanwhile, the Hong Kong government is carrying out a democratization program as part of its "decolonization" policy. All these changes have caused and will cause repercussions in all social realms in the runup to 1997, thus rendering Hong Kong a valuable place laboratory to observe the interactions between power realignment and mass communication. The observations and insights reached by Hong Kong communication researchers have enriched our understanding of the interplay between power, ideology and journalism and have provided a basis for international comparison.

Press Freedom

Given Hong Kong's colonial political power, one would expect to find a low degree of press freedom. This is true as far as the legal context is concerned. If the Hong Kong government were to translate the letter and spirit of the suppressive ordinances and regulations into action, Hong Kong's press freedom would be drastically curtailed. (Shen, 1972; Chan and Yau, 1987; Leung, 1989). It turns out that the Hong Kong government seldom practise these laws, resulting in a press freedom second only to Japan in Asia.¹³ This begs an explanation. Instead of attributing Hong Kong's press freedom to the British liberal-democratic tradition like most people do, Chan and Yau (1987) argued that it is the pressure from China that has subjected the Hong Kong government to self-restraint. They documented the precedent case in 1952 during which the Hong Kong government had utilized the suppressive press laws to suspend the leftist newspapers when faced with severe criticisms. This was met with diplomatic protests from Beijing which finally forced the Hong Kong government to call off the newspaper suspension. In essence, the countervailing force posed by China serves as a deterrent for the Hong Kong authority to practise the stringent press laws to the letter.

Kuan and Lau (1988) had a different emphasis, though not necessarily a contradiction, in their explanation of the high degree of press freedom in Hong Kong. They maintained that there is no integration between the media and the political elites. The structural linkage between media and political institutions is also weak. They attributed the high degree of press freedom in Hong Kong to the relative absence of the need for media control, as the authority of the Hong Kong government has rarely been challenged by the mass media. They cited Mitchell (1969) to show that editorials critical of the Hong Kong government were rare indeed. They postulated that it is the editors'

¹³ According to the evaluations of the International Press Institute.

preoccupation with Chinese affairs that had acted as a suppressor of their concern with Hong Kong politics.¹⁴

Since the late sixties, interactions between the press and the Hong Kong government have been increasing. Through various types of briefing, the government is able to influence the media agenda and editorial directions. The Government Information Service creates (GIS) information pressure for the mass media by constantly feeding them with releases through a teleprinter network. In effect, the GIS enjoys a virtual monopoly of information about the government. It achieves its hegemonic mission by setting limits for what the press could publish, exerting pressure on what it should publish and excluding alternative range of news. (Lee and Chan, 1990a) But the GIS's monopoly of hegemonic power is being breached as the power base of the Hong Kong government is undermined (Kuan and Lau, 1988). China has become a major factor in local politics. Increasingly, the reformed and more "representative" Legislative Council, pressure groups and opinion leaders also command public attention. With the expansion in the political arena, the nature of issues may seriously challenge the gatekeeping role of the government. The control of the flow of government information will no longer suffice to subject the mass media to governmental manipulation in the critical period of transition. The rules of the games need to be redefined in legal terms.

The Hong Kong government has indeed taken steps to relax the legal control of mass media since 1985 (Leung, 1989). For instance, the notorious Control of Publications Consolidation Ordinance which bestowed the Government almost arbitrary power to prevent what it deemed as undesirable publications from the market was repealed. The new laws are more specific and less restrictive and thus less threatening to press freedom. However, the government continued to uphold the Secrecy Act, the Film Censorship Regulations and the Emergency Regulations which, as many social critics have observed, still give the Government too much power. Many agree that these laws need to be relaxed as well.

