Communication and Culture: China and the World Entering the 21st Century

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Clash and Compatibility of
Journalistic Cultures:
Mainland China and Hong Kong

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Interviews with seven journalists reveal that significant
differences exist between Chinese immigrant journalists
in Hong Kong and their Hong Kong colleagues. The
most observed difference is in news judgment and the
terminology used in writing. Other differences observed
are writing approach, story structure, stress on checking
facts, attribution of sources, and work ethos. Chinese
immigrant journalists report that they are changing to
become more like their Hong Kong colleagues in some
respects but seem resistant to change in other respects.
The process of acculturation throws light on the
question of what journalistic culture may emerge as
communication between the various Chinese
communities increases.

Hong Kong is a British colony to be returned to China in less than a
year’s time in 1997. The practice of journalism in Hong Kong, now under
a commercial-pluralist model, has been promised survival alongside
“Communist” China’s official-monopolist model of journalism — under
the proclaimed arrangement of “One country, two systems.” It would be
a simplistic view, however, to think that the two systems can operate
irrespective of each other, given the increased communication between
the two territories. This paper is concerned with one particular means
through which the two systems influence each other — the migration of
journalists from mainland China to Hong Kong.
Growth of Hong Kong Journalism

Migration of people from China to Hong Kong has been unrestricted until quite recently. The 1930s and 40s was a period when many journalists moved from China to Hong Kong (Chan, 1988). Tight restriction on migration was introduced in 1980 when the Hong Kong Government abolished the "touch-base policy," which had previously allowed those Chinese migrants who made their way to the urban areas of Hong Kong to stay. A quota of legal migration set at 75 per day was introduced. The quota has since been increased to 150 per day.

Control over the influx of people from mainland China to Hong Kong was accompanied by the growth of the Hong Kong-born population, which since 1971 has exceeded half of the total of Hong Kong's population. The increasingly large proportion of indigenous population provided an environment for the development of a Hong Kong culture, one notable aspect of which is its distinctive vocabulary. Journalists who grow up in Hong Kong not only bear witness to this culture, but an increasing number of them are educated in journalism guided by an American liberal model (Chan, Lee, & Lee, 1996). In a way, these journalists share with their predecessors who migrated from China decades ago certain journalistic values, as journalism practised in China before 1949 was heavily influenced by the West in general and by the U.S. in particular (Li, 1981; Gu, 1992). Hong Kong journalism has marked itself off from mainland Chinese journalism in contrast to the latter, which modeled itself on the Soviet socialist model after 1949.

Recent Immigrant Journalists from China

Since China's adoption of the Open Door Policy in 1978, news on China gradually became one of the staples of the Hong Kong news media in the early 1980s. China desks began to be set up. In the past few years, noticeably more mainland Chinese people have been available and working in the Hong Kong press as journalists. They concentrate on the China desks, where they use their home connections to their advantage. Like their Hong Kong colleagues on the China desk, they are based in Hong Kong and make occasional reporting trips to China. At other times, they do interviews over the telephone. The majority of China news in the Hong Kong press, however, is sourced from the mainland Chinese press and news wire services.
The China desks of many Chinese-language newspapers in Hong Kong are now headed by new immigrants from China. One of the study's interviewees, who heads a China desk, observes that there is not a single China desk in local papers that is entirely staffed by Hong Kong journalists.

Many of this new generation of immigrant journalists are trained in journalism schools in China and worked as journalists before they came to Hong Kong. The mainland Chinese journalism culture they brought with them has posed a challenge to the Hong Kong journalism culture. The mutual influence between the two offers a case for acculturation study in an organizational setting.

**Acculturation in Work: Unstudied Area**

Studies in intercultural contact are plentifully found in a number of disciplines. Generally, a group-level approach has been adopted by anthropologists and sociologists while an individual-level approach has been adopted in social psychology, communication, sociolinguistics, cultural anthropology and psychiatry (Kim, 1988; 1989). The processes involved as a result of the culture contact have been variously called acculturation, adjustment, assimilation, adaptation and integration. Agreement on the concepts behind the range of terms is low and cross-fertilization of studies from different disciplines is lacking (Kim, 1988).

