



HONG KONG STUDIES READER SERIES



Hong Kong Media

Interaction Between Media, State
and Civil Society

Chi Kit Chan
Gary Tang
Francis L. F. Lee

palgrave
macmillan

Hong Kong Studies Reader Series

Series Editors

Brian C. H. Fong, Academy of Hong Kong Studies, The Education
University of Hong Kong, Tai Po, Hong Kong
Tai-Lok Lui, Academy of Hong Kong Studies, The Education
University of Hong Kong, Tai Po, Hong Kong
Stephen Chiu, Academy of Hong Kong Studies, The Education
University of Hong Kong, Tai Po, Hong Kong

In recent years, Hong Kong society has undergone significant political, economic and social changes. Hong Kong Studies, as an interdisciplinary field of area studies that takes “Hong Kong” as a central subject of analysis, has become the focus of attention for both locals and non-locals from different backgrounds. There is a growing demand from local and non-local students, school teachers, scholars, policy researchers, journalists, politicians and businessmen to understand the development of Hong Kong in a more systematic way. The *Hong Kong Studies Reader Series* is designed to address this pressing need by publishing clear, concise and accessible readers to key areas of Hong Kong Studies including politics, history, culture, media, etc. The series aims to offer English-Chinese-Japanese trilingual guides to anyone who is interested in understanding and researching Hong Kong.

Chi Kit Chan · Gary Tang · Francis L. F. Lee

Hong Kong Media

Interaction Between Media, State and Civil Society

palgrave
macmillan

Chi Kit Chan
School of Communication
The Hang Seng University
of Hong Kong
Sha Tin, New Territories
Hong Kong

Gary Tang
Department of Social Sciences
The Hang Seng University
of Hong Kong
Sha Tin, New Territories
Hong Kong

Francis L. F. Lee
School of Journalism
and Communication
The Chinese University
of Hong Kong
Sha Tin, New Territories
Hong Kong

ISSN 2523-7764

ISSN 2523-7772 (electronic)

Hong Kong Studies Reader Series

ISBN 978-981-19-1819-3

ISBN 978-981-19-1820-9 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-1820-9>

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd. 2022

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover image: © Yuji Sakai/Getty Images

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd.

The registered company address is: 152 Beach Road, #21-01/04 Gateway East, Singapore 189721, Singapore

PRAISE FOR *HONG KONG MEDIA*

“There has been much instant analysis of the dramatic decline in Hong Kong’s media freedom, but this is *the* authoritative account of the beginning of the end of territory’s experiment with liberal exceptionalism as an enclave within the People’s Republic of China. This is not parachute punditry or armchair analysis. Written by three Hongkong scholars immersed in the city’s media, movements and culture, the book is faithful to the micro dynamics of a complex city even as it contributes to global theoretical understanding of the relationship between media and politics in hybrid and authoritarian settings.”

—Cherian George, *Author, Media and Power in Southeast Asia*

“*Hong Kong media: Interaction between media, state and civil society* by Chan Chi-kit, Gary Tang and Francis L.F. Lee is an outstanding achievement. It is a must read for everyone who is interested and cares about Hong Kong. The book highlights the central role that the media and media professional played in shaping and often creating, modern Hong Kong. The book provides a comprehensive and critical analysis of media in Hong Kong society by examining the interaction and mutual influences of the media system, the state, and civil society. Chan, Tang and Lee offer novel theoretical insights into media transformation in a hybrid regime. These are embedded in rich empirical data which range from the colonial era to the new realities of the national security law. It is the great level of detail and eye for nuances paired with sharp theoretical perspective

which makes the publication such compelling reading. The examination the relationship between journalistic professionalism, press freedom and censorship in the ever changing political and economic structures reveals the complexity in which media professionals navigate. In Hong Kong radical transformation of media and its role in society through the digitalisation of communication was exacerbated by increasing control from China, creating a uniquely high-pressure environment for journalists. The critical and balanced analysis of these developments are aptly followed by a fascinating study of the ethos and attitudes of journalistic professions. Together these chapters allow for deeper reflections on the agency of media organisations and the journalistic corps. The transformative impact of the media is outlined in exceptional detail in the chapters on the emergence of a distinct Hong Kong identity and social mobilisation, confirming that the Hong Kong we know, or knew until recently, would have been impossible without the media. The engaging writing reflects the vibrancy of the Hong Kong media during times of “liberal exceptionalism”. The authors manage to capture this spirit of a bygone era in an outstanding fashion that is engaging and invites deep emotional reflections. Although *Hong Kong media* stops with the national security law which ends “Hong Kong as a liberal enclave under Chinese sovereignty”, the authors highlight the value of continue studying the territory and its transformations. The conclusion raises questions about how citizens and journalists maintain their values and identity and make sense of the new increasing authoritarian structures. The book underlines the important contribution of a free and dynamic media in creating and protecting liberal societies. In times in which civil liberties and freedoms are under pressure globally this message cannot be overstated.”