Ideology, Power Change and Journalism

What Seymour-Ure (1974) observes as a close press-party "parallelism" prevalent in Europe and the Third World, applies to Hong Kong. It is unique in that the press partisanship is intertwined with, and sharply divided along the lines of the CCP-KMT conflict which is not a product of internal politics. The British, keeping the rules of the political game, have been tolerant of the CCP-KMT propaganda battles as long as they do not disrupt social order and threaten British rule. (Chan and Lee, 1984) On the

¹⁴ This view of the journalists' concerns in the fifties and sixties is also shared by Chan and Yau (1987) themselves and Chu (1990).

basis of party linkage and financial source, the press can be classified into (1) the ultra-leftist which are the CCP's propaganda mouthpieces, (2) the commercial centrist, (3) the mainstream rightist that are market-oriented, yet ideologically sympathetic towards the KMT and (4) the ultra-rightist that is owned by the KMT. (Lee, 1985)

In a content analysis of the press coverage of a civil protest Chan and Lee (1985) found that political ideology is an important factor in shaping constructed reality in Hong Kong. Newspapers with different political ideology are observed to have framed the same event in their own light. They consequently theorized that political ideology, among other factors, constructs a "journalistic paradigm," which is a gestalt worldview, a cognitive map, and a way of "seeing" that defines the entities of journalistic concerns, resulting in patterns of selective coverage, interpretation, emphasis and exclusion. This observation was confirmed in the coverage study of a riot which was again presented differently by the partisan press (Lee and Lee, 1986). Press ideology also "sets limits" and "exerts pressure" on the way government information is edited to fit partisan predispositions (Lee, 1985).

The ideologically stratified press in Hong Kong exercises organizational control primarily through entry recruitment. (Chan and Lee, 1988) A survey of reporters showed that they were ideologically so congruent with their newspapers that the majority of them did not feel subjected to specific or explicit guideline control in the newsroom. As a practical matter, they need not be told specifically what to write. Social control in the newsroom is a structural and subtle process, with reporters tending to absorb the institutional definitions of the situation and news norms.

So (1982) and Lee (1987), in two separate case studies of press coverage, have convincingly argued that political ideology, important as it may be, cannot fully account for the way news is produced. Journalists' professionalism, working routines, the press' commercial orientation and resources all interact with the news organisations' political ideology in shaping the final news output. So also argued that the impact of political ideology varies with the mode of reporting -- crisis mode vs. the routine mode. While political ideology may not enter the news equation when routine events are covered, its role will become visible during social crisis. However, if the crisis reached a magnitude almost beyond the control of even the ruling party, the organizational control of the press may break down and the journalists' personal inclinations may emerge as the determining factor of newsmaking, as in the case of the Beijing pro-democracy movement in 1989 (Fung, 1990).

The onset of political transition since the early eighties has given rise to studies whose themes are captured in the title of J.M. Chan and C.C. Lee's (1990) forthcoming

book: *Dancing to the Beat of Power Change: The Hong Press in China's Orbit*.¹⁵ This study analyses how the ideologically polarized press in Hong Kong reacts to the imminent reversion of the colony to China in 1997, how the press aligns itself with the newly constituted power structure, and how it shifts its journalistic paradigms in line with political transformation. It is found that the shift of journalistic paradigms varies with the press' political ideology or affiliation. The commercial centrist and rightist newspapers, because of organizational and ideological flexibility, have shown much greater accommodation to Xinhua than have the ultra-rightist newspapers which have opted out or has softened its hardline anti-communist rhetoric. Finally, the ultra-leftist newspapers have moderated their anti-colonial overtones. (Chan and Lee, 1989)

Since Hong Kong's transition is being phased in gradually, the media shift their journalistic paradigms in a cumulative and incremental fashion. The paradigm shift is as yet incomplete and will continue to be elaborated long after the change of power in 1997 (Lee and Chan, 1987). The shift of journalistic paradigms is not necessarily a linear and irreversible process. Paradigms may regress when there is a change in power that is perceived damaging to the very interest of the mass media and the groups they serve. Specifically, paradigm regression may ensure if the PRC is perceived to fail to carry out its promise as stated in the Joint Declaration. (Chan, 1986)

The press' reaction to the Tiananmen tragedy in 1989 provided an illustration of this theoretical observation. While issues of significance to the China-Taiwan rift inevitably sparked off partisan coverage by the Hong Kong press, the Beijing democracy movement transcended that rift. For the first time in history a political issue of this magnitude was met with a unified response from the entire ideological spectrum of the press. The leftist and other newspapers all condemned the Beijing authorities for their brutal suppression of the movement. However, the press gradually reverted to their normal positions when the Beijing authorities consolidated their power base. No matter how much paradigms have regressed, the political discourse is structurally bound within the parameter of the concept of "one country, two systems." (Lee and Chan, 1990b)

Public Opinion

The study of political communication is not complete without researches on the audience's dispositions. The onset of political transition has also witnessed the flourishing of public opinion studies. A content analysis of *Ming Pao*, a leading newspaper in Hong Kong, found that it had reported a total of 261 surveys between 1984 and 1989.¹⁶ Many such surveys were polls about people's confidence in the future

¹⁵ To be published by New York's Guilford Press in late 1990.

