

Shifting Journalistic Paradigms: Editorial Stance and Political Transition in Hong Kong

Joseph Man Chan and Chin-Chuan Lee

Since the signing of Sino-British Joint Declaration in September 1984 Hong Kong has entered a transitional phase, preparing for its ultimate return to China in 1997. This transition is characterized by a drastic redistribution of power and authority, and a realignment of social forces. Most significantly, a *dualistic* power structure has emerged, signifying a rapid decline of traditional British colonial dominance and a corresponding rise in the influence of the People's Republic of China in Hong Kong.

This political transition has produced profound implications for politics, economics, culture and other social realms in the Crown Colony. It is important to note that in some respects the press is more vulnerable to this pressure than most business enterprises. If the worst happens after 1997 business enterprises may find it easier to move out of Hong Kong than the press, which, because of cultural and linguistic barriers, has fewer choices. Moreover, Chinese political culture places a premium on the power of words.¹ The People's Republic has expended a considerable amount of effort and energy in fostering a favourable image before and after the Sino-British negotiations. Xinhua (New China) News Agency, the main institution operating in Hong Kong from Beijing, has actively and successfully woven a co-optative web with the media and journalists. Given the sensitive position of the press, it is reasonable to argue that what happens to press freedom and media performance may epitomize what might hold true for other spheres of life. In other words, the fate of the press is an acid test for the Chinese policy of "two systems within one country."

Hong Kong is thus a rare living laboratory for observing how changing configurations in the political environment influence the mass media. This article seeks to provide a timely analysis of how the press, which spans the entire left–centre–right spectrum of ideology, adapts its "journalistic paradigms" since, and because of, the political transition. This article treats only editorial shift; evidence in other domains (news content, organizational change of the press) will be considered elsewhere.

This article will (1) first develop the concept of a "journalistic paradigm"; (2) trace the emergence of a dualistic power structure in Hong Kong; (3) examine political ideology and partisan affiliation of the press; and (4) compare the direction and magnitude of editorial paradigm shifts in relation to press ideology.

1. Lucian Pye, "Communication and political culture in China," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (1978), pp. 221–46.

Journalistic Paradigms: Continuity and Change

We define a “journalistic paradigm” as a set of taken-for-granted and unspoken assumptions, or gestalt world-views that inform the media as to what “social facts” to report (and what not to report) and how to interpret them.² From an organizational perspective, a journalistic paradigm is imperative to the mapping of time and space and to the organizing of a glut of “occurrences” into “new events.”³ We found that the Hong Kong press, driven by different political commitments, constructed radically different realities about social protest. The fact that this protest had a highly ambiguous cause served to reveal the underlying logic of the journalistic paradigms in a sharper focus.⁴ Paradigms acquire stability. Journalism has a strong tendency to “normalize” anomalies and assimilate them into their explanatory framework. Exceptions prove normality, rendering visible the implicit news values and the boundaries of news-making.⁵

Like a scientific paradigm, journalistic paradigm shift occurs rarely.⁶ The shift is the last resort. When confronted with newly-discovered phenomena the media may endeavour to “repair” old paradigms rather than undergo a fundamental change of paradigm. Historically and presently, journalistic paradigms were and are shaped by social formations, that is, the interpenetration between the state and society in general as well as the coalitions of dominant groups in particular. Mass media not only reflect the perspectives of

2. Joseph M. Chan and Lee Chin-Chuan Lee, “Journalistic paradigms on civil protests: a case study in Hong Kong,” in Andrew Arno and Wimal Dissanayake (eds.), *The News Media in National and International Conflict* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1984). The concept of “paradigm,” in a metaphysical sense, is borrowed from Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 2nd edit.

3. The concept of “journalistic paradigms” is akin to that of “news frames” (Gitlin, Tuchman), “news perspectives” (Gans), and “media logics” (Altheide and Snow); see Herbert Gans, *Deciding What is News* (New York: Pantheon, 1979); Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); David Altheide and Robert Snow, *Media Logic* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1979); Gaye Tuchman, *Making News* (New York: Free Press, 1978). Journalistic paradigms, constituted in and by specific socio-cultural contexts, are by no means universal. While in western democracies the primary paradigm is media professionalism and objectivity, political ideology and partnership figure more importantly in determining journalistic paradigms of the Third World press. Media professionalism is not ideologically free; critics argue that western liberal media typify the power centre as being neutral, objective and detached; the practical problem of “objectivity” is solved by establishing an official point of reference for news. They claim that liberal media thus objectify the status quo and construct legitimacy. See Gans, *Deciding What is News*; Tuchman, *Making News*; Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News* (New York: Basic, 1978); Philip Schlesinger, *Putting ‘Reality’ Together* (London: Constable, 1978); Edward Said, *Covering Islam* (New York: Pantheon, 1980); Robert K. Monoff and Michael Schudson (eds), *Reading the News* (New York: Pantheon, 1986).

4. Chan and Lee, “Journalistic paradigms on civil protests.” Related research includes Chin-Chuan Lee, “Partisan press coverage of government news in Hong Kong,” *Journalism Quarterly*, Vol. 62 (1985), pp. 770–76.

5. Lance Bennett, Lynn Gressett and William Haltom, “Repairing the news: a case study of the news paradigm,” *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (1985), pp. 50–68; cf. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

6. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*; Bennett *et al.*, “Repairing the news.”

the powerful but also power *relations* in society.⁷ Mass media are likely to continue to “mirror” the dominant perspective unless challenged by a new countervailing power base that arises. Within this framework, the media also actively construct realities which interact with, or intervene in, social formations.

A scientific revolution, in the Kuhnian sense, simultaneously abandons an old paradigm and adopts the new one. The new paradigm puts the old data in a new light by changing some of the field’s most elementary theorems. The shift of a journalistic paradigm may or may not be so abrupt. Unless there is a revolution that may radically transform the “journalistic paradigms,” reality is usually redefined in a cumulative and incremental fashion.⁸ If the paradigm shift is ahead of public readiness, the media risk being perceived as “caving in to the pressure,” and is thus detrimental to their credibility. Hong Kong’s political transition is being phased in gradually, so there is an anticipated schedule for socio-political and journalistic transformations.

Formation of a Dualistic Power Structure

In the absence of party and electoral politics the colonial administration has until recently enjoyed a virtual monopoly of political power. Hong Kong’s political system approximates the ideal type of a bureaucratic polity, whose decision-making is relatively insulated from social and political forces outside the highest elite echelons of the bureaucracy.⁹

Although Great Britain was one of the first countries officially to recognize the People’s Republic of China she rejected Beijing’s repeated requests to set up an official mission in Hong Kong for fear of a potential threat to her legitimacy. Thus, since 1949 the Hong Kong branch of Xinhua News Agency has acted as China’s de facto official representative in Hong Kong. To wit, Xinhua has had a dual role to play: as a news agency, and as a political agency. Out of its some 500 staff members, only 30 work in the news division; the others are assigned to various political tasks. Xinhua co-ordinates and supervises China’s interlocking organizations (banks, trade companies, schools, film and publication companies and labour unions) in Hong Kong and represents China in dealing with the colonial regime.

