“Hundreds of Flowers Blossoming” in the Internet Media Services in Hong Kong and Taiwan [Part I]
“The Last Fortress for Freedom of Speech” in Hong Kong Where Conventional Media Stay Silent*

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Abstract

In recent years, Internet media services are emerging one after the other in Hong Kong and Taiwan. In the backdrop is the citizens’ mounting discontent with conventional media, which is exercising “self-restraint” by not delivering news critical of China, with whom Hong Kong and Taiwan’s economic ties are growing ever closer.

In Hong Kong, the growing Internet media, to a degree, is helping to secure freedom of speech and press as well as media diversity, but the Internet media in Hong Kong mainly carries editorial comments rather than reporting the news, and the editorials tend to be propaganda-like, reflecting a political position. Although small-scale media outlets are effective in realizing diversity or pluralism, they are limited in their power to influence public opinion in Hong Kong.

Two issues can be pointed out as challenges facing the Internet media in the future. One is to secure stability of business. Many Internet media entities depend on donations to finance their operation, but some are forced to close down not being able to collect enough funds. For those who depend on income from advertisements, it may become harder for them to carry stories which are critical of the Chinese government, and thus will face the same issues as the conventional mass media do.

The other challenge is the fear that, if Internet media develops smoothly and starts to increase its influence on the public, the Hong Kong government will strengthen their intervention, respecting the wishes of the Chinese government. Thus Hong Kong’s Internet media for sure will be buffeted by its relationship with the Chinese government. Its only strength for now is the support of the public. Under such circumstances it will be difficult to shake off “vulnerability” from its future.

Introduction

Internet media services in Hong Kong and Taiwan, two areas in the Chinese cultural sphere, have grown and diversified remarkably in the recent years. This phenomenon of online media can be seen around the world. But what is different about Hong Kong and Taiwan compared with other countries is that there is a major driver, other than the progress of information technology, which is pushing this growth. In the backdrop is the discontent of the people with conventional media in both areas for its reluctance to report news critical of the Chinese government, as the two economies grow even closer with that of mainland China. And the people are looking to Internet media as an alternative source of news.

The emerging Internet media outlets in Hong Kong and Taiwan look, to me, like hundreds of flowers blossoming in the fields. In a two-part series, I will report on what is happening in the media industry based on field surveys carried out in March 2015, with the present political situation in mind.

Part I reports on the Internet media in Hong Kong. The context is as follows.
I  Overview of conventional media in Hong Kong

Major conventional media outlets — television, radio, newspapers — in Hong Kong can be divided into two groups: those written or broadcast in Chinese (mainly in Cantonese, the mother tongue for the people of Hong Kong, and Mandarin) and those in English.

As for television, TVB (Television Broadcasts) and ATV (Asia Television) had been the only two broadcasters in Hong Kong for a long time, each having one English-language channel and one Cantonese-language channel for analog broadcasting, and TVB having five digital channels and ATV having six. But business had been sluggish at ATV since the 1990s and, from September 2014, the company was forced to delay paying its employees many times and had to sharply cut its news broadcast time, as it was struggling with a critical financial situation. And in April 2015, the Hong Kong government decided to terminate ATV’s broadcasting license at the end of March 2016. In addition to terrestrial broadcasting, cable television broadcaster i-Cable and IPTV (Internet Protocol television) company NOW Broadband TV operate in Hong Kong as multi-channel, pay television networks. Furthermore, a businessman named David Chiu, the second son of the former ATV owner, founded a company to newly enter into the media business and applied to the authorities for license to operate a free television company, immediately after the government had decided to annul ATV’s license. All of these media operators are watching vigilantly to get their hands on ATV’s groundwave broadcasting frequency bands and transmission facilities.

ATV, on the other hand, is also planning to apply for a terrestrial broadcasting license after April 2016, under the leadership of the new owner. Public broadcaster RTHK (Radio Television Hong Kong) does not have its own TV channel, but broadcasts programs that it has made on TVB and ATV, during prime-time television hours. And Phoenix TV mainly broadcasts for the Chinese mainland in Mandarin Chinese.

As for radio broadcasts, RTHK has seven channels broadcasting in Cantonese, Mandarin, and English. The two commercial radio broadcasters are Commercial Radio and Metro Broadcast, each having three channels. For digital broadcasting, Metro Broadcast has three channels, and DBC (Digital Broadcasting Corporation), a newcomer in the business, has seven channels. Most of the programs for both television and radio are broadcast in Cantonese.


Chart 1 shows the media outlets grouped according to their relations with the Chinese government. The classifications are based purely on my evaluation, taking into account the background of the entities’ owners.
The Hong Kong Economic Journal and Ming Pao Daily News have changed their reporting positions in the past two years and are indicated as such in the chart.

WeiWeiPo, Takung Pao, and the Hong Kong Commercial Daily are managed directly by the Chinese government. Phoenix TV, owned by Liu Changle, who once belonged to the People’s Liberation Army, is virtually a Chinese government broadcaster. And Oriental Daily News, the leading newspaper in Hong Kong, and TVB are gradually gravitating towards Beijing. Nowadays, people in Hong Kong are making fun of TVB calling it “CCTVB,” and implying how much TVB resembles mainland China’s CCTV (China Central Television), now. South China Morning Post, which held a neutral stance against China, is said to have begun leaning toward China in the recent years.

II Recent “incidents” in the conventional media

The Chinese government and Hong Kong government, which respect the wishes of Beijing, banks and real estate firms in Hong Kong that rely heavily on business from China, and state-owned Chinese enterprises doing business in Hong Kong have placed visible and invisible pressure on conventional media outlets to become pro-Beijing. This move is resulting, in the recent years, in a severe deterioration of freedom of press in Hong Kong. Reporters without Borders\(^3\) publishes the *World Press Freedom Index*, every year, and according to its 2015 edition, Hong Kong’s ranking has plummeted from 18th in 2002 to 70th in 2015, among the 180 countries assessed. Looking at the transition in these past three years, Hong Kong has moved from 54th to 58th, then to 61st and to 70th. I have already reported\(^3\) on the decline of press freedom in Hong Kong based on an on-site survey carried out in January 2013, and therefore, in this paper I will report on the “incidents” that have occurred in the past two years\(^4\). Of the incidents, following four factors which may threaten the freedom of press in Hong Kong can be pointed out.
Violence

In February 2014, Kevin Lau, former-editor-in-chief of the Ming Pao Daily News, was suddenly stabbed from behind, six times in his back and legs, as he was getting out of a car near a restaurant and was seriously injured. The following month, the police arrested two suspects in Guangdong Province in mainland China, and later arrested nine suspects in Hong Kong. Some of the suspects belong to organized crime syndicate. According to the police, it is not clear if this attack on Lau is related to what he has been saying in the papers, but Lau himself and the public think that the attack was ordered by someone who wanted to shut him up and do away with freedom of speech. The Hong Kong Journalists Association and eight media entities have announced a joint statement expressing their concern, saying, “This kind of incident challenges freedom of speech and press in Hong Kong.”