—Dr. Malte Philipp Kaeding, *University of Surrey, UK*

“Communication studies and media analysis are vital components of Hong Kong Studies. Any attempt to grapple with the social, cultural, and political dynamics in contemporary Hong Kong society must cover the role of the news media and their impacts at the societal level. The significance of the news media is partly a reflection of the liveliness of the media business in Hong Kong. Such a vibrant news sector, in turn, facilitates the formation of an industry of professional journalists who function like guard dogs for the public. In a partially democratized polity, news media interface between the government and the general public, striking a delicate balance between the state and society. On the one side, political

influence can shape news media via market pressure. On the other hand, considering its commercial interest, the media business cannot ignore its popularity among the audience. It strives to promote its readership, connecting news media to the public. As a result, not only will news media inform the public, they also come to play a role in social mobilization. In this regard, the news media are constitutive and constituted in the social setting. The economic and political environment makes its mark on the news media, and the news media, through the dissemination of messages, inform the public by providing them with different interpretive schema. The authors of this title offer an engaging discussion of the interactions between news media and state, market, and civil society. Not only do they give us a solid background to understand the changing dynamics shaping the news media before 1997, but they also offer us an up-to-date analysis of the emerging challenges since Hong Kong's return to China. Their critical analysis and reflection of the current scene facilitate the readers to ask further questions on the news media and the status of Hong Kong society.”

—Prof. Tai Lok Lui, *The Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong*

CONTENTS

1	Introduction	1
2	Press Freedom and Political Change	39
3	The News Professionals	79
4	The News Audience	119
5	Transformation of Media, Social Values, and Hong Kong Identification	157
6	Media and Social Mobilisation	195
7	Final Remarks	233
	References	257
	Index	281

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 5.1	Frequency of news clips mentioning “marginalisation” and the relevant keywords, 1998–2012	168
Fig. 5.2	Percentage of population identifying themselves to be Hong Kongers, 2008–2017 (by age group)	171
Fig. 5.3	Percentage of population identifying themselves to be Chinese, 2008–2017 (by age group)	172
Fig. 6.1	Daily time trend of frequency of the threads with the word “review” (檢討) on LIHKG, from June 1, 2019 to February 1, 2020	218

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1	Selected list of past or present owners or major shareholders of media organisations (adopted from Lee, 2018)	48
Table 2.2	Hong Kong journalists' perceptions of the extent of various self-censorship practices (2011)	54
Table 3.1	Demographic profile, work condition, and perceived social status of Hong Kong's journalistic profession before the handover	85
Table 3.2	Job satisfaction and professional membership of journalists before the handover	87
Table 3.3	News values and media functions perceived by Hong Kong's journalists before the handover	88
Table 3.4	Political attitudes and perceptions of journalists in the 1990s	90
Table 3.5	Demographic profile, work condition, and perceived social status of journalistic profession in post-handover years	95
Table 3.6	Job satisfaction of Hong Kong's journalists and their evaluation of professional bodies in post-handover years	98
Table 3.7	Adaptation to new media by Hong Kong's journalists	100
Table 3.8	News values and media functions perceived by Hong Kong's journalists in post-handover years	101
Table 3.9	Perceived media self-censorship of Hong Kong's journalists in post-handover years	104
Table 3.10	Political attitudes of journalists in post-handover years	105

Table 3.11	Adaptation to collective action by Hong Kong's journalists (2011)	107
Table 4.1	Consumption of news brands	123
Table 4.2	Citizens' interests in different news topics	128
Table 4.3	Ways to get news online	130
Table 4.4	Level of news participation	132
Table 4.5	Perceived representativeness of media and other institutions	139
Table 4.6	Citizens' perceptions of media self-censorship	141
Table 4.7	Trust in specific news organisations	144
Table 4.8	Extent of online news payments and their predictors	148
Table 4.9	Predicting willingness to pay among non-payers	151
Table 5.1	Cross-tabulation between national identification and political identification ($X^2 = 300.05^{***}$)	179
Table 5.2	Cross-tabulation between national identification and value orientation ($X^2 = 169.46^{***}$)	179
Table 5.3	Cross-tabulations between national identification and different aspects of the use of social media	180
Table 5.4	Logistic regressions for localist identification and Hong Konger identification	181
Table 5.5	Logistic regressions for localist identification, divided by different groups of value orientation	181
Table 5.6	Logistic regressions for Hong Konger identification, divided by different groups of value orientation	182
Table 5.7	Comparison of news exposure, political discussion, use of social media, and national and Hong Kong identifications among the supporters of the Anti-ELAB Movement between the two waves of a panel survey	185
Table 5.8	Four phases of the interaction of the socio-political structure, media development, and Hong Kong national identification	186
Table 6.1	Protesters' reasons for participating and supporting political parties, and sources of movement-related information in the Umbrella Movement	210
Table 6.2	Percentage of frequency of the selected movement organisations, political parties, political figures, and keywords mentioned in the selected newspaper, in the reports about the Umbrella Movement, from September 28 to December 15, 2014	212