¹⁶ Joseph Man Chan (1990) "Figures Do Not Always Tell the Truth," *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, p.22 March 9 1990. (In Chinese)

of Hong Kong, reactions to the pace of political reform, perception of social problems and attitudes on emigration. These polls not only provide information about the social distribution of opinion on important issues, they sometimes served as ammunition for "public opinion wars" that are fought among the Chinese government, the Hong Kong government and various groups in Hong Kong who tried to rally support for their own cause.

The majority of these polls were done by social groups, marketing firms, the government and academic institutions. The most persistent academic record in this area is the Social Indicators Project headed by Siu-Kai Lau at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. After a pilot study in 1987 (Lau and Wan, 1987), Lau and his colleagues have been surveying the Hong Kong population annually on their opinions, attitudes, aspirations, values and living quality. If the project carries out its promise, it will provide valuable data about the distribution and change of opinions, among others, before and after 1997.

Another persistent record of public opinion is provided by the Confidence Index, constructed and published by the Survey Research Hong Kong, a marketing firm. Based on surveys which it has periodically conducted to monitor the population's confidence since January 1985 after the Signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration. A study of the index curve reveals the important influence of China on the people's confidence in Hong Kong. (Chan and Lee, 1990) Confidence dives whenever China is perceived to have tightened its reins over Hong Kong or taken up hardline internal policies. While the people's political confidence may have effects on their economic confidence, it is observed that internal economic crisis such as the stock market crash in October 1987 did not have an adverse influence on the people's evaluation of the political future. Obviously, the confidence of Hong Kong hinges on the ebb and flow of liberalism in China.

Information seeking behaviour during the political transition has drawn some attention as well. Kuan and Lau (1988) have found that television is the main source of political information, followed by newspapers and radio. They have convincingly argued that the citizens of Hong Kong are not as indifferent to political information as journalists perceive them to be because their survival instinct dictates a constant surveillance of the political environment. How do people actually seek information during this period of political uncertainty and how are their opinions affected by such behaviour remain to be explored.

The interplay between political power and journalism and China has long been under the scrutiny of communication researchers in Hong Kong which had been the outpost of China watching after the Communist takeover in 1949. It is only after China opened itself up in the early eighties that Hong Kong's role was reduced. Leonard Chu,

at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, is a veteran researcher in this area. In one of his more recent works, he (Chu, 1987) found that there are both continuities and discontinuities in China's press system as a consequence of liberalization. The changes included industrial and distribution expansion, introduction of professional techniques and more relaxed control of content. The mass media, no longer regarded as instrumental of class struggle, were given an additional role of conveying information for modernization. What remained unchanged is the party's supreme organizational control over the media. Marxism, Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought are still upheld as the sources of guiding principles for the Chinese communication system.

Communication and Social Change

Communication and development has been the major research concern in the sixties. The roles of mass communication in development have been reassessed in tandem with the shifts in development paradigms. Studies by Hong Kong researchers have contributed to a more sophisticated understanding of the developmental use of mass media. Besides, some studies begin to tackle the problem of communications and cultural development in a dependent economy.

Developmental Communication

In a comparative study of four British colonies, Hong Kong, Singapore, Nigeria and Guyana, Paul Lee (1986) compared, among others, (1) the roles of mass communication in national integration and legitimation and (2) the relationships between developmental journalism and economic growth. A content analysis of the press in these four nations showed that the newspapers contained very few integrative or disintegrative messages. It is reasoned that the mass media performed the integrative function by omitting the coverage of disruptive issues and by redefining social reality. The impact of this redefined social reality depends on the credibility of the press which in turn, is determined by the way the press is controlled. Direct government control was found to be less effective than indirect influence. While development journalism correlated negatively with economic growth, it does not relate to authoritarianism/totalitarianism in any systematic way. The practice of development journalism is more of a function of a nation's desire to, and belief in, the use of mass communication in promoting economic growth.