Reporters and photographers covering a story were also assaulted. In August 2013, people opposing the actions of a teacher, who reviled the police for their attitudes towards Falun Gong\(^5\), which has been active in Hong Kong protesting Beijing’s actions, held a rally. A photographer from the TomoNews, a weekly magazine published by Apple Daily, covering the rally was pushed down by a retired policeman, who was participating in the rally, and beaten. And a photographer from the Ming Pao Daily News, trying to take pictures of the violence, was elbowed and thrust away. The police arrested the former policeman for the assault, but the court found him not guilty accepting his claim that “he just pushed the cameraman so that he wouldn’t bump into him.”

Also in October 2013, a female reporter of the South China Morning Post, who had come to the court to cover a couple, was pushed down and kicked by a man, and the man broke her camera. This incident was photographed by more than ten reporters at the court, and there was sufficient evidence against him, but the case was dropped. The Hong Kong Journalists Association asked for an explanation of the decision but received no answer from the authorities.

These incidents have made journalists in Hong Kong suspicious of the police, the judiciary, and the Hong Kong government, overseeing them, that they are not guardian angels of freedom of press, but on the contrary, have a completely opposite view.

Change of personnel

In January 2014, Kevin Lau, the before mentioned editor-in-chief at Ming Pao Daily News was suddenly replaced by Chong Tien Siong, the former editor-in-chief of Nanyang Siang Pau, a pro-Beijing newspaper, in Malaysia. This change of personnel was thought as a way for Ming Pao Daily News to show its consideration to the wishes of the Chinese government. And 90 percent of the employees at Ming Pao signed a petition demanding the management to explain the reason for the transfer and to declare that the paper’s policy of independent editorial rights and impartial reporting has not changed.

At the Hong Kong Economic Journal, Chief Editor Chan King-Cheung was appointed the head of the digital section of the journal in May 2015, and in July of the same year, Alice Kwok Yim Ming (郭艶明), who had led the online publication of the free-paper Headline Daily, became the chief editor. After Kwok became chief editor, it is said that more pro-Beijing articles are carried on the journal. In October, an article that criticized TVB, a major TV station, for being too friendly to Hong Kong’s Chief Executive Chung-ying Leung, who is faithful to the Chinese government, was scraped from the journal by the chief editor. Three journalists and Yuen Yiu Ching, the associate editor, resigned as a show of protest. In addition, several columnists who regularly contribute to the paper revealed that the editors censored the contents of their articles.
It was reported that in October 2013, when Commercial Radio Hong Kong applied to renew its license, Chief Executive Chun-ying Leung, unhappy about Wei-Ling Li, a radio talk-show host for Commercial Radio who was very popular for her critical remarks on the Hong Kong government, asked that she be fired as a condition for the renewal of the license. In about two weeks’ time, Li’s talk show aired in the morning prime time hours was moved to an afternoon time frame, when the viewing rates are low. Li protested, revealing that the CEO of the radio station threatened that she will be “fired if she doesn’t obey,” but was officially dismissed in February 2014.

3 License

In October 2013, the Hong Kong government announced that of the three companies applying for a new free-television service license, a subsidiary of i-Cable (a cable TV firm) and NOW Broadband TV (an IPTV) will be the two entities that will be granted license. HKTV (former City Telecom) was not granted license. The authorities did not give the reason for rejecting HKTV’s application on the grounds that what was discussed in the Executive Council of Hong Kong government, whose members are not limited to ministers, is classified and cannot be revealed. In 2011, the Hong Kong Broadcasting Authority which oversaw the broadcasting industry back then suggested that all three applicants should be granted license to operate free-television stations. But this proposal was ignored by the government when making the decision, which enraged the public. The day after the announcement, 410,000 people posted on Facebook their wish for HKTV to be granted license. And after that, 60,000 citizens staged a demonstration in front of the government building. According people working in the media, the reason for HKTV being rejected was that HKTV chairman Ricky Wong harshly criticized Chief Executive Leung, saying, “Leung doesn’t understand the realities and there’s no medicine that can cure him,” when Leung kept delaying handing out the licenses. They assume that the decision was a kind of revenge by Chief Executive Leung or the Chinese government.

4 Advertisements

Between 2013 and 2014, advertisements by major banks suddenly disappeared from the pages of Apple Daily, which is known for its unreserved criticism of the Chinese government. Those banks were HSBC, Hang Seng Bank, the Bank of East Asia and some others. And because of this, Apple Daily was forced to cut six pages from its newspaper. The am730, a free-paper, also lost many advertisements from Chinese government affiliated banks like the Bank of China, China Construction Bank, China CITIC Bank International and others in the fourth quarter of 2013. Because of this move, the free-paper lost up to HK$1.2 million (US$154,242) of its monthly advertisement revenue.
III Worsening media environment in Hong Kong

Next, let’s take a look at how media people in Hong Kong view the media environment there, through my interviews with them.

- Mak Yin Ting, Journalist

Mak Yin Ting has been working as a journalist for some thirty years. After working as a reporter for the Hong Kong Daily News and Tin Tin Daily News, she joined RTHK and was with the company from 1993 to 2007, working as the head of the news division, among others. In 2007, she received the Champion of Freedom of Speech award from the Visual Artists Guild, a non-profit organization based in the United States working to protect the freedom of speech and expression. Currently, she works as a Hong Kong correspondent for RFI (Radio France International).

Mak commented that the media environment in Hong Kong has further deteriorated with the Chinese government strengthening its hold and the media industry exercising more self-censorship. She talked about the election for Hong Kong’s chief executive held in 2012. The front-runner was thought to be Henry Tang, the second in command in the previous administration. But in the end, Chung-ying Leung, enjoying a strong support from the Chinese government, won the election coming from behind. She assumed that Leung taking the office has advanced the deterioration of the media environment. Then Mak talked about the situation each conventional media outlet is facing.

As for TVB, the largest television station in Hong Kong, she pointed out that former secretary-general Luk Hon Tak (陸漢德) of DAB (Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong), the pro-Beijing political party, became managing editor of the press section at TVB in March 2015. According to Mak, from 4 years ago, TVB keeps a policy of not interviewing scholars who have democratic ideas. And nowadays, it seems that TVB’s top executives explain what was discussed at the daily editorial meeting on the phone in Mandarin Chinese with someone. Mak suspects someone on the other end of the phone is the Chinese government, as Hong Kongers speak in Cantonese among themselves. She also told me that in the autumn of 2014, the violent attacks by the police in the dead of night on the participants of the Umbrella Democratization Movement was broadcast live, but all the violence was cut from the broadcast after the manager of the editing department came to office in the morning. And dozens of reporters signed and submitted a petition objecting to this action, but were transferred to the filing department as a “disciplinary” measure.