In spite of this, Britain has treated Xinhua as a foreign agency. Xinhua, whose operation was a public mystery, had not been able to

7. Clarice Olien, Philip Tichenor and George Donohue, “Structure, communication and social power evolution of the knowledge gap hypothesis,” *Netherlands Journal of Communication* (1982).

8. Majid Tehranian, “Iran: communication, alienation and revolution,” *Intermedia*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (1979), pp. 6–12; Pye, “Communication and political culture”; Chin-Chuan Lee, *Media Imperialism Reconsidered* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1980), pp. 203–237.

9. Lau Siu-kai, *Society and Politics in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1982); Peter Harris, *Hong Kong: A Study in Bureaucratic Politics* (Hong Kong: Heinemann Asia, 1978).

countervail British dominance. This began to change in 1982 when “Hong Kong’s future” became an issue. Xinhua moved to the foreground and constituted a second power centre both during the Sino-British negotiation period (1982–84) and its aftermath. In the post-agreement period Xinhua has made its influence deeply felt in every realm of social life. Most significantly, Xinhua is the organizer, coordinator and supervisor of the Basic Law Drafting committee and its Consultative Committee, both designed to formulate a framework for the future Hong Kong.

Within China’s political structure, Xinhua assumes the equivalent of a provincial-level organization. After Xu Jiatun, a member of the CCP Central Committee, became its director in 1983, he reorganized Xinhua into 10 departments, thereby imitating the colonial government structure. He has also set up three district offices to extend Xinhua’s influence and to “monitor public opinions” on a more local basis. Regarded as Hong Kong’s “shadow government,” Xinhua has actively recruited local talent to cope with the political transition and to fill the British vacuum in 1997.¹⁰ Xinhua has woven a co-optative fabric which stretches from institutional absorption to bonds of friendship, and which engulfs both media owners and their employees. This is part of China’s “united front” strategy, and it seems to have considerable implications.¹¹

Partisan Newspapers in a Colonial Marketplace

This article attempts to relate journalistic paradigm change to the formation of the twin power centres – that is the colonial regime and Xinhua. It is important to note that Hong Kong has one of the most tolerant press systems in the Third World: government control is minimal. What Seymour-Ure observes as a close press–party “parallelism” prevalent in Europe and the Third World, applies to this colonial city–state.¹² The partisan press is linked to political party organizations, loyal to party goals, and caters to partisan audiences. However, Hong Kong has no local parties. Press partisanship is intertwined with, and sharply divided along the lines of the Chinese Communist Party–Kuomintang (CCP–KMT) conflict. The British, keeping the rules of the political game, have been tolerant of the CCP–KMT propaganda battles fought within the framework of social order and British rule.

The partisan press, however, co-exists with the commercial press. Around 1970 and in response to the rapidly expanding market economy, “centrist” newspapers began to emerge and prosper. They are loyal to Hong Kong and critical of both Beijing and Taipei. While

10. Sin Loong, *A Shadow Government of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hai-san, 1985).

11. Joseph Man Chan, “Shifting journalistic paradigms: mass media and political transition in Hong Kong,” unpublished doctoral dissertation, the University of Minnesota, 1986.

12. *The Political Impact of Mass Media* (London: Constable, 1974).

devoting significant coverage to Chinese politics, these papers appear to focus more on local issues and the immediate concerns of Hong Kong citizens at large. It is not in their collective interest to identify too closely with either external party.

On the basis of (i) source of financial support and party linkage, (ii) place of registration, (iii) choice of national day and calendar, and (iv) ways of addressing the Beijing regime and Taipei regime, the nine papers for this study (chosen for their influence and representativeness of ideological positions) can be categorized as follows:¹³

1. *Ultra-leftist*: As the CCP's propaganda mouthpieces supervised by Xinhua Hong Kong Branch, they include *Ta Kung Pao* and *Wen Wei Pao*. Registered in Hong Kong and mainland China, they celebrate national day on 1 October, adopt the western calendar, refer to Taiwan as "Taiwan," "the Taiwan authorities," or "the Chiang Clique," but call Beijing "our country," "our government," "the People's Republic of China," or "China."

2. *Centrist*: Market-orientated, advertising-supported, and not linked to any political party, they register only with the Hong Kong Government, adopt the western calendar, do not observe either national day, call the Taipei regime "Taiwan," "the National Government" and the Beijing regime "Communist China," "Mainland China," or "China." The centrist papers we sampled include *Ming Pao*, *Sing Pao* and the *Oriental Daily News*.

3. *Mainstream rightist*: Most prominent are *Sing Tao Jih Pao* and *Wah Kiu Yat Pao*, founded in 1938 and 1925 respectively. They are responsive to the Hong Kong market, yet tilt mildly to Taiwan out of political ideology and historical ties with the KMT. They register both in Taiwan and Hong Kong, observe the KMT's national day on 10 October, call the Taiwan regime "the Republic of China" or "Nationalist China" and refer to the mainland regime as "Communist China," "the Mainland," instead of the "People's Republic of China." (Much has changed recently, as will be shown.)

4. *Ultra-rightist*: These include the *Hong Kong Times* and the *Kung Sheung Daily*. The *Times* was established by the KMT in 1949 as a propaganda output – at the threshold of the Chinese mainland – in the wake of its withdrawal to Taiwan. *Kung Sheung* has a strong historical presence and once ranked itself with *Sing Tao* and *Wah Kiu* as a mainstream paper. While loyal to the colonial regime, its anti-communist fervour bears a strong resemblance to the *Times*. In an inaugural editorial (in 1925) *Kung Sheung* professed its aim to check the "communist tide" surging in China. The paper's ties with the KMT increased during the Anti-Japanese War and the subsequent civil war years.¹⁴

13. Chin-Chuan Lee, "Partisan press coverage."

14. "Inaugural Proclamation," *Kung Sheung*, 8 July 1925.

Hypotheses and Methodology

Viewing mass media as a social sub-system that is conditioned by the configuration of social forces, we investigated journalistic paradigm shifts as a response to a major structural redistribution of power in society. The latter sets the general direction of adaptation for media organizations and limits their strategic options. The new power centre incorporates the media through co-optation or coercion or both. From the resource dependence perspective, the media institutions depend on external resources and must respond to incorporation. Environmental pressure, however, is not uniformly absorbed and may result in differential media adaptation.