Table 6.3	Percentage of respondents who answered “important” or “very important” for the perceived importance of the respective organisations and social media platforms in the Anti-ELAB Movement (June 26, <i>N</i> = 418)	215
Table 6.4	Percentage of respondents who answered “agree” or “strongly agree” with the following statements (June 28, <i>N</i> = 418)	215
Table 6.5	The impacts of the use of media on the perception of movement leadership (September 28, <i>N</i> = 405)	216
Table 6.6	Percentage of respondents answering “quite a lot” or “always” for the use of the respective media	221
Table 6.7	Percentage of frequency of mentioning the selected keywords among the selected online news media, from June 9, 2019 to December 31, 2020	223



CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Chapter 1 outlines the theoretical and eventful significance of studying Hong Kong media. It revisits the scholarly literature which discusses the interaction between news media and state, market, and civil society. Classic theses about state–press relationship, the role of market force on press freedom and news quality, critiques on journalistic professionalism and public journalism are explicated and situated in a conceptual framework which explains the conditions of media autonomy and press activities. After that, the chapter illuminates an eventful perspective to understand the Hong Kong media—the book takes the eruption of enduring street protests, and the unexpected chain reaction from China on Hong Kong’s governance and social freedom in 2019–2020 as a “critical event” which fundamentally alters the interaction between state, market, civil society and media. Before the eventful moment, Hong Kong enjoys a certain degree of political exceptionalism as a liberal enclave under Chinese sovereignty. Yet the rapid rise of state brinksmanship on local social freedom has put a question mark to the continuation of such political exceptionalism. That is why it is a critical timing to revisit and investigate how Hong Kong media react to the shifting dynamics of state–society relationship.

Walter Lippmann, the early twentieth-century American journalist and public intellectual, famously made the distinction between “the world outside and the pictures in our heads” (Lippmann, 1922, p. 1). Walter Lippmann was writing at a time when politics and public affairs in the United States were “nationalising”. That is, as transportation and

communication technologies made different places of the country more closely connected to and intertwined with each other, what happened in a locality became increasingly heavily influenced by happenings elsewhere in the country. As a result, more issues had to be addressed at the national level. At such a historical juncture, Lippmann believed that the media had become ever more significant because people simply could not have direct experiences of most of the things happening in the country, not to say the world at large. The media were overwhelmingly the most important sources of information and images about the world for people.

Similarly, Benedict Anderson (1983), the anthropologist best known for his idea of the nation as an imagined community, posed the question of why people could have such strong feelings of themselves being part of a nation when, in reality, most people would not have travelled to most places within their countries and would not have known too many of their compatriots. Although Anderson's (1983) story about the rise of nationalism was a complicated one, focusing on the broad historical changes he labelled "print capitalism", the "print" part of the phrase points to the role of the media: the media have always been a main source of the national imagination.

Hong Kong is sometimes described as only "a small city" with a few million residents, but it is also a global city (Sassen, 1991), a financial centre in the network of global capitalism. In the age of globalisation, the points made by Lippmann and Anderson are certainly more applicable than ever before. Beyond these general considerations, the media played very significant and more specific roles in the city's social and political development. For example, Hong Kong was once—in the early post-WWII period, to be precise—seen by many residents as a "borrowed place, borrowed time" (Hughes, 1967), and a distinctive "Hong Kong identity" became more prominent only since the 1970s. Among the factors contributing to the emergence of this local identity was the fast-growing local media industry driven by a surplus economy (Ma, 1999). For another example, since the 1980s and into the early post-handover years, the Hong Kong society has maintained a certain degree of social and political stability despite many political controversies and the continual lack of democracy. In this context, communication scholars Chan and So (2005) formulated the idea that the media played a surrogate democratic function in Hong Kong in the early post-handover years. By channelling and representing public opinion, the media compensated

for the lack of formal democratic institutions and contributed to the proper functioning of the social-political system.

Hong Kong is a media-rich or even media-saturated society. When Hong Kong returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, the city had 14 major daily newspapers,¹ two free television broadcasters, one paid television service provider and a range of magazines. As of 2021, the numbers became 17 daily newspapers,² three free television broadcasters, two paid television service providers, various magazines and a wide range of online media outlets. Hong Kong is one of the most digitally connected societies in East Asia. According to the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) in Hong Kong in 2000, around half of the households in the city had personal computers. Among these households, 73.3% were connected to the internet. By 2021, 95% of Hong Kong's households had broadband services, and the mobile subscription penetration rate stood at 280.1%; that is, each person in the city owned roughly 2.8 mobile devices. Catching up with new digital trends has never been a problem for the fashion-chasing Hong Kong public. According to a paper done by the research office of the Legislative Council Secretariat in Hong Kong,³ the social media participation rate jumped from 68% in 2014 to 83% in 2018. The thematic household survey report (No. 73) of the Hong Kong government also indicated that by 2020, 99% of Hong Kong people aged 10 and above engaged in some online social activities, 87.4% used web search engines, and 69.1% sent and received emails.⁴

The media are therefore a very important part of the Hong Kong society. Understanding the media system in the city is indispensable for an understanding of the society at large. From a more dynamic perspective, the media has played a key role in shaping the various social and

¹ According to Sze (1999, p. 74), there were 12 major Chinese daily newspapers in 1996. Adding two well-known daily English newspapers in Hong Kong at that time (the *South China Morning Post* and the *Standard*), there were thus 14 major daily newspapers during the eve of the handover of Hong Kong.