As for ATV, she says when TVB, the industry’s leader, was taking a neutral stance, ATV was valued by Beijing as a pro-Beijing broadcaster. But since TVB became pro-Beijing, its worth decreased, and that is why the Hong Kong government is not that keen on bailing ATV
out. Mak also talked about HKTV, the firm that provides video-on-demand services. She says it is clear that the Hong Kong government is using its television licensing power as a tool to control the media. HKTV creates good TV dramas but if they can show that only through its video-on-demand service, it will be difficult for the company to make ends meet.

She says RTHK, Hong Kong Economic Journal, Ming Pao Daily News and even the anti-Beijing Apple Daily are now exercising more self-censorship in reporting news against China’s wishes. She thinks that Internet media is the “only means of survival” for freedom of speech and press in Hong Kong.

- Johnny Lau Yui Siu, Commentator on current affairs

Johnny Lau Yui Siu had worked at Wen Wei Po, a Chinese-government operated newspaper in Hong Kong, and for three years from 1986, he was the Beijing bureau chief. But in 1989, the Chinese government crushed the student-led popular demonstration using military force, which is commonly known as the June 4th Tiananmen Square Crackdown. At that time, Wen Wei Po was sympathetic to the democratization movement and left a blank space where the editorial was regularly carried in order to show its objection to the Chinese government. And because of this action, the president of the company was dismissed and Lau was transferred from the news section to the translation section. Lau was told to repent his actions, but when he rejected this, his pay was cut, and in the end, he was fired. After that, Lau moved to Hong Kong and has lived there for some twenty years. Currently, he contributes articles on current affairs and also hosts a program on RTHK.

Like Mak, he also thinks that conventional media in Hong Kong is gravitating more and more towards the Chinese government, much faster now than when Hong Kong was handed back to China from Great Britain in 1997. In addition, the Chinese government is trying to get a stronger grip on the media through controlling advertisements carried on newspapers, and the recent slowdown of the Hong Kong economy is also affecting the media. A sluggish economy reduces revenue from advertisements, and the media companies, who are gradually losing strength, do not have the power to speak out against the government or major firms anymore. He also said we can see from what happened in the Umbrella Democratization Movement that newspapers are beginning to lose their influence on young people. But he also pointed out that conventional media is superior to Internet media when you compare personnel, funds, and how much research and reporting are done. He says conventional media has more influence on the public, compared with Internet media. That means people’s opinions will be influenced by the increase of news outlets in the pro-Beijing camp.
IV  “Hundreds of Flowers Blossoming” in the Internet media

I have discussed the worsening environment of the conventional media in Hong Kong, but in this chapter, I would like to talk about the emerging Internet media services there, which are popping up one after the other and look, to me, like hundreds of flowers blossoming in the fields. Internet media has emerged as an antithesis of conventional media. So in most cases, the basic stance of the outlets is pro-democracy, at the opposite spectrum of pro-Beijing. We can group them according to their backgrounds and main purposes. Chart 2 shows the eight Internet media studied, grouped based mainly on their relations with conventional media.

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1-1 Converted from conventional media

- Post 852 Yuen Yui Ching, Editor

Office of Post 852
Yuen Yui Ching worked as assistant editor at the Hong Kong Economic Journal from 2005 to 2013. When the chief editor of the journal changed, he felt that the “freedom that was there had gone,” and left the journal with several other political and current affairs reporters. He started an Internet media outlet named Post 852 in January 2014 with the reporters. The number “852” is the area code of Hong Kong and indicates the new generation, and “Post” stands for the old generation. So, “Post 852” means harmonization of old and new. It posts news stories, news analyses, and commentary. The outlet has an editor, three reporters and four others staffers: a total of eight workers. The website enjoys about 200,000 to 300,000 page-views per day and 100,000 plus visitors. But when the Umbrella Democratization Movement took place, it got about one million page-views and 300,000 visitors. The website needs about HK$300,000 (US$39,000) per month to operate, and currently it depends on donations to run the business. Yuen told me they even auction off neckties contributed by pro-democratic legislators to earn funds.

Post 852 will make major changes from April 2015 (interview carried out in March) and will have the following four sections on its website.

i Latest news
ii News analysis
iii Net-radio
iv Multi-medialization

Yuen expects items “iii Net-radio” and “iv Multi-medialization” will be important sources of revenue. That is because ever since the Umbrella Democratization Movement, many advertisers have been putting off placing their advertisements on Post 852. He sees this as a result of the Chinese government placing pressure on businesses in Hong Kong to do so. But “Net-radio” will broadcast programs not directly related to politics, such as those for culture, entertainment, and everyday life, and therefore, advertisements will be easier to get. For “Multi-medialization,” he expects to attract many young viewers who like to view video online by posting their contents on YouTube (many radio stations post live images of their studios as the programs are broadcast).

To explain the problems of conventional media, Yuen told me about its reporting of “the customer carriers,” who come to Hong Kong from mainland China to buy massive amounts of baby formula, cosmetics, and other daily necessities to bring back home. Demonstrations were held by Hong Kongers because the customer carriers nearly buy up all the goods, leaving hardly anything for the citizens to buy. And when the media reported the standoff between the demonstrators and the police, who came to stop crashes between the demonstrators and the customer carriers, the media selectively reported only the negative aspects of the demonstrators. Yuen says media reporting of the demonstrations by the Umbrella Democratization Movement, which occurred in the autumn of 2014, was more balanced. Pressure of the authorities has intensified since the latter part of the Umbrella Democratization Movement and he assumes that this is the reason why conventional media’s news reporting lacks balance now.

As for Internet media, Passion Times is much more popular than Post 852, he says. Yuen points out that “this reflects the dominance of radical pro-democrats in politics in Hong Kong, but what they are providing is not news but ‘propaganda.’” He stressed that Post 852 will protect the principle of a news media, at all cost.

Yuen told me that “compared with conventional media, Post 852 lacks both resources and funds and doesn’t have a library, but of the difficulties, the most important challenge facing it is finding the money to run the website.” Its priority is to secure sources of income. Yuen understands that the weak point of Internet media is its lack of ability to collect
information, and the number of reporters needed to remedy that cannot be hired without money. As for the freedom of speech and press, Yuen says Post 852 has not received political pressure, except from hackers, but complained that the Chinese and Hong Kong governments discriminate Internet media by shutting it out of their press conferences. He suspects that they do this because the governments think that Internet media is harder to control than conventional media. When I asked him if he thinks the government will try to control Internet media, he said, “I’m sure they will try. Whether they will succeed or not is another thing. If I can’t operate Post 852 in Hong Kong, I will go to Taiwan and continue my work.” He showed his strong will to fight for freedom of speech and press as a journalist.