A general theoretical perspective that seeks to elucidate the structural relations between mass media and the power centre in society has been developed by us elsewhere.¹⁵ Specifically, this article aims to analyse the direction and extent of journalistic paradigm shift towards the twin power centres (the colonial regime and Xinhua) both before and after the Sino-British accord. We hypothesize that the magnitude of journalistic paradigm shift due to structural power transformation is inversely related to the ideological extremity of the press. It follows:

i. The mainstream newspapers (centrist and rightist), by virtue of their relative ideological and organizational flexibility, will show a more visible general shift in the journalistic paradigms to accommodate Xinhua as the new political power. They may at the same time remain loyal to the colonial regime.

ii. The ultra-rightist papers, because of their ideological extremity, have less latitude of movement and hence would display less accommodation towards Xinhua than do the mainstream papers.

iii. The ultra-leftist papers, for the sake of a smooth transition, might move away from their traditional anti-colonial stance to cultivate a cordial relationship with the Hong Kong Government.

Methodologically this article is an effort of qualitative content analysis which “‘tease[s] out’ those determining but hidden assumptions which in their unique ordering remain opaque to quantitative content analysis.”¹⁶ Both qualitative and quantitative analyses, however, complement each other. The conclusions of this study, based qualitatively on the editorials, are corroborated by our related quantitative research on the paradigm shift in news reports during the same period.

We carefully examined 1,131 editorials published by nine papers between September 1982 and February 1986. Table 1 sums up the distribution of editorials analysed. Our examination proceeded with

15. Chin-Chuan Lee and Joseph Man Chan, “Journalistic paradigms in flux: mass media and political transition in Hong Kong,” paper presented at the 36th annual convention of the International Communication Association, Chicago, 22–26 May 1986; see also Chan, “Shifting journalistic paradigms: mass media.”

16. See Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching*, pp. 303–305.

hypotheses that emerged from our previous work and from “soaking” in the press materials. Since day-to-day newspaper editorials tend to be repetitive over a given time, we identify the text and quotes in accordance with the criteria of (1) political significance; (2) ability to represent the mode of the recurring themes; and (3) ability to preserve the subtlety of the latent and contextual meaning structure that signifies the change of themes, tones, and phrases over time.

Table 1: **Distribution of Editorials Analysed**

<i>Political Stand</i>	<i>Newspaper</i>	<i>Number of Editorials</i>
Ultra-rightist	<i>Hong Kong Times</i>	96
	<i>Kung Sheung</i>	229
Rightist	<i>Sing Tao</i>	114
	<i>Wah Kiu</i>	62
Centrist	<i>Ming Pao</i>	310
	<i>Sing Pao</i>	60
	<i>Oriental Daily News</i>	121
Ultra-leftist	<i>Wen Wei</i>	85
	<i>Ta Kung</i>	55
		N= 1132

A number of comparative check points have been made to guard against the likely though unwitting tendency to disregard unresponsive evidence. First, using the date of the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration (September 1984) as a watershed point, we scrutinized the editorial paradigms *before* and *after* this monumental event. Secondly, we cross-compared the shift of editorial paradigms by nine papers organized into four ideological strata. To enrich analytical depth and to maintain a critical eye on the materials, we examined the differences that existed both *between* and *within* the strata. Finally, this incisive reading of the editorials was undertaken in conjunction with interviews with journalists, government officials and Xinhua cadres, and a study of published documents, journalists’ memoirs and magazines.

Journalistic Paradigms in Flux

The “Hong Kong issue” has dominated the news since 1982. The nature of the issue has taken on many zig-zags. Journalistic paradigm shifts, depending on the political/ideological commitment of individual papers, closely followed the life-cycle of the issue in stages. When China indicated in 1982–83, via informal channels, that she intended to regain Hong Kong, all but the communist press greeted the news with distrust – on the grounds that Hong Kong’s prosperity would be

untenable under Chinese rule. Most editorials firmly supported British efforts to gain a concession from China for a continued British presence beyond 1997. This editorial chain of considerable unanimity began to break when Hu Yaobang, then director-general of the CCP, confirmed the long-circulated rumour of China's intention to retake Hong Kong. Shifts in centrist and rightist journalistic paradigms became particularly discernible and were further precipitated in 1984 by the British decision to forfeit Hong Kong and by the Sino-British Joint Declaration. As expected, some papers shifted their stance drastically, others reservedly. In what follows, we shall show that the nature and extent of change is principally contingent upon where each paper stands in the political/ideological spectrum.

Rightist Journalistic Paradigm

Sing Tao: This newspaper supported a continued British rule with greater persistence than *Wah Kiu*. When the sovereignty issue was first broached, a typical editorial would read,

There is no place for the British [to play] in Communist China's blueprint on Hong Kong. Under this circumstance, will the British remain to take up some administrative responsibilities? Definitely not. But whether the British have the full administrative power or not is the deciding factor of confidence and capital movement. Beijing leaders have missed this point.¹⁷

Like many non-leftist newspaper, *Sing Tao* was confident that the British commitment could fend off China's advances. In 1982, for example, immediately after Britain had agreed to enter into negotiations, *Sing Tao* wrote:

Mrs Thatcher, in the first hours of her first day in Hong Kong, has twice pledged that Britain would be responsible to the Hong Kong people and would express their interests during the negotiations with mainland China. . . . Because she has correctly grasped the "reality" of the Hong Kong people and their desire to maintain the status quo, she is uniquely qualified to perform the promised responsibility and to express Hong Kong people's interests.¹⁸

Sing Tao's support remained unfailing throughout the entire negotiations.¹⁹

Again, like many others, *Sing Tao* had faith in Britain's commitment to the status quo. It also overestimated the role of China's economic dependence on Hong Kong while underestimating her political motive of using Hong Kong as a showcase for reunification

17. "Continual absence of assuring news for the Hong Kong people," editorial, *Sing Tao*, 4 December 1982.

18. "The female prime minister committed to moral responsibility with iron shoulders," editorial, *Sing Tao*, 29 September 1982.

19. For example: "Have confidence in London's promises," editorial, *Sing Tao*, 6 July 1983; "The Hong Kong Government has successfully diverted a disaster," editorial, *Sing Tao*, 28 September 1983.

with Taiwan. Thus, *Sing Tao*, concluded that there were “absolute reasons” for believing that Hong Kong would have a “bright future” (i.e. maintaining the status quo).²⁰

As soon as the Sino-British Joint Declaration was initialed *Sing Tao* showed signs of acquiescing to the newly-defined political “reality.” For example, it argued,

The five million people of Hong Kong have no choice but to have confidence in the “Sino-British Agreement” which determines Hong Kong’s future. It is superfluous to doubt whether the Hong Kong people have confidence or not. Moreover, there is no reason why the Chinese majority of the local population who have created prosperity during British rule cannot maintain Hong Kong’s prosperity when it is returned to China. It is clear that the rise and fall of Hong Kong, from now on, depends not only on the Hong Kong people but primarily on Beijing. If Beijing has confidence in implementing the “Sino-British Agreement” and the scheme of “one country, two systems,” Hong Kong’s future prosperity will certainly be greater than it is now.²¹

Dating from late 1984 *Sing Tao* seemed to have changed its tone to one of consistently supporting the Sino-British accord. Past worries seemed to have been replaced by a growing confidence. In late 1984, for example, it noted:

Businessmen and government economic agencies from all the world have revived their confidence in investing in Hong Kong in the past 10 months. The speed and magnitude of investment growth is unparalleled. This is very important for it at least erases people’s worries about Hong Kong’s future and the gloomy atmosphere, encouraging Hong Kong citizens to strive for further economic prosperity and social stability.