Acculturation was first defined in 1936 as culture change that results from continuous, firsthand contact between two distinct cultural groups (Berry, Kim, & Boski, 1988). The term was adapted by Graves three decades ago to study the individual, referring to those changes in an individual (overt behavior and covert traits) whose cultural group is experiencing acculturation collectively (Berry et al., 1988).

Ward and her colleagues have distinguished two types of acculturation: psychological and sociocultural, the second referring to "the ability to 'fit in' or effectively interact with members of the host culture" (Ward & Kennedy, 1992, pp. 395–6).

Illustrative of the fragmentation in studies on acculturation, immigrants and sojourners have developed separately as two areas of inquiry (Kim, 1988). The sojourner literature consists of a bulk of studies on foreign students in the U.S., and the adjustment of the Peace Corps volunteers and the multinational managers. Studies on immigrants, on the other hand, are concerned with integration of the community into the host society, mostly in the U.S., Canada and Australia (Kim, 1988).

Among the many studies on immigrant acculturation, little has been done on acculturation in work values or practices. Studies on
immigrant work are mostly concerned with its economic aspect (e.g., Chapman & Iredale, 1993; Borjas & Freeman, 1992). Or they are concerned with its impact on the family (e.g., Duleep & Sanders, 1993; Stier & Tienda, 1992). Those which do look at strangers working in an organization abroad are mostly training-oriented catering to managers working overseas (Furnham & Bochner, 1982). Thomas & Ravlin (1995), for example, studied the psychology of employees as response to a foreign manager's adaptation. Network analysis of acculturation, which studies how linkages among a defined set of people could explain the adaptive behavior of the people involved, bears potential to illuminate how the work organization could mediate the stranger and host cultures. Such analyses, unfortunately, are plagued by theoretical and terminological confusion (Weimann, 1989).

Although acculturation of long-term residents (such as immigrants) often involves the minority stranger and the majority host, the result is not necessarily the minority adapting to the majority towards eventual assimilation. Berry (1988) identified assimilation as only one of four adaptive responses, the other three being integration, rejection and marginality. Similarly, Stonequist distinguished three modes of acculturation: (1) assimilation into the dominant group, (2) assimilation into the subordinate group, and (3) some form of accommodation between the two societies (Kim, 1988).

The learning approach has been adapted by Bochner to study the newcomer's social acculturation. Furnham & Bochner (1982) argued that “if the sojourner is to work effectively in the new setting, and lead a relatively stress-free and fulfilling life, the person must acquire the social skills of the host culture” (p. 164). Hull demonstrated in 1978 that inaccurate knowledge has negative consequences for adjustment (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1988). This study is not concerned with the acculturation of social skills, but rather work practices, of the immigrants. Therefore, it is the acquisition of knowledge of Hong Kong's journalistic practices that determines how well acculturated the mainland Chinese journalists can be.

**Exploratory Study**

An exploratory study using interviews was carried out in May 1996 with the following aims:

1) to identify the perceived difference in professional values between the new immigrant Chinese journalists and Hong Kong journalists;

2) to observe the direction of influence of the two journalistic cultures (groups); and
3) to observe the mode of change that results from such influence.

Semi-structured open-ended interviews were conducted with seven journalists who were either working in China desks of Chinese-language newspapers in Hong Kong or had left their jobs within the past six months. They were contacted either through introduction by informants, or further introduction by interviewees. When an interviewee from one group expressed negative perception about the other group in the same news organization, at least one journalist from the other group in that organization was interviewed. Interviewees were not aware of who else was interviewed.

Although the interviewees could not claim to be a representative sample, the seven journalists had worked in a total of nine news organizations in Hong Kong, including those which had the biggest China desks. More interviewees were not selected as observations given during the last interviews repeated those from earlier interviews.

Three of the interviewees were considered Hong Kong journalists and the other four considered Chinese immigrant journalists. Of the three Hong Kong journalists, two — (F) and (G) — were born and educated in Hong Kong. The third, (E), was born in mainland China but educated in Hong Kong after she came to the territory at the age of eight. She identified herself as a Hong Kong person. All were University or college educated, one in journalism. And all started working as journalists after graduation. The four immigrant journalists — (A), (B), (C), and (D) — had all come to Hong Kong after 1990. All are graduates of mainland Chinese Universities majoring in journalism and had worked as journalists in quasi-official news organizations before arriving.

