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# The Effect of self-censorship on news credibility: public's perception of Hong Kong newspapers after the 1997 Handover

Yuwei Sun  
*Iowa State University*

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**The Effect of self-censorship on news credibility:  
public's perception of Hong Kong newspapers after the 1997 Handover**

by

**Yuwei Sun**

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Journalism and Mass Communication

Program of Study Committee:  
Raluca Cozma, Major Professor  
Daniela V. Dimitrova  
Mack Shelley

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

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**ABSTRACT**

Since the 1997 handover when Hong Kong became a special administration of China, scholars have expressed concern over a perceived decline in freedom and credibility of once a vibrant media system. This survey study builds on previous scholarship that documents a growing rate of self-censorship in Hong Kong newsrooms. The results indicate that Hong Kong citizens are aware of this phenomenon and that they trust newspapers less than they did before 1997. Regression analyses find that perceptions of self-censorship, attitudes toward China, and attitudes toward media in general, as well as demographic characteristics, are related to this decline in newspaper credibility.

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It has been 17 years since the administration of Hong Kong has been returned to China in 1997 after being a colony of Great Britain for one and a half centuries. Hong Kong is now one of the two special administration regions of China, governed under the principle of “one country, two systems,” which bestows on the territory a high degree of political autonomy. The “one country, two systems” policy states that Hong Kong is part of China, but its capitalist system and lifestyle shall remain unchanged for the next 50 years. The Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Hong Kong’s constitutional document, clearly stipulates that the territory “has a high degree of autonomy and enjoys executive, legislative and independent judicial power, including that of final adjudication” (Basic Law, Article 2, 1997, p3).

Such a framework is important for Hong Kong to retain its distinct identity and strengths as an international financial, shipping and aviation center. But things have changed in many realms during the past 17 years, including that of the mass media, one of Hong Kong’s most dynamic and core industries.

Hong Kong’s media system has long been praised for being free and for its diversity. Protected by the Bill of Rights and the Basic Law, freedom of the press guarantees the unfettered flow of information to and from its highly commercialized and privately owned media outlets. Because of its healthy and vibrant media environment, Hong Kong is home to many of the world’s biggest media players, such as the Asia headquarters of the Associated Press and the *Asia Wall Street Journal*.

Many have observed, however, that press freedom has declined with the development of closer economic and political ties with Mainland China after the 1997 handover. As early as

1995, scholars have warned that the media system has been increasingly suppressed (Lee & Chu, 1995). Once considered editorially dynamic, the quality and quantity of news reports are said to have considerably diminished.

Before 1997, there were about 20 major newspapers in Hong Kong; As of 2013, this number is down to eight (Lee & Lin 2006). With four television and three radio stations, the media market still remains competitive.

What is more noticeable, according to Guo et al. (2010), is the prominent slant toward reports that are favorable to the Chinese central government. This may be due to the fact that many media organizations are owned by business tycoons or corporations with strong ties to China (Fung, 2007). Several media owners are current or former members of the National People's Congress, China's parliament. Many have significant business connections in the mainland. Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that news stories reflect mostly the interests of the dominant class. Even those that do not receive direct funding from Chinese businesses choose to stay away from stories that may cast the mainland in a negative light (Lee & Chen, 2009).

Thus, self-censorship is now common in the newsrooms of Hong Kong. Self-censorship, as defined by Lee and Chen (2009), refers to “non-externally compelled acts committed by media organizations aiming to avoid offending power holders such as the government, advertisers, and major business corporations” (p. 113). It constitutes a major threat to press freedom.

According to a survey done by the Hong Kong Journalists Association in 2007, 58% of the journalists that constituted the sample reported that press freedom had declined since the handover. Among those who thought things had gotten worse, 72% said self-censorship was the

biggest culprit. Some 30% of the reporters polled said they had practiced self-censorship in the last year; another 40% said they knew of a colleague who had.

Media critic Zhang Tao (2006) says that more and more self-censorship happens in Hong Kong because some media outlets have been acquired by big businesses with economic ties with China. Thus, they now serve their owners' interests instead of functioning as advocates for the general public's concerns. Because the electronic media are allowed to broadcast in mainland China, and magazines and newspapers can be sold in subscription form in the mainland, media owners are thus taking advantages of the big mainland market. Organizations that are not subject to control and self-censorship are not allowed to send reporters to gather news in the mainland. Self-censorship is also driven by known acts of intimidation, arrest and imprisonment imposed on offending reporters, practices that produce a chilling effect.

Senior editorial staff members have also been offered incentives to exercise self-censorship. It is reported that some make as high as HK\$5 million (about 700,000 USD) per year for their efforts (Zhang, 2006). Others are offered managerial or executive positions. This is on top of the practice of hiring journalists with Chinese background to control the editorial direction. Because they supposedly know how to read the intensions of China, they are able to establish better relationships with the mainland. Self-censorship has also been bolstered by the reduced right of reporting by accorded to frontline reporters (Zhang, 2006). Lee and Chen (2009) add that self-censorship is enhanced by selective positioning and assignment, the observational learning of tacit rules, the giving of ambiguous orders, and the use of professional or technical reasons to justify questionable news decisions.

Second only to Japan in terms of the press freedom index assigned by Freedom House in the past, Hong Kong's ranking has continuously declined over the past five years. Now it is

ranked fourth in Asia, after Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. In 2011, Freedom House reduced Hong Kong's press status to "partly free," noting that in the territory, "political and economic pressures narrow the space for free expression" and stressing that "increasing media self-censorship poses a serious threat to free expression in this Chinese Special Administration Region."

Self-censorship inevitably downgrades the credibility audiences ascribe to media reports. The lack of credibility is a serious concern considering that people rely on the press to be informed about the issues that affect their lives. Guo et al. (2010) argue that "local residents in Hong Kong share a strong faith in the community press in terms of diversity, autonomy, and freedom, particularly when cast in comparison with its mainland counterparts" (p.2). People tend to view the media favorably if they "carry out the watchdog function and keep the public interest at heart" (p.2). As the media lose their vigor in taking on their role as the conduit between the decision makers and the people, the eroding credibility of the Hong Kong press becomes a matter of grave concern.

This study explores whether self-censorship has affected the public's perception of news credibility after the 1997 handover. The focus will be on newspapers because the print media remain the one of the most popular medium in Hong Kong. Specifically, the study asks: Is the public aware that self-censorship is happening in the newsrooms? What kind of factors could also affect the credibility rating of the newspaper? To what extent do they still consider newspapers as credible sources of news?

Answering these questions will help establish the level of satisfaction, trust and confidence readers still hold today about Hong Kong newspapers. By asking respondents to compare news credibility before and after 1997, one can provide an audience assessment of the

state of media affairs over time. Thus, the general public can benefit from the study by knowing whether their newspapers are still performing the duties and responsibilities of the mass media that are expected of the press in a modern society.

## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The main focus of this study is to determine public perception of newspaper credibility after Hong Kong's 1997 handover given the fact that self-censorship is already widely adopted in the newsroom, as many scholars and media practitioners report (Cheung, 2003; Fung 2007; Lee 1998; Lee & Chan, 2008; So & Chan, 2007). This study aims to assess public's awareness of self-censorship and whether the public recognizes the problem as a threat to news integrity. Lastly, the intervening influence of various attitudes on public assessment of newspaper credibility is also discussed in this study. This chapter reviews the literature on media credibility and the problem of self-censorship in Hong Kong. Hong Kong people's attitudes toward media, mainland China and politics are also included in this chapter as those may have a bearing on newspapers' credibility assessment. The study's hypotheses and research question are listed in the final section of this chapter.

#### **The definition and problem of credibility**

*Credibility and trust are the core of journalism. Nothing is more valued.*

*Miller & Kurpius (2010)*

News credibility has long been considered as the most important value for media organizations. Since the time of Aristotle, who provided remarkable insights into the message credibility process, it has been argued that the success of persuasion depends both on the *ethos* (ethic) and *logos* (message itself). As more people consume mass media as their main source of information, the media should maintain their credibility and trust of what they offer to the general public. The value of a news organization hinges on its credibility, a concept that

circumscribes the journalistic values of accuracy and objectivity, the fundamental tenets of the journalistic profession. As George (2007) puts it, “without credibility, media will wither” (p. 898).

News credibility can be briefly defined as the perception of a news channel’s believability (Bucy, 2003). Various researches on news credibility can be dated back as early as the 1950s (Hovland, 1951; Hovland & Weis, 1953). Early credibility studies focused on source credibility. Hovland and Weis (1953) did an experiment to determine what combinations of communicator qualities would lead to attitude change in participants. They hence identified two dimensions of source credibility: trustworthiness and source expertise. Later in 1964, Westley and Severin analyzed channel credibility across major U.S. media outlets. Kiouisis (2001) did a comprehensive summary of the previous news media credibility studies and divided the study of news credibility into two principal domains: source credibility and medium credibility. Source credibility studies examine the contexts and content of the news, while medium-centered credibility studies focus on the channel through which content is delivered. The present study falls under the latter category.

The credibility of media has been constantly dropping in the recent decades (Oyedeji, 2010; Pew, 2001, 2010, 2012). Almost all news credibility studies conducted in various countries during the past two decades indicate a credibility deficit regardless of the medium, organization, or press system (Andaleed et al., 2012; Shan 2013; Shen et al., 2011). For example, in Nepal, the government-owned media maintain their silence over sensitive topics, and the private media agonized over how to cover the news, causing the decline of media credibility (Hutt, 2006). The same situation happened in China as well. As Shan (2013) noted in her study, young people’s perception of news credibility of traditional media, especially state-owned newspapers, has fallen

significantly since the emergence of the micro-blog in 2008. Idid and Wok (2012) revealed that the credibility of newspapers and TV among both Malay and Chinese in Malaysia has been declining. The credibility on the newspaper was recorded at 83% and on TV at 82% in 2008 but dropped to 77% and 80% in 2012. In the Eurobarometer survey conducted in 2011 within the European Union shown that 53% of respondents indicated that they were not to trust the press and another 45% said they had no trust of television.