The very first pre-condition for the growth of confidence in Hong Kong, according to the same editorial, is the implementation of the “Sino-British Agreement.”²²

In an annual review editorial, *Sing Tao* even appealed to national pride:

The dust aroused by the two-year-long negotiation over Hong Kong’s future is now settled by the formal signing of the “Sino-British Agreement.” The wounds and tears caused by the Opium War on the sons and daughters of China will soon fade into history. The life-style valued by the Hong Kong people is guaranteed for 50 years in black and white terms. At the same time, both mainland China and Taiwan have scored notable achievements in developing their economies and living standards. They, together with the

20. “Hong Kong has a very bright future,” editorial, *Sing Tao*, 30 September 1982.

21. “In the aftermath of initialing the agreement on Hong Kong’s future,” editorial, *Sing Tao*, 27 September 1984. *Sing Tao* showed its acquiescence to the political development immediately after Foreign Minister Howe announced in April 1984 Britain’s decision to return Hong Kong to the People’s Republic of China (“The three main points in Foreign Minister Howe’s announcement,” editorial, *Sing Tao*, 8 December 1984).

22. “Revive the confidence to invest in Hong Kong,” editorial *Sing Tao*, 12 December 1984.

steadily progressing Hong Kong, each with their own merits, form a tripartite system which constitutes an economic force able to compete with Japan.²³

Such an optimistic vision was unthinkable just one year ago. One of its more recent editorials concluded:

First, we must have confidence in mainland China in implementing the "Sino-British Joint Declaration" [which the paper formerly called the "Sino-British Agreement" after the British fashion]. Secondly, we should consciously and voluntarily work for a stable transition. Lastly, we should be proud to be Chinese and to return a perfect Hong Kong to China [which the paper formerly referred to as "Communist China" or "mainland China"]. Every citizen should work for this from now on.²⁴

Wah Kiu: Sharing two propositions with *Sing Tao*, *Wah Kiu* initially argued: (1) that mainland China was unlikely to retake Hong Kong for economic and strategic reasons;²⁵ and (2) that the British prime minister and other British officials were trustworthy negotiators on behalf of the Hong Kong people.²⁶

Wah Kiu, nonetheless, differed from *Sing Tao* in some key respects. First, *Wah Kiu* quoted some social leaders to discredit such policies as "letting Hong Kong people administer Hong Kong," while *Sing Tao* did not.²⁷ Secondly, it explicitly argued against the urge by *Sing Tao* and ultra-rightist papers to internationalize the Hong Kong issue.²⁸ Thirdly, *Wah Kiu's* acquiescence was in greater haste than *Sing Tao's*. *Wah Kiu* had quoted Chinese officials more often and at greater length even before Britain made public her intention to withdraw from Hong Kong. In the heat of negotiations in 1983, for example, *Wah Kiu* referred to Hu Yaobang: "Now Hu Yaobang has once and for all stated the (takeover) date, we no longer need to guess and speculate. Given a definite period, we had better prepare in our own social positions for the new reality that is emerging."²⁹ Typifying

23. "The last day of a year again," editorial, *Sing Tao*, 12 December 1984.

24. "To discuss seven issues with Ji Pengfei," editorial, *Sing Tao*, 12 December 1985.

25. "Peng Zhen's talk and Hong Kong's future," editorial, *Wah Kiu*, 21 July 1982; "The history and reality that deserve respect," editorial, *Wah Kiu*, 4 August 1982; "Looking at the Beijing-London-Hong Kong relationship in a broad and long-term perspective," editorial, *Wah Kiu*, 24 September 1982; "What Mrs Thatcher cannot disclose at will," editorial, *Wah Kiu*, 29 September 1982.

26. "Welcoming the British Prime Minister Mrs Thatcher's visit to Hong Kong," editorial, *Wah Kiu*, 27 September 1982; "What Mrs Thatcher cannot disclose at will," editorial, *Wah Kiu*, 29 September 1982; "Negotiation on Hong Kong's future advances into the second stage," editorial, *Wah Kiu*, 4 July 1983; "Governor Youde: the burden is heavy, the road is long," editorial, *Wah Kiu*, 28 July 1983.

27. "The right directions for negotiations on Hong Kong's future," editorial, *Wah Kiu*, 26 May 1983.

28. "Some principles for negotiation over Hong Kong's future," editorial, *Wah Kiu*, 3 January 1984, "Dangerous arguments to be keenly watched," editorial, 27 January 1984.

29. "The date on which Hong Kong's sovereignty will be retaken is decided," editorial, *Wah Kiu*, 17 August 1983. An editorial that best illustrates *Wah Kiu's* tendency to speak indirectly for Beijing at this early stage is: "The concept and outline of the 'Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.'" editorial, 17 October 1983.

its sharpened journalistic paradigm shift, the paper proclaimed in January 1984:

For China [formerly referred to as “Communist China” or “mainland China”] to retake Hong Kong’s sovereignty as well as jurisdictional power is absolutely right because Hong Kong is part of Chinese territories and its inhabitants are Chinese. If China, which owns the land and the people, is not entitled to Hong Kong’s sovereignty, what kind of ridiculous world would it be?³⁰

Shortly before the Joint Declaration was initiated, *Wah Kiu* asserted that Hong Kong people “had no reason to feel uneasy or lack confidence in the future of Hong Kong.”³¹

Centrist Journalistic Paradigm

Oriental Daily News: Deliberately “apolitical” and non-controversial, its short, daily editorial does not touch on Hong Kong’s future except on a few very important occasions (e.g., the signing of the Sino-British accord). Instead, the politically sharp *Miu Yu Column*, signed and written by a deputy editor, is generally regarded as the paper’s “surrogate editorial.”

At the outset, in 1982, Miu Yu deemed nationalism as an “abstract” principle that must not be used to dictate the return of Hong Kong to China. He said:

From hundreds of readers’ letters sent to me, not a single one agrees to an immediate retaking of Hong Kong. Does this indicate that the *Daily’s* readers do not care about the righteousness of nationalism? When righteousness contradicts interests, we need to keep cool in the analysis of costs and benefits. This is not to say that righteousness of nationalism can be done away with. But in the last analysis, nationalism is mental, conceptual, theoretical and abstract in nature, while interests are concrete and personal. At this juncture labelling other people as “traitors to Chinese nationalism” is no proof of the labellers’ righteousness but of their craziness.³²

He often reiterated the concern for China’s “inevitable” interference should Hong Kong become China’s special administrative region. He commented, for example,

Although the Chinese constitution may be drawn upon to protect “one country, two systems” or “one country, two sets of law” . . . it is inevitable that the law makers will include some mainland Chinese other than British and Hong Kong citizens and that the present Supreme Court of Appeal in

30. “Dangerous arguments to be keenly watched,” editorial, *Wah Kiu*, 27 January 1984.