² According to Wisenews database, there were 18 daily newspapers in May 2021; yet, among them, *Headline Daily* and *Headline Finance* actually referred to parts of the same newspaper; thus, there were 17 daily newspapers.

³ Key statistics from the study are available at <https://www.legco.gov.hk/research-publications/english/1920iish15-social-media-usage-in-hong-kong-20191212-e.pdf> (last accessed in June 2021).

⁴ The report is available online at https://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/data/stat_report/product/B1130201/att/B11302732021XXXXB0100.pdf (last accessed in June 2021).

political changes in Hong Kong in the past decades, while ongoing social and political changes have also shaped the evolution of the media system. The book thus aims to offer an overview of the relationship and mutual influences between the media and society in Hong Kong.

Both “media” and “society” are very broad terms. This book has a relatively specific focus on public communication, by which we refer to societal communication about public affairs. Public affairs, in turn, can be understood as matters that are pertinent to the distribution of resources and power in society and that affect the interests of people as members of “the public”. Hence, when it comes to “media”, our focus will be primarily on what we normally call “news media”. The news media are conventionally constituted by a group of formal organisations specialising in the production of content in an attempt to inform people about what is going on and to facilitate societal deliberation on common concerns. Certainly, with the transformation of the media system following digitalisation, the blurring of the boundary between the public and the private, the increasing intertwining between the originally distinctive media industries, and the rise of phenomena such as citizen journalism, questions such as “who is a journalist” and “what constitutes the news media” have become contentious. Therefore, the various chapters of this book may go beyond discussions of the news media as traditionally defined. However, the news media and public communication remain our main concerns.

In addition to specifying the aim and focus of the book, effectively addressing the relationship between media and society in Hong Kong requires a relevant conceptual framework and a proper specification of the societal context. These are what the remainder of this chapter will do. We will first discuss the theoretical underpinnings of this book, which centre on the interaction among the media, the state, the market and civil society. We will then provide a brief account of the historical development of Hong Kong. As will be clear by the end of this chapter, Hong Kong has experienced tremendous and arguably paradigmatic changes in 2019 and 2020 due to the Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement and the establishment of the National Security Law (NSL). Retrospectively, the tremendous changes in 2019 and 2020 would make one feel that the social and political system in Hong Kong was relatively stable between 1997 and 2019. In this chapter, we explicate the core features of society and politics in Hong Kong during the period. After the conceptual and contextual discussions in the following pages, the chapter ends with a statement of the value of studying the Hong Kong case and an outline of the contents to come.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS: MEDIA, STATE, MARKET AND CIVIL SOCIETY

This book examines the Hong Kong media by paying attention to its interaction with state power, market forces and civil society. The news media extends our communication activities and social imaginary beyond our immediate living circles. They inform us of the “social facts” that we may not gain from our families, friends, and colleagues. They provide us with social commentaries, educational information, and entertainment materials. All of these can foster our public lives and shape our attitudes towards public affairs. While acknowledging the significant role of news media in our society, scholars, politicians, social activists, and educators have consistently reminded us of the stakeholders who exert their influence on journalists and the news. More broadly speaking, the news media are, after all, part of the larger social-political system; understanding the media requires understanding how it interacts with the other major components of the social-political system, including the state, the market, and civil society. For clarity, the following pages first explicate how the media relate to each of the three entities before discussing the interactions among all four.

Media and the State

In authoritarian countries, the news media largely play the role of the official mouthpiece and ideological apparatus. By contrast, the news media in democratic countries are typically structurally independent from the state. In the ideal of journalistic professionalism following the tradition of liberalism, the news media should even exhibit a certain degree of antagonism towards the state. The news media are often considered the Fourth Estate; that is, it is the fourth (and informal) branch of the government monitoring the operation of the legislative, executive, and judiciary branches. Journalists are supposed to be watchdogs for society to prevent the abuse of power. Democracy, in the words of media sociologist Michael Schudson (2008), needs an unlovable press.

However, in reality, media scholars have long noted that the press is not as independent and critical as it is expected to be, even in democratic countries. In their classic study, Herman and Chomsky (1988) argued that the U.S. media are not fundamentally different from the media in authoritarian countries in that their work essentially amounted to, as the title of

their book suggests, manufacturing consent. Most scholars have not gone as far as Herman and Chomsky. They recognised that the media in democratic countries are not mouthpieces of the government. Yet, the media in operation are seldom like the idealised heroes celebrated in movies such as *All the President's Men*, *Spotlight*, or *The Post*. As Donohue et al. (1995) put it, the media are neither watchdogs nor lapdogs. They can best be described as guard dogs. The news media typically supports the dominant political institutions of their own society. They typically support elites as a whole. However, at times of conflict and scandals, the media would turn on some of their masters.