According to the Pew Research Center (2012), the believability ratings for major news organizations in the United States have suffered broad-based declines as well. In the year of 2012, Pew Research Center found that positive believability ratings have fallen significantly. The average positive believability rating was 56% in 2012, compared to 62% in 2010. Pew Research Center reported: “the public continues to express skepticism about what they see, hear and read in the media. No major news outlet—whether broadcast or cable, print or online—stands out as particularly credible” (p.12). Maier (2005) found that trust in the U.S. news media has been eroding for at least two decades with the proportion of those who believe what they read in their daily newspaper down from 80% in 1985 to 59% in 2003.

### **News credibility measurements**

Scholars have proposed several dimensions of the news credibility construct. They have utilized a variety of measurements in their quest to gauge media credibility. However, there is little agreement on how to create a scale to best measure media credibility (Kohring & Matthes, 2007). Despite the diversity of scales, the various scale items that scholars employ are highly similar and measure the same underlying dimensions.

Most researchers use a multidimensional approach to gauge media credibility (Gaziano

& McGrath, 1986; Infante, 1980; Meyer, 1988; Sundar 1996;). Meyer (1974) suggested that credibility is a multidimensional concept that may be measured by multidimensional measurement. Infante (1980) developed three dimensions to measure source credibility, consisting of trustworthiness, expertise, and dynamism. Trustworthiness was operationalized as honest-dishonest, trustworthy-untrustworthy, and sincere-insincere. Expertise was described as skilled-unskilled, qualified-unqualified, and informed-uninformed. For dynamism, he used bold-timid, active-passive, and aggressive-meeek. Rimmer and Weaver (1987) included 12 items in their credibility measurement. They were trustworthiness, fairness, bias, completeness, respect for privacy, representation of individual interests, accuracy, concern for community well-being, separation of fact and opinion, concern for public interest, factual foundations of information published, and qualifications of reporters. Johnson and Kaye (1998, 2000) employed believability, fairness, accuracy, and depth of information in their study to assess news credibility. Sundar (1996) included accuracy, objectivity, bias, fairness and also added sensationalism in his explication of the concept. Abdulla et al. (2002) included currency, timeliness and being up-to-date as measures of news credibility.

Perhaps the most popular measurement comes from the Gaziano and McGrath's research in 1986. They developed a 12-item additive news credibility index that includes objective, accuracy, the absence of bias, and fairness, later found that credibility had more to do with perceived fairness, lack of bias, fairness, and good faith.

This study will employ the measurements suggested by Gaziano and McGrath (1986) since they are the most commonly used measurements when dealing with news credibility assessment.

### **Factors influencing news credibility**

The factors that affect news credibility can be examined from two aspects: one from the audience perspective and another from the media practitioners' perspective.

The American Society of Newspaper Editors, conducting a survey in 1985, found a gap in news credibility perceptions between the public and media professionals. The general public viewed press practices as trampling the rights of ordinary citizens and highly invasive of privacy, while media practitioners saw those behaviors as essential to watchdog journalism. The survey detected a lack of respect for the media as institutions and perceptions of political bias in the media. Simply put, trust in news is lower among people who believe the news media are manipulated by powerful groups. Kiouisis (1999) found news credibility perceptions to be influenced by media use and interpersonal discussion of news. He found general skepticism about news, but people rated newspapers as more credible than online news or television. Storud and Lee (2013)'s study found that media credibility is positively related to media exposure. The more often people watch a channel, the more people rate that channel as credible. Another study found that people who trust the news media overall are more likely to use mainstream sources such as network news and newspapers (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003).

Political involvement seems to be another factor that influences audience's perception of media credibility. Gunther (1992) posits that involvement with civic events is a predictor of explaining how people make media credibility judgments. He showed membership in political, religious or other social groups is associated with credibility assessments. To be more specific, if a person identifies with a particular political group, he or she will be significantly more likely to have an unpleasant attitude toward the media. Also, Aarts and Semetko (2003) found a relationship between levels of political engagement and attention to the news media. In their

study, they revealed that audience's political efficacy and political involvement and media consumption are positively related but political involvement and media credibility assessment are somehow negatively related. There is evidence that when audiences have strong opinions over some civic discussion or have a strong sense of belonging towards a particular political group, they are more likely to hold a negative view on news media coverage (Guther et al., 2001; Schmitt et al., 2004).

Storud and Lee (2013) also found that political knowledge and political affiliation could help explain people's impressions of media. They argued that, in the United States, liberal Democrats were more likely than conservative Republicans to find neither major TV networks, including CNN, Fox News and NBC, particularly credible. Compared to Democrats, Republican seem have more faith in media, in Jones' study, nearly 40% of the republican and republican-leaning independents trusted that the media to be fair and balance, while the number is only 16.5% among the Democrats. (Jones, 2004)

Demographics are also an important factor to determine media credibility. Various studies have noted that certain demographic variables, such as age and education, have a strong impact on credibility assessment (Bucy 2003; Mulder, 1981; Westly & Severin, 1964). In general, older, more educated audiences tend to be the most critical of media, while younger, less educated news consumers are more likely to be accepting of news coverage and to evaluate the media as credible. In terms of gender, it was found that male, especially older male, were more likely to be cynical towards media (Mulder, 1981). Income is also an indicator of news credibility ratings; people with high levels of income tend to rate media as less credible (Robinson & Kohut, 1998).

Media-based factors affect media credibility as well. The most attributed one is the quality of the news (Andaleed et al., 2012; Maier 2005; Fischer et al., 2005). The content and quality of the news could largely affect people's perception on news credibility. For example, Maier (2005) found a strong association between the errors spotted in the news and news credibility. He concluded that errors, to a large extent, diminished respect for newspapers. Fischer et al. (2005) also draw the same conclusion that people tend to select news outlets they perceive to offer high quality in reporting. Andaleed et al. (2012) in their study on credibility of news in Bangladesh reached the same conclusion that the presentation of news, including image quality and news reporting techniques, were important elements influencing news credibility.

In fact, Andaleed et al. (2012) summarized five media-based factors that possibly influence the credibility of news: they were independence of the news; social role of news; objectivity of the news; source expertise; and the quality of the news. Independence of the news, as they explained, means that the media should be free from government control in order to gain more freedom of speech to encourage public discourse on civic issues. The social role of news entailed the media shall fulfill their responsibility to promote social development, and the media's failure to do so would result in credibility deficits. Objectivity of the news was defined as news content that should be accurate, fair and objective. The authors mentioned that the more objective the reporting, the more credible the news would be to the audience. In terms of source expertise, the sources rated high in expertise correlated with the greatest perceived trustworthiness among message recipients. George (2007) in his study also revealed that dependence on government and political sources would lead to greater perceived credibility of news.

Media-based factors also include management changes, mainly referring to the increased conglomeration of the media industry (Bagdikian, 1997; Hickey, 2003). Scholars argued that the more concentrated the media outlets are, the less credible they would be perceived by the public. Government censorship and self-censorship (Cheung, 2003) are another vital factor affecting media credibility. Simply put, the more censored the news, the less credibility they would have.

This study draws on literature on both the audience-centric and media-based factors that influence credibility, and looks at the extent to which factors could affect news credibility. These factors include attitudes towards Hong Kong media, attitudes towards China, political involvement and self-censorship among the media. The following pages review the literature on these predictors of credibility perceptions, allowing for elaboration of hypotheses at the end of the chapter.

### **The definition and problem of self-censorship**

A central concept explored in this study is audiences' awareness of self-censorship in the media.

In cases of self-censorship, one party is both the censor and the one being censored (Horton, 2011). Scholars have offered different definitions of the term. To Horton (2011), self-censorship means "internal constraints" (p. 95) that prevent media organizations from publishing news that conflicts with the ideology the organization espouses. Cheung (2003) describes it as "the self who volunteers to be silent." Lee uses more operational language, (1998) defining self-censorship as "a set of editorial actions ranging from omission, dilution, distortion and change of emphasis to choice of rhetorical devices by journalists, their organizations and even the entire

media community, in anticipation of currying reward and avoiding punishment from the power structure” (p. 57). By “power structure,” he refers to the power holders in society, including the government, major advertisers, and those who own news organizations (Lee & Chan, 2003). Although these power holders typically do not directly or explicitly request media organizations to censor news content, journalists and editors do so to avoid punishment or accrue rewards.

Generally, self-censorship has troubling effects on press freedom and the flow of information (Cheung, 2003; Hayes, 2007; Horton, 2011; Lee, 1998). It is “a threat to either individual autonomy or the truth; it is a danger to the qualities of news that are highly treasured” (Horton, 2011, p. 92).

To understand self-censorship, it is important to comprehend the motives and reasons behind the act. Self-censorship always involves “conscious elements” (Horton, 2011, p. 97). Cheung (2003) argues that it also has “unconscious” aspects. It is hard to establish a clear case of self-censorship because it exists in so many forms and is active in various modes—the “accused always denies it, and observers can hardly prove the intention behind the act” (Lee, 2007, p. 136). The practice results from social (external) and psychological (internal) factors. The external factors may be political, economic, social and extra-legal, while internal factors include journalists’ personalities and inclinations, as well as the media organization’s editorial stance (Lee, 2007).

Media self-censorship, according to Brown (1991), is not necessarily a bad thing, depending on whether it can be justified and accepted by the public. “There are occasions [such as during war times or when lives are at stake] when reporters and editors voluntarily agree with authorities to hold back important information. There are good moral reasons for certain kinds of

self-censorship” (p. 23). Horton (2011) argues that when serious and indisputable harm is likely to result from the reporting, freedom of expression may, at least for a time, be curtailed.