31. “Hong Kong people’s wish,” editorial, *Wah Kiu*, 2 August 1984.

32. “The righteousness of nationalism,” *Miu Yu Column*, *Oriental Daily News*, 5 February 1983. The same idea was reiterated in two other *Miu Yu* columns: “The righteousness of nationalism,” 5 February 1983; “Imperialism,” 17 October 1983.

London will be relocated in Beijing – by then the spirit of the rule of law in the British tradition will be all scrapped.³³

In short, in Miu Yu's estimation, "one country, two systems" is infeasible in practice.

Signs of a journalistic paradigm shift were visible as early as 8 December 1983. Miu Yu concluded in one of his columns, as follows:

Beijing has sufficiently understood the importance of Hong Kong's prosperity. What the Hong Kong people fear is that Communist China may fail to recognize this and may "irrationally" act it out in Hong Kong. But all indicators seem to point out that this fear is unnecessary.³⁴

Miu Yu increased his favourable portrayal of Xinhua, saying,

It [i.e. the New Year speech] is the first speech ever made by the head of Xinhua's Hong Kong Branch. In the past, no media organizations had invited the highest Chinese representative in Hong Kong to make such a speech. This event indicates that Xinhua's increasingly significant role in Hong Kong's affairs begins to command greater attention from the mass media. . . . Director Xu Jiatur's speech is not a "super-governor's" act to overwhelm Hong Kong. On the contrary, only a rejection [of an invitation to speak] will pose himself as a "super-governor."³⁵

In marked contrast to his repeated assertions of the past regarding the CCP's untrustworthiness on account of historical record, Miu Yu seemed to have developed a very different perspective by April 1984. He said: "The present leaders of the CCP have repeatedly self-criticized (their past radical lines) in their public speeches. In light of their ideals and interests, the sincerity of their self-criticism is not to be doubted. This new consciousness has induced the birth of the concept of "one country, two systems" which is different in nature from the CCP's deceptive policies on nationalist bourgeoisie in the fifties."³⁶ He continued, "If we analyse Communist China's policies in Hong Kong merely in light of its past record and neglect all its present changes, we may be far from truth."³⁷

Furthermore, Miu Yu began to exemplify "one country, two systems" as a solution for international conflicts. He said:

In fact, the "one country, two systems" concept innovated by China is

33. "Hong Kong law ruling Hong Kong," Miu Yu Column, *Oriental Daily News*, 24 June 1983.

34. "Negotiating the future," Miu Yu Column, *Oriental Daily News*, 8 December 1983. Shortly after this, Miu Yu indicated that he had learned of the British decision to withdraw from Hong Kong ("See who changes first," *Oriental Daily News*, 25 January 1984.)

35. "High evaluation of Hong Kong people," Miu Yu Column, *Oriental Daily News*, 1 January 1984.

36. After the CCP consolidated its power in early 1950s, it launched a series of programmes to nationalize the economy. In its transitional phase, the nationalist bourgeoisie were promised "co-ownership," but this was finally swept away by CCP's speedy measures to root out the private sector.

37. "The new is different from the old," Miu Yu Column, *Oriental Daily News*, 6 April 1984.

receiving increasing international attention and is generally considered to be a very honest and solid formulation that may be applicable in numerous international conflicts such as those between the Germanies and the Koreans.³⁸

From then on, Miu Yu continued to expound China's Hong Kong policies,³⁹ quoting economic figures to support his optimistic evaluation of the future, and sometimes to explain away what he saw as a misunderstanding between Chinese leaders and the local press.⁴⁰

Sing Pao: Taking a position that was generally mild and somewhat obscure during the early stage of the negotiation, this paper did not carry editorials until mid 1983. Quite revealing was its editorial on 23 September 1983:

China always says that it will reclaim Hong Kong when the time is right. Is the expiration of the lease of the New Territories the right moment? Following the major goal set by China, let us use modernization as the criterion of judgment: leaving Hong Kong as it is would facilitate China's modernization. Taking modernization as the criterion is a flexible way of doing things while over-emphasizing the lease expiration is an indication of rigidity. Not only rigidity, it also damages a friendship [between Hong Kong and the People's Republic] that has lasted for more than 30 years.⁴¹

Sing Pao's support of the status quo was precipitated by the relocation of Jardine Company, a leading British Corporation historically tied to Hong Kong, to Bermuda. With a sense of urgency it declared:

Communist China should renew its understanding of Hong Kong, do away with the "emotional part" and revise the plans concerning Hong Kong's future. Within the principle of retaking Hong Kong's sovereignty, [China should] formulate policies on the basis of the concrete situation in order to preserve Hong Kong's stability and prosperity and to facilitate the modernization of our mother country [i.e., China] and its whole unification. . . . In fact, the assumption of sovereignty itself is sufficient [to fulfil nationalism] –after that, Hong Kong should be left alone to become a sufficiently autonomous, free, democratic, prosperous and stable international city.⁴²

Sing Pao, however, became quite favourably disposed to the final outcome of the negotiation. When the date of initializing the Joint Declaration was drawing near *Sing Pao* began to emphasize the legal binding power of the Declaration and to portray it as "the brainchild

38. "Twelve points of policy for Hong Kong," 28 April 1984.

39. For example, "Sino-British Accord," Miu Yu Column, *Oriental Daily News*, 2 August 1984; "Moral responsibility," Miu Yu Column, *Oriental Daily News*, 13 September 1984.

40. See, e.g., "Those who believe will be saved," Miu Yu Column, *Oriental Daily News*, 30 April 1984; "Don't be afraid of interference," Miu Yu Column, *Oriental Daily News*, 6 October 1984; "Rumours feed on rumours," Miu Yu Column, *Oriental Daily News*, 7 October 1984.

41. "How to evaluate the Hong Kong question," editorial, *Sing Pao*, 23 September 1983.

42. "Alleviate the 'Jardine shock immediately,'" editorial, *Sing Pao*, 30 March 1984.

of far-sighted politicians.”⁴³ *Sing Pao* wrote a series of editorials praising the scheme of “one nation, two systems” after the initialization, one of which said: “The general reaction to the Joint Declaration just released is good because it is unexpectedly detailed and specific. It is better than expected. Overall, the majority of the Hong Kong people have accepted it; what differs is the extent of acceptance.”⁴⁴ In another, it argued, “We thought the most significant thing implied by the initialing of the Joint Declaration is that Hong Kong people will gradually be the masters of Hong Kong, holding their fate and future in their own hands.”⁴⁵ *Sing Pao*’s positive assessment of China’s policies in Hong Kong seems to increase with time. On 7 January 1986, for example, it said:

In 1985 which just ended, the greatest achievement of Hong Kong is its enhanced political stability. One year after the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration, the feasibility of “one country, two systems” has become more and more deeply rooted in people’s hearts.⁴⁶

To sum up, *Sing Pao* provides a clear demonstration of an editorial shift that follows the larger structural power change in the system. From a status quo mind-set, it became one of the first supporters of Chinese policies on Hong Kong. This is a paper heavily identified with the *existing* power rather than with consistent ideology.