China's experience in the developmental use of mass communication, once hailed as a model for the third world, was demythologized by L. Chu (1986). In assessing the developmental role of ideology, he observed that the originally change-oriented Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, the founding ideology in China, when enforced through the party-government bureaucracies, was turned into a "change-

resistant" or "change-neutral" ideology that has suppressed the people's innovativeness and delayed national modernization. Ideological internalization by the people failed to materialize even though the mass media were obliged to propagate the official ideology. The centralized media system in China was found to be vulnerable to the abuse of both political and media power (Chu, 1983). When the government policies were unwittingly deleterious to the people, mass media multiplied the damages.

China has also been studied from an "informatization" perspective. Lee (1990a) examined the occupation structure as well as the growth rates of major media and telecommunication services to determine the pace at which China informatized itself. The low growth of China's service sector in the last three decades spoke to the slow trend of informatization. But when the supply of mediated information and telecommunication services is used as an indicator, China has made strides. A review of the scientific and technological information sector in China led Lee to identify four obstacles to China's informatization: the lack of coordinating administrative structures, financial resources, trained personnel and information consciousness. In another study, Lee (1990b) found that China, like many third world nations, was beset with "communication dualism" in terms of technological, socio-economic and geographical disparities. In China, the most advanced technology is observed to co-exist and complement a sea of low technology. However, the communication disparities in favour of the urban areas and core developed regions formed a serious barrier to the transformation of China into an information society. More investment in communication is deemed necessary to bridge the rural-urban and core-peripheral gaps.

As China carried out a series of socio-economic reforms in the last decade, the communication hardware and software in China have undergone important changes. These include the proliferation of modern mass media, the establishment of telecommunications infrastructure as well as the introduction of entertainment media and advertising. Chan (1989) found that Hong Kong served as an important facilitative agent of all these changes. Hong Kong exerted its influence through demonstration, co-production, joint-venture, competition (in the southern part of China where some people have direct or indirect access to Hong Kong's media fare) and even direct pressure. It is concluded that the Hong Kong's influence was contingent chiefly upon China's open policy and levels of education and economic development. As it exists now, Hong Kong's influence, radiating northward towards China in a fan-like manner, is gradual, uneven and deepening.

Dependent Communication Development

The remarkable economic development in Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong appears to have supported the thesis of "dependent development."¹⁷ Following this, Tang and Chan's (1990) raised these questions: "If dependent development is possible, how does it relate to its culture, or more narrowly, its communications? Is dependent *cultural* development or dependent *communication* development possible too? If so, what forms does it take? What are the processes involved? What are the factors that help shape such dependent cultural or communication development? What are the social and cultural impacts of such dependent communication development? How do the local people react to it?" Answers to these questions are essential for elaborating the theories of cultural imperialism which tends to overemphasize the structural dominance of western communications and slights the options available to the dependent nations.

Lee (1990) has illustrated that Hong Kong's indigenous productions of television programs, movies and popular songs dominate the local media market. In fact, Hong Kong has become a regional media exporting centre. In a longitudinal analysis of international news coverage in Taiwan between 1954 and 1987, Tang and Chan (1990) found that a periphery's economic-political development may lead to some level of news development, dependent in character as it may be. The best illustration of such news dependent development is the diversification of international news sources in Taiwan. In addition to relying on wire news, the press has built up its international news gathering apparatus which should be more sensitive to the perspectives and needs of the Taiwanese people. The self-generated international news had become a contending source. This news development in Taiwan and the communications development in Hong Kong attested *against* dependency determinism that leaves no room for cultural or communication development in a dependent situation.

The domination of international communication has been studied from Hong Kong as the receiving end. Through an investigation of three forms of popular culture in Hong Kong, movies, television and popular songs, Lee (1990c) found that the patterns of absorbing and indigenizing foreign cultures varied. These patterns vary in the extent to which they absorb the form and content of foreign cultures. They include the wholesale adoption of foreign cultural forms and content, selective copying of form or content and organic assimilation of foreign form and content. The emergence of various patterns in absorbing and indigenizing foreign cultures is contingent upon the relative strength of foreign and local productions, the consumers' purchasing power, the

¹⁷ P. Evans (1979), *Dependent Development: The Alliance of Multinational, State and Local Capital in Brazil*, N.J.: Princeton University Press; F. C. Deyo (1981), *Dependent Development and Industrial Order: An Asian Case Study*, N.Y.: Praeger; and F. C. Deyo, eds., (1987), *The Political Economy of the New Asian Industrialism*, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.

competition and stimulation from other forms of culture, the demographic changes and government policies.

