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The Press In Hong Kong

by

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THE PRESS IN HONG KONG

News papers
Hong Kong
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Hong Kong has a press which reflects the developments of its community.

At a glance, the statistics present a picture which once prompted the Hong Kong Government to report that "if communications are the lifeblood of a modern society, then Hong Kong must surely be one of the healthiest communities in the world."

With a population of 4,000,000, Hong Kong is served by:

- 1,500,000 copies in daily circulation from over 60 newspapers;
- 1,500,000 radio sets and audio receivers with seven local broadcasting channels;
- 300,000 television sets with four channels (two of which also operate a colour service).

Free of direct government intervention or restriction, the press enjoys complete freedom of expression. Although there are criticisms that the Government Information Service, in its eagerness to improve communication between the administration and the people, takes on too much responsibility in reporting government policies and actions, it can also be argued that it is the press that permits this state of affairs.

Further breakdown of the statistics presents a somewhat better focused picture as follows:

THE PRINTED PRESS

With 375 copies to every 1,000 people, Hong Kong's newspaper readership ranks second highest in Asia, next only to Japan (487 per 1,000), and way above the world average of 102 per 1,000, or the Asian average of 40 per 1,000. A rented newspaper system, practised by Chinese tea house patrons, may mean more readers would share a copy; the very cheap price (HK10c., or US1.5c. per copy) also enables one reader to buy many copies, particularly in the evening when the price is further reduced.

About one third of the newspapers, including four in English, share the main advertising market with other local media. The total circulation of the English papers is estimated to be around 100,000, and the Chinese circulation, among some 20 newspapers, is in the region of 1,000,000, with at least four of them selling over 100,000 copies daily. Three major Chinese papers have airmail editions serving overseas Chinese com-

munities, and one English paper publishes a weekly airmail supplement for overseas distribution. Most of the newspapers in this category are represented in the Newspaper Society of Hong Kong.

The larger newspapers are well-versed in their representation of international news, satisfying the information needs of an economic entity of world importance. This section of the printed press, in particular, encompasses every shade of political opinion, ranging from extreme left to extreme right, but the non-aligned outnumber the extremists. Most of the larger papers are editorially showing an increased awareness of social responsibility, reflecting public reactions on social practices and government actions. It was the 1967 disturbances that touched off this press movement to tackle the social problem brought about by Hong Kong's rapid industrialization and urbanization, and this significant development reflects the community's interest in re-examining Hong Kong's internal affairs and in trying to find ways to eliminate causes for grievances which could breed militant dissidence. Several Chinese-language papers are expanding their correspondence columns, enabling readers to voice their opinions and to draw the attention of the authorities to grievances.

The second category of newspapers, numbering some 40, with a total circulation of 400,000 or more, cater for an entertainment-orientated readership and their pages have very limited or practically no coverage of international or local news. These papers, a number of which are printed in colour, reaching substantial circulation figures and drawing considerable advertising support, devote their columns to activities in show business circles. Some publish nothing but charts, forecasts and reports of horse racing in Hong Kong and dog racing in Macau. More than a third operate on a shoestring budget, share facilities among themselves and even staff, and somehow manage to survive with a small circulation of a few thousand copies and practically no advertising support.

The nine left-wing newspapers, which constitute roughly 15 per cent of the local circulation, spread themselves in both categories. While the orthodox papers solicit advertising support, the fellow-travellers scrounge along race course and greyhound tracks.

Besides dailies, the Chinese and the English press in Hong Kong produce some 140 regular publications.

These are extremely varied and include highly specialized academic journals, internationally distributed magazines using Hong Kong as their headquarters, ecclesiastic journals by missionaries, promotion periodicals for the trades, guides for entertainment, shopping and tourism, and local renditions of the "cheesecake" type of pictorial.

The press is supported by a well-developed printing industry, which also helps to make Hong Kong one of the book printing centres in this part of the world. The total labour force in printing and publishing is reported to be over 16,000.

TELEVISION AND RADIO

Technologically, electronic journalism in Hong Kong could be termed sophisticated, particularly with the satellite communications centre added to the service in 1969.

Hong Kong's first television service was a two-channel closed circuit system charging viewers a monthly subscription fee. The second station is wireless and free. There is keen competition between the two, in bidding for advertising support as well as in visual news coverage, especially of sports events.

Radio appears to have suffered a setback after the rapid growth of television services. This can also be interpreted as an indication of saturated distribution—crowded living quarters tend to encourage people sharing a living room to share the radio as well. However, the noticeable drop in the number of commercials on the air does suggest a plateau, if not a decline, in radio as a mass medium.

Radio Hong Kong, the government station, does not carry advertisements. The number of newscasts is substantial, and local consumption does not require an all-news channel. Its BBC newscast relays are of good quality and popular. Both radio and television devote almost equal air time to Chinese and English transmissions. The Chinese newscasts and "canned" programmes are usually translated from the English originals. This often delays the Chinese presentation for a few hours or, in the case of non-topical programmes, days. The English channels have a substantial Chinese audience but not vice versa.

The printed press of Hong Kong has not regarded television news coverage as a threat to its position. The two media tend to complement each other, though this may not be true when they compete for advertising support.

Still greater use of television as a mass medium is being pursued in Hong Kong. Government is getting ready to introduce educational television soon, and developers are already planning a third service to enter

into the market when the franchise stipulating the operation of only one wireless television company expires in 1972. So far the very high cost of live broadcast via satellite has rendered its regular use uneconomical for all but the most important news events.