Ming Pao: Positioning itself as a leading “intellectual paper,” *Ming Pao* has made various proposals to mediate the positions of China, Britain and the “Hong Kong people.” The process of its editorial paradigm shift was at first subtle, gradual and smooth, but the pace was quickened once Britain announced that it would give up Hong Kong’s sovereignty.

Based on the economic logic, *Ming Pao* was confident that China would not claim Hong Kong in 1997. It observed in 1981:

Thorough studies on the historical, legal, economic, political, diplomatic and strategic aspects of the (future) issue have been made. The consensus is that it is quite unlikely that China will take back Hong Kong or the New Territories in 1997 when the New Territories lease expires.⁴⁷

Ming Pao often made its point through the use of metaphors or parables. For example, it said, “Some people hold the view that following the takeover by China and the introduction of limited changes to the system here prosperity may still survive. This is from

43. “Both the Agreement or the Joint Declaration have legal binding force,” editorial, *Sing Pao*, 18 September 1984; “The blueprint for a smooth transition,” editorial, *Sing Pao*, 2 August 1984.

44. “All the reactions to the Joint Declaration,” editorial, *Sing Pao*, 29 September 1984.

45. “Actively participate to practise civil rights,” editorial, *Sing Pao*, 28 September 1984.

46. “Competition for Lunar New Year stalls shows confidence,” editorial, *Sing Pao*, 7 January 1986.

47. “Three requirements for an arrangement on Hong Kong’s status,” *Ming Pao*, editorial, 19 February 1981.

an idealistic rather than a pragmatic point of view and is not founded on facts. . . . Hong Kong is a strange goose laying golden eggs. It is not beautiful at all, offensive to the eyes of many others. However, if it is stripped of its ugly feathers and dressed in phoenix or peacock feathers, it will cease to lay golden eggs.”⁴⁸

Although *Ming Pao*'s trust in Britain's commitment to Hong Kong was not as strong as the rightist papers, it nevertheless defended Mrs Thatcher's promise of moral responsibility towards Hong Kong when she was under attack by leftist newspapers.⁴⁹ It reasoned that the British, albeit on the weaker side of the negotiation table, had three cards in their favour. One is the “public opinion card:” the majority of Hong Kong's citizens favour the status quo. The second is the “prosperity and stability card” – that is, China's economic self-interest to preserve Hong Kong's status quo. The third is the “international treaty card,” referring to China's obligation to observe the Nanking Treaty by which Hong Kong was ceded to Britain. With these three cards in hand, *Ming Pao* predicted that the British would have more to bargain for than a simple abrogation of Hong Kong's sovereignty.”⁵⁰

Ming Pao doubted that Chinese policies being disclosed would be feasible. In particular, it raised the concern that once their current leaders had died policies towards Hong Kong might have a problem of continuity.⁵¹ Meanwhile, *Ming Pao* did not think that Chinese leaders would be willing to state their promises in black and white.⁵²

After Hu Yaobang announced that China would regain Hong Kong on 1 July 1997, *Ming Pao* began to show signs of accommodating itself to Beijing's plans. Commenting on Ji Pengfei's (head of China's Hong Kong and Macao Office) promises of a high degree of autonomous rule by the Hong Kong people, the rule of law and the free flow of capital, *Ming Pao* said:

For fairness' sake, we would say the measures enumerated by Ji Pengfei are liberal enough to make the people here feel satisfied. There are still some issues to be touched upon. . . . But these can hardly be described as key issues.⁵³

Since then *Ming Pao* has published long editorials to provide economic, political and strategic rationales for China's policies, saying that they might not be untrustworthy after all.⁵⁴ When Premier

48. “A strange goose that lays golden eggs,” editorial, *Ming Pao*, 14 October 1982.

49. “Britain's moral responsibility towards Hong Kong,” editorial, *Ming Pao*, 20 October 1982.

50. “Three cards in the British hand,” editorial, *Ming Pao*, 4 July 1983.

51. “Same as before: free entry and exit,” editorial, *Ming Pao*, 25 November 1982.

52. See below fn. 55; and “Horses must be fed to make them work,” editorial, *Ming Pao*, 7 July 1983.

53. “Ji Pengfei's concrete measures for “Hong Kong administered by Hong Kong people,” editorial, *Ming Pao*, 15 October 1983.

54. See, e.g., “From ‘79’ to ‘97,’” editorial, *Ming Pao*, 24 October 1983; “Making use of Hong Kong over a long time rather than imposing reforms,” editorial, *Ming Pao*, 25 October 1983; “Fundamental demands by China, Britain and Hong Kong,” editorial, *Ming Pao*, 15 December 1983.

Zhao Ziyang reiterated China's Hong Kong policies in his address to the Canadian Parliament in June 1983, *Ming Pao* was quick to point out that it represented an "official pledge and guarantee to the people throughout the world" and reflected China's "sincerity" in implementing her pledge.⁵⁵

Ming Pao's shift of journalistic paradigm appeared to take a quantum leap when the Joint Declaration was about to be initialed. From thence editorials used lengthy quotes from Xinhua and other Chinese officials in an effort to clear up what it perceived to be public misunderstandings of China's policies.⁵⁶ This process culminated in a series of editorials heaping praises on the concept of "one country, two systems" and the Declaration. In an article especially written for the *People's Daily* (the CCP's official organ), Louis Cha, publisher and principal editorial writer of *Ming Pao*, reiterated the idea that the concept of "one country, two systems," being "far-sighted and grand in scope," serves as a model of conflict resolution for the whole world. Cha concluded that it is "a dictum that can teach a hundred generations."⁵⁷

Ming Pao urged the Hong Kong people to have confidence in the "one country, two systems" plan because it is born out of a concrete situation rather than ideological orthodoxy and is linked to China's primary national goals.⁵⁸ Evaluating the Joint Declaration, *Ming Pao* said:

After a detailed reading of the agreement, we discovered the demands that we have raised in the past two years have all been incorporated. We may say that both China and Britain have accepted all—not just the basic ones but 100%—of the requests made by the majority of the Hong Kong people. We cannot really think of what else to add to such an agreement. The Hong Kong people have got what they wished, what else can they ask for?

Cha, as a prominent member of both the Basic Law Drafting Committee and its Consultative Committee, has professed to participate actively to effect a smooth political transition.