In studying the formation of a subculture in Hong Kong, Chan (1987) found that the local mass media played a pivotal role in transmitting and popularizing the disco fever originated from the west. However, the impact of such re-transmitted western culture is not uniform on all social members. To the youngsters from good schools and well-to-do families, disco dance is nothing but a new form of entertainment. However, it was more likely for marginal youth groups, when caught on by the disco fever, to develop into a youth gang subculture that not only engaged in disco dancing but also loitering and sometimes delinquent activities. This case study illustrates that the impact of foreign culture on a receiving society is not uniform among its members. It varies with the social positions of the recipients.

Hong Kong has made rapid economic advances in the last four decades. Associated with this change is its cultural transformation. Local movies, a major recreational medium in Hong Kong, has recorded the paths of this cultural change. The analysis of the movie industry as well as the cultural meanings of local movies have been periodically done and published in the form of anthologies, often to mark the annual international film festival in Hong Kong. The researchers include academics, serious film critics or movie practitioners. As a collectivity, their essays constitute insightful analysis of the movie history of Hong Kong, the mode of expression in movies and social change as seen through the cinema.¹⁸

Space limitation forbids a full review. Suffices it to cite two illustrative examples. In examining the social psychology of Hong Kong cinema, Sek Kei (1988) related social change to the movie content over the last four decades. He contrasted the movies in the fifties that stressed on traditional ethics and social problems with those of the eighties that provided either fancy escape from the political reality or emphasized boy-girl friendships or camaraderie between relatives and friends. Likewise, Cheng Yu (1988) found that the gambler were depicted as greedy sinners who wanted to get rich overnight in the black and white Cantonese films. Since the seventies, gamblers began to appear as respectable protagonists, serving as heroic characters in some comedy films.

¹⁸ Some of the more important anthologies include a series of works published under the Urban Council of Hong Kong, as listed in the bibliography of this paper.

Information Technology, Policy and Others

As an international trade and financial centre, Hong Kong owes its prosperity to the existence of a modern and extensive network. In the past, the absence of a comprehensive information policy did not seem to have hampered the proliferation of telecommunication services in Hong Kong. However, the advent of numerous information technologies, such as cable television and satellite television, coupled with the pressure for deregulation in telecommunication, the Hong Kong government has to take deliberate steps in reframing the telecommunication environment.

While the government has sought the advice of international consultancy firms, to academics in and out of Hong Kong are paying more attention to the regulatory issues of the colony. A study of the evolution of cable policy in Hong Kong led Lau and Baldwin (1989) to propose a cable television development strategy for relatively small nations with limited resources and a unique language. Three factors of cable development were of particular importance: (1) local and international sources of investment capital, (2) sources of program supplies and (3) supply of trained personnel. To provide a reasonable and flexible environment for cable investors and to take care of the interest of cable consumers, Lau and Baldwin proposed that cable operators be free to set rates, determine programming and level of program importation at the beginning trial and error period. Regulation will ensue if monopoly and programming importation go beyond some thresholds established at the outset of the franchising process. Also concerned with the threat of foreign dominance in programming, Lee and Yung (1990) pointed out that the insufficiency of local productions may result in cable television's failure to meet the community needs, which after all, had never been clearly defined by the cable policy makers.

Not every communication researcher's theoretical concern is connected to the social context of his or her residence. Clement Y.K. So is working on an ambitious citation analysis project to map the intellectual landscape of the field of communication and to evaluate its status as a discipline. In a component study, So (1988) examined the citation linkages of 10 communication journals and found that communication is still less developed than other social science fields and occupies only a peripheral position in the ecology of knowledge. There is a relative lack of exchanges within the field and between communication and other fields.

Whither From Here?

With the exception of regulatory policy research, communication studies are not centrally planned in Hong Kong. The research agenda are a result of individual initiatives and structural parameters like financial-institutional support, incentive system, trained personnel and social needs which we have discussed earlier. Therefore, one

should not assume the authority of a central planner and offhandedly dictate what the research priorities should be. To make realistic suggestions in regard to research directions, one should take into consideration of past research and the structural constraints.