**D100** Albert Cheng King-hon, Founder

Albert Cheng King-hon has a long career in journalism. In 1994, he became the host of a talk show, on current affairs, named *News Tease* and was very popular. From 1995, he hosted another talk show called *Teacup in a Storm* on Commercial Radio Hong Kong, which also won very high listening rates. With this program, he was selected as the most popular talk-show host for ten years in succession. In 2003, when the SARS epidemic struck Hong Kong, he called on the public to support the medical staff fighting the disease at the frontline and earned the nickname of the “Before-10am Chief Executive.” But the administration seemed to have been unhappy with his critical comments of the government, and in 2004, when it became time to renew the broadcasting license for Commercial Radio, he was relieved of his job. After that, he ran to be a member of the Legislative Council, and came in top of all the other candidates to win a seat. When he won a radio license in 2008, he retired as a council member and founded DBC (Digital Broadcasting Corporation), a digital radio station, and returned to the media industry. But when his close friend, Donald Tsang (chief executive of Hong Kong from 2005-2012), left office, and Chung-ying Leung became the new chief executive, because Albert had strongly supported the opponent, Henry Tang, a foul wind began to blow on Albert’s radio station. A financer, the largest shareholder of his radio station, hesitated to provide additional funds and DBC fell into a financial crisis only six month after its official start of broadcasting, and was forced to close down. Cheng sold his stocks to the financer and left DBC, and in December 2012, started D100, an internet radio station.

Cheng explained that D in D100 stands for “Digital” and “Democracy,” and 100 comes from the HK$100 (US$13) advertisements sold to supporters of DBC to help the radio station out of its financial squeeze. It has been more than two years since the radio station opened provisionally, and unlike other Internet radio stations, D100 broadcasts programs 24 hours a
day. The number of employees is about 50, and if you include free-lance moderators, the number of people working for the radio station totals to about 100. As for the listeners, the number amounts to over 500,000, and of them, one-third listens to the programs live. He said, “D100 can be said as one of the largest Internet radio stations in the world.”

Cheng said that D100 is a non-profit social service entity. And if the current 20,000 subscribers (annual subscription fee: US$200) of its flagship channel, Hong Kong Channel, increase to 50,000 the subscription fee plus donations will be sufficient to balance income and spending.

In March 2015, when I interviewed Cheng, D100 had two other channels. One was modeled on PBS (Public Broadcasting Service) in the United States and is a current affairs channel. Currently, the subscription fee for the “PBS” channel is HK$120 (US$16), but the radio station’s policy is to provide the channel free of charge in the future. The other channel is for older listeners called the Opera Channel and is provided free, but the service ended in May 2015.

I asked Cheng about his views on the recent news that hit the headlines and he expressed his approval of the Umbrella Democratization Movement, saying, “It was great. And the students were orderly when demonstrating.” But, he also pointed out that what is problematic is that the movement divided the people of Hong Kong in half. As for the customer carriers, he said, “Unfortunately many shops now sell baby formula and medicine (to cater to their needs), and small bakeries, which used to be everywhere in the city, have disappeared. Hong Kong people who oppose this trend should not attack the carriers but criticize the government, but they won’t.” He was critical of the demonstrations becoming violent, but was sympathetic with the people opposing the customer carriers.

As for political pressure, like Yuen of Post 852, Cheng only pointed out attacks by hackers. “We’re not like conventional radio stations that need to be licensed, so we have more editorial independence and our contents are more creative and better than them. So we get many subscribers,” boasted Cheng. He seems to be confident that Internet radio is better than conventional radio.
1-2 Emerging from conventional media

● Apple Daily  Cheung Kim Hung, Associate Publisher

Most conventional media outlets have moved into Internet media services. But I will not take up Internet media outlets whose articles carried on their webpages seem to have deteriorated and cater to Beijing, like their conventional parent newspapers have. A key new participant on the Internet is Apple Daily, a major newspaper in Hong Kong, which has always been critical of the Chinese government and supports a democratized Hong Kong. As I mentioned earlier, advertisement revenues at Apple Daily have plummeted in these few years, and the daily is facing a financial crunch. But it is also speedily moving into Internet media.

Cheung Kim Hung was the chief editor at Apple Daily from April 2011 to December 2014, and became an associate publisher overseeing its Internet wing. Income from advertisements on the website has increased more than several tens of percent annually in these two years. In fiscal 2014 (April 2014 – March 2015), its advertisement income was HK$330 million (US$43 million) and almost equaled that of its conventional newspaper which was HK$340 million (US$45 million). Placing an advertisement on the Internet is cheaper, and Cheung expects it to grow further in the future. The reason of its growth is the increase in the number of accesses to the website. As you go inside the main office of Apple Daily, you will see the total number of accesses posted on the entrance wall. On March 11, 2015, the day before my visit, the number of accesses was more than 30,640,000, and visitors totaled 2,570,000. The number is unbelievably large compared with that of Post 852.

Photo: Bulletin board showing the number of accesses

At first, contents on Internet newspapers were the same as the conventional paper. But several years ago, “video newspaper,” which posts video images of the news, started and is
received well by the public. From around 2011, “flash news” service which reports the news as it happens was started, giving the paper a new dimension that conventional paper cannot offer. Currently, “flash news” attracts half of the accesses to the website, in other words, the audience want to know what is happening now. Cheung, at first, wanted subscribers to keep on reading conventional newspapers as well, but he has changed his mind and now thinks that Internet media is the future. And the decreasing number of subscribers to their conventional newspaper does not bother him anymore. Currently the subscription to the conventional newspaper totals to some 146,000, which is less than half of what it was at its peak. But the expansion and the increased number of access to the online publication have made up for the loss incurred by the decreasing number of conventional newspapers sold.

As for the tone of Apple Daily’s articles compared with that of other conventional papers, Cheung stressed that Apple Daily has made it clear that it supports the Umbrella Democratization Movement. To those who say that Apple Daily is becoming one-sided, he replied, “Other newspapers would not carry articles on people who support the movement, so we did. And people who are against the movement would not talk to us, so we couldn’t carry their articles, anyway.” He stressed that Apple Daily is playing a role that no other paper can.

As for other Internet media outlets, Cheung said, “Although numerous online news outlets are emerging, they don’t have the manpower that we do. They will probably keep on posting commentaries. It will be difficult for them to really succeed.” Cheung said extending the online hours of “flash news” to 24 hours a day would mean that he would have to hire a new copy editor for the job, which would be very costly. But with declining revenue from newspaper advertisements, he has not been able to increase the workforce of 800 employees (including 400 reporters). He expressed concern that reporters are so busy that “they are not able to even have a cup of tea after covering a story,” and are exhausted.

Some people are concerned and suspect that Apple Daily will not be able to maintain its fighting spirit and keep on criticizing the government. That is because Jimmy Lai (66 years old), the charismatic owner of Apple Daily, who has led the organization, resigned as chief of Next Media, the parent company of Apple Daily, in December 2014. But Cheung declared that the new president of Apple Daily places more importance on “being balanced in what it reports, but its principle of maintaining ‘democracy’ and ‘monitoring the government’ will not change and the newspaper will not change its stance.”

2-1 Newcomers/Social movement type

In this section, I will introduce newcomers to Internet media who are not directly related to major conventional media companies.