Self-censorship has become commonplace in the news media today. Cheung (2003) argues that it is exercised not only in countries where the media are controlled by the government, but also in nations where the press enjoys high autonomy. The Pew Research Center (1999), conducting a survey of 287 American journalists and 81 senior editors, found that nearly 25% of its respondents said they found it necessary to avoid certain legitimate stories due mainly to organizational pressure. Bear and Hall (2005) found that 15% of their sample composed of 210 reporters, editors, managers and producers in the U.S. who covered the Iraq War said that on one or more occasions, they did not see the final edited version of their stories as accurate reports of what happened. In Japan where the press is considered free, self-censorship is “so systemic and so thorough” (Brown, 1991, p. 23). In their coverage of the dilemma presented by the Fukushima nuclear plant in the wake of the 2011 tsunami, the Japanese media seldom took a critical stance toward the government and the Tokyo Electric Power Company that administers the plant (Takeda, 2011). Takeda (2011) explains this is because most of the reporters who covered the disaster are members of press clubs that have ties with government ministries, political parties and business companies. Highly group-oriented, the Japanese always protect group members when something goes wrong, Takeda (2011) adds.

## **Self-censorship and News Credibility in Hong Kong**

As early as the 1990s, scholars have identified some problematic developments in Hong Kong's media system. These include a perceived shift in the journalistic paradigm (Chan & Lee, 1991), questions about press freedom, the infiltration of pro-China capital into the media market (Fung & Lee, 1994), and media self-censorship (Lee, 1998).

To many, self-censorship has been a “looming threat to press freedom and freedom of expression” (Fung, 2007, p.159) since the administration of the territory was handed over to China. Self-censorship, therefore, is an offshoot of the political transition (Cheung, 2003). “Any meaningful discussion of media performance in post-handover Hong Kong cannot avoid self-censorship” (So & Chan, 2007, p. 149).

The Hong Kong Journalists Association (1997) defines self-censorship as the “actions of individuals or organizations, whether deliberate, routinized or subconscious, in moderating, altering or shifting the expression of their views or the disclosure of information because of fear—whether real or perceived—of repercussions from China and its various agents and authorities” (p. 12).

Most scholars who examine the impact of self-censorship on news credibility study this relationship from the journalists' or organizational perspective. For example, Lee and Chan (2008) see self-censorship as signifying “the media's submission to political power. The fact that many journalists perceive self-censorship as a serious problem hints at the operation of counteracting forces that prevent journalists from completely internalizing the values and norms of the new political power center” (p. 331). Surveying Hong Kong journalists in 1996, 2001, and 2006, So and Chan (2007) found that self-censorship was perceived to be more serious in 2006 when 26% of their respondents considered it a serious problem, than in 2001 when only 14%

saw it as a major concern. Because media organizations consider themselves as representing the interests of Hong Kong and not those of China, it was surmised that the news media are not likely to yield to self-censorship. So and Chan (2007) reported that perceptions of media credibility improved from 1996 to 2001, but dropped from 2001 to 2006. The authors posit that this dip in credibility assessments may be due to fierce competition in the news market and the media organizations' political stance. When the public sees the media's position to be more in line with the interests of Hong Kong, perceived news credibility rises.

Professionalism is another factor often linked to credibility. Lee and Chan (2008) argue that professionalism is an important counteracting force to self-censorship. In Hong Kong, So and Chan (2007) submit that media professionalism "remains intact" (p. 156). Journalists widely subscribe to the professional values of a liberal press system despite changes in the social and political environment. The authors observe that "professionalism is tied to the local interest of Hong Kong in spite of the huge potential that the China market may hold for the Hong Kong media operators in the long run" (p. 155). Fung (2007) agrees, finding Hong Kong journalists adhering to general professional norms and conceiving themselves as liberals. However, scholars also note a gap between professional ideals and actual practice (So & Chan, 2007; Fung, 2007).

The rise of self-censorship and the decline of news credibility in Hong Kong are often attributed to two major factors: media ownership and market competition (Fung, 2007; Lee & Chan, 2007; So & Chan, 2007). Fierce market competition triggers sensational reporting to attract a wider audience. This tendency lowers the public's confidence in the media and the social status of journalists. Changes in media ownership have been going on after the handover. According to Fung (2007), "most news owners have financial interests in the mainland; a number of media proprietors have bent in favor of China in response to various forms of

cooptation or as attempts to appease the central authorities for private gain” (p. 154). From this perspective, Lee (2007) warns that self-censorship may become rationalized and ingrained over time. He calls this process “cultural co-orientation” (p. 140) that can result to journalists’ independent judgments gradually shifting closer toward China’s views on various issues. On the audiences’ side, people’s political opinions will have a huge influence on how they perceive self-censorship and news credibility in Hong Kong (So & Chan, 2007).

There are plenty of studies that have dealt with self-censorship and perceived news credibility after the 1997 handover. However, few have established a direct link between these two variables.

### **Attitudes toward China**

A cultural gulf still exists between the two sides nearly 17 years after Hong Kong’s reunification with China. Despite the fact that political and economic ties are getting closer at a governmental level, the ordinary people in Hong Kong do not see themselves as Chinese. They are more prefer the to be called as HongKongese. Right before the 1997 handover, a large number of Hong Kong people emigrated overseas because they had no confidence for the Hong Kong’s future under the Chinese regime. According to a survey done by the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1996, only 22% of the participants perceived Hong Kong would be better off after the return of sovereignty.

University of Hong Kong conducted a public-opinion poll every six months since 1997 to measure Hong Kong residents’ attitude toward whether they identified themselves as Hong Kong citizens, Chinese citizens or some combination of the two. In a survey that was released in June 2012, the number of respondents (45.6%) identifying themselves as Hong Kong citizens reached

the highest in 10 years, while the number who saw themselves primarily as Chinese sank to a new low, as only 18.3% of the respondents identified themselves as Chinese.

Hong Kong people have had this identity crisis for a long time, and Ko (2012) argued the main reason was Hong Kong's colonization under the British regime. She stated, "The colonial past is the reason why many see such a rigid delineation between "us" and "them" (Ko 2012, para 2).

Since the Hong Kong people have been raised in a democratic system, they perceived the non-democratic Chinese government rather negatively. Most of the Hong Kong locals regard the Chinese regime as brutal, dictatorial and arbitrary (Ko, 2012). As Ko suggested, the negative view of Chinese government reflects discontent over the communist government's control over the once highly autonomous city. Even though the Basic Law in Hong Kong stated that Hong Kong shall enjoy high degree of autonomy and self-governing without interference by the central Chinese government, the dominant political forces in Hong Kong are pro-China. The Hong Kong government is constantly criticized by the local pro-democracy newspaper as kowtowing to Beijing. In 2011, a post from a Hong Kong forum said, "we love the classic culture, long history, beautiful landscape and ordinary people of China, but not the regime." (Chou, 2013, p129).

However, Hong Kong people's love of ordinary people in Mainland China turned to distaste in 2012. In February 1, a group of Hong Kong residents raised HK\$100,000 to put up a full-page advertisement in Apple Daily describing Chinese mainlanders as "invading locusts" and urged Chinese people to stop the "endless infiltration to Hong Kong" (Apple Daily, Feb 1, A1). This advertisement was published after several conflicts such as subway fights over a little mainland girl's eating in the subway where eating is not allowed and Peking university professor Kong Qindong calling Hong Kong people "running dogs of British imperialists."

The root problem between the two groups, as Ko (2012) pointed out, is the large number of mainland visitors who flock into Hong Kong and disregard the culture and living style in the city. Also, the fact that pregnant women from mainland enter Hong Kong to give birth, which automatically grants the baby's permanent residency, is putting much pressure on the already limited social resources and health care services. Kwong and Yu (2013) said that the influx of mainlanders into Hong Kong and a series of social conflicts between Hong Kong locals and Mainland Chinese in 2012 became a tipping point for public anger as local people regard mainlanders much more negatively.

Ko (2012) argued that it is doubtful that Hong Kong people will adopt favorable attitudes toward China or their mainland brethren any time soon. On the other hand, Xu (2012) said that the two groups share a common culture and people generally welcomed the handover and the economic benefits that central government brought to the city.

This study aims to gauge Hong Kong residents' attitudes towards China and establish if they affect their perceptions of news credibility.

### **Attitudes toward the media in general**

Hong Kong's media have repeatedly been criticized by some scholars for sensationalism and only focus on the profits. Though the number of media outlets has shrunk, the media market still maintains a great deal of diversity compared to its counterpart in China. Huang et al. (2010)'s study suggested that audiences still share a strong faith in the media in Hong Kong in terms of their diversity and autonomy. And the public "expects media to be the one to monitor the government and tycoons and to voice for unvoiced" (p. 4). Also, people tend to view the

media more favorably if they take a critical view toward the government in Hong Kong (Huang et al., 2010; Lee, 2010).

The general public in Hong Kong is also more in favor of the tabloid newspapers over the elite newspapers because the tabloid newspapers tend to dedicate more coverage to entertainment even though they may assess elite newspapers as more credible. This suggested readership is not necessarily linked with credibility of the media.

Moreover, media in Hong Kong are commonly classified in terms of their political stances. Three main political stances are identified in Hong Kong, namely pro-democracy newspapers, pro-Beijing, and neutral (So & Choi, 2006). Since the views are quite diverse among the media, the Hong Kong public tends to identify with media outlets that adhere to their views.

It is the aim of this study to examine the relationship between attitudes toward media and perceptions of news credibility.

### **Involvement with Hong Kong current affairs**

In modern politics, success or failure depends very much on the ability and efficacy to communicate to the wider public. Political involvement is one of the most important functions of a democratic society. Herbert McClosky (1968) stated that:

*“Participation is the principal means by which consent is granted or withdrawn in a democracy and rulers are made accountable to the ruled. Since men can be equal and free only if they share in the determination of their own affairs, participation has been viewed as a means for realizing these democratic objectives as well.”(p. 74)*

Hong Kong people have long been considered lacking in broad political participation. In its colonial times under the rule of the British regime, the political decisions were left up to a small group of leaders. So ordinary citizens seldom had the chance to get involved in political discussion. The Sino-British Joint Declaration (1984) and later the Basic Law (1997) in Hong Kong both suggest that Hong Kong shall exercise a high degree of autonomy and enjoy executive, legislative and independent judicial power.

