



Losing **CONTROL**

Freedom of the Press in Asia

Losing **CONTROL**

Dedication

In memory of Sander Thoenes, 7 November 1968 to 21 September 1999, and all other journalists who have died in pursuit of the truth. Sander, the Indonesia-based correspondent for the *Financial Times of London* was murdered because he was a journalist while on assignment in East Timor.

Losing **CONTROL**

Freedom of the
Press in Asia



Louise Williams
and Roland Rich (editors)



Australian
National
University

E PRESS



Published by ANU E Press
The Australian National University
Canberra ACT 0200, Australia
Email: anuepress@anu.edu.au

This title is also available online at <http://epress.anu.edu.au>

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry

Title: Losing control : freedom of the press in Asia /
edited by Louise Williams and Roland Rich.

ISBN: 9781925021431 (paperback) 9781925021448 (ebook)

Subjects: Freedom of the press--Asia.
Government and the press--Asia.
Journalism--Asia.
Online journalism--Asia

Other Authors/Contributors:
Williams, Louise, 1961- editor.
Rich, Roland Y., editor.

Dewey Number: 323.445095

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means,
electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior
permission of the publisher.

Printed by Griffin Press

First published by Asia Pacific Press, 2000. This edition © 2013 ANU E Press

Losing **Control**

CONTENTS

Contributors vii

Preface

Press freedom in Asia: an uneven terrain — Amando Doronila xi

Censors

At work, censors out of work — Louise Williams 1

Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Mongolia

A few rays of light — Roland Rich 16

China

State power versus the Internet — Willy Wo-Lap Lam 37

Hong Kong

A handover of freedom? — Chris Yeung 58

Indonesia

Dancing in the dark — Andreas Harsono 74

Japan

The warmth of the herd — Walter Hamilton 93

Malaysia

In the grip of the government — Kean Wong 115

North Korea

A black chapter — Krzysztof Darewicz 138

Philippines

Free as a mocking bird — Sheila S. Coronel 147

Singapore

Information lockdown, business as usual — Garry Rodan 169

South Korea

Fear is a hard habit to break — Roger du Mars 190

Taiwan

All politics, no privacy — Ma-Li Yang and Dennis Engbarth 208

Thailand

A troubled path to a hopeful future — Kavi Chongkittavorn 219

Vietnam

Propaganda is not a dirty word — Peter Mares 239

Abbreviations 258

References 262

Index 275

Contributors

Kavi Chongkittavorn is Managing Editor of the Bangkok-based English newspaper, *The Nation*. He served as correspondent, a foreign news editor, Bureau Chief in Phnom Penh (1988–89) and Vietnam (1990–92) before becoming its Executive Editor in 1996. He has also served in the ASEAN Secretariat as a special assistant to the Secretary General and has been a Jefferson Fellow at the East-West Center, Hawaii, a Visiting Fellow at the University of Oxford, and Chairman of Southeast Asian Press Alliance.

Sheila S. Coronel is Executive Director and co-founder of the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, an independent, non-profit media agency specialising in investigative reporting. Previously she was a staff reporter for *The Manila Chronicle*, *The Manila Times* and *Panorama Magazine*. She has also written for *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* (of London and Manchester). Her collection, *Coups, Cults and Cannibals* was published in 1993. She has edited and contributed to several books, including *Pork and other Perks: Corruption and Governance in the Philippines*, *Boss: Five Case Studies of Local Politics in the Philippines* and *Patrimony: Six Case Studies on Local Politics and the Environment*, all published by the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism.

Krzysztof Darewicz holds an MA degree in Sinology from Warsaw University, Poland. From 1989 to 1999, he worked as a correspondent of the Polish Press Agency and Polish daily *Rzeczpospolita* in China and between 1990 to 1995 as a correspondent of Polish Press Agency in North Korea. He is currently a correspondent of the *Rzeczpospolita* in the United States.

Amando Doronila is currently Editorial Consultant and leading columnist for the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. He began his career at the *Manila Daily Bulletin* in 1953 before moving to *The Daily Mirror* in Manila in 1963. His opposition to the Marcos rule forced him to leave the Philippines for Australia in 1975 where he worked for *The Age* in Melbourne. Returning to the Philippines, he became Editor-in-Chief of the *Manila Chronicle* from 1986 to 1993.

Mr Doronila has written extensively on the issue of the media and democratisation in Asia. He is currently a special fellow at the Democracy and

Losing control

Leadership Project of the University of the Philippines and was recently Editor-in-Residence at the East-West Center in Hawaii. He was awarded the Philippine Catholic Mass Media Award for Best Analysis on three occasions starting in 1987 and has won the Manila Rotary Club Journalist of the Year Award in 1969 and 1988. In 1998, the French Government conferred on him the Order of Merit, rank of Knight. He has been recognised around the region for his contribution to journalism and democracy.

Roger du Mars is the Seoul foreign correspondent for the *South China Morning Post* and has freelanced for *TIME* magazine and the *Boston Globe*. He has been a journalist since 1989.

Dennis Engbarth is a freelance journalist who has lived in and written about Taiwan and Asian affairs for over 20 years. He contributes regularly to *Deutsche Press Agentur (dpa)*, *The Australian*, the *South China Morning Post*, *The Banker* and other publications. He is also a member of the Association of Taiwan Journalists.

Walter Hamilton was Tokyo Correspondent for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation for a total of 11 years, in three periods between 1979 and 1996. He has worked in journalism for 27 years, starting in print, then moving into broadcasting in 1975. In addition to his assignments in Japan, he has worked as a correspondent based in London and Singapore, at Parliament House, Canberra, and as the ABC's Economics Correspondent, based in Sydney. Most recently, he held the position of National Editor News (Radio). He is now freelancing.

Andreas Harsono is an Indonesian freelance journalist who regularly writes for Bangkok-based *The Nation* and *The West Australian*. He is currently a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University.

Willy Wo-Lap Lam is a recognised authority on China. A journalist, author and researcher with more than 20 years of experience, he has published extensively on areas including the Chinese Communist Party, economic and political reform, the People's Liberation Army, China-Taiwan and China-Hong Kong relations. A Beijing correspondent from 1986-89, Mr Lam is Associate Editor and China Editor of the *South China Morning Post*. Mr Lam's views on China and Hong Kong are frequently sought and cited

by global media such as CNN, BBC, Voice of America, NHK, TVB and ATV; major international news wires; and *Reference Material*, an internal news source for Chinese officials. Mr Lam is a graduate of the University of Hong Kong and the University of Minnesota. He is the author of four books on Chinese affairs, including *China after Deng Xiaoping* (John Wiley & Sons, 1995) and *The Era of Jiang Zemin* (Prentice Hall, 1999).

Peter Mares was the ABC's correspondent in Hanoi from 1995 to 1997. He continues to follow Vietnamese affairs closely as the presenter of daily regional current affairs program, *Asia Pacific*, broadcast on ABC Radio National and Radio Australia.

Roland Rich is the Foundation Director of the Centre for Democratic Institutions at the Australian National University in Canberra. The Centre is Australia's foremost democracy promotion centre. He served as an Australian Foreign Service officer on a number of postings including in Rangoon from 1982 to 1984 and in Vientiane where he was Australian Ambassador from 1994 to 1997. He has also worked in Cambodia.

Garry Rodan is an Associate Professor in the School of Politics and International Studies and a Research Fellow in the Asia Research Centre at Murdoch University in Western Australia. He has written extensively on the political economy of Southeast Asia, with special emphasis on Singapore. His research has recently focused on the media, including investigation into the significance of the Internet for authoritarian rule in Asia. A study of this was published in *Political Science Quarterly* in 1998 examining the case of Singapore. Currently he is examining the relationship between market development and the media in Asia, with emphasis on the implications of the Asian economic crisis and associated pressures for increased transparency on the media.

Louise Williams is an Australian journalist who has covered Asia for more than a decade, based in the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia. She has worked primarily for the sister publications, *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*, but has also written for *The Independent* (London), *The Observer* (London), as well as filing reports for the BBC World Service. In 1999 she was part of the *Herald's* team covering East Timor which won the Walkley Award for excellence in journalism for coverage of the Asia Pacific

Losing control

region. In 1994 she won the Citibank Pan Asia Journalism Award in conjunction with Columbia University. She returned from Indonesia last year and is presently attached to *The Sydney Morning Herald* Foreign Desk. She has written two books on the region and contributed to several others.

Kean Wong has worked as a journalist and broadcaster for the past 12 years, covering East Asia's political economy and popular culture for media organisations such as ABC Radio National and Radio Australia, *The Canberra Times*, and *The Sydney Morning Herald*. He has also written on these themes for *The Wire* and *Rolling Stone* magazines. Since 1994, he has worked for Malaysian media organisations such as *The Sun* newspaper (where he was a founding editor, establishing its investigative reporting unit), and *Men's Review* magazine. Based in Kuala Lumpur, he is presently a correspondent for the BBC World Service and *The Economist*. Educated in Kuala Lumpur, Perth, and Canberra at the Australian National University he is a Masters candidate at Macquarie University, Sydney.

Ma-Li Yang has worked with *CommonWealth Magazine* since 1988, and is currently Chief Senior Writer. She has also worked as a reporter with the *Chung-Hwa Daily News* (1986–88). She has received many awards recognising excellence in journalism, and is a specialist on environmental issues in Taiwan. She holds a Master of Environmental Science degree from the Australian National University and a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature from the National Taiwan University.

Chris Yeung joined the *South China Morning Post* in Hong Kong in 1984, where he is currently Associate Editor and Political Editor. Graduating from the Department of Communications at the Hong Kong Baptist College (now Hong Kong Baptist University) in 1984, Yeung completed a Master of Arts (International Relations) at the Australian National University in 1993. Yeung oversees political news coverage of the newspaper and writes regularly on a wide range of political and social issues. He is Editor of *The Red Dawn* (Prentice-Hall, 1998) which outlines the first year of Hong Kong after the changeover of sovereignty.

Preface

Press freedom in Asia: an uneven terrain

Amando Doronila

Despite the emergence of new democracies in East Asia during the last two decades of the 20th century, the freedom of the press continues to be under siege in the region. During those decades, the democratic wave in East Asia swept out authoritarian regimes in the Philippines (1986), Thailand (1992), South Korea (1992), and Indonesia (1998), making way for more pluralistic and open politics in those countries. Also in the 1980s, Taiwan abandoned authoritarian rule, and the press in that country is rated by the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists as one of the freest in the region.

The emergence of an outspoken and assertive press is an indicator of political democratisation. But a free press is neither a gift from heaven nor of the democratic process. Often, a free press precedes the fall of authoritarian regimes. Indeed, it is a harbinger of political change towards more open politics. The press plays a frontline role in political change, but it has to continue to struggle to preserve its gains, even after the election of a democratic government.

In Asia, one cannot talk about democracy or freedom of the press without qualifications. While democracy and freedom of the press are inseparable notions, one cannot assume these twin notions take the same focus in Asia as in North American and Western European democracies. A survey of the state of the press of the region must take into account the diversity of political cultures in the region and the specific ways that Asian governments are tolerant towards a critical or adversarial press.

In Asia, it is a valid proposition that freedom of the press, even in new and restored democracies (like the Philippines), is measured in terms of degrees in which frankness and criticism are tolerated by governments

Losing control

and their societies. Thus, while the press in the Philippines is probably the most unfettered in the region and replicates the western models of a free press, the Philippine press is not necessarily the role model for the rest of East Asia. The Philippines is East Asia's oldest constitutional democracy and has copied American-style presidential democracy, much to the dismay of Singapore's Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew, who considers the Filipino adversarial press and politics a source of political impasse that hampers economic development.

Filipino democracy is not the same as Thai, Korean, or Indonesian democracy, although all have adopted the minimalist criteria of having free elections and varying degrees of press freedom.

And so, as we scan the East Asian political landscape in the midst of the emergence of new democracies at the end of the century, and in the aftermath of the economic crises that shattered the bubble of the Asian tigers' economic miracles of the 1980s, we see an uneven, even treacherous, terrain of press freedom. I think the best metaphor to describe the political environment for press freedom in Asia today is that it is a minefield in which the press and journalists must tread carefully. They must be sensitive to such things as 'Asian values'—often a rationalisation for autocratic rule or political repression, or a justification of corruption.

While the press is outspoken in the new democracies, journalists and newspapers face constraints on their freedom in much of the rest of East Asia. In Singapore and Malaysia, for example, draconian Official Secrets Acts and national security legislation, as well as legal action from governments, restrict publication of news that governments would consider inimical to 'national security' or 'national interests'. Newspapers in those countries are government controlled. Coincidentally, these two countries which, before the outbreak of the East Asian financial crisis in mid 1997, had been brilliant performers economically, were also the main sources of the doctrine of 'Asian values', in defence of restrictive political environments (parliamentary systems of the Westminster mould).

Foreign correspondents face risks of expulsion in a number of Southeast Asian countries if they write news that displeases regimes. And in Northeast Asia, after the handover of Hong Kong to China, the cloud of uncertainty hangs heavily over the freedom of the press.

Only after the fall of the Soeharto regime was the system of licensing newspapers lifted, liberating latent restlessness of Indonesian journalists

over the state of affairs under 32 years of authoritarian rule, and opening an era of a critical press. The Soeharto regime had been described by the Committee to Protect Journalists as a perennial among its annual '10 worst enemies'. Its collapse triggered a wave of political reforms, including widening the freedom of the press.

Myanmar stands out as the worst case of political repression in Southeast Asia, and the press in Indochina suffers from the state-imposed restrictions of a socialist system, albeit trying to find its way into the market economy.

Against this uneven terrain, there are some hopeful developments for press freedom. In the environment of political liberalisation in Southeast Asia, journalists in the Philippines, a restored democracy, and the new democracies of Thailand and Indonesia have moved to consolidate and protect the freedoms they have gained. In 1998, the press organisations from these three countries organised the Southeast Asian Press Alliance (SEAPA), devoted to promoting and protecting press freedom.

The different paths towards political openness and the varying levels of tolerance for press freedom in East Asia have raised challenges to certain notions about democratic liberalisation or political change, and its relationship to economic development.

The restoration of democracy in the 1986 People Power Revolution in the Philippines does not substantiate the theory that political liberalisation is a consequence of economic prosperity. The revolution exploded from deep national distress fostered by political and social unrest against a corrupt and repressive Marcos regime. The economy had plunged into negative growth, and the Filipino middle class, that had broadened its base in the earlier years of economic growth, was the moving force behind the revolution. It had lost its gains, and revolted against pauperisation.

Prior to the East Asian financial crisis, there had been a fanciful perspective, supported by some Australian academics, that economic development had created a docile middle class which did not want to rock the boat lest they lose their economic gains. In this perspective, the middle class is deemed to have made a Faustian pact in which it trades off political activism in exchange for economic benefits. Singapore and Malaysia are cited as examples.

But the Indonesian unrest leading to the resignation of President Soeharto in May 1998 turned this perspective on its head. Two decades of high economic growth fostered by an authoritarian regime that brooked

Loosing control

no criticism from the press or politicians did not prevent the development of political movements originating from the streets and the distressed countryside to demand the resignation of Soeharto.

The economic collapse in Indonesia stemming from the crisis forced to the surface the effects of the lethal combination of corruption and the economic slowdown, hitting both the Indonesian middle and lower classes.

One of the important consequences of the East Asian financial crisis is that it accented the lack of transparency of financial systems in the region. While the crisis devastated all economies of the region, countries which were hit harder were also those that were least transparent about their financial transactions. These were countries where freedom of the press and access to information were restricted.

Post-crisis assessments in international conferences surveying what went wrong with the Asian miracle now underline the importance of transparency as a condition for recovery and avoidance of another severe economic crisis. By implication, the free press is essential for transparency. This post-crisis assessment not only provides reinforcement for a free press in developing societies rebounding from the crisis but also deflates the notion that a free press is a western value, not suited to culturally and politically diverse Asia.

On an anecdotal basis, I have always been uncomfortable with the notion that press freedom is alien to 'Asian values'. During decades of travelling to cover crises in Asia and even in Eastern Europe behind the Iron Curtain, I have had candid talks with journalists and editors in these regions. Over drinks and good food, journalists in countries with a captive press talk freely about what they know but cannot write because regimes don't allow it. Journalists everywhere have a universal bond—they are all the same. They talk freely among themselves. They know a lot, but they also know what not to disclose and are keenly aware of what is possible.

So, when conditions permit, they break loose from their shackles, they write what they know and they plunge into the struggle for open politics and press freedom. Press freedom is a language journalists know by instinct. It is not a western construct. Thus, when the Soviet system broke down, Pravda overnight blossomed into a free newspaper in which journalists who dared to write the unprintable were no less rambunctious than their western counterparts.

Indonesian editors I had met just before the fall of Soeharto were critical of the regime when talking to fellow journalists. However they said they could not write what they knew. But as soon as the windows opened to the new wind of change, journalists jumped into the stream of press freedom like fish swimming in water.

What bothers me is that new ways of stifling the press have found their way into new democracies and even in a restored democracy like the Philippines.

The press is used to conventional modes of suppression—libel cases, withdrawal of licences, expulsion of foreign correspondents, jailing, assassinations, censorship or self-censorship, and outright violence (as experienced by those covering ethnic riots).

With the advent of democratisation, there are fewer blatant reprisals such as raids by soldiers or jailing of recalcitrant and independent-minded journalists. More subtle methods have found their way into East Asia from Latin America where, despite the democratic wave, old habits of press suppression die hard, even at the hands of democratically elected governments.

The new method is economic strangulation of the press through withdrawal of advertising at the instigation of governments retaliating against press criticism. This new and insidious method, introduced by the democratically elected government of President Joseph Estrada, has hit the independent newspaper, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, the country's largest English daily. This method uses ostensibly democratic and legal means to strangle press freedom and undermine democracy.