One is the social-movement type internet media outlets. They are not interested in making profit, but are operating rather as a volunteer group and their purpose is political and social.
SocREC stands for Social Record Channel. The channel is provided by the Social Record Association founded in August 2010 by Paul Y.M. Leung, whose principal occupation is a truck driver. It carries video recordings of social incidents. According to Leung, about 20 people, housewives, students and others, are registered as reporters. SocREC has no office and the reporters are all volunteers. That is why SocREC only needs about HK$40,000 to HK$50,000 (US$5,000 to US$6,500) annually to run its operation which can be funded through contributions, so it does not need to carry advertisements for revenue. Its long videos are also uploaded on YouTube and the short ones are uploaded on Facebook. Some videos have received more than one million accesses, said Leung.

Leung told me that he started the operation because he realized that there is a deviation between what he sees on the news on conventional media and what he sees every day on the streets. When a Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization was held in Hong Kong in 2005, groups against free trade gathered from around the world and held demonstrations to protest. According to Leung, when television stations in Hong Kong reported the incident, they called Korean farmers gathered for the demonstration as “rioters.” But what Leung actually saw was Hong Kong citizens distributing fruits to the Korean farmers demonstrating very peacefully. There was a skirmish between the two sides, but it only lasted about 20 seconds. The television station aired images of those 20 seconds and emphasized violence in their reports. Leung pointed out the following two points as the backdrop of such editing of the images.

i. Conventional media in Hong Kong depend on income from advertisements, and provocative images appeal more to the public and bring up the viewing rates.

ii. Major advertisers are conglomerates and are controlled by the government, so pro-government news tends to be reported.

That is why Leung started SocREC as a platform to provide unedited news to Hong Kongers.

SocREC’s operation is based on the following ideas.

i. Words can be subjective, but videos are objective. So SocREC will capture everything that happens and upload that video recording without editing.

ii. Any media outlet may use whatever video SocREC uploads, free of charge.

Entertainment news is not carried by SocREC, so if there is no incident or accident that has social impact to report, there may be days when no videos will be posted on SocREC. Leung gave the following two incidents as the main events that SocREC carried on its website since its start.

i. The Umbrella Democratization Movement
ii. Anti-customer-carrier demonstrations

As for the Umbrella Democratization Movement, SocREC’s reporters were at the scene since the start of the students’ demonstrations. The reporters stayed with the students day and night throughout the duration of the occupation of the streets, enabling them to get a complete video recording of what was happening. He smiled wryly and told me that he couldn’t go to work for two months, covering the demonstrations, and his wife complained, asking, “When is it going to end!” The students’ camps for the movement were in Mongkok, Causeway Bay (Tong Luo Wan), Admiralty (Kam Chung), and several other locations and were wide spread, making it very difficult to deploy reporters at all locations.

For the anti-customer-carrier demonstrations in March 2015, which turned violent at times, Leung explained the background to the incident and stressed its significance. Owing to the customer carriers from mainland China, the price of baby formula in Hong Kong rose to HK$300 (US$40) from HK$100 (US$13), and the rent for shops skyrocketed from HK$50,000 (US$6,500) per month to HK$300,000 (US$40,000). When a restaurant’s rent increases, the price of food served goes up. Price of breakfast increased to HK$30 (US$4.5) from HK$18 (US$2.4). Rents for small apartments have surged from about HK$1,500 (US$200) to HK$4,000 (US$520) and because young people cannot afford to pay that much, the owners of apartment houses now divide the small apartment rooms into smaller section to rent it out. Small shops were forced to close down and cosmetics shops have opened in their place. The lives of the Hong Kong people have been greatly affected by the customer carriers. But conventional media took up this serious issue in their 30-minute news broadcasts for only about 5 minutes at the most. Leung lamented that people can’t grasp the complex background of the issue and stressed the value SocREC that can provide news without broadcasting-time limitations.

I wondered if the media outlet is recognized as a news media by the authorities when taking video images for reporting, but according to Leung, journalists must earn more than 50 percent of their income from journalism to join the Hong Kong Journalists Association, so SocREC cannot join these types of groups. That is why SocREC makes press identification cards by itself without permission from the government and distributes them to its journalists. The police have grown to recognize SocREC from its past activities and now allow its reporters to enter the restricted area after confirming their IDs.

What is different about SocREC compared with conventional media is that when reporting a rally, on site, TVB will use close-up images with only two or three people in the picture, but SocREC will try to capture a bigger picture, so that what is happening can be captured in its entirety and people can see what is truly happening. People can see better how many policemen are on the scene and how many demonstrators have gathered through a bigger picture. Comparing with Internet radio, he defined the role of SocREC, saying, “Most Internet radio stations make their comments based on our reporting, but they include many personal opinions which are not always true to the facts. But SocREC will always be the “farmer” who provides the produce for the “chef,” called the media, to cook.”

As the end of my interview drew near, he said, “Digging up news which otherwise would never have been reported is difficult. But if we break a story, other media outlets may follow suit. By broadcasting news from Hong Kong around the world, SocREC will push forward to maintaining freedom of press in Hong Kong,” and stressed that the job is challenging but rewarding.
MyRadio was established in 2007 and is one of the oldest Internet radio stations in Hong Kong. Its slogan is “Locale(meaning Hong Kong), Democracy, Anti-communism,” and its basic principle is that the Chinese government should not intervene in Hong Kong and that Hong Kong people should run Hong Kong by themselves. After its founding, the station applied for an official radio station license, but was rejected by the Hong Kong government. In December 2008, MyRadio joined management with HKReporter, another Internet radio station, but separated after six months due to internal discord. From March 2014, it started to broadcast a live program called Good Morning Hong Kong from 8 am to 10 am jointly with Passion Times, another Internet media outlet.

Raymond Wong Yuk-man, one of the founders of MyRadio, earned his popularity by hosting a program called News Tease on ATV from 1993, and has been nicknamed “Hooligan Professor.” After that he also hosted programs on Commercial Radio Hong Kong, but was dismissed in 2005, so he decided to go into politics. He was a member of radical democratic political parties, League of Social Democrats and People Power, and is currently an independent member of the Legislative Council. In addition to Good Morning Hong Kong, Wong also hosts the Wong Yuk-man Channel on MyRadio, aired from 10 to 11:30 pm on Mondays and Thursdays, every week.

Wong said he started MyRadio because major conventional media outlets would not report the arguments of the League of Social Democrats, when he was a member of the party. So he created MyRadio as a platform for minor political parties to make their claim. But at the start, he had a hard time raising operating funds. Wong makes it a policy not to carry advertisements to maintain independence in what and how the radio station reports the news. Its source of income is 30 percent from contributions and the remaining 70 percent comes from selling T-shirts and publications. It has three full-time employees and four to five part-timers. Its income and expenditure for a month amount to about HK$150,000 to HK$200,000 (approx. US$19,000 to US$26,000).
The programs are structured mainly around politics, but stories on movies and football are also taken up. They prepare two to three hours of program to be broadcast a day. Main programs such as Good Morning Hong Kong and Wong Yuk-man Channel are broadcast live, but by downloading an app, listeners can access the program live or by VOD (video-on-demand), on their mobile devices, together with images of the studio. MyRadio’s focus is on increasing listeners and is not on making profits, so it uploads the programs on YouTube as well. About 10,000 to 20,000 listen in live, and the number of downloads per week is about 200,000 plus.