During the handover period, the political situation in Hong Kong was quite unstable. There was a fierce political battle between the Chinese government and the British government over the issue of democratization in Hong Kong. The political environment was intense at that time. Therefore, Hong Kong people were less willing to join the political discussion out of fear that voicing opposition or criticism toward the Chinese government might have some negative repercussions after the political handover in 1997 (Willnat, 1996).

Even 17 years after the handover, the level of political participation in Hong Kong has not seen a great improvement. Hong Kong people seem to put more effort in economic development than in politics and political reform. As Wuchang Zhang, a famous economist and commentator put it, “In Hong Kong, we do not have the concept of nationalism, it is neither British nor Chinese. Hong Kong people are nonchalant toward politics” (Zhang, 2002).

Even the government constantly promotes to broaden the scope of political participation by lowering the voting age and setting up more district board elections. The participation rate is quite low. Some critics argued that Hong Kong showed no sign of democratization of the political system and strong citizen participation in government was even less likely to occur after the 1997 handover (Lee, 2010).

### **Political parties in Hong Kong**

Although the public involvement with politics is low in Hong Kong (Zhang, 2002; Lee, 2010), various political parties play a significant role in civic and democratic development in Hong Kong. Major political parties, like New Hong Kong Society and the Hong Kong Affairs Society emerged in the 1980s and the number of political parties remained constant after the 1997 handover. In general, political parties in Hong Kong can be distinguished as two major camps: the pro-democracy camp and the pro-Beijing, also called pro-establishment camp. The pro-democracy parties are considered to be liberals. They are middle class forces that aim to promote the rights and civic engagement for the general public, whereas the pro-Beijing parties are usually seen as conservatives who are mainly businessmen trying to establish close economic ties with China. Major pro-democracy political parties include Hong Kong Democratic Foundation and the Liberal Democratic Foundation; and major pro-Beijing political parties are The Hong Kong Progressive Alliance and Business and Professionals Alliance for Hong Kong.

This study will gauge Hong Kong residents' level of political participation and explore its relationship to perceptions of news credibility.

Considering the foregoing literature review, this study proposes a flow of influence diagrammed in Figure 1.

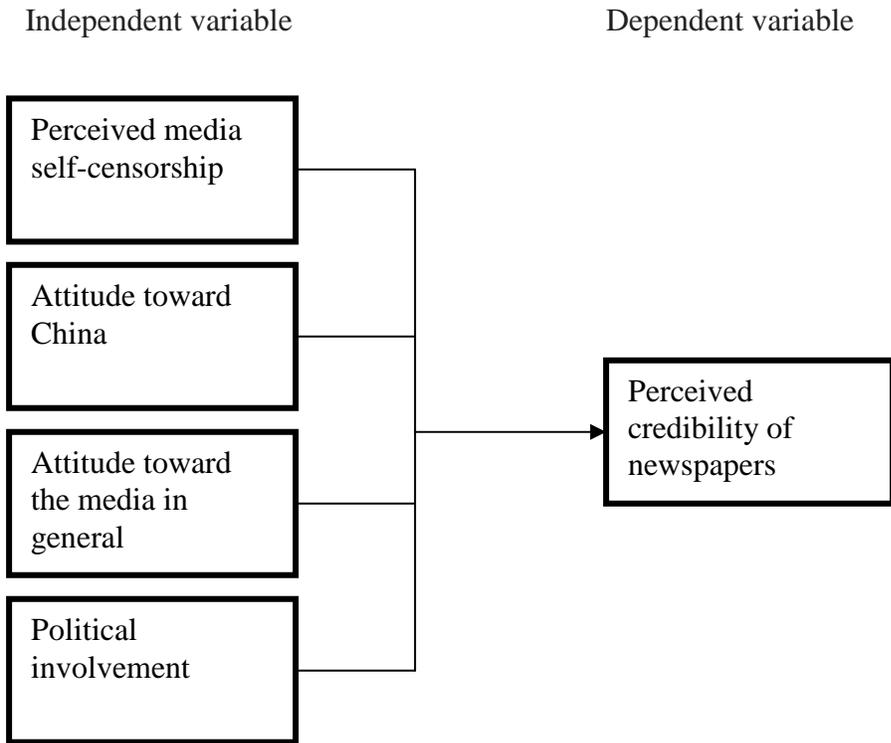


Figure 1. The conceptual framework of the study

### Research Questions and Hypotheses

Based on the foregoing literature review, the following research questions and hypotheses are posed:

RQ1: What personal characteristics predict perceptions of newspaper credibility in Hong Kong?

H1: Hong Kong residents perceive the media as less credible after the 1997 handover.

H2: Increased in perceptions of media self-censorship will result in a decline in public perception of news credibility.

H3: People with favorable attitudes toward China will assign greater credibility to the newspapers.

H4: People with more positive attitudes about the Hong Kong mass media in general will assign greater credibility to newspapers.

H5: People who are more involved in Hong Kong's current affairs will assign less credibility to newspapers.

## **Chapter 3**

### **METHOD**

To gather data for this study, a survey was conducted in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China in 2013.

#### **The Sample**

To recruit more respondents, the questionnaire was posted online to reach the entire Hong Kong territory. A link to the survey was posted on three Bulletin Board Systems (BBS): the Hong Kong discussion.com.hk, Uwants.com, Forum 4 Hong Kong Golden.com.

Hong Kong discussion.com.hk, was established in 2003, quickly became the most dynamic BBS in Hong Kong. According to Alexa, a web information company, the BBS had over 300 million registered users in 2013, 78% of them were local residents and the users' age ranged from 20-45 years old.

Uwants.com is an integrated BBS that is the second largest after discussion.com.hk. Also established in 2013, this forum displays fewer advertisements, and discusses more diverse topics. According to Alexa, Uwants.com's typical users are 25-45 years old; 60% of them are local. The website ranked 15<sup>th</sup> among the most popular sites in Hong Kong.

Forum 4 Hong Kong Golden.com proclaims in its motto that it is "the only forum in Hong Kong that fully supports freedom of speech." According to Alexa, it is ranked 30<sup>th</sup> among the most popular websites in Hong Kong. The average age range of the users is 18 to 40 years old. 86% of the active users are Hong Kong local people. People generally spend 20 minutes on browsing this website.

Those who hold accounts in these three BBSs represent diverse and heterogeneous voices. The BBS link to the survey website was kept active for four months from April to August 2013.

### **The Questionnaire**

The questionnaire measured general public's perception of newspaper credibility after the 1997 handover. Six sections were included in the questionnaire to test the hypotheses and to answer the research question proposed in chapter two.

### **Variables and their Measurement**

The following variables are measured in this study.

***Attitude toward China.*** This construct conceptually refers to how Hong Kong people view the political, economic, cultural and social aspects of China. This includes whether the respondents think the state of affairs in Hong Kong is better under the Chinese administration. Specifically, the following questions were asked: (1) the overall opinion toward China; (2) opinion toward Chinese government; (3) opinion about China's economic system; and (4) opinion about the general social situation in China.

The answers to these three items were averaged to measure attitude toward the media. The reliability of this index was assessed by computing Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach's alpha was .70, which is acceptable.

***Attitude toward the Hong Kong media.*** This variable refers to how Hong Kong residents assess media performance in general. Respondents was asked to evaluate how well the Hong Kong media are doing their job by asking respondents the extent to which they agree with the

following statements: (1) The Hong Kong media generally work for the public good; (2) Generally, media reports are fair and balanced; (3) I am satisfied with the level of freedom of speech Hong Kong currently enjoys. The response options to these items ranged from 1 to 5 where 1 means “strongly disagree” and 5 means “strongly agree.”

The answers to these three items were averaged to measure attitude toward the media. The reliability of this index was assessed by computing Cronbach’s alpha. The Cronbach’s alpha was .63. Although the Cronbach’s alpha was a bit low, it approached to the .75 significant level.

***Involvement with Hong Kong current affairs.*** This variable gauges the Hong Kong residents’ level of political participation and their engagement with current social affairs. Three aspects were taken into consideration, namely political interest, political involvement and political affiliation. Political interest was measured by asking respondents to indicate the degree to which they agree with the following statements: (1) I care a lot about Hong Kong’s political future; (2) I am very interested in politics; and (3) I discuss political and civic issues with others. The response options to these items ranged from 1 to 5 where 1 means “strongly disagree” and 5 means “strongly agree.”

The answers to these three aspects was averaged to measure involvement with Hong Kong current affairs. The reliability of this index was assessed by computing Cronbach’s alpha. The Cronbach’s alpha was .79.

Political involvement was measured by asking respondents whether they are a registered voter.

The questionnaire originally gauged political affiliation by asking respondents the political camp they belong to. However, the result was being correlated with attitude China, and hence dropped from the analysis. Attitudes toward China were used as a proxy in this case due to

the unique political landscape in Hong Kong. Respondent who claimed themselves belongs to pro-Beijing political camp had a favorable attitude toward China whereas respondent said they belong to pro-democrats camp regard China negatively.

**Demographics.** This variable is used to determine the essential information of the respondents, which characterized them into certain groups in Hong Kong. Based on the findings of past studies that some of the demographic variables are associated with credibility of the media (Bucy, 2003; Mulder, 1981; Robinson & Kohut, 1998), this study measured standard demographics such as gender, age, education and income to examine the relationship between the perceptions of credibility of news media and the demographic variables.

**News credibility.** The study's dependent variable, perceived news credibility, measures the extent to which the respondents consider the newspapers before and after the handover trustworthy and dependable. To measure this variable, items from Gaziano and McGrath (1986)'s measurements of news credibility was borrowed. In their original study, 12 items were included to gauge the news credibility. However, in order to have a more direct and concise idea to measure the concept of news credibility, only four items from Gaziano and McGrath (1986)'s study were used. They were fairness, bias and accuracy and trustworthiness. Respondents were asked to rate the newspapers' credibility on an index consisting of these four items on a 5-point scale. On the scale, 1 means the most negative attitude toward news credibility and 5 means the most positive attitude toward news credibility. The credibility ratings before and after the handover were compared to determine the impact of the handover on credibility perceptions.