They were interviewed individually and separately, except in the case of two Hong Kong journalists who worked in the same organization who were interviewed together. Interviewees were encouraged to volunteer their observations. No specific aspect of journalistic practice was probed. Three categories of questions were asked:

a) personal experience — of being an immigrant journalist in Hong Kong (for Chinese journalists) or of working with Chinese immigrant journalists (for Hong Kong journalists);

b) observation of the difference between Hong Kong and Chinese immigrant journalists; and

c) experience of change resulting from the difference.
Different Journalistic Practices

Interviewees generally agreed with others from their group about the difference in journalistic practices between the two groups. Perceived differences ranged from writing, reporting, to work ethos.

Language

Despite the common assumption that there exists one standard written Chinese, the use of different terminology in writing was a common observation readily volunteered by all of the interviewees except (D). It is also the author's observation that terms which are not used or even incomprehensible in Hong Kong, but presumably common in China, often appear in reports of China news in Hong Kong.

One immigrant journalist, (A), who came from Jiangxi in 1990 and was deputy to the head of a newspaper's China desk, was noticeably more "localized" than the other immigrant journalists. His speech was sprinkled with some popular Cantonese terms developed in Hong Kong. (A) said he had gone through a traumatic period before he could change to become more like a Hong Kong person. Of the various aspects involved in journalistic work, he described the difference in writing as "the most disturbing" when he first came. He commented, "Many mainland reporters [in Hong Kong] have the problem of writing in a very mainland-Chinese style." Another immigrant journalist, (B), agreed: "The first problem for those who came [from China] is the difference in expression in the language." (C), who had his journalism education in Guangdong and had worked as a journalist there for two years, also said the difference in the language of writing is the greatest problem:

The style is different. . . . The articles written by those who recently came have many jargons — There are too many new idioms in China. . . . We have to cater for the Hong Kong readership when we write for them. . . . There are many figures [in the expressions used] in mainland China. . . .

Writing Approach

Another difference in writing which was perceived by nearly all of the
two groups of journalists, but one, on which each criticized the other group, was the approach in writing. Chinese immigrant journalists criticized the objective writing of Hong Kong journalists while Hong Kong journalists criticized their immigrant colleagues of reporting their own interpretation as fact.

(C), who headed a newspaper’s China desk, was in agreement with (B) that news writing in China allows room for analysis, which was lacking in Hong Kong. He said:

News and features are not clearly defined in China. News could also have many adjectives, adverbs and opinions. These are not acceptable in Hong Kong. In Hong Kong news is news and opinion is opinion. . . . Hong Kong newspapers tend to “count the bowls and plates.” Our Hong Kong colleagues tend to lack the ability to summarize or analyze. When something big breaks, you give them a load of material to summarize to do a review piece, their shortcoming is revealed.

(B) said:

I think the mainlanders brought analytical writing. They provide more background information, are more analytical. Their writing style is slightly more subjective. . . . Some news reporting here does not allow putting one’s opinion in, but in China it is allowed. I think my judgment should be put in if it is correct and objective. . . . You must have [your own] judgment in reporting politics.

The two Hong Kong journalists who were interviewed together, (F) and (G), on the other hand, criticized their immigrant colleagues of drawing deductions and connections between events. (F) recalled one experience: “I was told [by my immigrant boss] not to write 70% when I’m given 100%, but to write it as 100% when I’m given 70%. My question is: ‘Why can’t I write 70% when I am given 70%?’”

(A) further remarked that Hong Kong journalists tend to simplify the causes and effects of events in writing news:
Hong Kong reporters tend to dramatize news — to turn it into stories. That makes the news more interesting. Now I would write it that way. . . . But China news in fact is not like that. China is so big, there is not a single reason which makes an event. . . .

The different writing approaches in fact reflect a difference in the two groups' perceived role of reporting. It is a clash in values between objective reporting upheld by the Hong Kong journalists and interpretive reporting cherished by the Chinese immigrant journalists. The different values are reflected in the Hong Kong journalists’ emphasis on writing “newsy” leads for stories — a point which only one of the immigrant journalists, (A), mentioned.