TRAINING FACILITIES

Six post-secondary colleges in Hong Kong offer training courses in journalism and printing.

Among these schools, the Communications Department of the Hong Kong Baptist College has by far the most comprehensive syllabus for both print and electronic journalism. The department is equipped with a closed circuit television studio, publishes its own bi-lingual student newspaper, and has a sizable library. It emphasises training in both the academics and the mechanics of journalism, and has students from a number of Southeast Asian countries.

The Department of Journalism at New Asia College of the Chinese University of Hong Kong offers bi-lingual bachelor degree courses, and the Mass Communication Centre of the Chinese University offers post-graduate studies.

Australia has served as a substantial recruiting ground for the English-language press in Hong Kong. The relatively low salaries offered by Hong Kong newspapers often fail to recruit local graduates of journalism, who are attracted instead by business or service firms, trade associations and advertising agencies to do public relations or publicity work.

The foreign press is well represented in Hong Kong, both in distribution and in news collection. The overseas press corps in Hong Kong give practical training to many local men on the one hand and retain Hong Kong journalists as their stringers on the other.

Far sighted publishers are beginning to appreciate the need for developing a higher calibre of press staff to improve journalistic standards, to introduce more scientific management, and to achieve higher productivity in the face of keen competition.

PRESS ORGANISATIONS

The Newspaper Society of Hong Kong has been formed to act in matters affecting the interests of all Hong Kong newspapers, the society or its members. Since none of the left-wing papers and few of the small papers are members, it cannot yet be said that it is able to speak with one voice.

There is also a Hong Kong Journalists Association, and a Hong Kong Chinese Press Association, but their membership is even more confined so that they have even less claim to be representative.

The Foreign Correspondents Club of Hong Kong has many local journalists amongst its non-correspondent members. Centrally located, the club has good facilities for social functions and serves as a useful meeting place for newsmen and newsmakers, particularly with its regular professional luncheons which always feature a noteworthy speaker.

The Chinese-Language Press Institute is a recent development on the press scene in Hong Kong. Inaugurated in November 1968, the Institute already counts more than 100, out of an estimated 150 Chinese-language newspapers published all over the world, among its members. With an aggregated 3,000,000 daily copies serving a readership of 30,000,000 Chinese outside mainland China, its members are from Chinese newspapers as far afield as New York, Surinam, and Vientiane. Of those newspapers which subscribe to the principles of an objective and free press, 80 per cent are represented in the Institute. In Hong Kong alone, 40 newspapers are members, in addition to which there are 12 associate members.

The Institute has a programme of activities that includes in-service training courses, professional seminars, experiments in the mechanisation of Chinese type-setting, standardisation of translated terminology, and other services to its members.

In November 1969, when the C.L.P.I. held its Annual Assembly in Taipei, the 150 delegates unanimously adopted the common canons of professional ethics for all the Chinese-language newspapers.

The Institute's projects are being pursued with appreciable results. The "Glossary on Moon Landing Terms", part of the standardisation of translated terminology project, was published in October 1969, and has proved to be very helpful to the Chinese-language press in its coverage of the Apollo 12 lunar probe.

A project for mechanisation of Chinese type-setting is being carried out with the Department of Communications of the Hong Kong Baptist College. It is believed that development of a mechanism which eliminates redundant Chinese characters, and includes all the 3,000-4,000 frequently used characters sufficient for an ordinary newspaper by carefully organising the keyboard, will revolutionise the Chinese newspaper industry and eventually the entire printing industry. The breakthrough would also solve an increasingly serious labour problem.

The Institute has organised several in-service training seminars in addition to its series of translation seminars in co-operation with the Extramural Department of the Hong Kong Chinese University. A seminar entitled "The Press and Social Changes" was conducted in 1969 with the Mass Communications Centre of the same university, and a seminar on "economic report-

ing" was offered in Hong Kong in January 1970 with assistance from the Press Foundation of America. The seminar was repeated in Taipei in March.

The Institute publishes for its members a weekly background service in Chinese, with socio-economic emphasis, in co-operation with the Press Foundation of Asia.

The Chinese-language press in Hong Kong, maintaining the headquarters for the C.L.P.I., has taken the lead to initiate concerted action to improve the standard of journalism and to tool themselves to tackle social problems.

The Hong Kong National Committee of the International Press Institute is very active in IPI affairs. Its Chairman has served many years on the IPI's Executive Board and is currently the Chairman of IPI. The National Committee was entrusted with the organising work for the IPI's 19th General Assembly.

In hosting the IPI 19th General Assembly, the press of Hong Kong has made its contribution to world journalism and expects to benefit, in greater return, from the exchange of views and the discussions of common problems, newspaper policies, techniques and current developments.

Pictures:

A hydrofoil, bound for Macau, passes the Western Praya of Hong Kong Island.

An ocean-going cargo vessel berthed at Kowloon wharves, with the harbour and Victoria Peak in the background.

Shop and restaurant signs vie for attention in the tourist area of Kowloon.

Chater Road runs through Hong Kong's business and banking centre.

Aberdeen harbour, on the south west side of Hong Kong Island, has changed considerably in recent years, developing into an industrial area and resettling many of its former boat dwellers in multi-storey housing blocks. However, picturesque corners still remain.

The approach path to Kai Tak airport affords passengers a spectacular view of the Kowloon peninsula, immediately below, and Hong Kong Island on the far side of the harbour.

Hong Kong's central district contains sizeable areas of open space.

A few miles from the metropolis are the quiet hills and valleys of the New Territories hinterland. Villages in this date back as much as eight hundred years.