**Media consumption.** To measure the respondents' daily media use, respondents were asked questions about their sources of news and their newspaper reading habits. The source of news determines the dominant medium for consuming the news. The respondents were asked

where they usually go for news. Newspaper reading habits refers to the extent to which newspapers are used as an information source. To measure this variable, the respondents was asked their (1) daily exposure to newspapers; (2) the level of attention they pay to newspaper content; and 3) the newspapers they regularly read.

## **Chapter 4**

### **RESULTS**

#### **The Sample**

A total of 312 questionnaires were collected from the major three BBS in Hong Kong, among which 29 were incomplete. Thus, a total of 283 valid questionnaires were analyzed. Because the link to the survey was posted online on three bulletin boards, the response rate could not be determined.

The respondents' demographic characteristics, including their gender, age, education attainment and annual income were first analyzed. A total of 128 males and 155 females participated in this study, with the male respondents accounting for 45% of the sample. The average age of the respondents was 34 years old. The oldest respondent was 65 years old while the youngest was 17 years old. The highest education attainment for most of the respondents was college-degree holders, which constituted 64% of the total respondents; 30% of the sample had post-graduate level education. About 41% reported an annual income of HKD 250,000 to 500,000, while 38% claimed the number was less than HKD 250,000 (1 USD=7.75 HKD).

#### **Media Consumption**

Among the 283 valid responses, 36% respondents selected Internet as their primary news source followed by 24% who selected TV and 23% who chose newspapers. One-third (33%) reportedly spent 15-30 minutes daily reading newspapers while 22% said the time dedicated to reading newspapers was less than 15 minutes. About 40% claimed they read half of the newspaper content; 21% of respondents said they read three-quarters of the newspaper content.

As for the newspaper selection, Apple Daily outnumbered other newspapers in Hong Kong with 41% of the sample, while other popular choices were AM730 (17.7%), headline Daily (17%) and Oriental Daily (16.3%). Overall, 51% of respondents reported they read newspapers, 60% of respondent read more than half of the newspaper content and about 70% of respondent spent more than 15 minutes daily to read newspapers. The finding suggests the newspaper still remain an important medium for the public to seek information.

### **Credibility ratings**

H1 predicted that Hong Kong residents would perceive the newspapers as less credible after the 1997 handover. Four items that consist of fairness, bias, accuracy and trustworthiness were used in the survey to assess the newspapers credibility before and after the 1997 handover. In order to have a concise idea of how the credibility changed, overall credibility was measured by combining the four items into one index. The mean values for the newspapers credibility before and after 1997 handover were 4.10 (Cronbach's alpha=.92, SD=0.70) and 3.33 (Cronbach's alpha=.88, SD=0.67), respectively. The results outlined in Table 1 suggest that Hong Kong residents generally perceived the newspapers as more credible before the 1997 handover.

**Table1. Summary of paired sample T-test analysis for differences in newspaper credibility ratings before and after the 1997 handover.**

Pre97	Post97	<i>t</i>
4.10 (.700)	3.33 (.675)	13.601***

N=283

Note. \*\*\* $p < .001$ . Standard Deviations appear in parentheses below means.

### Factors related to news credibility ratings

Hypotheses 2 to 5 and the first research question examine the relationship between credibility assessments and four variables (demographics, perceived self-censorship, attitudes toward China, attitudes toward Hong Kong media and political involvement). In order to control for the effects of covariates and to test the effects of the certain factors independent of the influence of others, hierarchical regression was conducted to test these hypotheses and research question. The results of the hierarchical regression predicting perceived self-censorship, demographic characteristics, attitudes toward China, attitudes toward Hong Kong media, and political involvement and its relationship between credibility ratings were reported in Table 2.

**Table 2. Block regression analysis for factors predicting perceived newspaper credibility in Hong Kong.**

Measures	F	$\beta$	F	$\beta$	F	$\beta$	F	$\beta$
<b>Self-censorship</b>	7.910*	-.165*	5.201***	-.150*	19.909***	-.111*	15.627***	-.129*
<b>Demographics</b>								
Age				.254***		.167*		.187*
Gender				.006		-.006		-.010
Education				-.017		-.044		-.052
Income				-.024		-.108		-.109
<b>Attitudes</b>								
AttitudeChina						.343***		.344***
AttitudeMedia						.301***		.293***
<b>Politics</b>								
Political Participation								-.069
Political Interest								.033
	$R^2=.027$		$R^2=.086$		$R^2=.336$		$R^2=.340$	

N=283

Note. \* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

### **Perception of self-censorship**

H2 predicted the newspaper credibility would decline as people's perception of self-censorship increases. The perception of media self-censorship was measured with the question "Do you agree that the newspapers in Hong Kong practice self-censorship" on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represents strongly disagree and 5 represents strongly agree. From the survey responses, 67% of the respondents agree that newspapers in Hong Kong practice self-censorship.

The result, shown in Table 2, indicates that the perception that newspapers in Hong Kong practice self-censorship was a predictor to the credibility ratings. That is, the more the people believe the newspapers in Hong Kong practice self-censorship, the less credibility they assign to newspapers. It should be noted that though the result shows a significant ( $p < .05$ ), the R square was rather small (.027), which shows a low relevance. It might be due to the fact of small sample size. Hence, H2 can only be concluded as marginally supported.

### **Demographics**

The first and only research question asked what personal characteristics predict perceptions of newspaper credibility in Hong Kong. The result indicates that of the four demographic characteristics (age, gender, education level and income), only age was statistically significantly related to the credibility rating. That means the older the respondents are, the higher the credibility score they assign to newspapers. Gender, education level and income made no difference in any of the models.

### **Attitudes toward China**

The scale to assess the attitude toward China consists of 4 items, which are overall opinion about China, opinion about Chinese government, opinion about China's economy system and opinion about China's social situation (Cronbach's alpha=.70). The opinion toward China for the respondents is about neutral to slightly negative (mean score=2.78 on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means strongly disagree/very negative and 5 means strongly agree/very positive), among which the attitude toward Chinese government has the most negative rating (mean score=2.31) followed by attitude toward China's social situation (mean score=2.54). H3 predicted that people who are more in favor of China regard newspapers as more credible. From the hierarchical regression analysis, this hypothesis was supported ( $p<.001$ ).

### **Attitudes toward Hong Kong media**

The scale to measure the attitude toward Hong Kong mass media in general combined three items, which are perceptions that the journalists in Hong Kong practice responsible reporting, Hong Kong media generally work to serve public interest and satisfaction with the level of freedom of speech Hong Kong currently enjoys. The Cronbach's alpha is .63. Though the number a bit low, it approaches the .75 significant level that suggests a strong internal consistency among measured items. The mean score for the attitude toward Hong Kong media in general is 3.59, which means the residents in Hong Kong generally have a positive attitude toward the media. From a regression analysis between the attitude toward Hong Kong media and newspapers' credibility, a significant relationship was found between the two ( $p<.001$ ). Hence H4 was supported. That is, people who have positive attitudes toward media in Hong Kong rate newspapers as more credible.

**Political involvement**

When measuring people's involvement with Hong Kong current affairs, two aspects were used. One is political participation, measured by whether the respondent was a registered voter; the other part is about political interest, measured by three-items scale, which included care about the political future of Hong Kong, interest in politics and discussion about political and civic issues with people. Another aspect taken into consideration is political affiliation. Descriptive statistics indicated that about 24% of the respondents were registered voters. The mean score for political interest is 3.29 (Cronbach's alpha=.79).

H5 assumed that people who are more involved in Hong Kong's current affairs would assign less credibility to newspapers. In the hierarchical regression (Table 2), none of the aspects were statistically significant. There were no significant relationships found between whether the respondents were registered voters and the newspaper credibility score, and respondent's political interest and newspaper credibility score. Therefore, H5 was rejected.

## Chapter 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

This study sought to determine public perceptions of the credibility of the newspapers before and after the 1997 handover in Hong Kong. It also examined how public awareness of self-censorship could affect audiences' assessment of newspapers credibility. The study also examined the impact of Hong Kong people's attitudes toward China, media and politics on perceptions of newspapers' credibility.

#### **The Findings**

The survey results are consistent with scholars' claims that the newspaper credibility dropped after the 1997 handover (Fung & Lee, 2007; George, 2007). In fact, ever since the transition period (1988-1997), many scholars already have expressed their concern that Hong Kong media face the looming threat of loss of press freedom and freedom of speech (Chau, Lee & Lee, 1995; Fung & Lee, 1994). Seventeen years after the handover, this problem seems to have gotten worse. Chinese University of Hong Kong's study on public evaluation on media credibility (2011) suggested that the media credibility score constantly declined since 1997. Although this study solely focuses on the newspapers' credibility, the result, once again echoes the view that media credibility suffers a deficit among the public in the post-handover era.

Reasons that contributed to the credibility crisis vary. One of the vital reasons, as some researchers suggest (Lee & Lin, 2006; Lee 1998), is self-censorship. Self-censorship is commonly practiced in the newsrooms of Hong Kong (Fung, 2007). After the handover in 1997, many media experienced a dramatic change in ownership. Media owners often have business interests in China and the "pro-China capital" continued infiltration into the Hong Kong local

media system (Lee, 2007). This leads to the practice of self-censorship among journalists and editors/columnists, particularly in the coverage of specific sensitive topics related to China. For example, the annual coverage of memorials for June 4<sup>th</sup> Tiananmen massacre has shifted from highly supporting the democratization movement to emphasizing the rational debate of such movement. The practice of self-censorship is not only evident in the newsroom, but also recognized by the Hong Kong citizens in this study. Over 65% of the respondents agree that the newspapers in Hong Kong practice self-censorship, while over 63% of the respondents agree self-censorship can be a serious threat to the integrity of the newspapers. Also, there is a strong negative relationship between perceptions of self-censorship and the credibility rating. People who consider the newspapers practice self-censorship retain less credit to the newspapers.