**Story Structure**

If reporting is meant to impart objective information, the logical arrangement in writing is to present the most important information clearly and early. The three Hong Kong journalists all agreed that their immigrant counterparts did not structure their news stories as well as they should. (A) is the only immigrant journalist interviewed who identified story structure as a difference between the two groups: “Mainland reporters may first write 200 words of background information before they say anything. Hong Kong reporters cannot do that. They have to put the sharpest point in the lead.”

The Hong Kong journalist who came when she was eight, (E), commented: “Hong Kong people take the lead very seriously, but they [mainland journalists] may not state clearly what the story is in the lead. Important information is sometimes put at the end or in the middle. Or maybe they think the information in the front is also important.” (G) and (F) both implied that their immigrant colleagues were not as competent as they in writing. (G) said, “They [immigrant journalists] may write a long paragraph which starts with ‘Months ago. . . .’ as the lead [of a story].”

The fact that story structure was not mentioned by the other immigrant journalists as a difference between the two groups probably reflects that it was not something they were aware of or considered important.
News Judgment

All immigrant journalists except (D) agreed that they had a different judgment from Hong Kong journalists on what made news. A mutual lack of understanding is one explanation given for the difference. (A) said half-jokingly, "There are too many things that Hong Kong people don’t know. Reporting China news for them is very easy: You go to China and just write up everything that you [Hong Kong reporters] don’t know. . . . But I would marvel: ‘That is news?!’" He summed up the difference as follows:

Mainland Chinese reporters use mainland Chinese common sense to make a judgment; Hong Kong reporters use Hong Kong common sense to make judgment. But their common senses are different. For example, several of us went to report the flood in Southern China. The water had gone down, the follow-up question was of course: "How will the Government relieve the situation?" Hong Kong reporters were saying: "What’s wrong? Food isn’t coming." But some mainland reporters in China estimated that food wouldn’t come yet. They understood that it had to wait for direction from the top, together with delivery arrangement, it would take 3 to 4 days. It would be considered a problem only if food wasn’t coming after 3 or 4 days. That is what mainland China always calls "national circumstances."

(C) gave a vivid illustration of the different news judgments of the two groups: "For example the telephone number in Guangzhou rose to 8 digits. The mainland angle is the fast development of the city’s telephone system, the increase in the system’s capacity, the new equipment introduced and the investment made." The Hong Kong angle is: "How to dial after the change? Will it be easier or cheaper to install telephones?" He commented that the difference in story angles arose from distortion in the news sense of the mainland journalists under the Communist system. He accepted that news should cater to the readers. And as he knew Hong Kong better, he could adjust to the readers’ interests.
(B), however, seemed to harbor his independent judgment of what made news, rather than accepting readers' interest as the yardstick: “Things I consider very important they [Hong Kong journalists] would consider unimportant. For example, the Legislative Council is scrutinizing a Bill. I’d look at the implication of the Bill. They’d look at the difference in opinion of different legislators.”

The Hong Kong journalists all agreed that their immigrant colleagues often came up with unnewsworthy stories. Two were even suspicious of their colleagues purposively faking news to achieve certain political motives, and remarked that their colleagues' news angles were like official [Chinese] ones.

**Relationship with Sources**

The Chinese immigrant journalists said they relied on people they knew in China as their news sources. Except (D), all immigrant journalists raised protection of their news sources as a special concern they had, that marked them apart from their Hong Kong counterparts. It was also cited by (A) as a reason which sometimes contributed to the difference in story structures:

> Sometimes we have to write indirectly to protect our sources. For example I am writing a story about [the Chinese Vice-Premier] Zhu Rongzhi. There are only a few people who know of it. I'd expose my source if I write the story, so I wouldn't write it. I'd write another story but somehow sneak the information in. . . . We wouldn't write more than 70 to 80% of what we know.

It is not uncommon to find China news stories in Hong Kong papers written without bylines or quoting sources. The Hong Kong journalists criticized the immigrant journalists for sacrificing their journalistic credibility in not naming their sources or using bylines. (F) said, “I can understand you not using your real name [in the byline] if you’ve got some confidential information. But they would not use their real names even when they are summarizing wire stories, something which is not sensitive at all.” (G) reported: “They blatantly said they wouldn’t use their names when they write something negative, but can use their names when they write something positive.” Both (F) and (G)
said their immigrant colleagues would not quote the sources either when they lifted stories from the mainland Chinese press. (E) remarked that non-attribution is a common practice in China.