Communication research in Hong Kong is severely limited by the small size of the research community. Compared with the western nations, it is at a stage of infancy. However, the limited research resources appear to have been efficiently used. The small group of researchers have touched upon the key research areas and have cut across geographic boundaries. Like all other nations, the quality of research is uneven for individual researchers and for the research community as a whole. However, the ready acceptance of Hong Kong researchers' works by international conferences, refereed journals and publishers speak to the overall quality of communication research as produced in Hong Kong. The challenge is to deepen and expand on the basis of existing researches. I venture some suggestions in this regard.

For Longitudinal and Comparative Studies

Methodologically, longitudinal analysis and comparative study warrant intensified commitment from communication researchers. While cross-sectional studies have their own merits, longitudinal studies which map changes over time should be particularly useful for Hong Kong which is scheduled to experience significant political change and transformation of the communications industries. The study of communication is primarily the study of social processes which necessitates analysis over time. Longitudinal comparisons will enrich and deepen our understanding of communication and social changes.

From an international vantage, Hong Kong or for that matter, Taiwan or China is just a case study. As with all case studies, it can be accused of atypicality and there always exists the possibility of picking another case that fails to fit. Admittedly, the studies I have reviewed are largely embedded in the contexts of Hong Kong, China or Taiwan whose specificity may reduce the generality of observations. Our task is to separate the unique from the general as they complement one another in theoretical formulation. To achieve this, enough cases covering a wider range of situations must be compared. Comparative study will help us identify the level of external validity of our observations and generate insights about the subject being studied. For instance, the shift of journalistic paradigms in gradual and scheduled political change, as in the case of Hong Kong, can be fruitfully compared with cases where power change hands more abruptly or violently such as the cases of the Iranian, the Philippines and Chinese Revolutions as well as power restructuring in South Korea and Taiwan. Likewise, the paths of informatization and processes of dependent communication development can be compared across Asian societies.

The on-going internationalization of Hong Kong the growing regional integration in Asia are also calling for more comparative studies within the region. Comparative study is in general more expensive and time-consuming than case studies. Given that academic exchanges among Asian scholars and that the financial and institutional supports for research are growing, comparative study, as an individual effort or as an international collaboration, is just desirable but also getting more feasible.

In Search of the Unique

Social theorization is a process of separating the unique from the general. What is general at one level may prove to be unique at a higher level. In other words, it is a process of identifying the conditions that give rise to a social phenomenon. The discovery of the unique is as important as the discovery of the general. In communication, the discovery of the unique in Hong Kong and other nations is functional in advancing the search for what Leonard Chu (1988) has called an "oriental communication perspective". It is not an ethnocentric but an open-minded attempt to further substantiate existing theories and hypotheses and to create new ones. This implies that occidental theories and findings should not be taken for granted. Lessons learned in the United States or other western nations should be treated as nothing but case studies. They should be re-examined or cross-validated in and out of the contexts of Hong Kong and elsewhere. Researchers in Hong Kong should be more alert to communication phenomena that are specific to the social context of their particular concern.

Contrasting with the west, some communication phenomena in Hong Kong and China appear to be quite distinct. For instance, the role of political ideology as a determinant of constructed reality is much more pronounced and prevalent in Hong Kong than the United States.¹⁹ Another uniqueness is derived from the high density living in Hong Kong where over 85% of the population live in high rises. This created potential conflicts between satellite television and cable television which are complementary in many western societies. It is because if the government let the people set up satellite master antenna freely, a satellite network can be built cheaply and almost instantly, thereby preempting cable television which takes longer and much more investment in establishing its network.²⁰ How to strike a balance between these two new

¹⁹ Many studies reviewed under the general heading of "political communication" pertain to the influence of political ideology in journalism in Hong Kong.