The introduction of new weapons to muzzle a free press warns against complacency. The fact that East Asia is moving—albeit slowly—towards more plural and participatory politics does not ensure that freedom of the press is protected. The press owes it to itself to continue to fight to preserve and expand its gains.

I very much welcome the initiative to survey the state of the media in Asia in this book, *Losing Control: freedom of the press in Asia*, and I commend the Centre for Democratic Institutions at the Australian National University for seeing the project through to fruition. One of the strengths of the book is that it has been written largely by working journalists. It is important, every now and then, to look critically at one's own profession and industry and to compare it to best-practice ideals. Constructive

Losing control

criticism, especially that coming from local journalists themselves, can greatly assist the cause of achieving freedom of expression throughout Asia.

The editors, Louise Williams and Roland Rich, have considerable first-hand experience in the region and shared with me and other Filipino journalists the exhilaration of the first years of freedom following the fall of the Marcos regime while they were both posted in Manila. I am delighted to be working with them again.

Amando Doronila

11 November 1999, Manila

Censors

At work, censors out of work

Louise Williams

Information is power, or so the enduring dictators of history have understood. In so many of Asia's capitals, from Beijing to Jakarta, from Rangoon to Hanoi, the scene was the same. In obscure back rooms, rows of desks lay lined up, their surfaces rubbed smooth by years of diligent effort, as the faceless agents of authoritarian states dutifully poured over newspapers and magazines. Carefully, the swarms of censors cut out 'subversive' articles from abroad, one by one, or bent low over 'offensive' captions and photographs and blacked them out by hand. They laboured over their own local newspapers too, erasing hints of rebellion and allusions to unpalatable truths tucked within the reams of propaganda. The carefully edited articles that resulted were read by one and all, but believed by very few.

The authoritarian, or quasi-authoritarian regimes of the post-colonial era in Asia, understood well the relationship between control over information and political power. In China, reading groups are convened to vet the ideological content of newspapers and to sway appropriately with the prevailing political winds. In Burma and Vietnam regimes still prefer risking the death of artistic expression by subjecting even song lyrics to the dour committees of ideological correctness. In the not-too-distant past, the enemy governments of South and North Korea, faced each other across the de-militarised zone, their regimes carrying labels from the opposite sides of the ideological spectrum, but their authoritarian controls over information much the same. And in Soeharto's Indonesia the military intelligence service worked directly within parts of the local media as well as harassing, cajoling and co-opting the foreign press.

Losing control

The political leaders of hundreds of millions of people took a personal, almost petty interest in their own propaganda. To the Chairman, the Great Leader or Secretary Number One, even obscurely critical references in minor publications were enough to attract their attention, and spark offence. So concerned were they about the moulding of their own images as great statesmen that the line between ego and political control sometimes blurred. Thus it was in Indonesia that former authoritarian leader, Soeharto, raged over the slight to his family implied by the *Sydney Morning Herald's* decision to breach the unspoken taboo and publish details of their personal wealth. And so it was, and in some places still is, that senior politicians spent their late evenings personally checking editions of daily newspapers before they went to print.

In North Korea citizens are subjected to the ultimate insult; the state security apparatus bans them from locking their doors at night so intelligence officials can wander in at will to ensure no unauthorised reading, listening or discussing is going on inside. Singapore has almost completed the electronic version of the same controls—a nationwide, government-run communications network which will bring the Internet into every home, and just as conveniently allow the authorities to wander into the cyberspace to check up on its citizens at any time.

In Malaysia and Singapore a western-style press flourished in form, but not in content. A sophisticated combination of legislation and ownership concentration ensured the media remained under control. In nations wracked by periods of acute political instability, like Thailand, the Philippines, and Cambodia, the messengers themselves sometimes became the victims—murder serving as the ultimate sanction against freedom of the press.

Control of the media has served as an integral part of maintaining political control in many authoritarian nations around the world. Whether claiming legitimacy from the political left or the political right, non-democratic regimes all agreed to control the flow of information to their people. Communist regimes had a finely honed system of control inherited from Lenin and Stalin and perfected over decades in the Soviet Union. The right-wing generals who ruled much of the balance were quick to learn the tricks of the censor's trade. So uniform was the model of political power in Asia during the economic boom of the 1980s, that a new 'Asian' model was widely discussed—one in which individual rights were

curtailed in the name of stability and individuality was submerged in favour of the economic progress that, it was argued, unfettered leadership could deliver. Within that model of authority, control of the press was essential.

Now the political map of the region is shifting, with control over the press and the technology of information dissemination never before so important in determining who will hold the reins of power. Losing control of information is one crucial factor in losing political control. Pro-democracy movements, assisted by the underground press, the Internet, and even mobile phones, have swept away authoritarian governments in Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan and even Mongolia in the past 15 years.

The new Wahid Government in Indonesia has simply abandoned control altogether, announcing the abolition of the Department of Information, where all those faceless bureaucrats at rows of wooden desks had wielded so much power under former President Soeharto. With a simple announcement the censors were no more. Among the new bureaucratic structures, a new Department of Human Rights would be established instead.

It would be simple if the debate over freedom of the press stopped there—with a black and white battle between the censors and the proponents of free speech. But there are many other issues to confront. Are the region's remaining censors fighting a futile battle against satellite television and the Internet, or could a compact, sophisticated, affluent state such as Singapore, wrest control over the next generation of information technology? And when the censors lose, does freedom of the press necessarily follow?

Here we learn that when the state relinquishes control of information a power vacuum is left behind. Into that vacuum rush a whole range of vested interests as new power structures are shaped. Can businesses or politicians just as effectively capture the press through the free market, using simple outright ownership or more underhand methods such as bribery?

The much-vaunted free market itself is a far from perfect model for the media. In a truly free market will not sensationalism win the day as the consumers' taste for scandals, violence and gore inevitably pulls the media away from serious news reporting?

Losing control

Without the censors who will control the press in their new role as society's self appointed watchdogs? In the newly democratising nations of Asia, where civil society and its institutions such as Press Councils and professional bodies to police press ethics are in their infancy, it is both fair and relevant to ask 'who will watch the watchdogs?'

Information technology as friend and foe

From South Korea to Indonesia, authoritarian regimes attempted to combine free market economics with closed political systems, which included significant controls over the flow of information. Many nations were successful in the short term, recording significant economic growth which, in itself, discouraged the millions who had gained material wealth from rocking the political boat.

The most rapid industrialisation in the history of the world was occurring in East Asia. Despite the label 'economic miracle', fast growth created urgent new social problems such as a yawning gap between the new rich and the old poor, mind-numbing pollution, the destruction of urban and rural communities to make way for development and massive migration flows towards the factories. The face of East Asia was being transformed.

Rapid economic growth in East Asia was kindled by large, cheap labour markets. The tiger economies and their aspiring cubs realised, however, that both technology and capital were essential to take the next leap in economic development beyond the cheap clothing factories and 'dirty' industries. Information technology was at the cutting edge of that leap, as was integration into global financial systems. Both brought with them unwelcome bedfellows.

It can be argued that new information technology so seriously undercut the ability of governments to control information, in nations such as Indonesia and Thailand, that the fall of authoritarian regimes was inevitable. Just as information is power, so too is technology. The spectacular advances in communications and information technology, the advent of satellite television and the globalisation of the media made the old-time censors, with their quaint armoury of scissors and thick, black pens, obsolete. New battle lines are being drawn for control of the Internet and the airwaves, but the speed of transmission and the volume of

information flashing its way around the world means this is a much more difficult line to hold.

It seems the dilemma now facing East Asia's remaining authoritarian regimes is how to balance the need for technology for economic development against the risk of losing control of information and, in turn, losing political control. The hermit states of North Korea and Burma seem to have decided to forfeit technology altogether, choosing autarky, and condemning their people to grinding poverty, to maintain tried and true models of information control.

China, Vietnam, Malaysia and Singapore, on the other hand, are seeking ever-more sophisticated means of information control, erecting electronic 'firewalls' to control Internet providers or even building the entire information network themselves. But, pressures continue to build in the region for greater press freedoms. The integration of once closed or isolated economies into the world economy has brought new demands for transparency, openness and the functioning of civil society. There is a clear need for scrutiny and criticism of the political tools of power and there are ever louder calls for an end to tools of repression such as censorship and the imprisonment, or worse, of dissidents.

So the autocrats are fighting a war on two difficult fronts. They have to face demands for democracy and the rule of law from their own people and from the international community while at the same time fighting to retain the tools of repression, including controls over information flows. Advances in information technology constantly move the bar higher.

It starts with pencil and paper. In the late 1960s, as Soeharto consolidated his hold on power, more than ten thousand Indonesian 'leftists', many of them writers and artists, were rounded up and shipped off to Buru island. So isolated was this barren, windswept piece of land that the island itself was a sufficient prison. Included among the survivors was Indonesia's best known author, Pramoedya Ananta Toer, who was held on Buru for more than ten years. There, he says, inmates were beaten if they were found with any reading material or caught with a paper, pens or pencils.

In Ceasescu's Romania every typewriter in the country was registered to ensure that dissident views could not be printed or published. In Burma today, every fax machine must be registered with the authorities to ensure that contact with the outside world is always vetted by the generals. In the Philippines it was photocopying machines which assisted the *samizdat*

Losing control

(or 'guerrilla press') in publishing alternative newspapers exposing the Marcos regime. In Thailand it was the VCR which allowed people to view illegal, pirated tapes copied from foreign satellite television broadcasts of the massacre of pro-democracy demonstrators by soldiers in Bangkok.

From the early 1990s mobile phones became important political tools, allowing organisers to pull together protest rallies in Jakarta, or disperse them in the face of a crack down. That tool carried pro-democracy movements one step beyond the illegal radio broadcasts which had called Filipinos into the streets in the mid 1980s.

Today it is the Internet. In Indonesia, the Internet was widely used to distribute articles critical of the Soeharto regime and to organise mass protests. Beijing's ongoing rage against the Falun Gong is being insidiously countered by thousands of quiet emails and caustic chat comments.

The Communist Party of China recognises that without information technology it cannot fuel its economic ambitions and thus continue to deliver even modest economic growth. And without growth it cannot hope to maintain stability and political power. Yet that very technology includes the Internet, allowing overseas Chinese pro-democracy groups to launch daily attacks on the regime across the telephone wires, opening and closing their web pages in a single 24 hour period to avoid detection. The Chinese Government can, and does, control Internet providers in China. It can, and does, impose harsh penalties on those caught accessing dissident material. But, the race to keep up with the Internet is a far more arduous task than maintaining control over conventional newspapers.

In Laos, the government-controlled *Vientiane Times* suddenly appeared in an illegal Internet edition, launched from outside the country, its usually tame columns complemented by a readers' section filled with critical comments. The 'guerrilla' Internet edition was condemned in the pages of the local newspaper, a move which only attracted more attention to the rebel edition without stopping the perpetrators.

In Burma and North Korea, progress is simply passing the people by—thus avoiding, or at least delaying, the collapse of tragically archaic systems of government with their systems of information control. These regimes have chosen isolation over economic development—and so the censors' scissors still wield power because the Internet is banned and few have the technology or the knowledge necessary to use it anyway.

It seems oddly incongruous that so backward a nation as Burma sits smugly besides Singapore, one of the most technologically advanced nations on earth. The Burmese generals prefer simply to keep their heads in the sand, while Singapore is intent on building the world's most elaborate sandcastle. All eyes must now turn to Singapore where the government is building the entire communications network itself—known as Singapore One. By next year every household in the island nation will be 'online', linked into a national electronic network offering sophisticated communications options and the Internet in every home. But, with ownership and control of the technology, can the government also effectively 'spy' on its citizens merely by downloading personal emails, or monitoring what people are reading on the Internet? Filters can be installed blocking out pornography, for example, as well as politically sensitive material.

It can be argued that Singapore is an exception to the rule—as a tiny nation more like a medium-sized city it can be much more easily managed (or controlled) than the vast reaches of China, for example. But Singapore, particularly founding leader Lee Kuan Yew, has played an important role in the 'Asian values' debate of the 1980s, and may play an important role in demonstrating the outer limits of control of new information technology in the new millennium.

For decades Singapore has fascinated political observers with its apparently contradictory mix of free market capitalism and political controls—Asia's 'big brother/or big father' society was making it out there in the freewheeling international marketplace. Lee Kuan Yew argued that curbing western-style freedoms, such as freedom of speech and freedom of the press, met a 'higher' goal of social stability which, in turn, paved the way for rapid economic development. Thus, a government had the moral right to curtail an individual's freedoms in exchange for economic rights.

It is not surprising that Vietnam has already sent teams to Singapore to study 'firewalls' to be built into the Internet and other tactics for information control. In Vietnam attempts are being made to train officials of the security apparatus to chase electronic information across the Internet, and to limit use of global information networks by making them expensive and accessible only through government agencies.

May the market forces be with you

There is a divide emerging between regimes clinging to authoritarian political models and the region's new young democracies. This gulf is also reflected in attitudes towards the press. The range of attitudes span the totalitarian control of all information in Pyongyang, the use of information as propaganda in Beijing or Hanoi, the retention of the form but not the reality of a free press in Malaysia and Singapore and the 'wild west' freedom of the press in the Philippines. The problems of the press in Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines are in many ways the most worrisome. The laws are largely in place but the result leaves much to be desired. Simply sacking the censor is not sufficient. In these countries, true freedom of the press is a distant ideal, not a reality. Censorship has been replaced by an uncomfortable form of information anarchy in the new democracies.

Once state control is relinquished a much more complicated power struggle is unleashed for control over the media. First cab off the rank is the simple commercial interest of private media companies seeking profits through sensationalism. Then there is the power of advertisers to influence editorial content by threatening to remove their accounts. Next come the politicians and business people who can take control by gaining ownership of newspapers or radio or TV stations themselves. Finally, there is the threat of bribery of journalists by vested interest groups and, if that doesn't work, there is the threat of violence against journalists by the old power holders such as the military.

Ironically, in a number of East Asia's young democracies, freedom of the press has unleashed the forces of sensationalism and voyeurism in such extreme forms that they are challenging cultural norms and community standards. With freedom comes the right to sell newspapers using bikini girls and horrific, intrusive photographs of terrible accidents. With freedom comes the right to use local movie stars as newsreaders and choose to lead the news bulletin with gossip about show business figures.

So serious is the drift towards the 'tabloidisation' of the media in Hong Kong, that a local group felt the need to set up a 'pollution index' to try to monitor sleaze, fabrication and scandals. The driving force behind tabloid journalism is simply profit; demonstrating that with the free market comes

the right to disseminate any kind of information, including pornography, violence and gore. Market forces are ultimately amoral.

The price of press freedom in the short term has been information anarchy, with the free market the new bottom line. The free market, however, does not take into account ethics or values, nor does it necessarily reject biases based on commercial interests, nor demand the media play a public service role by providing high quality, independent news and analysis.

The problem, too, with an entirely private, commercial media is that profits will continue to be the driving force behind television programming. Can an entirely private media serve the public honestly? Without independent, government or publicly funded broadcasters, such as the BBC, Australia's ABC, PBS in the United States, or Germany's *Deutsche Welle*, it is difficult to imagine where high quality current affairs and news programs will come from.

It is possible, however, that global news services, such as CNN and the BBC World Service, may be able to influence local demand for quality current affairs because they are now being beamed into Asia via satellite. This helps explain the fascination of the authoritarian states with the Ted Turners of this world. They recognise raw power when they see it. Pyongyang was fascinated that a fellow pariah state, Iraq, had been able to tell its side of the story to the world on CNN. Beijing continues to dangle the prize of a billion viewers in front of a fascinated Rupert Murdoch. Autocrats have the choice of banning CNN or courting it. They cannot ignore it. So global news may have its positive side. It might be guilty of simplification, trivialisation and, at times, obfuscation, but it will not risk its global audience by allowing itself to be the vehicle for a one-party state's national propaganda.

In a truly free market there are no gatekeepers, only consumers. In a number of countries important debates are underway on how to impose controls which deal with issues of values, taste and respect for privacy without allowing governments to use the issue of media quality as an excuse to return to government controls.

Already, tentative moves are being made in Thailand and Hong Kong to create Press Council type bodies to protect the public from the excesses of tabloid journalism and industry bodies to produce self-regulatory

guidelines for the media. But with heavy-handed censorship such a recent memory in Thailand, and with fears of intervention in the media by Beijing in Hong Kong, these are sensitive debates indeed.

In Thailand and Japan in 1999, landmark freedom of information legislation was introduced, opening up government departments to scrutiny by the public and the press. Thailand's Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai put the matter simply and eloquently: 'the public should know what the government knows'. This is the debate the newly democratic countries of East Asia must engage in. They are debating the limits of the market as a regulator and the need for legal and professional institutions to act as a brake on the excesses to which the market will otherwise lead.

Reporting corruption, corrupt reporting

A free press is not a luxury. A free press is at the absolute core of equitable development, because if you cannot enfranchise poor people, if they do not have a right to expression, if there is no searchlight on corruption and inequitable practices, you cannot build the public consensus needed to bring about change (James Wolfensohn, *International Herald Tribune*, 11 November 1999).

The conspiracy of silence on corruption is over. Wolfensohn is right to put reporting about corruption at centre stage. Reporting corruption can also be used as a gauge to test the degree of freedom the press is being allowed. In totalitarian societies, the leadership can do no wrong so the reporter is committing the crime in reporting corruption. The Burmese generals won't even allow consumer complaints about businesses run by their families or friends. The more progressive Chinese and Vietnamese leaders value the role the press can play in investigating and reporting official corruption. As such they have begun to incorporate a role for the state-controlled media in corruption investigations, adding a veneer of accountability to their own regimes. But they nevertheless insist on the final say in what will be printed and who will be shielded from the press. Only middle-level bureaucrats are lined up and sentenced to death on government television in China, serving as an example to others. Journalists who misunderstand this reality can themselves be jailed. The question is whether regimes such as China can manage to finesse the issue of the reporting of corruption to use it to enhance their own credibility.