**Fact Checking**

All three Hong Kong journalists stressed the importance to at least try to confirm the stories they lifted from the Chinese press but they were doubtful that their Chinese colleagues did the same. (E) said, “They would even use stories which are incomplete. . . . I hear there is a lot of fake news in mainland China; we should be more careful when we lift stories from mainland Chinese papers.” (F) and (G) blamed their immigrant colleagues for stories which were later found to be false.

**Work Ethos**

Stress arising from the demand to perform is a common experience of immigrant journalists. The immigrant journalists were speaking in a way which seemed to suggest that was a thing of the past. But their Hong Kong counterparts were still negative about the immigrant journalists’ not working hard enough to do their job well. On this point (D), who provided little information during the interview, did observe a difference between the two groups: “Before [in China], everything was arranged. The interviewee was very nice and would receive you very warmly. Sometimes the story was written for you or they gave you a lot of material. In Hong Kong I have to dig up material to report. . . . There is much more pressure here.” But (F) and (G), who worked in the same organization as (D), said, “They would let things pass without trying hard to do good stories.”

There is some agreement between the two groups that Hong Kong journalists persevere more. (E) said, “In the face of obstacles in reporting, they [immigrant reporters] tend not to fight. Hong Kong people would not keep quiet when they have obtained reporting permits but are prevented from reporting.” (C) agreed; “Immigrant journalists too make phone calls and chase up stories. But they are more inclined to give up when there are obstacles.”
Influence and Change

In the organization where (F) and (G), and (D) worked, the China desk was headed by a Chinese immigrant who had been in Hong Kong for more than 10 years. (F) and (G) remarked that she worked quite like a Hong Kong person. It was the deputy head of the desk, who became very influential, with whom (F) and (G) had the most clashes. (E), who worked under (C) in another paper, commented that of the immigrant journalists who came in the last few years, there were "one or two" — she meant the head and deputy head of the desk — who had good news sense of what readers were interested in. Such observations seem to suggest that some immigrant journalists do rid themselves of at least certain journalistic practices observed of immigrant journalists.

This would accord with the subjective experience of the immigrant journalists, who all saw a change in their ways. However, if change depends on learning the way of the Hong Kong journalists, then the prerequisite of change in some particular aspect would be the identification of difference between the two groups in that aspect. The fact that three of the four immigrant journalists did not mention story structure as a difference between the two groups probably means those three would not change in the way they structure their stories. Changes would be expected in the most identified aspects of differences. Indeed, the changes that were most reported were in the use of terminology and news judgment.

Although (C) headed the China desk, he had to report to several levels of superiors. And it was the feedback from his superiors that he said had helped him change: "Many people in the company oversee the China desk . . . . There is a mechanism that helps localize Chinese reporters. . . . You take the China page to the Chief Editor every night. You get criticized if there are jargons. That'll change you." In Hong Kong, chief editors are all Hong Kong people except in the mainland China-sponsored papers. They were bound to demand change, he said. Similarly, (A) said he learned through painful lessons from his superior: "I was very hurt when a good story I wrote was chopped into 3 pieces and marked all over . . . . Gradually I adjusted . . . ."

Feedback from superiors may not be a valid mechanism of acculturation for new immigrants who work in organizations heavily staffed by recent immigrants, or sponsored by Chinese organizations. (A), for example, worked in the China desk of an organization
completely staffed by immigrants when he first arrived. He said during the two-and-a-half-years of working there, he did not speak a word of Cantonese and therefore did not change the language of writing. But he did pick up some clues for structuring stories from his desk head who had been in Hong Kong for many years. The other source of feedback that he mentioned was from readers. (A) said, "The readers often called to complain. They asked what on earth we were writing about." They could not understand the terms the journalists used.

(D), who worked with a mainland China-sponsored paper when he first came, said he only felt some difference in the selection of stories between newspapers in Hong Kong and in China when he left that paper. He said the mainland-sponsored paper reported news like papers in China, putting "emphasis on the official angle." (D), however, stressed that he worked according to the instructions of the desk head and therefore did not see himself any different from his Hong Kong colleagues.