Other threats to the newspaper credibility might be the fierce competition in the market, so the outlets decide to take a commercial strategy to attract more audiences (Fung, 2007). It includes heavy advertising, a decline in the civic and community reporting, and an increased focus on infotainment. For example, Apple Daily has traditionally thrived on sensational accounts of crime, gossip on entertainment business and soft pornographic features. In this study, Apple Daily topped the most popular newspaper in Hong Kong. Over 40% of the respondent chose Apple Daily as their daily-reading newspaper.

The competition in news market leads to a concentration of media, meaning the media market is dominated by only a handful of business tycoons. This phenomenon is in line with findings in some studies in the United States (Kiouisis 2001; Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002). Scheufele and Nisbet (2002) summarized four reasons for the decline in media trustworthiness: decline in interest in public affairs reporting, heightened commercialization, depoliticization, and entertainment.

Also, the rise of Internet might be another reason for the newspapers' credibility drops. The number of people using the Internet to find and read news is consistently on the rise. In fact, Internet is the number one primary source for the respondents to consume news in this study, followed by TV and newspapers. People might grant more credibility to online news than their traditional counterparts. Kim and Masiclat (2007) stated that online media enhance audiences' assessment of expertise and trustworthiness because online media are delivering news important to society and relevant to their individual needs.

This study also revealed the relationship between public's attitudes toward China, Hong Kong media and politics, and the newspaper credibility assessment. The public's attitude toward Hong Kong media and attitude toward China were both found to be strong predictors of newspaper credibility perceptions.

Hong Kong people's attitude toward China, as expected, is not very favorable given that the social tension between Hong Kong people and mainland Chinese tightened in recent years. This study revealed that people who think of China positively regarded newspapers as more credible. These respondents might not mind the recent lamented trend of change in newspaper ownership, which has increasingly shifted into the hands of pro-China tycoons and corporations (Fung, 2007). As Lee (2007) noted, "supporters of demarcation are more likely to have perceived the existence of self-censorship and a decline in press freedom. People who identified with China more strongly were less likely to perceive decreases in press freedom in Hong Kong" (p. 451).

It is interesting to note that although the public rated newspapers as less credible after the 1997 handover and seem very much aware that self-censorship exists, they generally still maintain a very positive attitude toward Hong Kong media. They consider Hong Kong has a

dynamic media system in which the journalists generally perform balanced and responsible reporting. In sum, readers can count on the Hong Kong media to present generally accurate and informative reports of news. This finding is consistent with the previous studies (Huang et al., 2010; Lee, 2010) that Hong Kong people generally have good faith in their media system, especially compared to their counterparts in China, whose media are considered as a mouthpiece of the Chinese government. In terms of newspaper selection, Apple Daily outnumbered other newspapers in Hong Kong to become the public's number one choice. Traditionally prestigious newspapers like South China Morning Post and Ming Pao have lost significant ground. This is expected as the general public in Hong Kong is more in favor of the tabloid newspapers over the elite newspapers because the tabloid newspapers tend to be juicier in content and more soft news oriented.

Surprisingly, there was no significant relationship between attitudes toward politics and credibility ratings of newspapers. Previous studies (Gunther, 1992; Judd & Milburn, 1980; Shan, 2013) suggest that involvement with politics is the most powerful predictor of people's perception of news credibility. However, in this study, when controlling for other variables like demographics, and attitudes toward China and Hong Kong media, no relationships were found. This may be due to the nature of Hong Kong people who are not involved in politics (Lee, 2010). Political involvement and interest were found to be quite low in Hong Kong. Less than one third of the respondents were registered voters and showed enthusiasm toward politics.

The present study failed to find support for Bucy's (2003) contention that older audiences tend to be the most critical of media, while younger audiences are more likely to evaluate the media as credible. In this study, as opposite to Bucy's findings, younger people assigned newspapers less credibility than those who are older. This may be because the young

people in Hong Kong are more critical toward both Hong Kong and the Chinese government, as well as the media. They are more critical than those who are older, as Chou (2013) noted, and there is a growing trend in youth uprisings in Hong Kong society.

### **Implications of the Study**

This study detected a decline in newspapers' credibility after the 1997 handover and found that the public has awareness of the ongoing self-censorship in the media outlets, whereas many previous studies (Lee & Chen, 2008; Lee & Lee, 2006) focused on journalists' perception to determine the issue. About 55% of respondents assigned a low credibility score, compared to the Pew Research Center survey in 2012 that 44% of American don't trust the news media (Pew, 2012). Also, attitudinal variables, such as attitudes toward China and toward media in general, suggest a strong impact on public's perception on newspaper credibility assessment. These findings are valuable to the media practitioners to understand the public's perceptions of newspaper credibility. The media practitioners should be aware of the ongoing newspaper credibility decline in Hong Kong, while people still credit journalists for performing a good job in reporting. Yet most people agree that self-censorship is serious threat to media integrity in Hong Kong.

This study detected a decline in newspapers' credibility after the 1997 handover and found that the public has awareness of the ongoing self-censorship in the media outlets, whereas many previous studies (Lee & Chen, 2008; Lee & Lee, 2006) focused on journalists' perception to determine the issue. Also, attitudinal variables, such as attitudes toward China and toward media in general, have a strong impact on the public's perception on newspaper credibility assessment.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for the Future Study**

This study has illuminated some factors that contribute to newspaper credibility perceptions after the 1997 handover in Hong Kong. Although the results have applied implications on the determination of credibility perceptions, the study has several limitations and suggestions for future studies.

First, the sample size may have been not big enough to represent the entire population in Hong Kong. According to Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, the college education attainment rate was 53%, the average income of Hong Kong people was about 250,000 HKD, and the voter registration rate in Hong Kong was 40% in 2013. In my study, the respondents represent a well-educated, middle class but less dedicated to politics population. Future studies should strive best to test whether the result will hold for a bigger sample and thus provide a more accurate picture of credibility evaluations.

Second, one aspect not gauged by this study is the rise of Internet in Hong Kong. It might be another reason for newspapers' credibility decline. The number of people using the Internet to find and read news is consistently on the rise. In fact, Internet is the number one primary source of news for the respondents in this study, followed by TV and newspapers. This might also explain why younger respondents, who are more likely to depend on the Internet for their news diet, rated newspapers as less credible than older people. They might grant more credibility to online news than their traditional counterparts. Kim and Masiel (2007) argued that online media enhance audiences' assessment of expertise and trustworthiness because online media are delivering news important to society and relevant to their individual needs. Future studies should look into people's perception of online news sources' credibility.

Another limitation of the study is that the survey did not use panel data; the perceptions of pre-1997 newspaper credibility were measured concurrently with those of the present, allowing for forgetfulness or various experiences in the past 17 years to color and perhaps alter how respondents truly judged newspapers' credibility at the time. A more objective measure, that of analyzing the news coverage and bias over time of the eight newspapers still in existence in Hong Kong, could also be the subject of future studies.

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**Appendix A****Questionnaire: Hong Kong Newspaper Credibility Survey****(In English)**

This study aims to determine Hong Kong residents' perceptions of the credibility of newspapers before and after the handover. You will be asked to complete a questionnaire that asks your opinions about this topic. It will take about 15 minutes to complete the survey. Please rest assured that your answers and any information you provide will be kept strictly confidential.

If you have any questions regarding this survey, please contact Yuwei Sun, graduate student, Greenlee School of Journalism and Communication, Iowa State University, Tel: (515) 708 5705; e-mail: [yuweis@iastate.edu](mailto:yuweis@iastate.edu).

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey.

**Screen Question:** How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_ years old.

**Part A. Attitudes toward China**

1. What is your overall opinion about China?

- 1) Very unfavorable
- 2) Somewhat unfavorable
- 3) Neutral
- 4) Somewhat favorable
- 5) Very favorable

2. What is your opinion about the Chinese government?

- 1) Very unfavorable

2) Somewhat unfavorable

3) Neutral

4) Somewhat favorable

5) Very favorable

3. What is your opinion about China's economic system or its economy?

1) Very unfavorable

2) Somewhat unfavorable

3) Neutral

4) Somewhat favorable

5) Very favorable

4. What is your opinion about the general social situation in China?

1) Very unfavorable

2) Somewhat unfavorable

3) Neutral

4) Somewhat favorable

5) Very favorable

5. What is your opinion about China's culture?

1) Very unfavorable

2) Somewhat unfavorable

3) Neutral

4) Somewhat favorable

5) Very favorable

6. To what extent do you agree that the state of affairs in Hong Kong is better under the Chinese administration?

- 1) Strongly disagree
- 2) Disagree
- 3) Neutral
- 4) Agree
- 5) Strongly agree

**Part B. Attitudes toward the media in general.**

To what extent do you agree with the following statements? Please indicate the level of your agreement on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means “strongly disagree” and 5 means “strongly agree.”

*(Please choose only one answer.)*

1. The Hong Kong media generally work to serve the public interest.

- 1) Strongly disagree
- 2) Disagree
- 3) Neutral
- 4) Agree
- 5) Strongly agree

2 Media reports are generally fair and balanced.

- 1) Strongly disagree
- 2) Disagree
- 3) Neutral
- 4) Agree
- 5) Strongly agree

3. Hong Kong has a dynamic mass media system.

- 1) Strongly disagree
- 2) Disagree
- 3) Neutral
- 4) Agree
- 5) Strongly agree

4 The Hong Kong media generally mirror the position of the Chinese government on issues.

- 1) Strongly disagree
- 2) Disagree
- 3) Neutral
- 4) Agree
- 5) Strongly agree

**Part C. Involvement with Hong Kong current affairs**

1. Are you a registered voter?

- 1) Yes
- 2) No – Please go to 4

2. Did you vote in the Legislative Council elections last year?

- 1) Yes
- 2) No
- 3) I can't recall
- 4) Refuse to answer

3. Did you vote in the District Council elections last year?

- 1) Yes

- 2) No
- 3) I can't recall
- 4) Refuse to answer

To what extent do you agree with the following statements? Please indicate the level of your agreement on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means "strongly disagree" and 5 means "strongly agree."