Corruption by strongmen and their cronies has been the dominant theme of Asia's pro-democracy movements. Former Philippines strongman, Ferdinand Marcos, and his counterpart in Indonesia, Soeharto, were visibly seen to have amassed vast fortunes for their families by abusing their political power. At every level authoritarian regimes boasted a raft of officials who did just the same; the nature of the political power structure facilitated corruption because there were no watchdogs to hold the power élite to account. At an every day level, on the street corners where police braved the thick fumes and the tropical heat, in the queues for driving licences, and in the offices where applications for school places were shuffled, the example from the leadership was followed. Corruption was part of the system and no one was allowed to complain lest the finger be directed at the billionaire president.

Overlaying any discussion of press reporting on corruption is both the legacy of the recent past and dominant cultural mores. Investigative reporting is a skill much in demand but little evident. In the new democracies, analysts have pointed to the problem of a free press being run by a generation of journalists trained under government controls. Journalists now face the task of making sense of the new political power map and the complex social and economic changes industrialisation has brought, often without the necessary analytical or research skills. A number of media commentators have pointed to an inadequate understanding of press ethics, such as the Indonesian tabloid which proudly and unselfconsciously calls itself *Trial by the Press*. In Mongolia, the flagship communist mouthpiece modelled on *Pravda* tried to lure back readers by changing its name from *Truth*, to the more provocative *Is It True?*

The reskilling of journalists is a challenge. The culture of fact-checking needs to be instilled in an entire generation of journalists accustomed to being told what to report. This problem goes well beyond the communist states of East Asia. Early indications in Thailand suggest few reporters are seeking the previously classified documents under the new Freedom of Information Act. So accustomed are journalists to simply being 'handed' information to publish that the majority have remained in the comfort zone of the past, merely waiting for news to be leaked through highly politicised channels instead of taking the initiative themselves.

The information comfort zone must also include culture. In Japan, East Asia's first industrialised nation with a long history of democratic

Losing control

processes and freedom of the press, what the public is offered is strongly influenced by the long-standing practice of herd journalism. In Japan, a sophisticated system of information management has been established which pulls journalists together into press clubs, known as *kisha* clubs. These clubs are attached to political parties, chambers of commerce and even business groups, where the same information is provided to all. The warmth of the herd discourages individual initiative and the cosy press clubs this system is built around have their own subtle censorship codes—such as the denial of further cooperation with journalists who break from the pack.

How a free press will report corruption remains a crucial issue. It is already apparent that information about corruption can be used as a political tool. Just as political camps leak details of the corrupt practices of their opponents in the west, and the media is used in a political power play, so too will a free press be used in Asia.

At the same time self-censorship continues. In Hong Kong, journalists fearful of the implications of the return to the former British colony to China have steered clear of sensitive subjects despite no direct intervention from Beijing. Right across the board self-censorship is determined by the personal experiences of journalists; those raised with the fears of censure of the past must be more reticent despite recent changes. South Korea's press is still recovering from the wounds of the strongman's controls. Indonesia's journalists are delighted but stunned by the abolition of the Department of Information. After more than three decades of intimidation, direct controls, harassment and co-option, reporting taboos have been built in to the media's psyche. It takes more than overnight political change to build a new media.

Many journalists in East Asia's new democracies are poorly paid and equally poorly trained. They find it difficult to operate effectively within a free press environment. In a number of countries, including the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia and South Korea, there is an ongoing culture of 'envelope journalism' despite the reforms of the political system. Bribes paid directly to journalists have long been used to influence editorial content, and this kind of corruption is rationalised as not morally wrong but simply a part of the system and an expected bonus for journalists.

Corruption within the media is potentially a very serious problem, given the dominant role the press is playing now in reporting on corruption

within governments in young democracies. When authoritarian governments controlled the press the public was unable to gain access to information about the corrupt practices of officials. With a free press, however, corruption at all levels can be reported, including corruption of the media industry itself.

'Envelope journalism' is perhaps the greatest threat to the credibility of a free press. It cannot be justified by reference to the poverty of the journalist in question. In Australia, the two most highly paid radio journalists in the country insisted on being paid millions more from business for favourable editorial comments about those business' products. The 'cash for comments' scandal in Australia is merely the end point that envelope journalism reaches.

The endgame is democracy

'When people look back at what happened in this century, they will find it difficult not to accord primacy to the emergence of democracy as the preeminently acceptable form of governance' (Sen 1999:4). This was Nobel laureate Amartya Sen's response to the question of what was the most important thing to have happened the 20th century. 'This recognition of democracy as a universally relevant system, which moves in the direction of its acceptance as a universal value, is a major revolution in thinking, and one of the main contributions of the twentieth century.'

Democracy made its way in East Asia in the last years of the last decade of the century. There are the examples of Japan, Taiwan and South Korea in Northeast Asia, and the Philippines and Thailand in Southeast Asia. The entire international community is keeping its fingers crossed that Indonesia can also make the transition. Successful transition to democracy with multi-party elections and liberal values is now seen as the key to good governance and sustainable economic development.

The decisive battle for democratisation is the fight for freedom of the press. The flow of information is the key to empowering people. The most powerful weapon in the battle for democracy is the truth and it is the media that is charged with delivering it as best it can to the people. This is a fact that autocrats understand even better than democrats. So the issue of freedom of the press takes on the broadest dimensions. It is not just a battle to ensure respect for Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of

Losing control

Human Rights. It is a battle to determine the shape of society, its mores and the functioning of its political system.

Losing Control: freedom of the press in Asia takes us right up to the end of this tumultuous century. It deals with the Chinese media cranking up its latest propaganda campaign, this time against the Falun Gong. It discusses how the Indonesian media lost its way in reporting the tragedy in East Timor. And it comments on how the Cambodian media—or at least parts of it—surprisingly reported the allegations that the Prime Minister’s wife had her husband’s movie star girlfriend assassinated.

The book adopts a country-by-country approach dealing with all the countries in Northeast and Southeast Asia. It does not attempt to sweep across to the sub-continent. It would not be possible to do justice to any discussion of freedom of the press in that region by sandwiching it in between the pages of a book about East Asia.

The methodology is based on an underlying assumption: that journalists are best placed to provide the most up-to-date analysis of their own industry. Where possible, local journalists have contributed the country chapters. In some cases a more useful outcome could be achieved by employing foreign correspondents and commentators. Authors have written their chapters using journalistic research tools, such as first hand interviews, as well as more conventional academic methods.

Willy Lam, one of the most respected journalists writing on China, gives us insight into the thought processes of the decision-makers in China and explains how they are trying to handle the dilemma of dealing with information flows. Walter Hamilton puts his years in Japan to good use in explaining the difficulty of breaking free of the herd mentality. Kavi Chongkittavorn traces the development of Thai democracy and the press freedoms which now accompany it from the perspective of one who has participated in that struggle.

Andreas Harsono lives through his chapter on Indonesia, a journalist both exhilarated and concerned over the speed and direction of events. And in Sheila Coronel’s chapter on the Philippines one can discern both pride in the country’s achievement in democracy and exasperation at how it is being used.

Peter Mares and Roger du Mars explain the situation in Vietnam and South Korea respectively by analysing their histories. Both nations have

difficult pasts which point to problems in their present handling of media issues. Mary Yang and Dennis Engbarth trace the path by which Taiwan could boast perhaps the freest media in Asia.

Chris Yeung devotes considerable attention to the handover of Hong Kong to China and the shadow Beijing will cast in the future.

It has been left to Krzysztof Darewicz and my co-editor Roland Rich to deal with the difficult totalitarian end of the press freedom spectrum in North Korea and Burma. Roland Rich nevertheless finds a few rays of light in Cambodia and Mongolia.

Amando Doronila provides his perspective in an insightful essay on a complex issue, one which he has long faced as a prominent journalist and editor both in the good years and the bad. He is the doyen of Asian journalists and his voice needs to be heard.

All the contributors attacked their subjects individually but many have taken up similar themes and issues and it is on these and the many examples provided in the book that this overview chapter has drawn.

Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Mongolia

A few rays of light

Roland Rich

Many political dissidents have died within the walls of Burma's notorious Insein prison, where former inmates say the thick stone walls run with water in the wet season and the wind howls through the open bars as prisoners huddle like caged animals. In 1996, sexagenarian Leo Nichols, the Anglo-Burmese acting Honorary Consul for several European countries, died within the prison complex a few months into his three-year sentence. His crime: possession of an unregistered fax machine. Perhaps, more to the point, though, was his friendship with opposition leader, Aung San Suu Kyi. In Burma censorship and control of the media is complete. The Internet is banned and the grinding poverty imposed upon the people through isolation and authoritarianism means few own the technology which could give them access to alternative forms of information anyway.

There is a depressing theme which dominates any discussion of the state of freedom of speech in Burma, as well as in Brunei, Cambodia, Laos and Mongolia: the struggle against authoritarianism in its various forms. It matters little whether the form of authoritarianism is monarchical, communist or a military dictatorship, intolerance of press freedom produces the same results. It is virtually by definition that the leadership of such countries can do no wrong, and so the crime in reporting corruption

or incompetence is therefore committed by the reporter. In such an environment, however, the voracious appetite of the public for reading or viewing material remains much the same. So, in the absence of any real news, information or analysis, the Burmese and Lao look straight past the propaganda and pour over the colour advertisements around it. The promotions for haircuts and new consumer products are as close to symbols of the outside world as you can get in these tightly controlled societies. And although several of these governments are now in their post-authoritarian phases, the current state of the media demonstrates that a culture of freedom cannot be established overnight.

While full press freedom does not exist in any of the five countries dealt with in this chapter, some are moving purposefully in that direction. Of the five, perhaps the country with the greatest degree of freedom of expression is Cambodia, probably a legacy of the period of government by the United Nations (UN) in 1992–93. The United Nations Transition Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) endowed Cambodia with a liberal constitution and thus broke some of the shackles of a twelve-year-old orthodox communist regime. Cambodia today boasts a vibrant civil society determined to hold onto the freedoms inherited from the UN period, but it is at times a difficult battle where the weapons are not only state power but assassins' bullets. Beyond the higher principle of defending press freedom, lies another challenge—facing the problems of the low quality of reporting.

The emergence of Mongolia from seven decades of communism also illustrates some important themes. The main means of controlling the press in communist countries has always been self-censorship and in post-communist societies many journalists have found it difficult to reinvent themselves. Press freedom is clearly not achieved simply through new legislation or the tearing up of old laws. It also requires a culture of a free and responsible press and a critical mass of journalists who value and defend that culture. Mongolia no longer routinely practices state censorship yet media freedom remains stunted. The Mongolian example argues for the proposition that a culture of press freedom cannot be developed where the state has a monopoly on media ownership. The Mongolian and other examples here also demonstrate that one necessary, though clearly not a sufficient, condition of press freedom is private and

Losing control

diverse ownership of the media. In this sense Mongolia is moving in the right direction.

The Burmese generals have learned some lessons since they fooled themselves into believing that the people would vote for them. Their mentor, General Ne Win, never bothered trying to be loved. He was satisfied with being feared. Burma's problems today flow from Ne Win's autocratic rule. Like Napoleon's puppies in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, Ne Win locked his military successors away from the outside world and when they emerged it was as the SLORC, an expressive acronym for the State Law and Order Restoration Council, since renamed the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). Having been rebuffed overwhelmingly in 1990 in the popular vote they thought they would win, the Burmese generals now understand their relationship to the Burmese people better. They won 10 of the 485 seats while the National League for Democracy (NLD) won 392. They refused to hand over power to NLD leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, and instead, placed her under house arrest. Another response to the poll was to reassess an already repressive press policy, to ensure total domination of the mass media by the state. As we enter the Information Age, Burmese authoritarianism has no place to go other than autarky and the poverty that will inevitably accompany it.

There are also lessons to be drawn from the one-dimensional media of Brunei and Laos where there is no pretence of freedom of the press, but neither does there appear to be the public will to fight for it. Media freedom is part of a wider process of engaging the people in the government of their affairs. It cannot exist where, for reasons of apathy or resignation, the broader public is not prepared to demand and defend it. Here again the Internet is playing its role. It will allow opinions to be expressed, anonymously if necessary, and thus test the proposition that the people are content with their lot as the official media will have us all believe.

Burma

Every year Guardian Sein Win would hold his press party inviting foreign diplomats, stringers for foreign publications and a few locals. The guests would sit around discussing politics and personalities, focusing in particular on what was often grandly called the post-Ne Win era. The press parties were held in the 1980s, before SLORC had taken charge. It

was as if the group lived in a country where the press had some use for political analysis. Respect for Sein Win was the reason the group came together at all. Sein Win had been a crusading newspaperman in the 1950s, when Burma was by and large a democratic country with something approaching a free press. His association with his newspaper was such that, in a country where a small stock of unisex names is shared by a large population, the name of his paper—*The Guardian*—had come to be tacked on to his own, thus distinguishing him from the thousands of other Sein Wins in the country.

Among the regular guests was the stringer for the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, a skeletal old man who many years before had lost the courage to file anything but government press releases. There was also the stringer for *Agence France Presse*—a real livewire. Everybody knew that while he liked to put the French news agency on his business card, his income came from his very competent tennis coaching. Of the diplomats, one could pick out the occasional spooks, just as Sein Win no doubt recognised the operatives from the Department of Defence Services Intelligence (DDSI) who had come as representatives of the now tame local newspapers.

In Ne Win's Burma there was a certain level of tolerance of such facades, as long as one stuck to form and did not attempt to stray towards substance. Political censorship was standard operating procedure and it remains in daily use by his political successors.

Today there is neither freedom of the press, nor tolerance for any kind of freedom of expression in Burma. The mass media has been directly controlled by the government for nearly four decades, with the most diligent of censors focusing on the local print media, locally made films and movies, and the state-run broadcasting stations. The government does not bother too much about foreign uncensored films and satellite TV access because so few people have access to them in what is now one of the poorest countries and when few Burmese have any knowledge of foreign languages.

There are two major newspapers in Burmese—the *Kyémon* (The Mirror) and the *Myanma Alin* (The New Light of Myanmar)—and one in English under a translated name of the latter. They are published in Rangoon, with a circulation around 200,000 copies for each of the Burmese versions. All are under the supervision of the News and Periodicals Enterprise

Losing control

(NPE) of the Ministry of Information. And, all articles, news items and feature articles are prepared and selected by the NPE. The Office of the Strategic Studies (OSS), of which SPDC Secretary 1, Lt Gen Khin Nyunt, is the helmsman, prepares all articles on political and social issues. Any local writers, journalists or cartoonists wishing to preserve their independence prefer not to contribute to these newspapers, and the general public well understands their propagandistic nature. There is one evening newspaper called the *City News* run by the Yangon (Rangoon) City Development Committee (YCDC), another government organisation. The *City News* differs from the other newspapers only in that it carries film news, commodity prices, and some foreign tabloid news. It has an estimated circulation of about 35,000 copies.

In Mandalay, there are two newspapers in the Burmese language—the *Ratanabon* (the Mandalay) and the *Mandalay Daily*. The former is run by the NPE and the latter by the Mandalay City Development Committee. The *Ratanabon* is Mandalay's version of the *New Light of Myanmar* and the *Mandalay Daily* of the YCDC's *City News*. Circulation is around 30,000 for the *Ratanabon* and 20,000 for the *Mandalay Daily*. While the Ministry of Home Affairs has approved over 70 weekly magazines, only 48 actually appear, covering pop issues, sports, business, crimes, international news, cartoons, women's issues, student guides and, of course, propaganda. The best selling weekly has a circulation of some 30,000 and concentrates on cases of adultery, rape and murder, but most smaller weeklies survive with around 10,000 to 20,000 copies sold. There are also over 100 magazines produced each month. The best-selling monthly has a circulation of more than 40,000 copies but no one knows the exact number of sales because publishers prefer not to share these facts with either the revenue department or the contributors. The best-selling magazines cover astrology, mysterious events and tales of miraculous traditional remedies.

Before SPDC came to power, there were very few weeklies and the number of monthlies were just a half of the existing figures. After the takeover, the regime issued permission to publish weeklies and monthlies to its offshoots. Staff welfare committees of various government departments were given this privilege. For instance, the staff welfare association of the Ministry of Information has three publications—*International Affairs*, *Sports*, and the *Pyay Myanmar* (Burma)—and all three sell well. As a result, staff from these departments enjoy free monthly

supplies of rice, edible oil and a small amount of cash. Other committees usually give concessions to private companies and individuals to publish the magazines on their behalf. Of the 48 weeklies only 14 are privately owned—one of them is run by a daughter of SPDC Secretary 3, Lt Gen Win Myint, while the remaining 34 licences are owned by government agencies or civil service staff welfare committees. The OSS publishes two weeklies—the *International Economics News Journal* and the *Myanmar Morning Post*, the latter in Chinese. The Department of Defence Services Intelligence (DDSI) also publishes a couple of propaganda journals but they are the least popular of the weeklies.

Private ownership of the monthly magazines is more common, with only 20 being run by the government. However, some of the privately owned monthlies still have strong government connections and one of the best selling magazines, *Living Colour Advertisement* and *Buying Guide Magazine*, is owned by the son of SPDC Secretary 1, Lt Gen Khin Nyunt. Similarly, a group of Wa people (former insurgents along the Chinese border, with whom the government has signed a ceasefire agreement) owns another monthly magazine called *Fashion Image*, which is reportedly printed on machines in the compound of a DDSI unit. Another DDSI unit publishes a monthly propaganda magazine called *Myet Khin Thit (New Pasture)*, but it does not sell well.