One reason the media behave like guard dogs is that the dominant political institutions, after all, hold the resources that the media need. Late British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (1985) once famously said that the media hold the oxygen of publicity that political leaders need, but political leaders and dominant political institutions hold the “facts” and information that the news media need. Dominant political and social institutions are also where “credible news sources” come from. Bennett (1990), for instance, proposed the indexing hypothesis. He argued that the news media mainly indexes the points of view of people within established political institutions. It follows that the news media may indeed become highly critical of the government when there are elites within the dominant political institutions criticising government administration. Similarly, Chin-Chuan Lee (2002) used the phrase established pluralism to describe the contents of the media in liberal democracies: the media do present a plurality of viewpoints, but that plurality is often restricted to what exists within the established institutions.

One famous journalistic studies example in line with Bennett's indexing perspective and Chin-Chuan Lee's notion of established pluralism is Dan Hallin's (1986) study of U.S. media coverage of the Vietnam War. Against the popular myth that the American media were highly critical of the U.S. government regarding the war, Hallin showed that the U.S. media turned against the government only when the opposition party started criticising the administration of its Vietnam policy. For Hallin, the actual practice of journalistic norms must also be understood. The American media exhibited a degree of objectivity on issues falling within the sphere of legitimate controversies, but the media tended to uphold the dominant viewpoint when an issue fell within the sphere of consensus, and the media tended to become one-sidedly critical when a matter fell within the sphere of deviance. The problem, for Hallin,

is that established political institutions have disproportionate power in determining which issues fall into which sphere.

Nevertheless, the above discussion should not lead one to assume that the media are often subservient to the state. Professional norms and ideals do matter. The media system, as well as the relationship between the media and political power, is complex. Historical memories and news icons urge journalists to frame certain stories in specific ways that may not be preferred by power holders. Collective memories about highly significant social events could unleash ritualistic power that the state could hardly defy. Event contingencies can catch political power out of guard and provide a window of opportunity for the media to provide highly critical coverage (Bennett et al., 2007). Rivalries across governing elites, separation of powers by different social institutions, and large-scale collective movements could result in the re-mapping of political power, which enables the media to perform a critical role. Political power does not control everything. There is a constant negotiation between the media and the state that shapes what the news media do in specific scenarios.

Media and the Market

In addition to state power, the news media are also subject to the influence of market forces. The rise of mass media in modern societies was driven by market demands for and supply of information. In the writing of media sociologist Michael Schudson (1978), in the Progressive Era in the United States, the market enabled the news media to be independent from the “spoil system” of political and partisan sponsorship by selling “objective and impartial” information to the urbanised middle class. The market even became a metaphor for a normative vision of the press: the press should serve as a marketplace of ideas where different ideologies and discourses compete, with the belief that the best ideas will win the competition.

Such a vision of how the media market works, however, has been criticised by those who question the application of commercial logic to the news media. In the British case, James Curran (2002) attributed the rise of the English commercial press to the triumph of the middle class, who aimed to shake off the domination of the royal and noble classes in the age of Scottish enlightenment and industrialisation. However, through its emergence, the English commercial press also adversely affected the viability of the “radical press” that pursued more fundamental social and political changes.

Contemporary media critics are similarly concerned about the various side effects of the news media's commercial practices. An obvious issue is the influence of advertisers on media practices, which often derails the journalistic norms of objective reporting and impartiality. The media market presumably facilitates the news media in serving the needs of their audiences. In reality, however, most news media "sell" their readership to advertisers, as advertising revenue is an important business lifeline. This results in some problematic consequences. First, to avoid offending major advertisers, news that is critical to the interests of major advertisers may be censored or downplayed (Bagdikian, 2000). Second, commercial logic leads to a press operating according to the principle of a one-dollar-one-vote. The news media can be, overall speaking, more inclined towards serving the interests of the affluent classes instead of the interests of the underprivileged, because the former is who the advertisers are looking for. Third, and more generally, the commercial character of the news media encourages media organisations to treat their audiences as consumers instead of citizens. Media are more inclined to serve their audience by providing what they are interested in, such as sensationalised news stories about crimes, private lives of celebrities, and so on, instead of news on what the public interest actually resides (McManus, 1994).

Believers in the market sometimes argue that the media are indeed just businesses, and that there is no problem for them to do what is best from the business perspective. However, given the fundamental point that the news media are where publicly relevant information and discourses come from, its performance can impinge on the proper operation of the society. Therefore, whether the news media should simply follow the "invisible hand" of the free market has been a contested issue. For libertarians who strongly distrust political power, it remains advisable to have minimal governmental intervention in the press, and this often means that the media is allowed to operate simply according to what their commercial nature dictates. However, since the mid-twentieth century, most academics have agreed upon a broadly defined "social responsibility theory" of the press (Baker, 2001).