*(Please choose only one answer.)*

4. I care a lot about the political future of Hong Kong.

- 1) Strongly disagree
- 2) Disagree
- 3) Neutral
- 4) Agree
- 5) Strongly agree

5. I am very interest in politics.

- 1) Strongly disagree
- 2) Disagree
- 3) Neutral
- 4) Agree
- 5) Strongly agree

6. I regularly discuss politics and civic issues with others.

- 1) Never
- 2) Seldom
- 3) Sometimes
- 4) Often

5) Always

7 What is your political affiliation?

1) Pro-Democrat Camp

2) Independence

3) Pro-establishment

4) No affiliation

5) Refuse to answer

**Part D. Perception of media self-censorship and news credibility**

1 Where do you usually go for the news?

1 ) Newspapers

2 ) TV

3 ) Radio

4 ) Internet

5 ) Social Media

6 ) Others

2. How many minutes per day do you usually spend reading newspapers?

1) Under 15 minutes

2) 15-30 minutes

3) 30-60 minutes

4) More than an hour

3. About how much of a newspaper edition do you read?

1) About a quarter of the newspaper content.

2) About half of the newspaper content.

3) About three-quarters of the newspaper content.

4) Almost all of the newspaper.

4. Which newspaper (s) do you regularly read?

1= Ta Kung Pao

2= Wen Wei Po

3= Oriental Daily News

4= Sing Tao Daily

5= Ming Pao

6= Apple Daily

7= Hong Kong Economic Journal

8= Southern China Morning Post

9= The Standard

10= AM730

11= Headline Daily

12= Metropolis Daily

13= Others

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

5. I am satisfied with the level of freedom of speech Hong Kong currently enjoys.

- 1) Strongly disagree
- 2) Disagree
- 3) Neutral
- 4) Agree
- 5) Strongly agree

6. The newspapers in Hong Kong practice self-censorship.

- 1) Strongly disagree
- 2) Disagree
- 3) Neutral
- 4) Agree
- 5) Strongly agree

7. Self-censorship is a serious threat to newspaper credibility.

- 1) Strongly disagree
- 2) Disagree
- 3) Neutral
- 4) Agree
- 5) Strongly agree

8. The journalists in Hong Kong practice responsible reporting.

- 1) Strongly disagree
- 2) Disagree
- 3) Neutral
- 4) Agree

5) Strongly agree

9. How would you rate the credibility of newspapers in Hong Kong before the 1997 handover?

Please indicate your rating on a scale from 1 to 5.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Are unfair						Are fair
Are biased						Are unbiased
Are inaccurate						Are accurate
Can not be trusted						Can be trusted

10. How would you rate the credibility of newspapers in Hong Kong today? Please indicate your rating on a scale from 1 to 5.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Are unfair						Are fair
Are biased						Are unbiased
Are inaccurate						Are accurate
Can not be trusted						Can be trusted

### Part E. Personal Information

1. What is your gender?

1) Male

2) Female

3) Others/prefer not to say

2. In which part of Hong Kong do you live?

1= Wan Chai

2= Eastern

3= Central

4= Southern

5= Kwun Tong

6= Kowloon Tong

7= Wong Tai Sin

8= Mongkok

9= Shan Shui Po

- 10= Yau Tsim
- 11= Sai Kung
- 12= Shatin
- 13= Islands
- 14= Tsuen Wan
- 15= Tai Po
- 16= Tuen Mun
- 17= Yuen Long
- 18= North
- 19= others

3. What is your highest educational attainment?

- 1) Less than high school
- 2) High school and some college
- 3) College
- 4) Post-graduate level or above

4. What is your annual income?

- 1) Less than HK\$ 250,000
- 2) HK\$ 250,000-500,000
- 3) HK\$ 500,000-1,000,000
- 4) Over HK\$ 1,000,000

**APPENDIX B****Questionnaire: Hong Kong Newspaper Credibility Survey****(IN CHINESE)**

本次問卷調查的目的在於研究公眾對於中國的看法，對於媒體的映像以及政治立場是否會影響他們對於香港媒體公信力的評分，同時還將比較公眾對香港在 97 回歸前後媒體公信力的評價。問卷由 5 部分組成，將佔用閣下大約 15 分鐘的時間完成。閣下的回答以及個人資訊將會完全保密，只做為學術研究用途。

如果閣下由任何問題，請聯系孫雨薇，美國愛荷華州立大學新聞學院研究生。電話：  
： + 1 515 708 5705 或通過電郵： yuweis@iastate.edu.

感謝閣下的參與!

Screen Question: How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_ years old. 請問閣下今年幾歲？

**Part A. 對中國的態度 Attitudes toward China**

1. 你對中國的整體印象？ What is your overall opinion about China?

- 1) 非常不喜歡 Very unfavorable
- 2) 比較不喜歡 Somewhat unfavorable
- 3) 中立 Neutral
- 4) 比較喜歡 Somewhat favorable

5) 非常喜歡 Very favorable

2. 你對中國政府的印象？ What is your opinion about the Chinese government?

1) 非常不喜歡 Very unfavorable

2) 比較不喜歡 Somewhat unfavorable

3) 中立 Neutral

4) 比較喜歡 Somewhat favorable

5) 非常喜歡 Very favorable

3. 你對中國經濟體制的印象？ What is your opinion about China's economic system or its economy?

1) 非常不喜歡 Very unfavorable

2) 比較不喜歡 Somewhat unfavorable

3) 中立 Neutral

4) 比較喜歡 Somewhat favorable

5) 非常喜歡 Very favorable

4. 你對中國社會現狀的印象？ What is your opinion about the general social situation in China?

- 1) 非常不喜歡 Very unfavorable
- 2) 比較不喜歡 Somewhat unfavorable
- 3) 中立 Neutral
- 4) 比較喜歡 Somewhat favorable
- 5) 非常喜歡 Very favorable

5. 你對中國文化的印象？ What is your opinion about China's culture?

- 1) 非常不喜歡 Very unfavorable
- 2) 比較不喜歡 Somewhat unfavorable
- 3) 中立 Neutral
- 4) 比較喜歡 Somewhat favorable
- 5) 非常喜歡 Very favorable

6. 你同意此說法嗎？香港在中國的管理下發展的更好。 To what extent do you agree that the state of affairs in Hong Kong is better under the Chinese administration?

- 1) 非常不贊同 Strongly disagree
- 2) 不贊同 Disagree

3) 中立 Neutral

4) 贊同 Agree

5) 非常贊同 Strongly agree

Part B. 對香港媒體的態度 Attitudes toward the media in general.

To what extent do you agree with the following statements? Please indicate the level of your agreement on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means “strongly disagree” and 5 means “strongly agree.”

(Please choose only one answer.)

1. 香港的媒體服務於社會的需求。The Hong Kong media generally work to serve the public interest.

1) 非常不贊同 Strongly disagree

2) 不贊同 Disagree

3) 中立 Neutral

4) 贊同 Agree

5) 非常贊同 Strongly agree

2 香港媒體的報道是客觀公正的。 Media reports are generally fair and balanced.

1) 非常不贊同 Strongly disagree

2) 不贊同 Disagree

3) 中立 Neutral

4) 贊同 Agree

5) 非常贊同 Strongly agree

3. 香港的傳媒體系是充滿活力的。Hong Kong has a dynamic mass media system.

1) 非常不贊同 Strongly disagree

2) 不贊同 Disagree

3) 中立 Neutral

4) 贊同 Agree

5) 非常贊同 Strongly agree

4 香港媒體對事件的報道普遍是和中國政府的立場一致。The Hong Kong media generally mirror the position of the Chinese government on issues.

1) 非常不贊同 Strongly disagree

2) 不贊同 Disagree

3) 中立 Neutral

4) 贊同 Agree

5) 不贊同 Strongly agree

Part C. 參與香港時事 Involvement with Hong Kong current affairs

1. 閣下是註冊選民嗎？ Are you a registered voter?

1) 是 Yes

2) 不是 - 直接去到問題 4。 No – Please go to 4

2. 你參與了去年的立法會選舉嗎？ Did you vote in the Legislative Council elections last year?

1) 是 Yes

2) 沒有 No

3) 不記得 I can't recall

4) 不回答 Refuse to answer

3. 你參與了去年的區議會選舉嗎？ Did you vote in the District Council elections last year?

1) 是 Yes

2) 沒有 No

3) 不記得 I can't recall

4) 不回答 Refuse to answer

你同意以下說法嗎？ To what extent do you agree with the following statements? Please

indicate the level of your agreement on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means “strongly disagree” and 5 means “strongly agree.” (Please choose only one answer.)

4. 我關心香港的政治未來 I care a lot about the political future of Hong Kong.

1) 非常不贊同 Strongly disagree

2) 不贊同 Disagree

3) 中立 Neutral

4) 贊同 Agree

5) 非常贊同 Strongly agree

5. 我對政治非常關心 I am very interest in politics.

1) 非常不贊同 Strongly disagree

2) 不贊同 Disagree

3) 中立 Neutral

4) 贊同 Agree

5) 非常贊同 Strongly agree

6. 我經常與人討論政治時事 I regularly discuss politics and civic issues with others.

- 1) 從不 Never
- 2) 很少 Seldom
- 3) 有時 Sometimes
- 4) 經常 Often
- 5) 總是 Always

7 你的政治傾向 What is your political affiliation?

- 1) 泛民主派 Pro-Democrat Camp
- 2) 中立派 Independence
- 3) 親建制派 Pro-establishment
- 4) 沒有傾向 No affiliation
- 5) 不回答 Refuse to answer

Part D. 對香港媒體的印象以及媒體可信度評價 Perception of media self-censorship and news credibility

1 你一般選擇什麼途徑獲取新聞？ Where do you usually go for the news?

1 ) 報紙 Newspapers

2 ) 電視 TV

3 ) 電臺 Radio

4 ) 網絡 Internet

5 ) 社交媒體 Social Media

6 ) 其他 Others

2. 你平均每天花多長時間看報紙？ How many minutes per day do you usually spend reading newspapers?