The Printers and Publishers Registration Law enacted by the Ne Win's Revolutionary Council in 1962 still applies to the print media. According to this law, publication of any kind of written material without official knowledge and approval is forbidden. It is also illegal to own an unregistered printing machine of any kind including cyclostyling machines, computer printers, photocopiers, modems and fax machines. It was under this law that Leo Nichols, was sentenced to jail. *The New Light of Myanmar* dismissed the ensuing diplomatic protests simply by describing Nichols as 'a bad hat' (Reuters 1996).

General Ne Win also introduced the Press Scrutiny Board (PSB) in the mid 1970s on the pretext of ensuring correct Burmese spellings (Khin Maung Win 1999). However, within a few years it had become the censoring agency. Although it is under the General Administration Department of the Ministry of Home Affairs, the director of the board has been an army officer from DDSI since the mid 1980s. There are no specific or clear-cut guidelines for censorship, and the process is indiscriminate,

Losing control

depending on the prevailing political situation. All printed material other than the daily newspapers, which are published by the government, has to be submitted to the PSB.

Control of journalists is another method of stifling freedom of expression. Since the junta took over, at least 14 Burmese journalists have been sent to jail (www.freemedia.at). Two have died in prison and seven journalists, all members of the NLD, remain in Burma's jails. One of them, San San Nweh has been held in Rangoon's Insein prison since August 1994. On 6 October, 1994, under Article 5 of the country's emergency laws, a court whose proceedings took place in the prison, sentenced her to seven years in jail for 'spreading information prejudicial to the state'. Among other charges, she was accused of taking part in a video report by two French journalists in April 1993. Like the other six jailed journalists, she is being held in extremely poor conditions and is reported to have been ill-treated. Win Tin, editor of the daily *Hanthawadi* and deputy chairman of the Burmese Writers' Association, who was sentenced to a ten-year jail sentence in 1989, spent several months in a cage usually used for dogs.

Political criticism is not tolerated, nor are complaints about the activities of government departments, not even genuine consumer complaints with no overt political motive. Publishers, writers and journalists understand well these two golden rules and generally abide by them. Even so, the PSB is ever watchful and intervenes when it thinks necessary to direct publishers to omit or amend material which may be regarded as sensitive by the senior leadership, for example when a story contains characters whose names are identical to those of senior military figures—a not uncommon occurrence.

The PSB also monitors material closely for symbolic or hidden messages. Stories, including those with religious or cultural themes, with vague or ambiguous messages are not approved. No slang is allowed, no matter how widespread their use. Consumer complaints and criticisms of the private sector are sometimes permitted if the business concerned is not connected with the military leadership or their family members.

Government propaganda is compulsorily included in all publications and, since March 1999, weeklies owned by staff welfare committees have to reproduce from the government daily newspapers at least one article or a cartoon attacking Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD party. All weekly magazines are from time to time also directed to include articles on matters

'of contemporary interest', for example denying rumours which are implicitly critical of the government or which the government is concerned could lead to unrest.

The obligation to include government propaganda is a particularly difficult requirement for publishers given the rather pathetic and puerile content of the official vitriol directed at Aung San Suu Kyi. The News and Periodicals Enterprise (NPE) is apparently so smug about the articles attacking the NLD that it had two compilations published in 1998 (News and Periodicals Enterprise, October 1998 and December 1998—all quotes are *sic*). Aung San Suu Kyi is variously described as 'the unrivalled world-renowned political stunt democracy princess' (Pauksa 1998), 'an animal with a long tale that has been placed on the throne' (Sithu Nyein Aye 1998) and as 'an axe-handle engaged in subversive acts to give trouble to Myanmar' (Maung Kya Ban 1998). She is often referred to as 'the wife of a White' (Pauksa 1998) and in a bizarre denunciation she is addressed in the second person as follows: '...you are extremely hot or do you take pleasure scorching others as you are the one who possesses intense heat' (Than Eint Hmu 1998).

Her crimes are numerous, often concerning her 'doing paid jobs as assigned by the British and the US' (Bamathi Khin Aung 1998), or along the lines of 'the democracy miss champion of peace goes roving to the West bloc embassies and diplomatic mission heads residences having meals at mealtimes and tea at teatime' (Maung Saw Tun 1998). One ingenious accusation concerns the many awards she has received including the Nobel Peace Prize which carries one million dollars. Daw Suu Kyi's critics argued 'that woman did not declare such amount of foreign currency, nor did she pay income tax and bring even a penny into Myanmar' (U Mingala 1998).

The criticisms of Aung San Suu Kyi are complemented by incessant criticism of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Voice of America (VOA), Radio Free Asia (RFA) foreign broadcasts to Burma. In one, the views of the generals on certain issues becomes quite clear. 'Myanmar clearly know that democracy, human rights, freedom of the Press and free flow of news of the Western media are only lies and conspiracies to give trouble to Myanmar with evil intention' (Thadindauk Thetsay 1998).

This is virtually the only sort of political commentary available to Burmese readers. There is no regular underground press in the print media.

Losing control

Unlawful organisations such as the Rangoon University Students' Union or the Young Monks' Union occasionally distribute photocopied leaflets, but possession of these is illegal and most people are reluctant to risk being seen reading them, given the severity of punishments for minor political 'crimes'. Political leaflets and newspapers printed in other countries are smuggled into Burma from time to time and their contents spread by word of mouth.

Although there is no Burmese *samizdat*, some unlawful publications do appear, including student guides, which are widely available and 'adult' literature, which is less so. A few foreign publications are available in supermarkets and bookstores and the major hotels generally have copies of daily newspapers from Singapore and the *International Herald Tribune*, but with contentious articles, such as the fall of Soeharto, clipped out. It is possible to subscribe to *Asiaweek* or *Reader's Digest* but subscribers are not allowed to receive them until PSB has removed any article deemed to be sensitive. The readership of English-language publications is quite low, around 2,500 copies in a country of nearly 50 million people.

The government controls the two television stations and one radio station. The Myanmar Television and Radio Department (MTRD) of the Ministry of Information runs one television station and the radio station, while the Public Relations and Psychological Warfare Department of the army runs the *Myawaddy* channel on television. Both organisations make their own programming decisions and approve all advertisements before putting them on air. MTRD tends to be the more conservative and businesses prefer to deal with the *Myawaddy* channel. *Myawaddy* also attracts a wider viewing audience, partly because it shows Taiwanese soap operas and movies. Approximately 10 per cent of the population own a television set and has access to local stations.

All radios are required by law to be registered but in practice this is widely ignored since cheap Chinese-made short wave radios began to flood the market in the 1990s. Costing about 2,500 kyats (about US\$12), they run reasonably well with 6 to 9 different short wave bands. Many people listen to Burmese-language radio programs broadcast by foreign stations. The BBC, VOA and RFA and the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), based in Norway and run by exiled dissidents, are the most popular among Burmese listeners. Japanese NHK and the All India Radio also

have Burmese-language programs but do not attract a wide audience. While actual figures are impossible to obtain, a rough estimate would be that about ten per cent of the population listens to foreign short-wave broadcasts.

Satellite television is expensive and thus not widespread and, even among those who own receivers, many are hampered by the language barrier and end up watching mainly music and action movie programs. They are therefore of little interest to the government and its censors.

Burma's economic deterioration has seen a decline in the number of domestic motion pictures produced from over 60 a year in the 1970s to only 19 in 1998, while about 20 video movies are produced each month. Burmese movies are generally of low quality, both technically and artistically. While some filmmakers claim this is due to censorship, the reality is that soap operas, action movies, and comedies sell better. Many foreign movies, American, Chinese (Hong Kong) and Indian in particular, are available from video shops and remain uncensored, probably because of the comparatively few people with the money to buy them.

On the other hand, the music industry is closely scrutinised because cassette players are more widely owned. Prior to recording, a singer or a producer is obliged to submit the lyrics to PSB for scrutiny and official approval. Upon completion of recording, several copies of sample tapes together with the approved copy of lyrics must be resubmitted to PSB to check the singer's compliance. Advertisements for the album and even album covers require PSB's approval.

It is not surprising in a country where the regime insists on controlling all mass media that the Internet is not available. The military government understands that it would have difficulty controlling Internet material on the Internet and so the most sensible tactic from its perspective is to ban it. Unlike other governments who would be concerned to forgo the economic advantages of the Internet, SPDC is not uncomfortable with notions of autarky and seems prepared to accept the poverty that, inevitably, will accompany it.

Links to many sites about Burma including the Internet edition of the *New Light of Myanmar* may be accessed through the Burma Project on the Open Society web page at www.soros.org/.

Laos

A recent conversation reported as taking place between a diplomat and an editor of a Lao newspaper focused on how the newspaper could be made more readable and relevant to its readers, while not trespassing on forbidden ground. The diplomat suggested road accidents and the plight of the victims as a worthy subject. The editor recoiled in horror. 'Impossible', he explained, 'because children of one of the nation's leaders might have caused an accident and it could thus not risk being reported'.

The Lao media remains mired in its communist origins. There is certainly no freedom of the press and the public seems largely willing to accept the version of the news the authorities wish to present. While the content and tone of the media continues to be closely regulated by the ruling communist Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP), the industry is nevertheless cautiously seeking to reflect the sentiments and concerns of society, thereby hesitantly drifting away from its political *raison d'être* as a mere conduit for official ideology.

At first glance, Laos appears to have a healthy print media environment—along with the *Vientiane Times* and its French-language cousin *Le Renovateur*, there are a host of Lao-language papers. The major daily publications are *Pasason* (The People), *Viengchan Mai* (The New Vientiane), and *Khao San Pathet Lao* (Lao Nation's News Brief). Endorsed as the 'official voice of the Central Committee of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party', *Pasason* is presented to the public as the pre-eminent information organ. Articles and editorials unreservedly reinforce and promote government policy. With its attention fixed firmly on domestic events, international coverage in *Pasason* tends to be an afterthought, with overseas stories normally sourced from Laos' fraternal neighbours, Vietnam and China. The Sunday edition of the paper seeks to offer lighter fare with politics giving way to sport, society and entertainment. In acting as the official mouthpiece of the Party, *Pasason* is supported by a raft of other publications—each of the LPRP's mass organisations (the Youth Union, Women's Union and Federation of Trade Unions) produces a monthly publication, with weekly newspapers published by the Ministry of National Defence and the Ministry of Interior. *Pasason's* ideological responsibilities also colour its presentation. Over the past two years, the paper has substantially reduced the volume of advertising for fear that

its ideological message was becoming overwhelmed by trading notices and classifieds. This perceived conflict hints at the LPRP's deeper challenge: to maintain its political relevance in an increasingly market-oriented and open society.

Viengchan Mai's open-door approach to advertising has been central to its emergence as Laos' most popular paper. The paper's centrespread of classifieds selling haircuts, motorbikes, and construction materials is its major drawcard. In addition, *Viengchan Mai* offers a number of other features less prevalent in Party publications—a greater diversity of articles, more international news, short fictional stories, and special interest pieces. Producing a similar kind of product for readers in Laos' capital city are a number of other newspapers—such as the weekly publication *Viengchan Toolakith-Sangkom* (Vientiane Business and Social)—all of which seek to offer a richer diet of information whilst fulfilling their political dues to the Party.

Vientiane Times, however, has sought to push the boundaries of acceptability by cautiously reflecting community feelings on a range of politically sensitive issues—anger at the state of Vientiane's roads, concern over the slow response times of police, and frustration at the inviolability of the military from proper financial and legal scrutiny. These English-language articles have not been reprinted in the Lao-language press.

In the electronic media, the Lao population is served by three television stations—National Television, Channel Three (a former joint venture with a Thai company which has since been taken over by the Lao government), and Channel Five which shows a blend of French-language and Lao programs. Two radio stations also exist. Lao radio and television services are of minor significance however, because of the similarities of language: Lao viewers receive more entertaining and informative programs broadcast from Thailand. Along the Mekong Valley, where 75 per cent of the Lao population is located, households have switched *en masse* to signals from northeastern Thailand. In a survey of Vientiane society undertaken by Australian academic Grant Evans in 1998, 94 per cent of respondents indicated that they had tuned in to Thai television during the past week; significantly, 51 per cent of this group indicated that their motive was to view news and current affairs thereby pointing to widespread dissatisfaction with Lao news services (survey published by the Lao Institute for Cultural Relations but not yet distributed).

Losing control

The advent of the Internet—another threat to the Party’s ability to control information—has naturally raised alarm bells within official circles. After several years of cautious consideration, the government finally issued its Internet Decree in 1997. It divided authority for the Internet between four government ministries. In this highly confused environment, the Ministry of Information and Culture seized the initiative and struck a joint venture deal with a Philippines-registered company to become Laos’ first Internet service provider. In an intriguing bureaucratic tussle, the Communications Ministry has hit back by establishing a rival provider, and ominously holds the potential authority to starve its competitor of trunk lines. In the meantime, efforts have also been made to block sites considered either politically or morally undesirable for Lao users.

By the end of 1998, political hard-liners opposed to the arrival of the Internet in Laos could claim to have been vindicated when an ‘unauthorised’ *Vientiane Times* web page appeared, put up by overseas Lao in the United States. The page draws on the hardcopy version of the paper but is complemented by additional commentary which occasionally levels stinging criticism at authorities. Efforts by the Lao government to disclaim the site including prominent denunciations in the printed version have, of course, simply drawn greater attention to it. The unauthorised *Vientiane Times* web page may be viewed at www.vientianetimes.com/.

Mongolia

The bloodless ‘Democratic Revolution’ of 1990 with its massive popular demonstrations against the communist system resulted in a wide open stable door to a free press—but initially the journalist horses refused to bolt. In the state television station MRTV, for example, almost everything continued as before. MRTV operated sedately in the distant rear of the free press pack, persisting in its historical, life-long role as mouthpiece of the government—still resolutely communist. The old guard was in control of Mongolian broadcasting and the election of the reformed communists in the 1992 elections seemed to vindicate its inertia.

Observers watched the polling stations again in 1996—the second free elections for national parliament—as families dressed in their Sunday best rolled up to cast their votes in a turnout close to 95 per cent of the electorate. To many people’s surprise, the vote produced the first non-communist

government of Mongolia since 1921. The changes, which began with the people power movement of 1990, would now be accelerated, particularly through the privatisation of state-owned companies and the encouragement of competition.

These days there are more than 500 registered newspapers in Mongolia. Back in the 1980s all publications were owned by the State, but by 1998 a transition was underway and most newspapers became privately owned and operated. It was only from 1 April 1999 that the newspapers with the biggest circulation were placed 'on the market'. The country's very first regular publication, called *Capital News*, was printed in pre-communist Mongolia in 1913 but the first national newspaper was not published until 1924 when Soviet communism was the dominant influence. It was called *Unen* (Truth) and was a replica of the Soviet party paper, *Pravda*. *Unen* was generally understood to be a means of advancing party views and policies and was never considered an accurate news source. During the 1980s *Unen* sold 180,000 copies. Over the past few years interest in *Unen* has waned and in 1997 it changed its name to *Unen Uu?* ('Is It True?') as part of an unsuccessful readership push. Now, circulation is down to less than 10,000.

The newspaper with the largest readership is the daily, government-owned *Ardyn Erkh* (People's Right). Like its main competitors, *Zasgyn Gazryn Medee* (Government News) and the privately owned *Onoodor* (Today), the daily is a broadsheet and rarely more than eight pages. *Ardyn Erkh* was established in 1990 after a communist journalist defected from *Unen* and started the official publication. Both *Ardyn Erkh* and *Zasgyn Gazryn Medee* are scheduled for privatisation by the end of 1999 and legislation requires that 40 per cent of ownership will be offered to employees with the remainder auctioned.

Mongolia's first English-language publication, established in 1991, is *The Mongol Messenger*, owned and run by the government news agency, *Montsame*. Initially it was seen as a method of attracting foreign investment, but with an increasing number of foreigners living in Mongolia it has become a vital information source and a sound generator of advertising revenue. Its increased advertising content and considerable potential will make it a sought after publication when the time comes to privatise.

Other popular publications include the weekly *Ulaanbaatar* which is controlled by the Mayor's office; *Nugel Buyan* (Sin and Virtue) which is

Losing control

owned by the Police Department; *Haluun Khonjil* (Hot Blanket) published twice a month and privately owned; *Khuumun Bicheg* (Human Scripture) published by *Montsame* in traditional Mongolian script; and *Il Tovchoo* (Open Chronicle) which is a very popular privately owned weekly. The privately owned and scandalous weekly newspaper *Seruuleg* (Alarm) has also increased in popularity and circulation now stands at more than 25,000.

In addition to the State television stations (three in total) there are two privately run stations—one by a local entrepreneur and the other by an American Christian concern. The government-owned radio and television networks will not be privatised until the Law of Public Service Broadcasting is finalised. The erratic Mongolian television network, Channel 25, is owned by former Communist rebel Baldorj, whose growing media empire also includes the *Onoodor* newspaper, *Jaag* Radio and the city's second English weekly, the UB Post. Since 1995, there has been access to international satellite networks such as CNN, Star TV and Moscow TV.

Before 1989, the Ideology Department of the ruling Communist Party (Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party [MPRP]) issued guidelines for editorial policy. There was also a Censorship Bureau which examined and at times rejected publications before they went to press. The bureau was abolished in 1990 and the editors were given censorship control tempered by a list of 200 subjects to avoid. Ironically, it was after the MPRP was ousted from office and the Democratic Coalition came to power that the new government made moves to halt the publication of *The Mongol Messenger* because a particular front page was 'an international embarrassment'. The paper continued to be printed thanks to the journalistic principles of the news agency director who ignored the party directive.