Interestingly, none of the three Hong Kong journalists felt that their practices had any direct influence on their immigrant colleagues. In fact (F) and (G) recounted many incidents where they argued with their deputy desk head, who came from China not long ago, about the ways things should be done. This in itself is confirmation of the perseverance they observed in Hong Kong journalists in getting news reported as they saw appropriate. In one case, (G) disagreed with the desk head and argued all the way up to the chief editor of the paper, who eventually ruled in favor of the desk head. Instead of mending his way, (G) took his story to a rival paper and published it there. None of the Hong Kong journalists was in a position in-charge, but none felt that they had been changed by their immigrant colleagues. This could be explained by the fact that the Hong Kong journalists judged their immigrant colleagues' practices negatively. And if that is the reason, it would imply learning would not take place where a negative attitude is involved.

On the other hand, their immigrant colleagues all reported they had changed in their pace of work. But "the pressure [to work hard] does not always come from the boss. It is the way my [Hong Kong] colleagues around me work that unsettles me," (C) said. This suggests that learning by observing one's colleagues is one of the means of acculturation.

Working with their colleagues, however, was not cited by any interviewee as a source of influence. (F) and (G) said although work meetings were held among their desks, the atmosphere was "like political
meetings in China.” There was no discussion of how the news agenda was planned, how stories were handled. The meetings, according to (F), were the desk head’s monologue of criticism or encouragement in the most abstract terms. In (E)’s organization, there was no work meeting and therefore no institutionalized channel for experiences to be shared among journalists, apart from the gatekeeping line.

Contact with Hong Kong society in general and the news media in particular is another important source of influence of change. Those who decided that they would like to change said they learned a lot by reading what others wrote and observing others. But they were unspecific as to how the process took place.

Not all immigrant journalists saw merit in changing all their ways. (C), for example, commented that readers might expect a different writing style from China news. People who knew China well, he thought, would consider the China page of a paper more authoritative if mainland Chinese jargon terms were used. He referred to two popular papers to support his view, saying that though proprietors of those papers were keen to stay close to their readers, the writing of their China pages was still not very “Hong Kong.” He also pointed out that Hong Kong readers had gradually accepted some mainland terms so there should be a convergence on the use of the language. As for the writing approach, no mention was made by any of the immigrant journalists that they had changed. This seems to suggest that when a certain practice is valued, such as analytic writing which they considered superior to the objective writing of Hong Kong journalists, no learning would take place and in consequence, nor did any changes in practice.

**Limitation of the Study**

The data presented above can only tap the views of those journalists who agreed to be interviewed. One immigrant journalist, (D), could be considered an exception within the group. While other immigrant journalists agreed readily to meet and be interviewed, he only agreed to an interview on the phone after much persuasion. Unlike the others, he offered little observation on the differences between Hong Kong and immigrant journalists, but stressed their similarities. It is likely that immigrants like (D), who are either less sensitive to the differences, or less willing to share their experiences with others, may show a pattern of acculturation different from those who readily agreed to be interviewed.
Some of the practices suggested by the Hong Kong journalists, such as non-attribution of sources, is also observed in Hong Kong news from time to time. It is possible that the Hong Kong journalists interviewed happened to adhere strictly to attribution that they magnify the difference as a characteristic of immigrant journalists.

None of the Hong Kong interviewees was in a position in-charge. Thus no observation was available from them on how immigrant journalists were influenced through the exercise of formal authority. This inadequacy, however, is remedied by the fact that the superiors of the immigrant China desk heads were Hong Kong people. And the immigrant journalists were able to report from their end the influence they came under.

In the organizations where the Hong Kong journalists worked, work meetings where stories were debated and reporting plans discussed were either never held, or they were dismissed as “political meetings.” Where an institutionalized network of sharing of experiences between journalists does not exist, acculturation is expected to rely only on the formal hierarchical communication between the superior and the subordinate, and the informal friendship between individuals. The acculturation effect arising from a regular interflow of ideas among colleagues was therefore uncharted in this study.

While readers’ feedback is a factor which changes the mode of acculturation, the composition of the readers, of what they expect from the paper, is another factor. The case where readers called to give feedback to (A) happened to be a serious paper whose readers did not accept mainland Chinese jargon. It is conceivable that for papers whose readership comprises a large proportion of recent immigrants, the readers may be comfortable with the Chinese jargon. In that case, readers’ feedback may suggest journalists write in less a Hong Kong way.