In the context of many European countries, the tradition of public service broadcasting is closely related to the idea of the social responsibility of the press. The fundamental idea is that broadcasting can have an extraordinary influence on society, given its pervasive nature and the presumed power of audio-visual messages. Therefore, it must be regulated and at least partly publicly funded. Many European countries thus boost

well-established public broadcasters, and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) is often seen as an exemplar. These public broadcasters operate according to carefully designed codes and editorial guidelines. BBC's editorial guidelines, for example, highlight the norms and principles of serving the public interest, accountability, accessibility, accuracy, due impartiality, the need to avoid harm and offence, respect for privacy, fairness to contributors and consent, independence from external interests, etc. The guidelines also stipulate how one should handle certain categories of sensitive content, such as war and terrorism-related stories, religious materials, and so on.⁵

In summary, much scholarly discussion on the relationship between the media and the market has addressed the question of compatibility between the normative expectations of the media and the search for profits. The key issue is the tension between the news as a commercial commodity and the news as a public good (Baker, 2001). For those who emphasise the news as a public good, a high degree of commodification of the news media is not conducive to the genuine freedom of the press and of information.

Media and Civil Society

Besides the state and the market, we have to consider how the media relate to and interact with civil society. Civil society is a widely contested term in social and political theories. For the purpose of this book, civil society refers to the full range of organisations, associations, and groups that is structurally independent from the state and the market. These include churches, neighbourhood associations, labour unions, professional bodies, community groups, social movement organisations, sports clubs, and so on. Without using the term civil society, de Tocqueville (1835) was among the first authors to emphasise the significance of such non-official, civil associations in public life in a democratic society. He pointed out that these civil associations help coordinate efforts to resolve community problems by the society itself. More importantly, by participating in such civil associations, citizens learn to consider themselves not as private citizens but as members of a community or the public. Hence, ideally speaking, civil society should help reconcile conflicts among private

⁵ BBC's editorial values, standards, and guidelines are available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/>.

interests, foster social trust and mutual respect, and generate a moral common ground based on which reasoned discussions of public matters become feasible (Seligman, 1992).

Civil society actors play several roles in the process of public communication. Hence, their relationships with the news media also have some dimensions. First, as the news media's role is to report on social life and public matters, civil society groups and their actions are key subjects of news coverage. In public matters, civil society associations may coordinate efforts to research the issues involved, articulate and aggregate the views and interests of private citizens, and generate possible solutions to social problems. Therefore, when governments put forward their policies, civil society associations can serve as important supporters, commentators, or critics. For the news media, this means that civil society actors are important news sources when journalists work on a wide range of stories. Social groups that have an interest in advocating certain matters and viewpoints (e.g., social movement organisations) need to forge a close and productive relationship with the news media (Ryan, 1991; Ryan & Jeffreys, 2019). On the other end, it is up to the news media to consider whether they would like to develop closer connections with a wider range of social groups to better represent the interests and voices of citizens. The movement of public journalism in the United States in the 1990s, for instance, involved an emphasis on strengthening such media–community connections (Glasser, 1999; Rosen, 1999).

Second, civil society actors can become critics and/or allies of the news media. While the news media see themselves as the fourth estate and have the role of monitoring the performance of the government, the society also needs measures and mechanisms to ensure the accountability of the media to the public. Some authors have noted “the rise of the fifth estate” as a result of the growth of the digital media space, which facilitated the proliferation of critiques and commentaries on media performance (McNair, 2013; Newman et al., 2012). However, with or without the internet, citizens can form groups aimed at monitoring the press. Nonetheless, critics of the news media coming from civil society typically uphold the core values of press freedom and journalistic professionalism. Their criticisms are often about how the news media acted unprofessionally, often due to influences by the state and market forces. In one sense, critics of the news media can actually be seen as allies of professional journalists when the latter try to defend their autonomy against political and economic power. The informal alliance between civil

society and professional media can be particularly conspicuous in places where press freedom and civil liberties in general are under siege. After all, civil liberties are unlikely to be sustained if a society does not have press freedom, and vice versa.

Third, in addition to acting as critics or allies, civil society actors can engage in media practices by themselves and establish what communication scholars often call “alternative media” (Atton, 2002; Couldry & Curran, 2003). While alternative media practices have existed in many countries for a long time (Downing, 2001; Eliasoph, 1988), the advancement of internet technologies has provided the impetus for the growth of alternative media outlets. This is because the internet has lowered the production and distribution costs of news content, allowed alternative media outlets to reach a wide audience more easily, and provided platforms and tools for collaboration between professional and amateur actors (Forde, 2011). A closely related development is the emergence of citizen journalism, as ordinary people with a mobile phone in hand can, nowadays, easily turn themselves into “news reporters” at the sites of social and political events. People can act as citizen-reporters intentionally or accidentally. For some observers, alternative media and citizen journalism present a distinctive challenge to the conventional notion of journalistic professionalism, because these emerging practitioners often see themselves as advocates of specific viewpoints instead of neutral and objective recorders of events. Nonetheless, the impact of alternative media and citizen journalism on conventional media would depend on how news audiences respond to the different types of media outlets and content.