Since 1994 the number of publications (including erotica) sold openly and seemingly without censorship, has increased and publishers basically print what they want when they want. As in so many countries where journalistic freedom has followed a period of authoritarian rule, however, the journalists have not been sufficiently responsible and there is a pressing need to improve journalistic ethics.

Journalists tend to belong either to the Mongolian Free Democratic Journalists Association or the Mongolian Journalists Union, but they both seem to spend more time opposing each other than pursuing issues of ethics, standards and workers' rights. Early on in Mongolia's transition

to a market economy, the Danish Government funded the development of the Press Institute of Mongolia. This has had positive effects on journalistic ethics in both the electronic and print media. The Institute also offered an alternative publishing house and since its inception the production quality of many newspapers has improved.

Officially, all foreign correspondents are supposed to register with the Ministry of External Relations and all foreigners entering the country for a period of more than 30 days must also register with the police.

Currently there are over 20 Internet cafes in Ulaanbaatar, with no restrictions on access. The casual user can access the Internet at any of the cafes for less than US\$2 an hour (the average family income is around US\$20 a week). International information is freely available from anywhere in the world. There are no apparent electronic fences. Domestic information is available on the daily independent update on the net, from the many newspapers and from radio and television stations. There seems little real possibility of controlling the competing flow of information via independent and foreign media, or the Internet. The state of the freedom of the press in Mongolia seems nearer the opposite end of the spectrum from that ten years ago; all that is needed, it seems, may be a better observance of the code of ethics by the journalists themselves.

Media websites

Mongolian National News Agency, www.mol.mn/montsame/

Mongolia Online 2000, www.mol.mn/

Mongolian Government State Property Committee (SPC),
www.spc.gov.mn/

Mongolian Ministry of External Relations, www.mol.mn/mer/

Brunei

In the tiny kingdom of Brunei, the authorities control the content of the local television and newspapers and reporting and programming is bland and matter of fact. There is no editorial page in the papers and little comment on government press statements or policies. A readers' letter page introduced in 1997 is a very popular vehicle for voicing discontent on a number of local issues. The family of Foreign Minister Prince Mohamed owns the major English-language paper, the *Borneo Bulletin*,

Losing control

and staff understand the limits of what they can and can't report. Local television is state owned and features significant religious content.

A new daily English-language paper, *News Express*, commenced publication in Brunei in time for the Southeast Asian Games in August 1999. The paper initially concentrated mainly on the Games and it is not clear if it will challenge the *Borneo Bulletin*. Singapore and Malaysian papers are also available.

Satellite dishes are permitted and for a small fee viewers can access *Kristal TV* which is a cabled local version of Star TV. Australian Television is available and viewers can subscribe to the Malaysian TV service ASTRO. Some overseas publications are not allowed in the country and others are stopped from time to time if they have an article that the local authorities consider offensive. Some women's magazines have bare skin blacked out to meet local Islamic sensitivities. *Kristal* censors MTV, the music channel, because of immodest dress and perhaps because of the lyrics of some songs. The Internet appears to be free of interference.

There is legislation covering visiting journalists, but those few who go to Bandar Seri Begawan tend to do so without necessarily letting the relevant authorities know.

Cambodia

Did the Prime Minister's wife have the Prime Minister's movie star girlfriend murdered in the hail of assassin's bullets on 6 July 1999? This is the question Cambodian newspapers are daring to ask after the accusation was first leveled at Bun Rany, wife of Hun Sen, by a French weekly news magazine, *L'Express* (Louyot 1999). The death of Piseth Pilika had touched a nerve in a Cambodian society inured by decades of war, genocide, communism and uncertainty. Cambodia's most popular movie star, a beautiful young woman, had been shot dead in broad daylight and, naturally, the press reported fully. But the test for the Cambodia press was whether it would also report the allegations of the Prime Minister's wife's involvement. To their credit, many newspapers did. The issue could no longer be ignored. Mrs Bun Rany claimed to have been libelled and said she would sue the French magazine. The issue was in the public domain, the press had done its job. It is unthinkable that Hun Sen in the communist era before the UN intervention would ever have allowed such

an accusation to be published anywhere in Cambodia. But with Cambodia groping towards multi-party democracy, the Prime Minister no longer has total power to direct the media.

Descriptions of Cambodia's press are usually paraphrased with a paradox: 'vigorous but not professional' or 'free but not responsible'. Freedom of the press is, indeed, a complicated and paradoxical issue in Cambodia; as in so many other areas of public life, the relatively recent imposition of multi-party democracy sits uncomfortably with the leadership's autocratic instincts. The media as it now exists in Cambodia, essentially began with the UNTAC regime in 1992–93. The regime attempted by means of military demobilisation, law reform and democratic elections, to bring democracy to Cambodia. The legal regime introduced by UNTAC included a constitution guaranteeing that 'Khmer citizens shall have freedom of expression, press, publication and assembly'.

The response was the emergence of a huge number of new newspapers and bulletins, the vast majority in the Khmer language, but several written in English, French and even Japanese. From the beginning, most of these publications were affiliated with political parties and used their new-found media freedom to write biased and often slanderous stories about their rivals and to publish aggressive opinion pieces about the issues of the day. Deeply scarred by the destruction of all media during the Khmer Rouge era of 1975–79 and followed by the restrictions of an old-style communist regime for 12 years thereafter, Cambodia lacked capable journalists and any tradition of a free and responsible press.

Nevertheless, despite its shortcomings, the free press flourished with little interference during the UNTAC period. Following the election of a fragile coalition and the departure of the UN administrators, however, the situation deteriorated rapidly. In 1994, the media was rocked by the murder of two newspaper editors and one journalist, as well as a grenade attack on the office of one newspaper that injured five, including two staff members. All of the publications involved were anti-Cambodian People's Party (CPP)—the junior, but powerful, partner in the coalition government. There have been sporadic attacks on journalists and editors every year since by unknown assailants invariably following criticism of the government or government officials in the newspapers involved. Murders of editors critical of the regime in 1996 and 1998 point to the fact that the ultimate form of censorship remains in use in Cambodia.

In addition, the CPP-dominated government, a descendant of the previous Communist leadership, exercised ever-tighter control over the Cambodian press. Cambodia's 1995 Law on the Regime of the Press reiterated the constitution's guarantee of press freedom, but allowed the Ministry of Information to take action against the press for a range of offences, including the broad power to suspend publications for printing 'any information that may cause harm to national security or political stability'. Ostensibly under the authority of this law, many newspapers have been threatened with closure and several shut down or suspended, for the publication or broadcast of material deemed 'inappropriate', usually because it was critical of the political leadership or the King.

In early 1998 the Ministry of Information suspended several newspapers on the grounds that they had insulted national leaders and threatened national security. The Ministry ordered the seizure of all copies of these newspapers and banned companies from printing the publications. The six opposition newspapers, *Samleng Samapheap*, *Antarakum*, *Kummit Kaun Khmer*, *Proyuth*, *Neak Tosu* and *Kolvoth Angkor*, had criticised Co-Premier Hun Sen.

Following elections and the formation of a new coalition government in late 1998, suppression of the Cambodian press relaxed along with the general political atmosphere. The new Minister for Information, representing the junior coalition party (FUNCINPEC), stated his intention to allow press freedom and improve the quality of the press, saying 'my duty is not to close down newspapers, but to guide them the right way'. This guidance has translated into a new and vigorously pursued concern to preserve Khmer culture by attempting to ban foreign words and foreign influences from the Khmer media.

Cambodian newspapers in 1999 remain consumed with politics and crime. They are notable mostly for the poor quality of reporting, short on fact but expansive on aggressively stated opinion, and for the increasingly violent, often colour, photographs of murder and accident victims routinely gracing the front pages. Almost all the Cambodian newspapers have proven unable to move beyond their political biases, and the reason for this is, at least in part, economic. With over 200 newspapers registered with the Ministry of Information (of which 30 or so publish at least weekly) and a paucity of paid advertising to go around, most rely on wealthy patrons, with various political allegiances and agendas, to stay in business.

One newspaper trainee recently told a foreign analyst that 'the industry we work in is not journalism, it's politics'.

Moreover, despite the return of political stability, the ruling party and its ideas about controlling information largely remain in place. Journalists admit that they still work within an enduring climate of fear, such that investigative journalism and stories reflecting badly on those in power are often self-censored. The 1995 Press Law still awaits amendment, and the Ministry of Information's attempts to draft media regulations clarifying its powers over the press have been met with criticism.

It was to the great credit of the fortnightly English-language *Phnom Penh Post* that it produced a series of articles in mid 1999 on corruption in Cambodia. The articles criticised the government's approach and called for tighter legislation. That these articles seemed to be accepted as a legitimate part of national debate on the issue speaks well for the growing tolerance of the diversity of political opinion in Cambodia.

The electronic media is a slightly different phenomenon. It is tightly government controlled, with the ruling CPP controlling all six of Cambodia's local television stations and eleven of its twelve radio stations (the twelfth, owned by an outspoken government critic, was shut down for several months for 'irresponsible broadcasting' during 1998-99). A small number of stations previously controlled by other parties were lost to CPP during the political upheaval of 1997.

Coverage of news and politics in the electronic media is minimal with news-reports tending to focus on the public activities of political leaders. Speeches and press conferences by the Prime Minister are frequently broadcast on all channels concurrently during prime time.

During the 1998 election, freedom of the electronic media emerged as a significant issue for opposition political parties and human rights groups. The United Nations Centre for Human Rights in Cambodia published several reports criticising the lack of access for other parties to the electronic media, and the blatant bias in reporting on political issues (United Nations 1998a, 1998b). One example often noted is that the return of ousted Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh from self-exile in early 1998 was the top story on CNN's worldwide coverage of the day, but failed to be even mentioned on any of Cambodia's local stations. The bias problem was only partly resolved by the late-passage of special provisions allowing airtime to all parties during the designated campaign period.

Losing control

In the post-election environment the electronic media does not play a particularly significant political role. It continues to broadcast *karaoke* and movies rather than news and politics. There appears to be no move to reform what news and political coverage exists. Opposition parties and human rights groups are already preparing to fight the same battles for the airwaves in the 2000 local-level election campaign as they did in 1998.

Media websites

Cambodian Internet Service Provider, www.cambodian.com/
Phnom Penh Daily, www.phnompenhdaily.com/
National Assembly of the Kingdom of Cambodia,
www.cambodian-parliament.org/

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to acknowledge the contributions of Jennifer Storey and David O'Connor on Mongolia and of others who assisted but prefer to remain unnamed.

China

State power versus the Internet

Willy Wo-Lap Lam

'Power grows out of the barrel of a gun'. said Chairman Mao Zedong on the success of the Communist Revolution. Yet it is equally accurate to say that power grows out of, and is sustained by, the nib of a pen. Propaganda, through the heavy-handed manipulation of the media, has been just as essential as the army and police in upholding the mandate of heaven of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). As China celebrated the 50th anniversary of Communist rule on 1 October 1999, the administration of President Jiang Zemin seemed to have barely deviated from the view that propaganda remains essential in promoting uniformity of thinking and support for the state, despite the telecommunications revolution which has transformed the global media.

More than the leaders of other communist and socialist countries, CCP chieftains have taken, and continue to take, a personal interest in propaganda. Mao himself was responsible for widespread pamphleteering before the Communist triumph in 1949. Then, from the early 1950s to the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, the media was used to build faith in the Communist utopia and the vision that China could 'overtake' the United States and the United Kingdom in 20 years. After Deng Xiaoping launched the reformist open-door policy in 1978, the theme of the official media was how to mix socialism with market reforms. In the wake of the Tiananmen Square massacre and following the dissolution of the Soviet Bloc in the 1990s, the leadership used the press to shore up faith in the CCP and to counter the 'infiltration' of 'bourgeois-liberal' ideas. Under the leadership of President Jiang it seems unlikely that the 'traditional' functions of the Chinese media, such as promoting cohesion among the Chinese people and denigrating western values, will change in the new

Losing control

millennium. In fact, President Jiang appears to be building his own quasi-Maoist personality cult. Calls in the press for patriotism and cohesiveness are thinly disguised attempts to promote the present leadership, with Jiang at its core.

Regardless of the prevailing view within the CCP, the crucial question facing China is how long the quaint Communist party 'reading groups' of censors, the vague media laws and regulations which encourage self-censorship, and the more blatant controls such as intimidation, arrest and imprisonment of journalists can hold back the tide of information technology. Already, the Internet is making significant inroads by linking dissident networks, and forcing the security apparatus into a seemingly futile race to try to stay one step ahead of a technology which allows new web sites to be opened and closed on a daily basis. At the same time market economic reforms are introducing new forces into the media. As government handouts decline, the media is being forced to make market-driven changes, adding racy stories on issues such as crime, smuggling and prostitution to lure readers. More broadly, the market place is facilitating the rise of civil society. Despite the CCP's dogged refusal to share power, non-party civic organisations have proliferated. The role the media might play in ending the one-party state in China, and how far off or how inevitable that demise may be, is a critical challenge for President Jiang and his fellow septuagenarian leaders.

Within the official birdcage

Media watchers in China believe it is unlikely the CCP's official straightjacket will loosen in the near future, given the freeze on political reform which followed the crackdown of 4 June 1989. The Chinese media's reporting of the Balkan crisis in the spring of 1999, particularly the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, provides a good example of recent CCP-style propaganda. According to the Chinese media, the 'Washington-led NATO military machine' was trying to subjugate first Serbia, and then the rest of the world using the new doctrine of international humanitarianism. Ethnic cleansing carried out by the regime of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic rated only a passing mention. The apology by US President Bill Clinton following the bombing of the Chinese embassy on the night of 7 May 1999 by NATO forces was not reported for two

days. Then the press fanned anti-US feelings as students and citizens protested outside US missions across the country and played a key role in stirring up nationalism and pressuring America and other NATO countries. But, all mention of the embassy bombing suddenly disappeared from the Chinese media towards the end of July, when the regime decided it was time to revive ties with the United States in an effort to rein in the 'pro-independence gambit' of Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui.

During the 1990s, there were several timid initiatives in press liberalisation. The most recent was the brief 'Beijing spring' of mid 1998, in the run-up to President Clinton's visit to China. At that time the administration was reportedly considering allowing intellectuals to form political parties. Chinese and diplomatic sources in Beijing cited internal papers written by CCP think-tank liberals recommending permission be granted for the establishment of a non-Communist Party and non-official publications. But behind the scenes the liberals lost. Following the Clinton visit there was a new clampdown on dissent and mass arrests of dissidents. Censorship was tightened considerably and observers anticipate that this phase of conservatism will last at least through to 2002, or the end of Jiang's term as Party General Secretary.

But, even against this relatively bleak backdrop, subtle but highly significant changes are taking place. Some of the momentum is coming from within the CCP itself—but more significant pressures are building due to market economic reforms and the expansion of civil institutions. In this environment the CCP has called on the media to assist in Beijing's goal of limited reform: small-scale, within-the-establishment changes such as cracking down on corruption and mal-administration within the framework of one-party dictatorship. Newspapers cannot call for the birth of a new political party, but they can place the spotlight on corruption cases which do not threaten the single party state.

A major development in 1998 and 1999 was the call by senior cadres for the press to play a more effective watchdog role, particularly in uncovering crimes committed by officials. Relatively liberal cadres argued that in the absence of an opposition party, the press should have the task of scrutinising government. Even conservative cadres recognised the media's role in blowing the whistle on corruption. Such calls were made by leaders as different as Premier Zhu Rongji and National People's Congress (NPC) Chairman Li Peng. In late 1998, Li said 'We must better

foster the media's power to supervise [government operations]... We must expose outstanding cases which severely infringe upon the law so that the cadres and the masses can be educated'. The former premier even asked the media to do its part in the 'construction of democracy and the legal system' and in fostering the ideal of 'running the country according to law' (China News Service 12 December 1998).

But, there can be no mistaking the proverbial birdcage. As Li hinted, the media could only expose certain designated cases sanctioned by the authorities. Throughout China, the prosecution and reporting of corruption by senior officials requires approval at the highest levels of CCP. For cases involving officials with the rank of vice-mayor, vice-governor or vice-minister, or above, authorisation by CCP Central Committee's Central Commission for Disciplinary Inspection is needed. Effectively, the media requires the nod of national or local-level propaganda departments before it can run stories on the misdemeanours of senior officials.

Taboos, mostly unwritten ones, are too numerous to detail. News blackouts are imposed on embarrassing events such as labour unrest or protests by overtaxed peasants. The same goes for the anti-government activities of pro-independence elements in Tibet or Xinjiang. Journalists are not allowed to play up political reform, except such innocuous exercises as administrative streamlining and boosting public consultation. Calls for accelerated democratisation or the dilution of the CCP's monopoly of power are clearly off limits. Generally, the media is discouraged from dwelling on the dark side of society, a reference to negative phenomena including the brain drain to western countries, suicide rates, prostitution and homosexuality.

Changes, however, are taking place in spite of the CCP's strictures. The economy is the most significant force for change. The late patriarch Deng Xiaoping and his disciples, such as Premier Zhu, realised that the development of the market economy would chip away at the authority of the CCP. But this was the price to pay for developing the economy. One key conclusion Deng drew from the dissolution of the Soviet Union was that if the people's standard of living was not improved, the regime's mandate of heaven would be in tatters.

To some extent the same applies to the media. Because the free flow of news and ideas is essential to the development of an information-based

economy, more cadres have come to accept that the floodgate must be slowly opened (*Straits Times*, 13 June 1999 and 27 February 1999). There is also the economic reality that the state media must become financially self-sufficient. Facing bulging budget deficits, the administration of Jiang and Zhu has tried to end the media's dependency on government handouts. With declining Party or government subsidies, the media must appeal to the marketplace to survive—and turn up profits! Sensational stories on crime and prostitution are pushing out the boundaries, without trespassing on sensitive political issues in afternoon tabloids that rival the raciest of Hong Kong's scandal sheets.