Wong told me that because regular television and radio stations need a license to operate, their comments are restricted in a way, but MyRadio can say anything including “four-letter” words. Its website is often attacked by hackers, but even if downed, it is not affected that much because the programs are uploaded on YouTube. On the authorities in Hong Kong strengthening control of the Internet, he was vigilant, saying, “They can’t now, but in the future, the Hong Kong government may pass a bill to strengthen control.”
Of the newcomers to Internet media, the two outlets introduced before are strongly inclined toward political and social movement. But there are some outlets that focus on sustainability as a business. The forerunner of Internet radio station memehk.com is the aforementioned HKReporter. CEO Lam Yue Yeung Anthony says memehk.com’s political stance is close to that of the pro-radical-democratic People Power, but is somewhat different from other pro-democracy Internet media services. According to Lam, MyRadio is Wong’s tool to broadcast his propaganda and is not a news outlet. And D100 is always calling for donations, and lacks continuity as a business. So memehk.com has been trying to diversify its sources of income, and in addition to carrying advertisements, it has decided to rent out its four studios. For example, it offers a one-stop service, which provides the studio and assistance in program production. The programs are, for example, thrillers, broadcast on pay-Internet media. They lease the studios four to six hours a day. Memehk.com’s programs are broadcast about four hours every day. Current affairs programs are held down to about 30 percent of the entire programming and the focus is placed on entertainment programs. It gets about 10,000 to 20,000 accesses for its live programs and 200,000 views per day for its archive. Since the start of memehk.com in 2013, it has enjoyed a total of more than 70 million views, over 10 million hours, for its archive programs. It also uploads all its programs on YouTube. Users of other Internet radios are between 15 to 25 years old, but memehk.com’s are a bit older and are about 25 to 45 years old, explained Lam.
The radio station’s settlement of accounts was balanced in the summer of 2014, but in October of that year, the radio station opened a news department and hired seven staff members which put it in the red once again. A news department is a money loser if you think only of the business side of operation, but Lam was adamant that “news programs are needed to make memehk.com have more depth in its programs than MyRadio and D100.” He understands that, from the start, Internet media outlets tend to “attack things or persons that it doesn’t like.” When the Umbrella Democratization Movement took place, Lam tried to be neutral when airing the video clips. As for the future, he hopes to “expand the business, but he doesn’t want it to become as large as Apple Daily.”

Ragazine
Co-founders Dick Lam (left) and Calvin Choy (right)

Ragazine was jointly founded by Dick Lam and Calvin Choy in July 2012. They both feel that freedom of speech at radio and television stations in Hong Kong started to deteriorate in around 2004, and had placed their hopes on the possibility of Internet radio, which does not need licensing by the government. They were working as volunteers at MyRadio around 2008, and through their experiences, realized that MyRadio, D100, HKReport and other Internet radio stations were run by incumbent legislators or former legislators who place themselves in the political sphere and, therefore, lacked a proper business model. As many Internet radio broadcasters depend on advertisement revenue, they were in a financial squeeze, and seeing that, Lam and Choy came up with an idea of a pay-radio, which charges membership fees. They set the annual membership fee at HK$330 (US$43), and as for non-members, they can
listen to the program for free, five days after the program was first broadcast. Ragazine makes about 20 to 25 programs, each about an hour long, and three to four programs are broadcast live. But they said most of the listeners download the programs to listen. The programs are downloaded on an average about 10,000 times and the popular programs more than 30,000 to 40,000 times. The programs are on politics, stock market analysis, and also subjects popular with those in the know, like football and wine. The ten presenters are not paid for their jobs, but they will think about paying the presenters when the presenters have become better known by the public.

To put Ragazine’s operation on track, Lam and Choy started a new financial news channel in November 2014. Their calculation was that Hong Kongers will pay for financial news. The membership fee was set at HK$2,500 (US$330) a year and was a bit expensive but whereas their main channel has 1,200 subscribers, the new financial channel already has 1,000 subscribers. Six one-hour programs per week are created, and the hosts for these programs are paid. Lam and Choy said profitable channels on Internet radio are those for financial news, thrillers, mysteries, and adult videos. Ragazine which places emphasis on financial news can earn income from both subscribers and advertisements and already makes a profit. But there are already more than fifty Internet radio stations in Hong Kong, and Ragazine’s contents vie with YouTube and Facebook, so the two are not so optimistic about the station’s future, commenting that, “Keeping the station afloat will take a lot of work.”

2-3 Newcomers/On the side of the establishment

- HKFEEL Lam Lok, Executive Director

As introduced, most Internet media outlets take an anti-establishment stance. But not all of them do. According to Executive Director Lam Lok, Internet radio station HKFEEL’s parent body is the Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers (HKFEW), an association of educators. HKFEW decided to start a net-radio station to hold down the operating costs because they thought an online radio would cost less to run than publishing 60,000 copies of its monthly journal, which cost HK$1 million (US$130,000) annually. The funds to run the station are all donated: sometimes HKFEW helps to find sponsors, and in other cases, companies directly support HKFEEL’s new projects. The employees consists of two to three full-timers and two to three part-timers. They make twelve to sixteen 30-minute programs per week. It has three kinds of programs: education, 40 percent; current affairs, 20 percent plus; and entertainment, 20 percent plus. Educational programs include a program for planning life after entering university called Life Planning and a program for introducing employment for medical doctors and taxi drivers, and so forth. The total number of access for the past 11 months plus, was 700,000. Most of the listeners are high school students, but there are also
junior high schoolers.

Lam explained that some programs do criticize the government, but as for the Umbrella Democratization Movement, HKFEEL did not cover the demonstrations very much as they were too political. They also did not take up “national education” which was a major political issue.

V Assessment of Internet media

I have discussed the various emerging Internet media outlets in Hong Kong, but now let’s take a look at how people involved in the media evaluate the situation.

① Political circles

• Christopher Chung Shu Kun, Pro-Beijing

Christopher Chung Shu Kun has a slightly negative view about the Internet media which often criticize the Chinese and Hong Kong governments. Chung says because conventional media work within a framework set by law and have guidelines of their own, radical expressions are not seen that often. But Internet media are not bound by regulations, and because their commentators are not professionally trained for the job, young commentators especially tend to fall into biased and unethical discussions in the programs. Chung explained that the young students who occupied the streets in the Umbrella Democratization Movement were listening to specific radio stations like MyRadio, D100 and other like outlets, limiting the information coming in and getting a false impression that they represent the whole of Hong Kong. But he stressed that, in reality, many Hong Kongers were opposed to the students’ actions and emphasized that the voice of very political Internet media only represents a portion of the Hong Kong people and that it’s unhealthy that these Internet media use social incidents to fan hatred among people.