The influx of the new generation of immigrant journalists in large numbers to Hong Kong is relatively recent. Whether it means the journalistic cultures of the China desks are still volatile or they have started to stabilize is a question that deserves further investigation. Within such a perspective, the data that emerged from the interviews highlight the following factors which influence the direction and result of acculturation of the two groups of journalists.
Work Organization Factors

Gatekeeping System in News Organizations

Since at the moment newspapers in Hong Kong are mostly headed by Hong Kong people, the more strictly they supervise the China desk and the more they demand the China desk to follow the Hong Kong practices, the more likely the culture change would be towards the Hong Kong direction. But the effect of their supervision would be restricted to those practices which are manifested in the news presentation, such as writing, news judgment and source attribution. Other practices in reporting can evade the knowledge of the people above.

Within the desk itself, the more strictly the head of the China desk supervises the staff, the more likely that the practices of the head will dominate.

Relative Formal Power of New Immigrants and Host Journalists

Whether it is the immigrant journalists or the host journalists who occupy gatekeeping positions will influence which of the two sets of practices prevails. It is likely that if more new immigrants occupy high positions, then more mainland Chinese practices will continue.

Personnel Composition in the China Desk

If a China desk is dominated by immigrant journalists, it is more likely that a new immigrant entrant would perpetuate the immigrant journalists’ practices.

Mechanism of Idea-Sharing

If meetings are held frequently where Hong Kong journalists and immigrant journalists can discuss their work, it is more likely that the two groups will influence each other. The direction of change is determined by a combination of relative formal power and informal power relationships.
Informal Links

Informal links reinforce or supplement the mutual influence of the two groups fostered by institutional means. If immigrant journalists have good social relationships with Hong Kong journalists, either of the China desk or of other desks of the organization, it is more likely that the two groups will influence each other.

Individual Factors

Commitment to Value

If the immigrant journalist or Hong Kong journalist is highly committed to a value she holds, it is less likely that she would change that value. Conversely, if the commitment to a value is low, change on that value is more likely. The acceptance of a reader-orientation in news judgment is an example of low commitment to the immigrant journalist’s original value of news judgment.

A special case of commitment to one’s value can become a resistant factor if some journalist is indeed motivated by factors other than being a journalist. Political motives behind news selection, for example, can work as a resistant factor against change in news judgment.

Perception of Role

If the new immigrant perceives her role as fundamentally different from Hong Kong journalists, it is more likely that she would sustain her practices. The continued use of mainland jargon terms is an example.

Links with the Larger Host Society

If the new immigrant journalist has more contact with the practices of other news media, either through socializing with Hong Kong journalists or reading news reports produced by other organizations, it is more likely that she will learn more practices of Hong Kong journalism. If the immigrant has more contact with members of the host society in general, it is more likely that she learns the terminology commonly used in Hong Kong.
Attitude to Host Society

If the new immigrant holds a positive attitude towards the culture of the host society in general, it is more likely that more practices of the host society will be accepted and learned.

Macro-Environment Factors

Readers’ Interest

Except those financed by mainland China, newspapers in Hong Kong are run commercially. They cater their product to the interests and tastes of the readers. It is a common observation that the trend of readers’ interest in Hong Kong is towards dramatic or human stories. This has been reflected in the rise in reportage of such stories, particularly in Southern China. Such a trend may open up more chances of employment for Hong Kong journalists, who have perseverance as their advantage. This could change the composition of future China desks.

Immigrant journalists, of course, enjoy other advantages in covering human stories since their appearance and language camouflage them better when they travel in China.

Readers’ Background

Those newspaper readers who are themselves immigrants from China are used to the way of writing and reporting stories in mainland China. If the proportion of readership of a paper is high on immigrants, which may be expected of popular newspapers, it is more likely that mainland Chinese practices are maintained — assuming that the mechanism exists for the news organizations to identify their readers’ habits.

Significance of Study

This exploratory study, which focuses on the China desk, succeeds in identifying a host of factors worthy of attention in the investigation of acculturation of Chinese immigrant journalists in Hong Kong in general. Knowledge of the conditions, processes and mode of such acculturation would inform media managers of the strategies required for certain results. Taking migration as a source of change to the Hong Kong
journalistic culture, this study opens up a dimension for understanding the feasibility of the “One country, two systems” arrangement for Hong Kong.

References