Also significant is the rise of civil society and the role of the Internet. While the CCP maintains a monopoly on political power, there is growth in non-party, civic organisations, from consumer-protection associations and chambers of commerce, to semi-clandestine outfits associated with cults and *qigong* sects. While most associations are not permitted to produce their own publications, they have contributed to a more pluralistic society and media. With the growth of the Internet, civic associations can air their own views on websites. One reason behind the crackdown on the enormously popular Falun Gong sect, a Buddhist-cum-*qigong* organisation, in mid 1999 was its ability to mobilise tens of thousands of followers via the Internet (Agence France-Presse, 22 July 1999).

The yoke of orthodoxy

China's government-controlled media now reaches deep into society. Eighty-eight per cent of Chinese have access to the network of 932 television stations and 86 per cent of the population is served by 1,623 radio stations. Three-hundred and five million households own a television set, and with plummeting retail prices due to industrial overproduction two television households are becoming more common (Reuters, 23 December 1998). For news, rather than entertainment, the 2,160 newspapers and 7,900 periodicals are still considered the main source of information.

Despite official efforts to separate the government from the direct control of businesses, most media outlets are official organs or subordinate units of the CCP and government organisations. All heads of key media units are appointed by the CCP Central Committee's Organisation

Department, or its local equivalent, and all report to the various propaganda departments of the CCP. The *People's Daily* and *Outlook Weekly*, for example, are mouthpieces of the CCP Central Committee. *The China Youth Daily* reports to the Communist Youth League and the *Workers Daily* is a subsidiary of the official—and only—trade union, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (Fan Li 1999). Every newspaper, magazine and radio or television unit is sponsored by an appropriate unit of the CCP or the government.

In this way internal ideological and power struggles can be played out through the media. The *Nanfang Weekend*, a subsidiary of *Nanfang Daily*, and the mouthpiece of the Guangdong Province Party Committee was repeatedly disciplined by the central Propaganda Department in the mid 1990s for its exposition of the darker side of society. The paper became a symbol of the unending tug of war between the *zhongyang* (central authorities) and local authorities. At the time the paper was protected by former Guangdong party secretary Xie Fei, a relatively liberal official. In September 1997, however, Xie was replaced by the hardline Li Changchun, who towed the Beijing line far more closely. By 1999, *Nanfang Weekend's* muckraking had declined and a number of the most senior journalists had resigned.

The marketplace, too, has offered journalists new and innovative loopholes to circumvent the *zhongyang* line. As the tide of commercialisation began sweeping the nation in the mid 1990s, more CCP and government departments offered 'official sponsorship' to new newspapers or magazines for a fee. In this way a group of free-thinking editors who wanted to start a quasi-private publication could pay the fee to qualify as the subsidiary of, for example, a mediocre, provincial-level research institute. After pocketing the money, the institute would usually turn a blind eye to the contents of the publication. However, much of the efforts of the censors are now targeted at these small publications (Reuters, 29 January 1999).

Access to foreign publications is limited by a government monopoly on imports which uses quotas to control the circulation of papers such as the *Asian Wall Street Journal*, the *International Herald Tribune* and the *South China Morning Post*. Import quotas limit each publication to not more than 10,000 copies and censors can ban entire daily consignments if, for

example, the edition carries a picture of the Dalai Lama or Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui.

New chinks in the armour of official censorship are more evident in television despite the CCP's determination to guard the airwaves against subversive foreign programs as zealously as it does its air space against enemy aircraft. With minor exceptions, foreign satellite broadcasts are not available to ordinary Chinese. In 1993 and 1994, the government introduced regulations to forbid individual households from setting up satellite dishes to get programs from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan or the United States. CNN and BBC TV are only available to hotel patrons (*The Times*, 5 June 1999). However, the official CCTV, which has nine channels reaching the homes of 900 million people, is planning a major marketing launch of satellite television. There are indications more foreign entertainment programs will be permitted. In 1998 and 1999 Rupert Murdoch's News Corp., the MIH Group of South Africa, and Encore International, a subsidiary of the American cable TV company TCI, all gained initial footholds with one-off sales of entertainment programs or documentaries. The Hong Kong-based Phoenix TV, partly owned by Murdoch, is the only foreign satellite broadcaster with regular access to sizeable chunks of the urban population, at times broadcasting news programs containing material not deemed politically correct by the Chinese censors (Reuters, 5 August 1999).

The rapid spread of cable TV will also add variety to the official fare. As of early 1999, there were more than 1,000 cable stations, mostly at municipal or county level. Each network transmitted an average of 20 channels (Brent 1998). China's large state-owned enterprises, which often employ more than 100,000 staff, also run their own cable stations. These cable companies often buy entertainment programs from Hong Kong and other parts of Asia, and occasionally broadcast news and documentaries, particularly in relatively liberal cities in Guangdong.

Can a hundred flowers bloom in the 21st century? Mao's 1950s' slogan was actually used to lure assorted 'anti-party elements' to speak their minds to provide the state security apparatus with enough evidence to jail them. It is particularly relevant for President Jiang. The head of the so-called Shanghai Faction in Chinese politics and considered more conservative than Deng in ideological matters, he has reinstated a number

Losing control

of Maoist norms (Xin 1996). To understand media policy in *fin de siècle* China, it is important to study the concerns of Jiang and his associates.

More than his former mentor Deng, Jiang holds the Maoist viewpoint that the CCP must have a tight grip on the pen. Jiang is fond of proclaiming that the media must be in the hands of 'trustworthy Marxists who are loyal to the party' (*People's Daily*, 16 October 1999). Jiang's views on the media and propaganda were expounded during his landmark visit to the *People's Daily* in September 1996. He stated that '[t]he work of the media is ideological and political work—on which the future and fate of the CCP and country lie'. Jiang identified promoting the *zhongyang* line and maintaining socio-political stability as the media's key tasks. Or as the quasi-Maoist director of *People's Daily*, Shao Huaze said, 'Journalists should increase their capacity to distinguish between political rights and wrongs. There must be no ambiguity over the crucial principle of the Party's leadership over the media and the role of the media as the mouthpiece of the Party' (Agence France-Presse, 29 October 1999). As Propaganda Chief Ding Guan'gen sees it, the rightful role of media is to 'resolutely develop the *leitmotif* of patriotism, collectivism and socialism; and to combat the influence of corrupt and decadent thoughts' (*Sing Tao Daily News*, 16 June 1997).

The media was asked to steer clear of taboo subjects, ranging from scandals involving senior cadres to apparently innocuous subjects such as casualties from fires and floods. History, too, was manipulated with a 1996 ban on the press carrying commemorative stories to mark the 30th anniversary of the start of the Cultural Revolution. On the 80th anniversary of the May Fourth Movement, which first introduced western theories of democracy to China, publication units were told not to dwell on the liberal aspects of what became known as the Chinese Enlightenment (*Ming Pao*, 12 June 1999 and 20 November 1998). One of the most disturbing aspects of the Chinese media in the late 1990s, however, was the emergence of a quasi-Maoist personality cult around Jiang. Far more than previous leaders (including Deng), Jiang often monopolised the first three to four minutes of the nightly CCTV news. His speeches to officials, People's Liberation Army soldiers, model workers and peasants were reported in great detail, and touted as must-read material in ideological sessions. The President's minders made use of all media opportunities to show that the core of the third generation leadership was in control (Lam 1999).

The media policy of Premier Zhu, widely considered the Politburo member most in tune with the new century, is worth assessing as it illustrates the most basic CCP contradiction in its attitude to the media. A cadre may have a liberal track record in economic reform, but he may still subscribe to the quasi-Maoist view that the media should serve the political ends of the CCP. Not unlike President Jiang, Zhu is a talented manipulator of the media. During recent trips abroad, his aides paid special attention to coverage in the local media, including Chinese-language papers in countries with sizeable Chinese communities such as the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. Zhu regularly made himself, or at least some underlings, accessible to the press. During his visit to the United States in April 1999, the few dozen Hong Kong journalists covering the premier complained that they had been given no access. The same day, his spokesman, scheduled an extra briefing for the Chinese-speaking press.

Zhu made many friends among the press in 1998 when he toured the studios of CCTV and talked to the journalists responsible for the news magazine program *In Focus*. 'Supervision by the media is very important', the premier said, '[P]ress supervision can correct the mistakes of our work and reflect the voice of the masses'. Zhu praised the journalists for having 'overcome many problems', perhaps an allusion to the fact that many government departments had blocked their work. He instructed the media to play a catalyst role for party and government policies (New China News Agency, 7 October 1998). But while Zhu likes to present himself as a patron of the media, he has also made it clear his support depends on not trying to second-guess the *zhongyang* line. Take, for example, the economic tsar's well-known views about not devaluing the renminbi, or the virtues of joining the World Trade Organisation (WTO). From 1997 onwards, official papers and journals were not permitted to carry the articles of scholars who advocated renminbi depreciation. Nor were the media allowed to air the views of the anti-WTO lobby after Zhu decided to move faster on the accession issue in early 1999 (Zhengqin 1998).

Hazards for journalists

While the ideal of 'rule of law' was enshrined first in the CCP charter in 1977 and then in the State Constitution in 1999, efforts to promulgate the nation's first journalism or publication law have been repeatedly

postponed. Early versions of the law, drafted in the relatively open mid 1980s, borrowed elements of similar laws in the west. One key player, the liberal former editor of the *People's Daily*, Hu Jiwei, travelled to the Shenzhen special economic zone to exchange views with Hong Kong editors and journalism scholars. While upholding the overall theory of party guidance, the early drafts stated that a publication unit or journalist could only be penalised under clear-cut criteria such as endangering national security or libelling the CCP and cadres. They also acknowledged the journalists' rights to report the news in a truthful manner. The brief thaw of 1997 and 1998 revived pressure to enact media laws, but by mid 1999 they had been mothballed.

The absence of clear-cut laws has left many journalists frustrated and vulnerable to the whims of CCP officials. 'We often feel uncertain when we are dealing with tortuous news events, especially in investigative reporting', *Workers' Daily* senior editor Wang Xiaolong said in 1998. 'There should be a law to define what the media can and cannot do' (Agence France-Presse, 18 August 1998). This confusion, of course, can be used to the CCP's advantage. Without the protection afforded by a media law, journalists are left exposed to a plethora of draconian statutes and government practices. Most Chinese journalists, as well as foreign journalists based in China, live and work in fear of violating laws on state secrets or national security. The State Secrets Law (1988) and the Maintenance of State Secrets Law Implementing Procedures (1990) have given Party and government units, such as the Ministry of State Security and the State Bureau for Protecting Secrets, maximum flexibility in incriminating journalists. For example, Article 2 of the State Secrets Law defines state secrets as 'matters that affect the security and interests of the state, knowledge of which ... is restricted to personnel within certain limits for a definite time'. Such secrets include 'major policy decisions on state affairs', as well as classified material relating to defence, diplomacy, industry, science and technology (Fu and Cullen 1996).

As veteran journalists delight in pointing out, however, 'whatever has not appeared in the *People's Daily* can be considered state secrets'. There is no freedom of information act, nor any tradition of the public's right to know, increasing hazards for journalist. In facing litigation, reporters accused of leaking state secrets cannot cite the public interest in self-defence.

In the 1990s, scores of domestic and foreign journalists were detained or harassed for alleged breaches of the state secrets codes. Breaches sometimes amounted to no more than running draft versions of speeches due to be delivered by senior cadres or disclosing trade or commercial information. Foreign, Hong Kong and domestic journalists have all been subject to the arbitrary imposition of legal sanctions. However, while western correspondents are expelled from China and Hong Kong reporters receive short jail sentences, Chinese journalists may be severely punished. New China News Agency (NCNA) journalist Wu Shishen, for example, was given a life sentence for making available to a Hong Kong paper an advance copy of the speech Jiang delivered at a Party Congress in 1992. By contrast, the Hong Kong journalist who allegedly bought the material from Wu was let off after a brief detention.

Laws on defamation and related judicial procedures are also open to abuse. Article 101 of the Civil Law General Principles enshrines a citizen's right to his good reputation and provides legal protection against insults, libel and other means used to damage a person's good name. Defamation of a political nature can be dealt with under Article 105 of the Criminal Law. The statute says it is a crime to 'instigate the subversion of the political power of the state and the overthrow of the socialist system through spreading rumours, slandering or other ways' (Goodale 1999). A number of dissidents and *avant-garde* journalists have been successfully sued and punished for libelling the state. On the other hand, state media are usually protected from defamation charges or lawsuits when they carry reports of the supposed crimes of dissidents. Prominent dissident Chen Ziming attempted to sue the CCP's Propaganda Department, the NCNA and *People's Daily* for libel over a report stating he had 'participated in and directly commanded' attacks against martial law troops in 1989. The courts refused to hear the case (Schlesinger 1992).

While the regime believes it must maintain the ideological barricades against hostile foreign forces, it is unlikely Beijing will allow foreign media outlets to circulate or broadcast in China, or establish joint ventures with local outlets. As of mid 1999, only a handful of foreign magazines specialising in non-political subject matters, such as *Elle*, *Figaro* and *Cosmopolitan*, have been permitted to publish Chinese editions with official publishing units. Why certain foreign publications are allowed to establish footholds and others are not is neither officially explained nor subject to

Losing control

any policy guidelines. It is assumed that a Politburo-ranked official must approve politically sensitive joint ventures. Evidently the personal permission of Politburo member in charge of propaganda, Ding Guan'gen, was given for the *Shenxing Daily*, a joint venture between a Shenzhen official unit and Hong Kong's Sing Tao Group. The paper, however, looks and reads much like a mainland paper. Efforts by other foreign or Hong Kong dailies to set up mainland-based papers have all been unsuccessful.

Those foreign news companies which have secured a significant foothold in China, have invested considerable financial resources in the trust of leaders. Rupert Murdoch's News Corp., for example, has a 45 per cent stake in the Hong Kong-based Phoenix Satellite TV. Phoenix carries a mixture of racy entertainment and normally non-controversial news programs. According to his critics, Murdoch declared his good intentions by publishing an official biography of Deng Xiaoping, and scrapping plans by a subsidiary book company to publish *East and West* by former Hong Kong Governor Chris Patten. But it is no coincidence that on sensitive occasions, such as the run-up to the tenth anniversary of Tiananmen Square in 1999, signals for Phoenix are muffled, as are those of CNN and BBC which are in any case only available in hotels or foreigners' compounds.

Blitz against the media

Without western-style laws, media control is exercised mainly in the form of *ad hoc* notices, secondary regulations and administrative practices. One of the easiest methods is simply to cut down the numbers. To trim real and potential poisonous weeds, a wave of newspapers, magazines and television stations closures began in the mid 1990s, in the name of shrinking the budget deficit. From 1995, the State Press and Publications Administration stopped issuing licences for new newspapers and publishing houses and in mid 1996 applied the same principle to radio and TV. In-house newspapers and magazines run by the CCP and government departments were slashed. In late 1996, then Vice-Premier Zhu Rongji ordered the closure of dozens of newspapers sponsored by the state banking system (Singer 1997). As well as outright closures, Beijing concocted other innocuous sounding policies to prevent a hundred flowers from blooming. One was a massive merger initiative, swallowing existing

publications into six mammoth media conglomerates: three in Guangzhou, two in Beijing and one in Shanghai (Reuters, 4 August 1998). A key theme of the reform of state-owned enterprises was to form conglomerates along the lines of the Japanese *zaibatsu* and the South Korean *chaebol*. The creation of conglomerates makes it easier for the authorities to exert control.

Dozens of politically incorrect magazines and publishing houses were closed down in the late 1990s. It is important to note that given the state's largely successful control of the underground opposition, publications by clandestine organisations similar to *samizdat* in the Soviet Union were almost non-existent. The media units axed were relatively tame intellectual journals that never opposed the CCP directly. They ran foul of Beijing for espousing relatively radical views on political or cultural modernisation. For example, the Beijing-based *Oriental Monthly* was disciplined in 1997 and 1998 for running articles on ways to learn the lesson from the Cultural Revolution. Both *The Way of Beijing* and *Cultural Times of Guangzhou* were closed down in 1999 merely for advocating an open attitude towards western values and a faster pace of reform (Agence France-Presse, 15 January 1999).

According to watchdog units such as the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists, the CCP administration is among the world's worst offenders for incarcerating reporters. In the summer of 1998, Shi Binhai, an investigative reporter with the *China Economic Times*, was detained for almost one year for conducting private interviews with ousted party chief Zhao Ziyang. Shi's case was never brought to public trial. Not a word about his fate ever appeared in the official media. Gao Yu was locked up in 1994 for allegedly leaking state secrets in the course of writing articles for Hong Kong publications. Gao had to serve her full five-year term despite numerous petitions by foreign governments and human rights organisations (Agence France-Presse, 28 March 1999).

Censorship in Beijing remains much the same now as it was in the 1950s, even as China is gearing up to launch its first satellites in 2001 and 2002. Proofs of the front page of the *People's Daily* have to be approved by a senior Propaganda Department bureaucrat, usually Politburo member Ding, the night before publication. A 'reading group' in the department consisting of censors and ideologues pore through major papers every day in search of violations of CCP discipline. During national festivals

Losing control

such as the 1 October National Day or 1 August Army Day, media publish the requisite feel-good messages from relevant authorities. At times of crises such as the confrontation with Taipei in 1995–96 and 1999, newspapers and television dutifully performed the role of agents for psychological warfare. Newspapers and TV stations nationwide must follow the NCNA wire when reporting on the activities and speeches of leaders.