Media, State, Market, and Civil Society

The above paragraphs explicate the media’s relationships with state power, market forces, and civil society separately. However, state power, market forces, and civil society also relate to and interact with each other in various ways. Therefore, they do not influence the media independently of each other. The interactions among all the entities can contribute to paradoxes and contradictions in the relationship between the media and the other actors.

For example, in communication studies, the intertwining of state power and market forces and their complex influence on the media has been widely examined by scholars in the tradition of critical political economy. For these scholars, the state and the market mutually constitute

each other; thus, the political economy must be considered holistically (Mosco, 2009). Instead of understanding the “free market” as one without government intervention, political economists point out that the market simply could not exist without relevant laws and regulations, such as laws and regulations that help ascertain and protect property ownership. In contemporary societies, the “market” for many types of products is also far from the ideal market populated by a huge number of small players envisioned in classic economic theories. Instead, many markets, including the media market, are marked by oligopoly and ownership concentration (Bagdikian, 2000; Herman & McChesney, 1997). As news media require heavy investment and capital flow to finance considerable staff costs and equipment for news production, they are usually controlled by sizable conglomerates or business giants. Such a tendency towards media ownership concentration induces possible collusion between politicians and media investors for the sake of mutual benefits. Partisan favour of press organisations and media owners taking their investment as instruments for political influence is not uncommon, even in democracies. Media self-censorship—media owners and their senior managers in newsrooms exercising control over news content in a relatively covert manner—is a well-known problem (Gans, 1979). Marriage between state power and market force is also manifested in the organisational routines of news production. Sociologist Gaye Tuchman (1978) discussed how journalists develop their “news net” so that they can effectively and efficiently produce news about unexpected news events. Networking with representatives from established institutions is crucial for news workers to make sense of “social facts” and obtain the information needed for their daily news stories. Political power and economic power are intertwined.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to assume that political and economic forces are always allies with each other. There are occasions when the media market can work against the wishes of political leaders. As long as the media are commercial entities seeking profits and audiences, they cannot ignore their audience demands and orientations. People seldom spend money on media content perceived as politically biased or merely government propaganda. When many people in a society hold a certain set of political values, or when many people in a society are highly dissatisfied with government performance, producing content that interprets public affairs based on those political values and/or reflects those public sentiments could be a sensible thing to do from a business perspective.

Moreover, in a large media market and with the proliferation of channels and outlets, there could be incentives for media outlets to identify their own target audience and construct their own niches (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). This creates incentives for product differentiation. Having a distinctive political standpoint is one way to carve open a niche market for oneself. As a result, a certain degree of plurality in media content can be expected, and as long as the media system as a whole has a degree of internal pluralism, the presence of media outlets exhibiting different political predilections could influence each other in specific ways. These considerations help us understand why, even in an authoritarian country such as China, the commercialisation of the news media, when coupled with other social and political forces, has the potential to provide the impetus for the rise of a contentious public sphere in which public discontent can be expressed (Lei, 2018; Zhao, 1998).

It should be obvious that when and to what degree the market might work against the state is largely dependent on the actions of ordinary people and civil society actors. As noted earlier, there is a tendency for the media to interpellate its audiences into the subject position of the consumer, but it is up to the media audiences themselves to take up the position of citizens with social and political values. Indeed, research has shown that there can be a significant gap between what ordinary people prefer to read and what professional journalists believe the public should read (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2013). Lippmann (1922) argued that one cannot expect ordinary people preoccupied with making a living and enjoying their private time with family and friends to pay close attention to public affairs all the time. In American political science, Lippmann's depiction of ordinary people was formalised and empirically substantiated through Philip Converse's (1964) classic analysis of the characteristics of the mass belief system. Michael Schudson (1998) thus argued that people should abandon the overly idealistic notion of the "well-informed citizen"; instead, the "good citizen" should be understood as acting similar to parents on the side of the swimming pool—they chat with each other, eat and drink, and just enjoy their own leisure time, but they are also paying some attention to their children in the pool, and will take action when needed. Largely following this line of thinking, political scientist John Zaller (2003) compared the media's role to that of the fire alarm or burglar alarm. Its most important function is to signal danger and crisis to the public.

Together, Lippmann, Schudson, and Zaller painted what they would consider a more realistic picture of ordinary citizens. However, their theorisation also points towards the fact that people can indeed become very concerned about public issues when highly important controversies, events, or crises occur. The gap between people's interests and journalistic judgements tends to narrow at such times (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2013). When people start taking up the subject position of the citizen and attend to matters of common concern, whether people's voices and interests can be articulated effectively and expressed clearly depends largely on the work of civil society associations. The media would then have to react differently depending on the status of public opinion: Is the predominant public opinion, expressed through means ranging from opinion polls to protest activities, largely against the government? Or is the general public broken down into competing factions that hold contrary views on public matters? If there are competing factions, are they capable of engaging in reasoned debates with each other, or are they so polarised that they see each other with high degrees of hostility? We can expect the news media to behave differently under these varying scenarios, partly because answers to these questions also shape the state's responses and the market's operation.