But at the same time, Chung is against restricting Internet media. Before, Internet media tended to report only one side of a story. The occupying of streets by the students during the movement had seriously affected the lives of citizens, and now, voices posted on Facebook and other social media have become more rational. So Chung hopes things will turn for the better in the future.

When I asked if he thought that people follow Internet media because conventional media is losing its freedom, he replied, “I don’t think so. Even if Apple Daily reported some news that is incorrect, it will not be penalized. When the British was governing Hong Kong, it sometimes refused to give licenses,” and rejected the idea that freedom of press has deteriorated since the handover of Hong Kong from Britain.
Wu Chi Wai, Pro-democracy

Wu Chi Wai thinks that the development of Internet media is inevitable no matter what the situation is with conventional media. He said conventional media seems to be contracting faster now. Wu acknowledges that Internet media conforms to the values pursued by young generations, and that in the past twenty years, the elimination of “authority” has occurred around the world. He pointed out that on the Internet people want to see either a “black” or a “white” world, not a “gray” world. This lopsidedness in “speech” is also seen in the United States and Japan, and cannot be avoided. To counter this issue, we need to expose students to various information at school.

Wu thinks that MyRadio and D100 offer a platform for discussion which is not offered by conventional media, so it is participating in promoting freedom of speech and press. But he also pointed out that there are many problems in Internet journalism, as there is a lot of shoddy information being reported. In many cases, a topic that will attract many followers is proposed for discussion on a program, but the actual subject that is talked about is completely different. He said that people need to be aware of this.

When I asked about Internet media reporters being discriminated by the Hong Kong government, he strongly criticized the government, replying, “The government’s attitude is ridiculous. Of course there are reporters in Internet media that take a special stance, but if you ignore them, the society will lose trust in the government.”

People working in the media

Mak Yin Ting, Journalist

As mentioned earlier, Mak Yin Ting considers Internet media as the “only means of survival” for freedom of speech. But she is also aware that there are many issues: the arguments are often biased, many of the news reported are not directly covered by themselves, and the outlets have financial difficulties as their advertisement revenue is limited. She warns that if all media outlets report with a biased view, that might further split society. The reason why online media has to rely on stories from conventional media is that they do not have sufficient money to hire enough reporters. But even if they rewrite news stories from other outlets, if the original story is written by the self-restraining conventional media, it will not bring freedom of speech forward. She also criticized the Hong Kong government strongly for being unfriendly to Internet media.

As for the future of Internet media, Mak said Internet media in Taiwan is much larger in scale, doing better than Hong Kong, and has secured a place in Taiwan’s society. She hopes that an outlet like Taiwan’s weReport, which collects donations to conduct research and report on a specific theme, are created and become popular in Hong Kong, too.
Sham Yee-Lam, Chairman of Hong Kong Journalists Association

Sham Yee-Lam has worked as a reporter for the Asiaweek, Hong Kong Daily News, Apple Daily online, and Hong Kong Economic Times and became the chairperson of the Hong Kong Journalists Association in 2013. Sham explained that Internet media in Hong Kong is small in scale, has an unstable financial base, and most are social/non-profit enterprises. Also, Internet media outlets of various levels exist and their programs are not far from sheer propaganda. So it was her opinion that it will take much time for Internet media to take the place of conventional media.

But she also appreciates Internet media, because it embodies diversity, which the Hong Kong Journalist Association has always emphasized. As for the possibility of a stronger control by the Hong Kong government, she said, “If Internet media grows, the government will try to get a stronger hold of it,” and indicated that she was keeping a vigilant eye on the situation.

VI Conclusion

The growth of Internet media in Hong Kong clearly suggests that in the backdrop is the withering conventional media, which reflect the wishes of the Hong Kong government that is snuggling up to the Chinese government to faithfully carry out its policies. It is also obvious that the vibrant Internet media is contributing to secure freedom of speech and press and diversity in Hong Kong, to a degree.

But Internet media outlets in Hong Kong mainly carry commentaries and not news stories. And the commentaries are inclined to reflect the view of a specific political stance and could become propaganda, which means we need to be aware that some Internet media outlets are not news outlets that deliver objective and fair journalism, but outposts of a social or political movement. As most Internet media outlets are small operations, their influence on the public may be limited. Apple daily, which moved into online reporting from conventional media, enjoys 30 million accesses per day and is a giant in the field, but it is the only online media that can stand strong against the governments of China and Hong Kong and have major influence on the public. As the owner and chief executive of Apple Daily has retired, it is clear that journalism in Hong Kong is becoming more fragile.

Two points can be given as major challenges for the future. One is how to secure stability of operation. MyRadio, D100, Post 852 and some others depend heavily on contributions to fund their activities. If they are not able to collect enough funds, they might be forced to close down like Opera channel at D100.
In the future, Internet media may face the same problems as conventional media, which are advertisement-dependent models that must hold back carrying articles critical of the Chinese government. We can see this in Post 852 starting to find it difficult to get advertisement for its online news site.

Another concern is that if Internet media develops smoothly and increases its influence on the people, the Chinese and Hong Kong governments may strengthen their grip on the media.

Hong Kong became a region of the People’s Republic of China in 1997, and since then, the Chinese government has consistently strengthened its control over speech and journalism in Hong Kong. The democratization of mainland China is the only solution to solve this issue from its root. But in reality, control of the media in mainland China has accelerated and is getting stronger since 2004, especially after Xi Jinping became General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party.

In the background of the growing power of radical pro-democracy groups and Hong Kong localist movements, which MyRadio and D100 advocate, is the exfoliation of Hong Kong people’s expectations of a democratized China. For example in 2008, when a major earthquake struck Sichuan Province in China, Hong Kong people called for contributions to help the devastated area, and indeed, a large amount of money was sent as aid, but no one knows where the money went; money scandals concerning the Red Cross Society of China came to light. That is why when Chief Executive Leung asked for HK$100 million (US$13,000,000) to be included in the budget to aid the people affected by the April 2013 earthquake that hit the area around the Ya’an City, Sichuan Province, a South China Morning Post poll showed that only one percent approved and seven percent gave a conditioned approval, but 92 percent of those who responded were against the proposal. In other words the people of Hong Kong have given up hope for mainland China and they want to at least protect freedom and autonomy in Hong Kong, and they think more strongly that Hong Kong and mainland China exist separately. This phenomenon can be seen in the Umbrella Democratization Movement when, from September 2014, for about two months, Hong Kongers who were known as apolitical raised their voices and occupied the streets of Hong Kong demanding direct elections.