The same tight control is exercised over the more than 100 foreign reporters based in China. Despite much-improved communications with the outside world, Beijing still sees the foreign media as no more than an adjunct of their governments—even as secret agents. This is perhaps a reflection of the fact that many Chinese foreign correspondents are much more than journalists; they also file internal reports to leading Party and government departments. Following the NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, the US media claimed that two of the three journalists killed were in fact intelligence officers. This was denied by the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

The leadership's control of western correspondents has not changed greatly since the late 1970s, when the first batch of foreign reporters was granted residency visas for Beijing. By the mid 1990s, news bureaux could be opened in Shanghai and Guangzhou but the supervisory mechanism remains draconian. Journalists who want to conduct interviews must first apply to the foreign affairs bureau of government offices, factories or colleges. Correspondents who want to leave their bases and report in other provinces must first seek the approval of relevant local authorities. Many of the more active correspondents are subject to surveillance by state security agents on a daily basis. Taboo areas for foreign journalists include Beijing's treatment of dissidents and human rights in general, the underground church, and events in Tibet and Xinjiang. Throughout the 1990s, an average of one foreign reporter per year was expelled for reasons such as leaking state secrets. In 1998, the reporter for Japan's *Yomiuri Shimbun*, Yukihisa Nakatsu, was forced to leave for allegedly handling Party documents considered to be classified information. The same year, the accreditation of Juergen Kremb, the veteran correspondent for the German magazine *Der Spiegel*, was abruptly cancelled, apparently for his work on dissidents including Wei Jingsheng (Agence France-Presse, 7 October 1998).

Forces for change

The administration of President Jiang and Premier Zhu seems determined to pursue cautious economic market reforms while continuing the deep freeze on political liberalisation at least until 2002 or 2003, when they are due to retire from the front line. The real changes in media policy and practice, then, are likely to stem from non-party factors such as the marketisation of the economy, the emergence of civil society, the impact of the Internet, the impact of foreign influences—and the initiative of independent-minded journalists.

‘You have your strategy, I have my counter-strategy.’ This principle is often cited by local officials confident of foiling or at least diluting the *zhongyang’s* strictures. Yet the slogan also describes in a vivid manner the ability of free-thinking publishers, authors and video producers to thumb their nose at authority.

Since the mid 1990s, rebel book merchants have launched effective guerrilla warfare underground against the censors. In 1998 an estimated 60 per cent of the book distribution market was controlled by non-official and illegal publishers and distributors. There are approximately 400 official publishing houses. These clandestine operators have high mobility. They use the services of printers from different cities. The underground publishers, producing pirated or unofficial publications, usually disappear once their products are given to underground distributors, who then make them available to street-level booksellers. During police crackdowns, street vendors do not openly display the taboo books, which are only sold to trusted customers. The motive for many underground publishers is to make profits, not to fight for political freedom. And, not surprisingly, many of the illicit books are pornographic. But, a significant proportion of underground titles are politically taboo such as pirated editions of books first published in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Perennial favourites include Li Zhisui’s, *The Private Life of Mao Zedong*, the memoirs of Xu Jiatun (the former head of Beijing’s mission to Hong Kong who defected to the United States in 1990) and unofficial biographies of politicians ranging from Zhou Enlai to Madame Jiang Qing (*Ming Pao*, 2 April 1999).

According to Chen Fang, author of the best-selling *The Wrath of Heaven*, the phenomenon of underground publishing is both a blessing and a curse. Official criticism of his book, a fictional account of the corrupt empire of

the former Beijing party chief Chen Xitong, provoked wider interest in China. But, its distribution through book pirates and illegal networks deprived the author of most of the profits. Most liberal authors agree that clandestine channels have opened up much wider choices for China's readers, but at the expense of the author's livelihood.

China has caught on to the Internet. The number of surfers surged to more than four million in late 1999, compared to just 250,000 at the end of 1997. E-commerce and e-business are thriving. At the same time new online services such as *Shanghai.online* and *Shenzhen.online* are providing traditional media outlets with new competition. Most of them began by merely reprinting reports from newspapers, but gradually some have developed their own editorial material. *Shenzhen.online*, for example, now runs sensational social stories, ranging from robberies and murders to supermarket security strip-searching female customers, while staying clear of overtly political topics (*Wall Street Journal*, 18 January 1999). Most importantly, the Internet offers Chinese a window on the outside world.

Like other authoritarian governments in Asia, from the very beginning, China was aware of the destabilising influence of the Internet. Before Deng's demise in 1997, Propaganda Chief Ding was quoted as asking his experts whether the Internet could be grounded throughout China a day or so before the official announcement. In early 1996, Beijing required all Internet users to register with the police and later that year providers, who must be government-run or affiliated, blocked off some 100 sites. These included websites of the US Government, Hong Kong and Taiwan papers, as well as Voice of America and Radio Free Asia. Yet as the Chinese saying goes, '[W]hile the guardians of orthodoxy put up one foot [of resistance], the devils can up the ante by ten times'. Beijing has been unsuccessful in blocking the thousand and one sites that dissidents in the United States and other parts of the world are establishing. And on a daily basis, rebel intellectuals are downloading reams of 'offensive' material provided by overseas sympathisers (*New York Times*, 18 October 1998).

Consider the artful dodging perpetrated by the US-based *VIP Reference*, a 'subversive' Internet magazine that is being dispatched regularly to more than 300,000 e-mail addresses in China. Typical fare includes political news censored by the mainland media, information about dissidents, and

stories about factional struggles within the leadership. The addresses, compiled from commercial and public lists, include those of public and state security units. To escape police detection, the New York and Washington-based organisers switch providers each day. 'We like the concept of free speech and we want a legal system to protect it', said Li Hongkuan, a Chinese intellectual based in New York who edits the magazine. '[W]e want to destroy the Chinese system of censorship over the Internet.' To protect Chinese readers, *VIP Reference* asks recipients not to forward the material to friends within the country (Flatin 1999).

The Internet also worries the CCP because it is a potent tool for political organisation—and agitation. The China Democracy Party credited its fast growth to the word being spread on the net. The same was true for the Falun Gong, and many of the edicts of its founder Li Honzhi reached the faithful in the mainland and overseas via their websites.

The Internet also has a powerful interactive function. During the Cultural Revolution, college students put up *dazibao* (literally big-character posters) on campuses to air their views. Electronic versions of the *dazibao* first appeared during protests against the Japanese 'occupation' of the Diaoyu or Senkaku islands off Taiwan in 1996 and 1997. By the time of the Belgrade embassy bombing incident, the use of the Internet as a vehicle to spread political opinion had become routine. Both college students and intellectuals are spreading politically incorrect ideas via computer screens. Even though the views expressed in Internet fora may sometimes be pro-government, Beijing is alarmed its lack of control over a medium that can powerfully shape people's thoughts.

In late 1998 the CCP struck back with a vengeance. In big cities, particularly those along the coast, police departments expanded their divisions dealing with security concerning electronic data and the Internet. In mid August, the Ministry of Information Technology and well as the Ministries of Public and State Securities published regulations asking all departments to upgrade their information technology security. Government departments were forbidden to link internal computer systems to those outside the offices. Beijing also rushed through Regulations Governing the Security and Protection of Computer Information Systems. Among other things, the rules prohibited Internet activities that undermine the interests of the state and the legal interest of

Losing control

other citizens (Smith 1999). Huge sums of money were spent on importing foreign Internet-nanny techniques, such as filtration systems to block or catch offensive websites and data.

In January 1999, Lin Hai, a computer engineer in Shanghai, was sentenced to two years in jail for providing *VIP Reference* with a database of 30,000 addresses. Lin's wife, who was not allowed to attend the trial, said her husband had no interest in politics (Langfitt 1999; *Asian Wall Street Journal*, 19 January 1999). Police have been able to crack several Internet political journals published within China. The organisers of *Public Opinion*, whose contents were similar to those of *VIP Reference*, went into hiding in early 1999 (Farley 1999).

Yet technology is fast outpacing the regulators and police. There has been a reasonably long time gap of at least several months if not a year or two between the arrival of new Internet technology and a new regulation forbidding its use. Most importantly, excessive control could stifle scientific development and economic growth. Knowledge of the information superhighway is critical in understanding and accessing tomorrow's technology. As early as 1996, the *China Daily* pointed out that 'the value of the Internet so outweighs its potentially harmful aspects—pornography and politically destructive information—that the Chinese government has approved its opening to the public' (Lam 1999). At least along the coast, the Internet had, by mid 1999, become a formidable rival to the government propaganda machinery.

Looking toward the new millennium

During his memorable tour of CCTV, Premier Zhu praised reporters for being 'the mirror of government [work] and the forerunners of reform' (New China News Agency, 7 October 1998). But, witness the thousands of editors and reporters who joined the students at Tiananmen Square during the six weeks prior to the crackdown. After the troops marched into the Square, dozens of journalists were detained for abetting if not masterminding the pro-democracy movement. Believing that time is hardly ripe for a major step forward, most of these *avant-garde* journalists have since kept a low profile. But in China media workers do have a unique role in expanding pluralism, if not in promoting democratisation itself. In the former Eastern Bloc, alternate power centres such as the church and

trade unions were instrumental in the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet state. Since 1949, however, the CCP has been the only source of authority in the country. Newspapers and television stations have, albeit in an embryonic way, served the purpose of varying the ideological landscape. Most of the new ideas which have reached urban areas, have been disseminated through the media, not other networks.

For two to three years before the 4 June 1989 crackdown, it was liberal papers such as the Shanghai-based *World Economic Herald* and the Beijing-based *Economics Weekly* that coupled market reforms being with western-style political freedom. Given the Jiang administration's tight control over the mainstream media, the relatively liberal papers of the late 1990s were most remarkable for their efforts in urging faster market reforms, particularly quasi-privatisation for small and medium state-owned enterprises. The Beijing-based *China Economic Times* and the Chongqing-based journal, *Reform*, have delved into more fundamental questions such as the need for institutional and political change to match economic reform. For example, *China Economic Times* was at the forefront of the small-scale liberalisation movement in the run-up to the 15th Party Congress. It advocated the development of a mixed economy and the shareholding system. Even after the post 1998 freeze, the paper concentrated on sensitive areas such as the failure of the government to live up to its commitment to devote at least four per cent of gross domestic product to education. Liberal economist Wu Jinglian argued in *Reform* that one lesson of the East Asian economic crisis of 1997–99 was that China must liberalise its system of governance, including through the separation of government and business (*Reform*, April 1998; *South China Morning Post*, 15 March 1999).

Sometimes, small-circulation papers in remote areas have had the courage to ask overwhelming questions. Take the case of *Asia-Pacific Wind*, a weekly newspaper based in Kunming, Yunnan Province. On 4 September, 1999 it reported the corruption case of the vice-mayor of Ningbo, Xie Jianbang, who took home at least 500,000 yuan and was responsible for economic losses of more than 900 million yuan. Xie was given a suspended death sentence, which in the Chinese context means he would be let off after a long jail term. In a commentary, *Asia-Pacific Wind* asked why many low-level officials were executed for pocketing much less money and doing much less harm (*Asia-Pacific Wind*, 4 September 1999).

Books are also playing a significant role in political enlightenment in the late 1990s. Two publishing companies, Today's China Press and the Economic Daily Press, were instrumental in intensifying the debate on reform. Today's China Press published a highly influential series of books under the label, 'China's Problems'. Titles included *Cross Swords*, which chronicled the battle between reformers and leftists in the 1980s and 1990s, and *The Trap of Modernisation*, which criticised the administration for dragging its feet on reform.

Looking ahead at the new millennium, it seems likely that Fortress CCP cannot withstand the winds of change for long. Government propaganda has increasingly lost credibility: the circulation of the *People's Daily* and other traditional mouthpieces is declining fast, as more urban intellectuals have access to satellite television and, in particular, dissident websites. As Beijing-based media professor Hu Zhengrong pointed out, more people are living in a global village. 'As the economy and society become more globalised, the globalisation of broadcasting, television and communications is inevitable' (author's interview with Hu Zhengrong, 3 September, Kunming, China).

The pace of change is tipped to accelerate after China's accession to the World Trade Organisation. The development of the non-state sector of the economy will also provide the basis for a pluralistic society. President Jiang and his fellow septuagenarians are hanging on to power thanks to their control of the army and other 'tools of the dictatorship of the proletariat'. On the one hand, the CCP's apparent stranglehold over propaganda may help to extend its mandate of heaven. On the other, the growing diversity and irreverence of the alternative media is paving the way for the end of one-party dictatorship.

Appendix: Who's who of the leading print media?

Media	Responsible person
<i>People's Daily</i>	Shao Huaze
<i>Guangming Daily</i>	Wang Shen
<i>Reference News</i>	Xia Haitao
<i>Economic Daily</i>	Ai Feng
<i>Liberation Army Daily</i>	Sun Zhongguo
<i>China Youth Daily</i>	Xu Zhuqing
<i>Liberation Daily</i> (Shanghai)	Qin Shaode
<i>Nanfang Daily</i> (Guangzhou)	Li Mengyu
<i>Shenzhen Special Zone Daily</i> (Shenzhen)	Cheng Zengsheng

Media websites

China media network, www.guangmingdaily.com.cn/gbnn.htm/

People's Daily, www.peopledaily.com.cn/

Chinese Central Television, www.cctv.com/

Xinhua, www.xinhua.org/

Liberation Daily, www.jfdaily.com.cn/

China Democratic Party, www.freechina.net/edp/ (English edn)

Hong Kong Information Centre of Human Rights and Democratic Movement in China, www.speednet.net/

Democracy and Justice Party, <http://come.to/cdjp/>

Tunnel Magazine, <http://home.talkcity.com/WallSt/suidao/>

The Cardinal Kung Foundation, www.cardinalkungfoundation.org/

Falun Gong, www.falundafa.org/

Hong Kong

A handover of freedom?

Chris Yeung

How free is too free? Or, perhaps more accurately, how low is too low? These are the questions that officials and consumers in Hong Kong are asking as the media dishes up an increasingly sensational, voyeuristic and sometimes fictional diet of scandal, gore and intrigue. Did the *Apple Daily*, one of the tabloid market leaders, step over the line when it paid a labourer to pose in bed with a prostitute, thus illustrating the infidelity which drove his wife to push her two sons out of their high-rise apartment window and to jump herself? At what point does the government intervene to enforce minimum standards to protect the morals or sensibilities of society, or does the media industry itself need to rein in its own activities?

So serious is the slide into tabloid journalism in Hong Kong that one pressure group has established a 'pollution index' to monitor the media and provide the public with a list of the most 'polluted' publications (*Ming Pao*, 26 April 1999). The Hong Kong Journalists Association itself warns that pressures will grow for the policing of the media if the trend in sensationalism continues, opening up new avenues for government intervention in Hong Kong, a territory jealously guarding its freedoms as the 'Special Administrative Region' (SAR) following its handover from Britain to China in 1997. Could media irresponsibility so frustrate the public that the people of Hong Kong would be willing to trade off media freedoms and bring the local press more in line with Beijing?

The handover and the media

It seems ironic that two years after the handover which came with all the fears of Communist-style controls, that the biggest concern for press

freedom in Hong Kong is the media's own irresponsibility. The shift towards sensationalism can be seen in a wider context than the commercial motivation for sleaze. As in other countries of the region where the fear of censorship has been an issue, crime, sex and violence have provided juicy, non-political fare to push up circulation figures, but to avoid political controversy. There is little concrete evidence that Beijing has applied overt pressure to the Hong Kong media since the handover. However, media analysts contend there is a pervasive feeling of self-censorship within an industry which was, for so long, a bastion of western liberal press values in a capitalist Chinese enclave. Although it is too early to judge the long-term trends, the Hong Kong Government has, so far, adopted a hands-off approach. Under these conditions, media watchers tend to agree that the threat to Hong Kong's media at the turn of the century is coming from within the industry itself.

The media plays an important social and political role in Hong Kong. Under the British administration, the media was an effective and powerful watchdog against government failure and abuses of power, and it continues to play this role. This has been particularly important because Hong Kong has not yet established a mature, democratic political system. The history of democracy, despite the political principles of the colonial British administration, is a relatively short story. Universal suffrage was not introduced until 1982, and then only for the election of district boards, the lowest representative level in a three-tiered political structure. It took almost another decade of political agitation by Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement for the then colonial administration to take the next step towards wider democracy. In 1991, 18 seats out of 60 were made available for direct election in the highest political body, the Legislative Council. Of the remaining seats, 21 were reserved for representatives of functional constituencies, or local interest groups, 17 remained for government appointments and 4 for government officials. In 1995, the number of directly elected seats was increased to 20 and is due to be increased to 24 in the year 2000 and 30 in 2004. The Legislative Council is not due to be fully elected under a one person, one vote system until 2007, and then only under a set of strict requirements including the consent of the Chief Executive.

Under the political framework outlined in the Basic Law (Hong Kong's post-handover constitution) the Legislative Council holds the purse-

Losing control

strings, passes the laws and, above all, monitors the daily workings of the Tung Chee-hwa government and its administration. However, mixed electoral arrangements in the Legislative Council mean the majority of members have been drawn from business and political circles, with predominantly conservative political views, and a tendency to support the government. In the first two years as a SAR, the Legislative Council has not been able to operate as an effective check on government. The government is also complaining that with more democracy due to be introduced into the Legislative Council, administrative effectiveness will be hampered, signaling possible difficulties in the functioning of a future genuine democracy.

In this environment the media has served as a more powerful watchdog than the Legislative Council. At the end of 1999, the media exposed a spate of mismanagement in the Urban Services Department, including possible conflict of interest involved in the establishment of a tax consultancy by the wife of a senior tax official, and the mishandling of the chaotic opening of Hong Kong's new airport in mid 1998. Pressure from the media has produced admissions of mistakes from the administration and the appointment of a secretary-level official to deal directly with media inquiries. Reforms in the pipeline include requiring under-performing senior civil servants to quit, and have pegged pay rises to performance. Many senior government officials, groomed in the days of the largely unaccountable colonial British government, are now more willing to talk to journalists, officially or on a background basis. They are also prepared to participate in radio talk-back and provide direct responses to public comments and complaints. In short, the media is functioning as a powerful fourth estate and a welcome part of daily life in the SAR.