Notably, it could be argued that Lippmann, Schudson, and Zaller, perhaps all American authors, were writing against the background of a relatively well-functioning democratic political system and an overall speaking affluent society. What if we focus on a society where significant social and political changes are ongoing? What if controversies and crises recur very frequently in a society, so that the fire alarm has to ring almost all the time? How should the role of the media and the relationship between media and citizenship be reconsidered in such contexts? Answering these normative questions is outside the scope of this chapter and the book at large, but these questions highlight the importance of contextualising discussions of normative expectations of the media and empirical analyses of media performance.

The relationships between state power, market force, civil society, and media could hardly be exhaustively explicated in this chapter. However, the previous pages should have provided an overview of the conceptual framework that guides our analyses of the Hong Kong media in this book. There is no single way to implement the framework. Depending on the empirical focus of each of the chapters, some of the actors may be more prominent than others in the analysis. Issues of political economy, for

example, loom large in Chapter 2's discussion of press freedom in Hong Kong, whereas civil society and public opinion would obviously be the main concern in Chapter 6's analysis of media and social mobilisation. However, when considered holistically, the underlying principle remains that the roles and performance of the media must be examined as being embedded in a complex interacting system.

THE CONTEXT: POST-HANDOVER HONG KONG AND THE POLITICS OF LIBERAL EXCEPTIONALISM

While the previous section outlines the theoretical principles underlying our analysis, examining the Hong Kong media also requires a proper framework for understanding its context and historical development. If the media have to be understood in relation to the state, the market, and civil society, then we have to understand how the state is organised and how society is structured in Hong Kong. Further, we need to delimit and specify the temporal scope of our analysis. Only analysing the media system in the late 2010s would be too limiting, but analysing the media system throughout the entire history of Hong Kong would be infeasible. This book analyses the Hong Kong media mainly, but not solely, in the period between 1997 and 2019/2020. 1997 was the year of the transfer of sovereignty of Hong Kong from Britain back to China. It is the beginning of what is typically called the post-handover period. 2019 is the year of the Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill (Anti-ELAB) movement, which triggered a series of political dynamics and directly contributed to the establishment of the NSL in 2020.

We identified the years 2019 and 2020 as the “end point” of the main period under our examination, not only because we happen to be writing in years 2020 and 2021 but because we believe that years 2019 and 2020 constituted a historical turning point for Hong Kong. Sewell (1996) argued that historical changes can be the result of gradual incremental change or the result of the impact of powerful, transformative events. A transformative event alters social structure in fundamental ways. While societies normally develop in a path-dependent manner, a transformative event can alter the path suddenly and substantially. Although this book was finalised only one year after the establishment of the NSL, there has already been enough evidence suggesting the occurrence of a “paradigm shift” in how Hong Kong is governed and how the society operates.

Strictly speaking, in Sewell's (1996) sense, the 1997 handover does not constitute a transformative event. The Handover was preannounced in 1984, and preparation for the political transition has been going on for 13 years before the handover ceremony on June 30, 1997. However, it does signify the formal beginning of contemporary Chinese rule in Hong Kong. Interestingly, against the background of the tremendous changes after 2019, one can actually see the years between 1997 and 2019 as a relatively stable period in which society and politics operated within the *paradigm of liberal exceptionalism*. There are, of course, significant events within the first 22 years after the handover, such as the protest of July 1, 2003, and the Umbrella Movement of 2014 (Lee & Chan, 2011, 2018). However, we will argue that, despite such events and the strategic shifts on the part of the state and important social actors that these events have caused, several fundamentals in how the Hong Kong society and politics operated remained largely intact. These largely unchanging fundamentals constitute the core of the paradigm of liberal exceptionalism. The events in 2019 and 2020 then led to a new political reality in which the society and politics in Hong Kong seemingly no longer operate based on those fundamentals. This is what we mean by a paradigm shift.

In the following pages, we begin our discussion of the social and political contexts by providing a brief summary description of colonial Hong Kong. This is followed by our elaboration of the immediate post-handover period and the notion of liberal exceptionalism. We will then discuss the Anti-ELAB Movement of 2019 and its repercussions, and we will explain the sense in which the establishment of the NSL and other recent developments had seemingly signified the end of the previous paradigm.

Before 1997: Colonial Hong Kong

The modern history of Hong Kong began with the Opium War between Britain and China—the Qing dynasty at that time—in 1841. Qing China lost the war, agreed to open five treaty ports to Britain for business operations, and conceded Hong Kong Island to Britain to bring the end of its first war against a Western European power. As historian John M. Carroll (2007) vividly captured in the title of his masterpiece, *Edge of Empires*, the raising of the Union Jack in Hong Kong earmarked its peculiar status as the interface between the Chinese empire in the Far East and “the