But the surfacing intention of the Hong Kong people to separate from mainland China has not made the Chinese government reconsider its policy, but blame this move on foreign powers as a conspiracy. It is ironical that the Chinese government has begun to strengthen control over the media, drawing the situation into a vicious spiral. Is it possible for the pro-Beijing people in Hong Kong to become a mediator between the people of Hong Kong and Beijing? A pro-Beijing member of the Legislative Council Chung Shu Kun has been criticizing Internet media, but has also said he is against stricter controls. In the backdrop is the fact that he cannot ignore the wishes of the public because he was directly elected by the people to his office. But many pro-Beijing members of council were elected from their functional constituencies and it cannot be said for sure that they represent the will of all Hong Kong people.

Relations between Hong Kong and mainland China will grow ever more complex and Internet media in Hong Kong will be tossed about for sure. The only hope for Internet media is the support of the people and its future looks vulnerable.

In Part II, I will introduce the situation of Internet media in Taiwan where, like Hong Kong, conventional media is beginning to cater to the needs of the Chinese government.
Notes:

1) Pronunciation in Cantonese and Mandarin are different, but about the same characters are used in writing.

2) A non-governmental organization headquartered in Paris, France, to advocate freedom of speech. Its World Press Freedom Index is compiled based on the responses to a questionnaire on media independence, self-censorship, and transparency, etc. of the press in the country. The responses are from 18 groups and 150 correspondents and journalists. For detail refer to [http://en.rsf.org/](http://en.rsf.org/)

3) “Growing ‘Consideration’ for China among the Media in Taiwan and Hong Kong,” Part II by Ken-ichi Yamada, June 2013, the NHK Monthly Report on Broadcast Research


5) Falun Gong (Practice of the Wheel of Law) founded by Li Hongzhi in Jilin Province in 1992 is a group exercising qigong (breath control). Its basic ideology is “truth, compassion, forbearance.” In 1999, out of dissatisfaction for the Chinese government’s treatment of the group, some 10,000 followers surrounded the Zhongnanhai government compounds and demanded recognition. Ever since then, the group is considered a diabolical religion and is oppressed by the government. But Falun Gong operates actively in Hong Kong under the “one country, two system” policy. But there have been trouble with the pro-Beijing people who are against the cult.


7) A movement mostly by students who held demonstrations that lasted 79 days from the end of September 2014, calling for a true direct election to select the chief executive. On August 31, 2014, the managing committee of the Chinese National People’s Congress, China’s legislative organization, decided that candidates for the office of chief executive of Hong Kong must have a majority support of the nominating committee and that the number of candidates would be limited to two or three. Student groups in Hong Kong opposed the decision, saying that “most of the members of the nominating committee are pro-Beijing and that virtually all candidates who are not pro-Beijing will be shut out of the election.” Demonstrations demanding a completely free election started. In the demonstrations, students occupied the streets of Causeway Bay, Admiralty, and Mongkok, all busy shopping and business districts in Hong Kong. It is said that at its peak the movement attracted over 200,000 demonstrators. The Chinese government indicated that it will not compromise to the students, and the prolonged occupancy of the streets started to affect the daily lives of the citizens, leading to criticism. After about two months from the start of demonstrations, the police moved in to eliminate the protesters sitting-in. And the demonstrations ended without any bloodshed. The movement is referred to as Umbrella Revolution, Umbrella Movement, or Occupy Central. Because the movement did not turn into a revolution and the fact that the organizers of Occupy Central were different from the leaders of that movement, I will call this movement Umbrella Democratization Movement in this paper.

8) In mainland China, babies fed with baby formula containing melamine for industrial use developed renal calculus and died. Ever since this incident, from around 2012, people have lost confidence in home-manufactured baby formula and started to buy imported formula that was purchased in Hong Kong and carried into neighboring Shenzhen, in mainland China, by customer carriers, or carriers. The goods carried into mainland China were not limited to baby formula. The carriers also bought cosmetics, cell phones, cameras, cigarettes, pork and other daily items, and it became difficult for Hong Kongers to buy these items in Hong Kong, as they were quickly sold out. In addition, small stores began to sell items that the carriers wanted, which also made it more difficult
for ordinary citizens to buy items they need. The carriers are both mainland Chinese and Hong Kongers, but the policy of the Hong Kong government to allow multiple travel between mainland China and Hong Kong in a day with one visa issue, has made it easier for the carriers to go back and forth between the regions to carry in goods, worsening the situation. So from April 2015, the Hong Kong government decided to limit travel to once a week.

9) Passion Times was founded by writer and current affairs commentator Wong Yeung Tat and his wife Chan Sau Wai in 2012. The media outlet’s stance is radical pro-democracy which places priority on the benefits of Hong Kong and opposes the Chinese government. Passion Times publishes a newspaper and operates an Internet radio station. http://www/passiontimes.hk/

10) Refer to (note 3) for detail on the DBC issue.

11) Animated News creates CG animations in place of video images for news stories. Apple Daily began operations in Taiwan in 2003, and in 2009 started test services of providing CG animations on its online channel. The method was rated highly in many countries as a way to help the understanding of news, but because the subjects taken up by the channel tended to be social events such as criminal or accidents, criticism from non-governmental and humanitarian organizations erupted. The government of the city of Taipei claimed that the outlet ignored to attach ratings restricting under-age viewing to some of the news carried on the website and imposed a fine, and also the National Communications Commission did not issue license to Next TV, which Apple Daily founded for the purpose of making inroads into television broadcasting. Next TV announced it will carry out self-censorship and not create CG animations that depict sex, violence and naked bodies, and was finally able to receive a license. For details please refer to my report “Conflict over the Broadcasting License Triggered by Over competition Stemmed from Liberalization,” September 2011, the NHK Monthly Report on Broadcast Research

12) My follow-up research found that in early 2015, 練家俊 (Lin Kar Chun), who is thought to be a LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) was hired at SocREC. He dressed as a woman and changed his name to 陳美琪 (Chan Mei Kei) to do the reporting and caused a stir in places where he had visited. Other reporters who didn’t want to team up with him when covering a story left SocREC. Leung answered my inquiry in late June, telling me that seven reporters had left and currently SocREC is operating with fifteen reporters. Leung thinks that a reporter should not be fired because of the person’s sexual orientation and rejected the requests of other reporters to fire Lin. But Lin was eventually dismissed from SocREC for entering the ladies’ restroom at the Legislative Council building during his job.

13) Video images of the Umbrella Democratization Movement by SocREC can be found, for example, at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=61WWC2VolVJY.

14) An education policy promoted by the Hong Kong government in 2012. The purpose was to “foster awareness as a Chinese.” Many pro-democracy people and citizens expressed strong opposition to the policy as they considered it as the communists’ way to brain-wash the Hong Kong people. The Hong Kong government reversed its policy and left it to each school to decide if it will adopt the policy or not.

15) For detail refer to: 習近平政権の言論統制 (Suppression of Freedom of Speech by the Xi Jinping Administration) by Yoshiki Mine, Sososha, 2014