²⁰ There are many articles about this issue. For instances: Man Ho (1990) "The Deadly Conflict Between Satellite and Cable Television," *Contemporary Weekly*, August 11, 1990. Paul Lee (1990) "The Cable Network Must Carry Satellite Television," *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, August 9, 1990. Joseph Man Chan (1990), "How Threatening is Satellite Television to Cable Television," *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, August 25, 1990; (all in Chinese)

forms of communication has become an interesting policy question. The concept of "face" has a unique place in Chinese culture. For example, "face" influences the choice of communication modes. To avoid losing face, for the communicator or the receiver, a critical message is preferably transmitted by writing than face-to-face communication. The concern for "face" sometimes results in the symbolic unity on the part the national leadership in the mass media. Dissenting voices are suppressed or reserved for more private occasions.²¹

For the Study of "Dependent" Communication Development

In light of the economic advances made by Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea and some other dependent economies, it is the right moment to enquire how communications and culture have fared in relation to dependent development in general. To what extent the communications of these economies remain dependent? To what extent their communications have developed in terms of ownership, control, market share and content indigenization? What are the processes involved? Having started their search for answers to some of these questions, Hong Kong researchers should elaborate their observations by comparing and contrasting the complex *processes of dependent communication development* in traditional media like television, movies, popular music and magazines as well as other modern forms of telecommunication. Indigenous media productions not only have outcompeted foreign media fare within Hong Kong but have been exported to many parts of the world. Given the small internal market of Hong Kong and the virtual absence of cultural protectionism, how Hong Kong has grown to become what J. Galtung (1971) might have labelled a "communication subcentre" is an intriguing question.

For an Urban Research Agenda in Developmental Communication

Developmental communication has rightly emphasized rural development in the past as it pertains to the welfare of the population majority in most nations. However, the growth of urban centres like Hong Kong and Singapore call for a city-oriented research agenda as well. Moreover, the agenda should not be limited to the use of mass communication to promote economic growth. It should be expanded to include the use of mass communication for development in social, political and cultural realms. The problematics can range from the roles of mass media in rooting out corruption to the use of mass media in checking AIDS proliferation, from the functions of mass media in democratization to the processes of communications development in a dependent economy. Studies as such will not be just relevant for Hong Kong. They should provide lessons for urban centres that have cropped up in other Asian nations where the rural population still dominates. As urban centres are of crucial importance for national

²¹ For a more detailed analysis of the effects of "face", see Chu (1986).

development, the study of urban issues can be as critical as the rural ones.

To Study Mass Media's Influence on Political Formation

Hong Kong has been undergoing a political transition which will culminate in the exchange of sovereignty in 1997. This scheduled change has turned Hong Kong into a rare living laboratory for the study of social sciences. Indeed, the most researched area in Hong Kong is political communication which has been approached from the level of institutions and to less extent, individuals. So far, the studies have focused on the institutional and social impacts of power change. To complete the picture, more attention should be given to the influence of the mass media on the power centres and the reactions of journalists at the individual level. One should not assume a theoretical stance of "structural determinism" which tends to slight the influence of mass media on political formation and the options available to individuals. Given the centrality of political power in China and Hong Kong, I expect this focus on the interplay among power change, ideology, communication and public opinion will continue into the future. Accumulation of such studies will not only provide historical records but also insights into the rules of political communication.

To Cross Regional Boundaries

Hong Kong will be incorporated as a Special Administrative Region of China in 1997. As the fates of these two places are tied, more research attention should be devoted to communication in China, particularly that in Southern provinces that are economically interwoven with Hong Kong. The socio-economic development in the provinces neighbouring Hong Kong and Taiwan in the last decade is particularly impressive. In addition to asking the traditional developmental communication questions in this new context, we can concentrate on the areas of technology transfer, town development and cultural diffusion across political boundaries. The many cases of transfer of communication technology should provide handy samples for investigation. Lessons learned should be of value to China and to other developing nations too. The towns flourishing in Southern China are outstanding in that they have absorbed the village labourer who want to move to the big cities and provide a basis for industrialization within the rural areas. How does the communication system relate to the development of such towns should be an interesting question for developmental communication as well. In step with the economic integration among Hong Kong, China and Taiwan, communication among these three places has been intensifying recent years. How does cultural diffusion take place across this triangle? What are social impacts of this "triangular" communication? Such questions can be fruitfully studied from the perspective of developmental communication or international communication.

For the Study of Advertising and Media Management

In view of Hong Kong's economic prosperity and formidable advertising industry, one would expect advertising research to flourish. However, it turned out that advertising has received only scanty attention. While there are several loosely-written paperbacks about advertising, only an anthology of essays edited Y.M. Sin and H.M. Yau (1986) is more serious in nature.²² Advertising is the backbone of Hong Kong's commercial media. As a discipline, it is attracting a growing number of students. To match its importance, more research should be done in this area.