Ultra-rightist Journalistic Paradigm

The ultra-rightist newspapers, *Kung Sheung* and *Hong Kong Times*, have opposed China's policies in their respective editorials. Their editorial paradigm largely remained unscathed in spite of the

55. "Pledge and guarantee of an international nature," editorial, *Ming Pao*, 24 January 1984.

56. See "Deng Xiaoping talked about the confidence problem of the Hong Kong people," editorial, *Ming Pao*, 27 June 1984; "How policies on Hong Kong are made," editorial, *Ming Pao*, 11 August 1984.

57. Louis Cha, "An innovation applicable to the whole world," *People's Daily*, 26 September 1984. Similar ideas were voiced earlier in a *Ming Pao* editorial entitled "A model applicable to the world," published on 29 June 1984.

58. "Confidence is to be based on what kind of foundation?" editorial, *Ming Pao*, 2 July 1984.

structural power change. But subtle signs of accommodation can be detected. During the Sino-British negotiation, the ultra-rightist newspapers strongly supported the British pursuit of continued rule over Hong Kong. Welcoming Mrs Margaret Thatcher's visit to Hong Kong, for example, the *Times* said:

In an interview with the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation], Mrs Thatcher repeatedly stated that Britain is responsible to the five million people of Hong Kong. She also mentioned that Hong Kong's prosperity is attributable to British rule over the years. Hong Kong's citizens have faith in Britain which is responsible to them. The British prime minister has also restated that Britain will keep the three Sino-British treaties which cannot be repealed at will. . . . Our previous quotations from Mrs Thatcher prove that this British prime minister pays considerable attention to the interest and wishes of the Hong Kong people.⁵⁹

Both *Kung Sheung* and the *Times* argued that "the nature of the Hong Kong problem" could not be encapsulated in such terms as "national interest" or "nationalism" but must rest in the "livelihood of the Hong Kong people." *Kung Sheung* argued that Hong Kong's "autonomy and independence" was an appropriate realization of "nationalism."⁶⁰ The *Times*, claiming that Beijing is not a legitimate negotiator with Britain over Hong Kong's sovereignty, denied the validity of the Joint Declaration thus produced.⁶¹

As a recurring theme before and after the Joint Declaration, they pictured "one country, two systems" as nothing but a "united-front gimmick" designed to deceive the Hong Kong people.⁶² The *Times'* editorials, pointing to China's tumultuous 30-year history, described the new policies as "sugar-coated poison."⁶³ Similarly, *Kung Sheung* cast doubt on China's promise of autonomous rule in Hong Kong. It said:

The slogan of "Hong Kong people administering Hong Kong" and the idea of turning Hong Kong into a "special administrative region" have dangerous ulterior motives. They are sugar-coated poison designed to kill two birds with

59. "Welcoming the British prime minister's visit to Hong Kong," editorial, *Hong Kong Times*, 26 September 1982. Similar comments are reiterated in *Kung Sheung's* editorial, "The British prime minister's stand on the Hong Kong question is firm," 5 November 1983.

60. "Comments on the visit of the intellectuals' tour in mainland China," editorial, *Kung Sheung*, 14 April 1983; "On the question of 'Hong Kong's sovereignty,'" editorial, *Kung Sheung*, 22 October 1982; "'Nationalism' dictates 'autonomous independence,'" editorial, *Kung Sheung*, 4 April 1983.

61. "Stay calm amidst changes, unite and self-help," editorial, *Hong Kong Times*, 27 September 1984; "The unglorious 'initialization,'" editorial, *Hong Kong Times*, 24 September 1984; "Hong Kong people do not recognize the 'Joint Declaration,'" editorial, *Hong Kong Times*, 4 September 1984.

62. For example: "Hong Kong people definitely do not believe the Communist Party's promises," editorial, *Hong Kong Times*, 16 April 1984; "Communists' words cannot be trusted," editorial, *Hong Kong Times*, 3 August 1984; "The two cutting edges of local communists' united front tactics," editorial, *Kung Sheung*, 16 September 1984; "The so-called 'Hong Kong model,'" editorial, *Hong Kong Times*, 24 December 1984.

63. "Don't eat 'sugar-coated poison,'" editorial, *Hong Kong Times*, 12 January 1984.

one stone. On the one hand, they soften Hong Kong people's determination to maintain Hong Kong as it is. On the other, nationalism, as they seemingly implied, disarms Hong Kong people's resistance.⁶⁴

Now that the political dust has settled, the integrity of the editorial agenda of the ultra-rightist press is being put to a severe test. Overall, both papers showed little sign of editorial paradigm shift, insisting that they could not acknowledge the legitimacy of the Declaration. But as newspapers, they could not totally shy away from editorial responsibility to cover such major political developments as the Joint Declaration, the setting up of the Basic Law Drafting Committee and its Consultative Committee, Xinhua's activities and China's elaborations of the idea of "one country, two systems."⁶⁵ *Kung Sheung*, facing what it perceived to be an increasingly hostile political environment, opted to close down in late 1984.

As a KMT organ, the *Times*' political stand has taken a tactical turn from hard-line to milder anti-communism, demonstrated by the ouster of six staunch anti-communist columnists,⁶⁶ the cancellation of a page devoted exclusively to anti-communist themes, and the softening of its overall rhetoric. The *Times* has supported, in news and editorials, local rightist and centrist groups calling on Beijing to let Hong Kong have a parliamentary democracy. Voicing a proposal represents the paper's subtle acquiescence to eventual rule from Beijing.

Ultra-leftist Journalistic Paradigm

The ultra-leftist newspapers, similar in their editorial paradigm, have considerably moderated their stance towards the Hong Kong Government after the Sino-British accord. They have toned down anti-colonial rhetoric and have "rehabilitated" the colonial institutions and policies they once so harshly criticized. As recently as mid 1983 Governor Youde was seen by *Wen Wei Pao* as a local agent of the British Empire whose interest was incongruent with that of the

64. "Hong Kong administering Hong Kong' is sugar-coated poison," editorial, *Kung Sheung*, 9 December 1982.

65. See editorials on the Joint Declaration: e.g. "Analysing the 'Joint Declaration Draft,'" *Kung Sheung*, 27 September 1984; "Stay calm amidst changes, unite and self-help," *Hong Kong Times*, 27 September 1984. Editorials on the Basic Law: e.g. "Hong Kong People have the absolute right in making the 'Basic Law,'" *Kung Sheung*, 25 October 1984.

66. What began as a successional fight among the *Times*' staff evolved into a political fight. On one side are the hard-liners who asserted that they should fight against communism simply "for the sake of anti-communism." The opposing faction thought it was for "truth" that they fought communism. The major difference between these two approaches is that the first regards anti-communism as a permanent goal which is immutable, while the second asserts that anti-communism should be practised in a "rational" way and should give "due regard" to changes within China. The controversy ended in an organizational reshuffling in which six staunch anti-communist columnists were sacked and a page that was devoted to hardline anti-communism was dropped. See Min-kwun Leung, "Anti-communist outpost in chaos," *Nineties Monthly*, January 1985.