1) 少於 15 分鐘 Under 15 minutes

2) 15 到 30 分鐘 15-30 minutes

3) 30 到 60 分鐘 30-60 minutes

4) 多餘一個小時 More than an hour

3. 你大約閱讀一份報紙的多少板塊？ About how much of a newspaper edition do you read?

1) 大約四分之一 About a quarter of the newspaper content.

2) 大約一半 About half of the newspaper content.

3) 大約四分之三 About three-quarters of the newspaper content.

4) 幾乎全部 Almost all of the newspaper.

4. 你經常閱讀哪些報紙？ Which newspaper (s) do you regularly read?

1=大公報 Ta Kung Pao

2=文匯報 Wen Wei Po

3=東方日報 Oriental Daily News

4=星島日報 Sing Tao Daily

5=明報 Ming Pao

6=蘋果日報 Apple Daily

7=香港經濟日報 Hong Kong Economic Journal

8=南華早報 Southern China Morning Post

9=英文虎報 The Standard

10=AM730

11=頭條日報 Headline Daily

12=Metropolis Daily

13=其他 Others

你多大程度上同意以下觀點？ To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

5. 我滿意現在香港所擁有的言論自由度。 I am satisfied with the level of freedom of speech

Hong Kong currently enjoys.

1) 非常不贊同 Strongly disagree

2) 不贊同 Disagree

3) 中立 Neutral

4) 贊同 Agree

5) 非常贊同 Strongly agree

6. 香港媒體存在自我審查。 The newspapers in Hong Kong practice self-censorship.

1) 非常不贊同 Strongly disagree

2) 不贊同 Disagree

3) 中立 Neutral

4) 贊同 Agree

5) 非常贊同 Strongly agree

7. 媒體自我審查會嚴重影響媒體的公信力。 Self-censorship is a serious threat to newspaper credibility.

1) 非常不贊同 Strongly disagree

2) 不贊同 Disagree

3) 中立 Neutral

4) 贊同 Agree

5) 非常贊同 Strongly agree

8. 香港的記者是公正客觀的報道新聞的。The journalists in Hong Kong practice responsible reporting.

1) 非常不贊同 Strongly disagree

2) 不贊同 Disagree

3) 中立 Neutral

4) 贊同 Agree

5) 非常贊同 Strongly agree

9. 請對香港 97 回歸前媒體公信力評分。( ) How would you rate the credibility of newspapers in Hong Kong before the 1997 handover? Please indicate your rating on a scale from 1 to 5. 香港媒體的新聞報道在 97 回歸前是：

	1	2	3	4	5	
--	---	---	---	---	---	--

不公平的 Are unfair						公平的 Are fair
有偏見的 Are biased						無偏見的 Are unbiased
不準確的 Are inaccurate						準確的 Are accurate
不可信賴的 Can not be trusted						可信賴的 Can be trusted

10. 請對香港 97 回歸後媒體公信力評分。How would you rate the credibility of newspapers

in Hong Kong today? Please indicate your rating on a scale from 1 to 5. 香港媒體的新聞報道在

97 回歸後是：

	1	2	3	4	5	
不公平的 Are unfair						公平的 Are fair
有偏見的 Are biased						無偏見的 Are unbiased
不準確的 Are inaccurate						準確的 Are accurate
不可信賴的 Can not be trusted						可信賴的 Can be trusted

#### Part E. 個人信息 Personal Information

1. 閣下的性別 What is your gender?

1) 男 Male

2) 女 Female

3) 其他 Others/prefer not to say

2. 你居住在香港哪裏？ In which part of Hong Kong do you live?

1= 灣仔區 Wan Chai

2= 東區 Eastern

3= 中環 Central

4= 南區 Southern

5= 觀塘 Kwun Tong

6= 九龍塘 Kowloon Tong

7= 黃大仙 Wong Tai Sin

8= 旺角 Mongkok

9= 深水埔 Shan Shui Po

10= Yau Tsim

11= 西貢 Sai Kung

12= 沙田 Shatin

13=離島 Islands

14=荃灣 Tsuen Wan

15=大埔 Tai Po

16=屯門 Tuen Mun

17=元朗 Yuen Long

18=北區 North

19=其他 others

3. 你的最高學歷 What is your highest educational attainment?

1) 高中以下 Less than high school

2) 高中 High school and some college

3) 大學 College

4) 大學以上 Post-graduate level or above

4. 你的年收入 What is your annual income?

1) 少於 25 萬港元 Less than HK\$ 250,000

2) 25 - 50 萬港元 HK\$ 250,000-500,000

3) 50 - 100 萬港元 HK\$ 500,000-1,000,000

4) 100 萬港元以上 Over HK\$ 1,000,000

## APPENDIX C

## DEFINITION OF VARIABLES

No	Variable name	Variable label	Codes
1	attiCH	Overall opinion about China	1= Very unfavorable 2= Somewhat unfavorable 3= Neutral 4= Somewhat favorable 5= Very favorable
2	attiGov	Opinion about the Chinese government	1= Very unfavorable 2= Somewhat unfavorable 3= Neutral 4= Somewhat favorable 5= Very favorable
3	attiEco	Opinion about China's economic system or its economy	1= Very unfavorable 2= Somewhat unfavorable 3= Neutral 4= Somewhat favorable 5= Very favorable
4	attiSoc	Opinion about the general social situation in China	1= Very unfavorable 2= Somewhat unfavorable 3= Neutral 4= Somewhat favorable 5= Very favorable
5	attiCul	Opinion about China's culture	1= Very unfavorable 2= Somewhat unfavorable 3= Neutral 4= Somewhat favorable 5= Very favorable
6	CHadmin	State of affairs in Hongkong is better under the Chinese administration	1= Strongly disagree 2= Disagree 3= Neutral 4= Agree 5= Strongly agree
7	medpubl	Media generally work to serve the public interest	1= Strongly disagree 2= Disagree 3= Neutral 4= Agree 5= Strongly agree
8	medfair	The content of media is fair and balanced?	1= Strongly disagree 2= Disagree 3= Neutral 4= Agree

			5= Strongly agree
9	meddyna	Hongkong has a dynamic mass media system.	1= Strongly disagree 2= Disagree 3= Neutral 4= Agree 5= Strongly agree
10	medCH	The Hongkong media generally mirror the position of the Chinese government on issues.	1= Strongly disagree 2= Disagree 3= Neutral 4= Agree 5= Strongly agree
11	voter	Registered voter in Hongkong	1=Yes 2=No
12	voteLC	Vote for the Legislative Council election last year	1= Yes 2= No 3=I can't recall 4=Refused to answer
13	VoteDC	Vote for the District Council election last year	1= Yes 2= No 3=I can't recall 4=Refused to answer
14	Carepol	Care about political future in Hongkong	1= Strongly disagree 2= Disagree 3= Neutral 4= Agree 5= Strongly agree
15	discpol	Discuss political issue with others	1= Never 2= Seldom 3= Sometimes 4= Often 5= Always
16	read	minutes of reading newspaper	1= under 15 minute 2= 15-30 3= 30-60 4= More than an hour
17	readcon	To what extent do you read a newspaper?	1= About a quarter of the newspaper content. 2= About half of the newspaper content. 3= About three-quarters of the newspaper content. 4= Almost all of the newspaper
18	news	newspapers usually read	1= Ta Kung Pao

			2= Wen Wei Po 3= Oriental Daily News 4= Sing Tao Daily 5= Ming Pao 6= Apple Daily 7= Hong Kong Economic Journal 8= Southern China Morning Post 9= The Standard 10= AM730 11= Headline Daily 12= Metropolis Daily 13= Others
19	freedom	Satisfied with the existing freedom of speech in Hongkong	1= Strongly disagree 2= Disagree 3= Neutral 4= Agree 5= Strongly agree
20	cancel	Newspapers in Honkong are practice self-censorship	1= Strongly disagree 2= Disagree 3= Neutral 4= Agree 5= Strongly agree
21	cancel2	Self-censorship is a serious threat to newspaper credibility	1= Strongly disagree 2= Disagree 3= Neutral 4= Agree 5= Strongly agree
22	respon	Journalists in Hongkong practice responsible reporting	1= Strongly disagree 2= Disagree 3= Neutral 4= Agree 5= Strongly agree
23	newscre1	Rate the fairness in Hongkong before 1997 with a scale of 1-5.	Enter the number
24	newscre2	Rate the biasness in Hongkong before 1997 with a scale of 1-5.	Enter the number
25	newscre3	Rate the accuracy in Hongkong before 1997 with a scale of 1-5.	Enter the number
26	newscre4	Rate the trustworthiness in Hongkong before 1997 with	Enter the number

		a scale of 1-5.	
27	newscre5	Rate the fairness after 1997 with a scale of 1-5	Enter the number
28	newscre6	Rate the biasness after 1997 with a scale of 1-5	Enter the number
29	newscre7	Rate the accuracy after 1997 with a scale of 1-5	Enter the number
30	newscre8	Rate the trustworthiness after 1997 with a scale of 1-5	Enter the number
31	gender		1= Male 2= Female 3= Others 9=missing
32	live	Which part of Hongkong do you live?	1= Wanchai 2= Eastern 3= Central 4= Southern 5= Kwun Tong 6= Kowloon Tong 7= Wong Tai Sin 8= Mongkok 9= Shan Shui Po 10= Yau Tsim 11= Sai Kung 12= Shatin 13= Islands 14= Tsuen Wang 15= Kwai Tsing 16= Tuen Mun 17= Yuen Long 18= North 19= Tai Po 20= Missing
33	edu	Education level	1=Less than high school  2=High school and some college  3=College  4=Post-graduate level or above

			9=missing
34	age	Respondents age	Enter the age 999=missing
35	income	Annual income	1=Less than HK\$ 250,000 2=HK\$ 250,000-500,000 3=HK\$ 500,000-1,000,000 4=Over HK\$ 1,000,000 9=missing