Another area that is underresearched in Hong Kong is media management. Exchanges with journalism practitioners quickly leads one to conclude that the level of press development in Hong Kong has been hampered by the outdated management prevalent in Hong Kong. What are characteristics of Chinese family style management? How do they fit in with the modern world? There are other interesting management issues for organizations in advertising, public relations, television and radio. How do the local and foreign corporate cultures differ from one another? How do they affect one another? Answers to the above questions will help upgrade the efficiency of the communications industry and enrich our understanding of communication at the organizational level.

For the Study of Information Technology

Another area that warrants more research attention is related to information technology. Information technology is rapidly transforming the communication scene in Hong Kong and elsewhere. How should these technologies be regulated to meet with the specific needs of Hong Kong? How do different technologies interact with one another? What are the social impacts of these technologies? What roles do telecommunications play in furthering Hong Kong's development in the social, economic and cultural arenas. Hong Kong is faced with burning policy issues regarding competition among satellite television, cable television and broadcasting television as well mounting pressure on the government to deregulate telephone services within and without Hong Kong. The lessons in Hong Kong should be useful for other third world cities that may be facing the same problematics soon.

²² This book is valued for its breadth but not depth. It covers a wide range of topics: the overview of the advertising industry in Hong Kong, the relation between advertising and economic growth, the consumers' evaluation of advertising, the regulations of advertising and management issues related to advertising.

For a Policy Exchange Forum

Functionally speaking, the marketing companies, the consultancy firms and the academics are complementary to one another. The marketing companies provide data about media consumption and opinion distribution; the consultancy firms provide reviews of existing situation in a given area and policy suggestions; the academics asks research questions that are in general more conceptual and theoretical in nature. To maximize the utility of this three-partite system, more institutional linkages between the government and the academic are essential. More academics should be coopted for policy research. At least, the academics or government officials should take the initiative to set up a policy exchange forum (e.g. in the form of a policy seminar series) whereby researchers, the government, interest groups and communication practitioners can get together to discuss communication policy issues in a relatively casual manner. Through such exchanges, all the parties can learn from one another. While the academic researchers' studies can inform the policy debates, they can also have a better grasp of the "real" world.

As it exists now, the government depends on foreign expertise for advice. It seldom taps the local talent. While the foreign experts may be knowledgeable with the situation elsewhere, they are usually not too familiar with the local specificities which should be heavily weighted in policy making. It is in the interest of Hong Kong for the government to build up an array of local expertise on communication issues by coopting more academics in research and policy-making. The inclusion of academics will certainly enlarge the policy perspective and enhance the quality of research. To maximize the utility of these data, the government should let the public have greater access to the data and results. To ensure the quality of commercial research, it is also advisable for commercial firms to ask academics to serve as their research consultants.

To Enlarge the Research Community

As mentioned earlier, the small size of communication research community in is restricting the volume of research output and scope of specialization. This limiting effect can only be overcome with the growth of communication faculties and the expansion of graduate programs. If the government's plans to almost double the current university enrolment and to allocate more resources for graduate training are to carry through, the communication departments in Hong Kong will certainly expand. This success of this expansion depends largely on the retention of existing staff and the recruitment of new qualified teachers, which is not that easy at this time of political uncertainty. The establishment of a doctoral program in communication is of strategic importance as it will turn out more locally-trained research personnel to meet Hong Kong's growing needs. The research community will expand almost instantly if the

communication teachers in Baptist College, which houses the largest communication department in Hong Kong, could be relieved of teaching overloads. It is clear that all this will take time to materialize.

As Hong Kong will be integrated as a Special Administrative Region of China after 1997 and exchanges among Hong Kong, Taiwan and China are intensifying, the communication researchers of these three places are forming a closer community. The crop of Chinese graduates that have finished or about to finish their doctoral training in the United States and other places can be considered as belonging to this community too because they share similar research concerns. As this enlarged community is at an embryonic stage, it is too early to predict when Hong Kong, China and Taiwan communication researchers will gain scholarship self-sufficiency as their Latin American counterparts do now.

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