Hong Kong community.⁶⁷ In the heat of the “public opinion war” amidst negotiation deadlocks, both papers published several editorials tending to delegitimize colonial rule. One of them posed a series of rhetorical questions:

What is the Hong Kong Government? A fair co-ordinator and distributor of interest or a partial ruler in favour of corporate interest at the sacrifice of public welfare? Does the government really listen to public opinion? Or does it merely act from its self-interest and the opinions of a few? We have often heard of boasts about how much the government respects public opinion and how perfect its political system is, but on the issue of price raises, where is this respect for public opinion?⁶⁸

No sooner had the Joint Declaration been initialed in 1984 than both papers switched their editorial stance to legitimize the Hong Kong Governor as a ruler serving the public good. Commenting on the Governor’s annual report, *Wen Wei Pao* said:

At the conclusion of the Sino-British negotiation, people doubted whether Hong Kong’s prosperity could be preserved, Governor Youde’s third report has given positive answers.⁶⁹

Moreover, both papers have moderated their traditionally critical evaluations of the colonial regime’s performance. *Wen Wei Pao*’s 1985 annual review said

In spite of the general slackening of the world’s economy and the rise of trade protectionism, Hong Kong’s economy remains stable and has secured some growth. . . . In light of the neighbouring areas’ zero or negative growth, we can only conclude that Hong Kong’s economic achievement is not easily attained.⁷⁰

The Hong Kong Government’s Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) was once labelled by the communist press as an organization designed to rectify corruption inherent in colonial capitalism in order to prolong British rule. In very different terms, *Ta Kung Pao* now had this to say:

The suspects charged by the ICAC will certainly be tried according to strict legal procedures. Hong Kong remains a society ruled by law and citizens still have confidence in legal justice. People need not speculate about what is

67. “Who does Sir Youde represent?” editorial, *Wen Wei Pao*, 9 July 1983.

68. “Check the trend of price raises to ensure the public’s livelihood,” editorial, *Wen Wei*, 16 September 1983. Other exemplary editorials that raised serious doubts about the government’s respect for public opinion include: (1) “Has public opinion ever been respected?” editorial, *Wen Wei Pao*, 5 September 1983; (2) “The loud calls for preserving the public’s livelihood,” editorial, *Wen Wei Pao*, 19 September 1983; and (3) “How constructive can the “Lubo Motion” be?”, editorial, *Ta Kung Pao*, 15 March 1984.

69. “An aggressive and solid annual report,” editorial, *Wen Wei Pao*, 7 October 1984.

70. “Reviewing Hong Kong in its first year of transition,” editorial, *Wen Wei Pao*, 31 December 1986. This generally favourable review can also be contrasted with *Ta Kung Pao*’s generally critical review two years earlier; “Reading Youde’s administrative report,” editorial, *Ta Kung Pao*, 16 October 1983.

behind the scene. What we want to point out is this: the establishment of ICAC is no doubt a positive factor for the Hong Kong society.”⁷¹

Likewise, *Wen Wei Pao* has also enthusiastically endorsed the Hong Kong Government’s decision to go on with a construction project. The paper seized this project as a “proof” that despite, even because of, political transition, Hong Kong continued to be a stable and prosperous entity – something that had previously been described as “deceptive” or “distorted.”⁷²

Seldom had the communist press commented on elections sponsored by the colonial regime. When they did, the comments were largely derogatory. When the colonial regime tried in the early 1970s to promote a sense of “Hong Kong belongingness” among citizens, the communist press regarded it as an attempt to check the growth of nationalism among the students. With reference to district council elections in early 1985, however, *Wen Wei Pao* argued that “an active participation in public affairs” is “essential.”⁷³ Urging the Hong Kong Government to use civil education to ensure that the voters knew what they were doing, it concluded: “Hopefully, this district council election can enhance the citizens’ sense of social participation.”

It should be noted that moderating its anti-colonialism does not imply that the ultra-leftist press refrain from criticizing the Hong Kong government *in toto*. But these criticisms are now framed as “constructive” suggestions, unlike past characterizations of colonial rule as fundamentally immoral.

Conclusion

The aim of this article has been to examine the paradigm shift of mass media in relation to the changing configuration of political power. In the context of Hong Kong’s political transition, the press editorials (along with news and other evidence not reported here) have shifted their world-views with regard to the dualistic power structure. Once political reality was redefined in terms of British withdrawal, the mass media have constrained their discourse within the parameter of the idea of “one country, two systems.”

The shift of journalistic paradigms varies with the press’ political ideology or affiliation. As expected, the centrist and rightist newspapers, because of organizational and ideological flexibility, have shown much greater accommodation to Xinhua than have the ultra-rightist newspapers. Particularly notable is the former’s shift from an initial preference for continued British rule to final acquiescence to, even an endorsement of, China’s eventual takeover. The two ultra-rightist

71. *Ta Kung Pao*, “The Editor’s Note,” 27 February 1986.

72. Such characterizations of Hong Kong’s prosperity were common in past ultra-leftist newspapers’ editorials. A more recent illustration can be found in *Ta Kung Pao*’s short editorial, “The high land price policy is devastating,” 4 December 1982.

73. “On the District Council election,” editorial, *Wen Wei Pao*, 22 January 1985.

newspapers, *Kung Sheung* and *Hong Kong Times*, have adopted different paths of adaptation. *Kung Sheung* has chosen to opt out while the *Times* has chosen to stay (at least for the time being) and has softened its hardline anti-communist rhetoric. As 1997 draws nearer growing pressure will be placed on the *Times* to conform to the general line. The paper may respond by acknowledging Xinhua as a legitimate power centre, or it may remain faithful to its position until the date when it will have no option but to close. Finally, the ultra-leftist newspapers, under the direction of Xinhua, have moderated their anti-colonial overtones. The emergent cordiality between the communist press and the colonial regime is to continue, in view of the promise by China in the Sino-British Joint Declaration to provide co-operation in the interest of stability and prosperity. Since Hong Kong's transition is being phased in gradually, the media will shift their journalistic paradigms in a cumulative and incremental fashion. New journalistic paradigms are born of the old, showing both continuities and discontinuities. The paradigm shift is as yet incomplete and will continue to be elaborated long after the change of power in 1997.

Will pluralistic media voices be lost? The political boundary, as previously analysed, has narrowed. But given Hong Kong's vibrant market economy and China's promise to preserve Hong Kong's capitalism beyond 1997, we do not believe that Hong Kong will lose its pluralistic media *in toto*. The press has undoubtedly reshaped its journalistic paradigms, largely moving towards the centre of gravity and accommodating the twin power structure. But journalistic paradigms, like political development, are dynamically changing and may take unexpected turns. Will the Beijing leadership remain stable? Will China keep her promises? How will Hong Kong's social formations be shaped? How will the media maintain their relative autonomy? All these questions will determine the content of journalistic paradigms in the future.