Fierce competition within the industry following the East Asian economic downturn has coincided with a decline in professional standards and a growing hostility to the press from some sectors of society, business and government. The media in Hong Kong now stands frequently accused of irresponsible reporting, bad taste, sensationalism, and fabrication. The pressure group, the Society for Truth and Light, set up the 'pollution index' to monitor sex and violence in Hong Kong's newspapers and released the results in April 1999 (*Ming Pao*, 26 April 1999). The three best selling dailies, *Oriental Daily News*, *Apple Daily* and *The Sun*, were identified as the 'most polluted'. While many agree that Hong Kong's media has become

progressively more politically powerful, the new paradox is that fewer people believe what they read, hear on radio, or see on television. Increasingly the media is being consumed as 'info-tainment', but dismissed as a serious source of information.

A survey of the front pages of the three most popular newspapers in October 1999 found entertainment news dominated, with the *Apple Daily* reporting on a new *paparazzi* team being set up by Asia Television, as well as the controversy over the same television station's decision to replace journalists with 'artists' to present the evening news bulletins. *The Oriental Daily News* devoted one of its entire front pages to a female pornographic actress who allegedly created mayhem in a luxury hotel after taking soft drugs. *The Sun* honed in on the conviction of a popular singer in a court in Hawaii for stealing a pair of US\$75 sunglasses, which he said he absent-mindedly picked up and forgot to pay for.

Media analysts believe it is too early to be certain that the media will continue to operate without political pressure from China. As a June 1999 joint report of the Hong Kong Journalists Association and Article 19: the International Centre Against Censorship, says of Hong Kong

Self-censorship is still a threat to media freedom, but probably no more than we reported in our 1998 publication. We continue to hear reports that certain publications or broadcasters have played down sensitive issues concerning dissident or separatist activities in China...a television station had cut back to just one episode its original plan to broadcast a six-part series on Tibet. However, some observers see the broadcasting on even a single episode, which includes excerpts from an interview with the Dalai Lama, as positive (Hong Kong Journalists' Association and Article 19 1999).

The report also points to the prominent coverage given by the media to the tenth anniversary of the suppression of the 1989 pro-democracy movement in China.

Local journalists argue strongly that the Basic Law's infamous Article 23 on subversive activities hangs like an axe over Hong Kong reporters. Article 23 states that the SAR

[S]hall enact laws on its own to prohibit any act of treason, secession, sedition, subversion against the Central Government, or theft of state secrets, to prohibit foreign political organisations or bodies from conducting political activities in the region, and to prohibit political

Losing control

organisations or bodies of the region from establishing ties with foreign political organisations or bodies.

Local journalists have remained nervous despite signals that the Tung Chee-hwa government is not rushing to draft new laws to implement Article 23.

Cut-throat diversity

For just 6.8 million people, Hong Kong produces 26 Chinese-language dailies, eight English dailies, one bi-lingual daily and five dailies in other minority languages—one of the highest levels of media exposure on earth. Most of the dailies also carry Internet editions and Internet access is widespread within the general community. Hong Kong is also served by a government-run radio and television station, two commercial radio stations, and a cable television station. Most households have access to satellite STAR television and people who live near the border can receive mainland Chinese television programs. Except for the three dailies, *Ta Kung Pao*, *Wen Wei Po* and *Hong Kong Commercial Daily*, which are generally described as pro-Beijing, most print and electronic media are market-oriented and non-ideological. There were a few traditional pro-Taiwan newspapers, such as *Hong Kong Times* and *Hong Kong United Daily*, which operated before the handover but they closed down for political and commercial reasons before 1997. The two mass-market newspapers, *Oriental Daily News* and *Apple Daily*, have taken up the major share in the Chinese newspaper market, with unofficial figures suggesting they have 70 per cent of market share. Their layout is bold and colourful, offering readers comprehensive low-rent guides to anything from cheap foodstalls to kinky brothels. *Oriental Daily News* claims a circulation of over 600,000, while *Apple Daily* says it sells a daily average of 400,000 copies. *The Sun*, launched in early 1999 as a sister paper of the *Oriental Daily News*, is believed to rank third with a circulation of less than 200,000. Most of the other dailies sell less than 100,000 daily copies. They include *Ming Pao*, *Sing Tao Jih Pao*, *Hong Kong Economic Times* and *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, which target educated, middle-income professionals and business executives.

Of the two English-language dailies, *South China Morning Post* has been the market leader for decades. It sells an average of 110,000, more than its

direct rival, *The Hong Kong Standard*. In addition to providing information to the expatriate and bilingual readers in Hong Kong, the English dailies also form an important channel for information on developments in mainland China to the rest of the world. Hong Kong's newspapers are available on the Internet and provide independent China coverage, from within China, for overseas China-watchers unable to access similar information through the government-controlled Chinese media. Partly because of its location at the southern tip of the mainland and partly because of its tradition of media freedom, Hong Kong has continued to provide a strategic regional base for many international media organisations, including *Asiaweek*, *Financial Times*, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, *Cable News Network* and *International Herald Tribune*.

Hong Kong's television viewers have access to 48 domestic and regional channels in various languages. These include four free-to-air commercial channels funded by advertising, 40 pay-TV channels funded by subscriptions, and a variety of free-to-air satellite channels. The two commercial stations, Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB) and Asia Television (ATV) are each licensed to broadcast one Cantonese and one English-language channel until the year 2000. The government announced in late 1998 it would not limit the number of free-to-air licences. Its policy is to gradually open the market to more providers. However, to avoid conflict of interest and a build-up of control by a single media operator, cross-media ownership will continue to apply to domestic free-to-air and pay TV services.

Commercialism versus social responsibility

Speaking at a lunch with board members of the Newspaper Society of Hong Kong in April 1999, Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa expressed his concern over developments in the media.

In the past six to 12 months, there have been a lot of views expressed in society. Many people have asked me: Why has the media become more market-oriented? Has it given top priority to making profits and increasing sales? It is true that everybody, every business organisation needs to make money, but apart from press freedom, should the media also shoulder some social responsibility (*Hong Kong Standard*, 10 April 1999).

Losing control

His remarks were similar in tone and content to a speech given by Chief Secretary for Administration, Anson Chan Fang On-sang, in late March 1999. The top SAR leaders are not alone in raising this concern. Various opinion surveys have shown growing public discontent with press commercialism and sensationalism. The first clear signs of declining media ethics were noticed several years ago. In 1996, for example, a weekly magazine ran a cover story claiming a local multi-millionaire was dying of cancer. It was a hoax perpetrated by a 19-year-old high school graduate, for which the magazine was forced to apologize publicly, but the fabricated story merely marked the beginning of the age of fiction and sleaze in the local news media. Other publications reported the fabricated suicides of both pop superstar, Leo Lai, and Yuan Mu, a retired Chinese official who had acted as government spokesman during the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown.

Calls for ways to curb media excesses include a controversial proposal to set up a media council to review complaints against the press. Similar to the Press Council in the United Kingdom, the idea drew strong resistance from the industry when it was first mooted in early 1980s. At that time talks on Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty were in their initial stages and the proposal triggered grave fears of curbs on a free press. Now, some influential media figures and officials believe it can be safely pursued. The Hong Kong Journalists' Association has proposed an informal media forum for the industry to tap the views of concerned groups, such as academics. The News Executives Association, whose members are mainly senior journalists and editors, is drafting a set of professional ethics guidelines to promote uniform standards within the industry. The guidelines are due to be completed by the end of 1999. Although there seems to be a general consensus within the industry that something has to be done to address public concern, there is little agreement on what concrete steps to take.

At a specially convened Legislative Council meeting in April, legislators warned that media organisations had better shape up or risk government intervention. The Democratic Party's Andrew Cheng Kar-foo said, 'I don't want to see the Government introducing legislation to govern media conduct and ethics. However, if the trend continues, I'm afraid the authorities would be forced to intervene' (*Hong Kong Standard*,

April 21 1999). The whole issue of media credibility, however, goes beyond the question of professional practices on matters such as use of sensational pictures and headlines. It raises a more fundamental question of the role of the media in post-handover Hong Kong, and swings the issue of media content back again into the political arena.

Traditionally, media organisations have aimed to balance the need to maintain commercial viability with varying levels of social responsibility. Despite the existence of some harsh laws on matters such as official secrets, Hong Kong's media has enjoyed minimal interference from the Administration in making independent news judgments and editorial comments. Clearly, the debate over the sleaze element has prompted the Administration to articulate its own stance on the social responsibility of the press. In her speech at a media awards ceremony on 7 March, Anson Chan urged the media to ensure the reports and information provided to readers were balanced and objective. '[Press media] should strive to maintain fairness when they try to arouse public discussion, take into account and respect the views and positions of different sides', she said (Fang On-sang 1999).

So as far as government officials are concerned, the media should be obliged to provide fair, balanced and objective information to readers. But whose right or role is it to define the concept of fairness and objectivity? Privately, senior Hong Kong officials have complained that the media has failed to give the public the opportunity to understand government policies and decisions. Officials argue they are not preventing the media from criticising them, but asking for fair coverage. The media, they insist, should not criticise the government for the sake of criticism and should actively support the government when it is on the right track. But critics believe these private views represent pressure on the media in the overall interest of society. This view is closer to former Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's ideology of press control rather than to the western notion of press freedom.

Because of the sensitivity of the issue of social responsibility, the government has not pushed too openly, or too hard, for controls. Privately, officials are hoping the industry itself will come up with solutions to put their house in order, thus leaving the government out of the potentially explosive censorship debate.

Threats to freedom of the press

Setting out a list of 16 benchmarks of Hong Kong's success in his swansong Policy Address in 1996, former Governor Chris Patten highlighted concern over whether the press would remain free after the handover. He asked 'Is the Hong Kong press still free, with uninhibited coverage of China and of issues on which China has strong views? Are foreign journalists and media organisations in Hong Kong still free to operate without controls?' (Patten 1996). Locally and internationally, there were fears about whether self-censorship would become the norm rather than the exception. In a speech in late March 1999, Anson Chan said the first 20 months of the SAR showed great protection of freedom of speech, with journalists continuing to enjoy ample room for independent reporting.

A Government report published to mark the second anniversary of the SAR on 1 July 1999 stated

Hong Kong's media has operated freely and unfettered, generating a robust and critical exchange of views on important matters and government policies or actions. If anything, the media has become more critical and demanding in its role as the 'guardians of public concern' (Hong Kong Government 1999).

At this point it does seem fair to say that the Hong Kong government has silenced cynics within and outside the SAR with its restraint and tolerance towards the local media over the past two years. The Beijing government has also won praise over its hands-off approach in allowing a genuine level of autonomy for the SAR. Top SAR leaders have repeatedly assured local journalists they are not intending to introduce legislative curbs on the media, despite vocal complaints against media abuses. Nevertheless, the high-profile remarks made by Tung Chee-hwa and Anson Chan give a clear signal that the government is not happy with the state of the media.

It is an open secret that Tung Chee-hwa and his top aides feel frustrated and angry with the sharp criticism in some influential newspapers over its handling of the right of abode crisis. These included the leading English daily *South China Morning Post*, the popular *Apple Daily* and *Hong Kong Economic Journal* (a financial daily widely read in business and intellectual circles). They all spoke out strongly against the government decision to seek reinterpretation from the Standing Committee of the Chinese National People's Congress over key provisions in the Basic Law. The

unprecedented move, later approved by the Standing Committee, has effectively overturned a landmark ruling by the Court of Final Appeal. The government had earlier warned an estimated 1.67 million mainlanders would have the right to reside in the SAR under the final appellate court's ruling on 29 January 1999. After the reinterpretation of the provisions, less than 200,000 will now be given the right. Unconvinced by the government's argument, some parts of the media strongly criticised the reinterpretation as a fatal blow to the rule of law, the independent judiciary and Hong Kong's autonomy. Top officials mounted a vigorous defence and propaganda campaign by writing to newspapers, encouraging their supporters to speak out and send articles to the media.

Recently, former *South China Morning Post* editor Jonathan Fenby said in a report in the *New York Times*, '[t]here's been a much stronger reaction to the newspaper, from officialdom, from business circles, from members of the establishment, than at any time since the handover' (31 July 1999). Whether these remarks provide any evidence of political pressure remains a matter for debate. It is difficult, however, to rule out the possibility that some journalists do feel the psychological pressure to carefully weigh their words. Some journalists admit they feel the problem of self-censorship does exist, but they have trouble giving concrete examples. The Legislative Council's legal constituency representative Margaret Ng Ngoi-ye, a practicing barrister and a former newspaper publisher, has observed in a *New York Times* report, 'As a whole, newspapers have become steadily more pro-government since the handover' (31 July 1999). The Tung Chee-hwa leadership clearly understands the negative consequences of being seen attempting to gag the media. For Hong Kong, with its economy largely dependent on foreign investment, freedom of the media remains an important benchmark for investors. Businesses would be likely to become jittery over any blatant curbs on the free flow of information and a reduction in accountability of the government, and the Tung Chee-hwa administration is well aware of the potential economic consequences.

Beijing's long shadow

According to a survey conducted by the University of Hong Kong in April 1999, 41 per cent of respondents felt the media was irresponsible in their reporting. A separate survey done by the Chinese University of Hong

Losing control

Kong shows credibility ratings for the media had dropped across the board. About one-quarter of respondents believe there is self-censorship by the media. Conversely, though, 36 per cent said the media had performed better in criticising the government after the handover. But, the same percentage of people, by contrast, found the Hong Kong media had failed to continue criticising and monitoring the mainland Chinese government after the handover. The Chinese University of Hong Kong researchers concluded that local media has become more restrained in criticising China.

China coverage remains the most sensitive aspect of press self-censorship, reflecting the vast differences between Hong Kong and the mainland over fundamental concepts and values. Not long ago, a mainland-born Hong Kong reporter Xi Yang was jailed for what would usually be considered scooping his colleagues by revealing plans to sell gold and raise interest rates. Xi, who worked for the *Ming Pao* daily, was convicted of espionage charges in a Chinese court. He was sentenced to a 12-year jail term in March 1994 and freed on probation in early 1997 before the handover. He has now emigrated. Xi Yang's case had a far reaching impact. Some China-beat Hong Kong journalists have since resigned, fearing they could become the next victims. Others have clearly become more cautious in dealing with sensitive mainland issues. Both journalists and members of the public hold a strong view that self-censorship in relation to China has become a problem. The problem is that Hong Kong and the mainland have different political systems and different concepts of freedom of the press.

One contentious example is the ongoing issue of the status of Taiwan. Mainland China has consistently claimed sovereignty over Taiwan, despite the reality of the anti-communist administration in Taipei. So sensitive is the Taiwan issue for Beijing, that nations with diplomatic ties to mainland China must relegate Taiwan's representatives to vaguely named commercial or tourist offices. Earlier this year, Taiwan's President Lee Teng-hui defined cross-Straits tensions as a problem between 'two separate states', launching a campaign which infuriated Beijing. When the government-run Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) broadcast remarks by Taiwan's unofficial representative in the SAR elaborating on the controversial concept, pro-China newspapers in Hong Kong were quick to lambast RTHK editorial staff for 'going far beyond the boundary of

'press freedom' and 'independent editorial line'. The RTHK was accused of violating the 'one country, two systems' principle by which China governs Hong Kong and challenging the Basic Law by propagating divisive advocacy. In RTHK's defence, the Assistant Director of Broadcasting (Radio) Peter Shiu Lo-sin wrote in the *South China Morning Post*,

[o]ne wider issue is the difference between 'promoting/advocating' and 'reporting/discussing.' Article 23 of the Basic Law guarantees freedom of speech and of the press. It is the firm view of our editorial colleagues and I am sure that of most journalists in Hong Kong, that discussing and debating an issue in the media does not in any way constitute an act of advocacy (9 August 1999).

The sharp attacks on RTHK by the pro-China media sent shivers down the spines of Hong Kong journalists because of the potential threat to press freedom and the broader question of freedom of expression under Article 23 in the Basic Law. The government may have indicated there is no urgency in enacting the new legislation, but it has never ruled out its future use. The ferocity of the criticism of RTHK indicated strong pressure from some quarters of the community for the media to adopt the Chinese mainland position when dealing with sovereignty issues. Any future legislation on Article 23 could impact on the media's coverage of issues relating to sovereignty and Communist rule. Will the Hong Kong media be allowed to give their backing to the 'two states theory'? Will journalists be allowed to report on the issue, discuss and analyse it, or raise it for a public debate? Will the SAR be given an entirely free hand to legislate on Article 23?

Article 23 was written into the Basic Law at the latter stage of the five-year-long drafting process. It responded to the historic opposition *en masse* by Hong Kong people against China's crackdown on Tiananmen demonstrators on 4 June 1989. Shocked by scenes of more than 1.5 million people, representing one out of every four Hong Kongers, marching in streets to condemn the shootings, Beijing was adamant that an anti-subversive provision in the Basic Law would uphold the authority of the ruling communist regime. The vociferous attacks against President Lee over his 'two states theory' and the crackdown in the northern summer of 1999 against followers of the Falun Gong, a religious sect in mainland China, reflect the depth of anxiety among Beijing leadership over threats

to its rule. It is hard to imagine the SAR government will not quietly consult Beijing when it begins drafting the anti-subversive legislation.

More than a year before the handover, mainland Chinese officials had already spelled out their views on Article 23. In June 1996, the then head of the Chinese State Council's Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, Lu Ping, said the Hong Kong press would not be allowed to advocate two Chinas after 1997 (*South China Morning Post*, 3 June 1999). Nor was the SAR given the power to advocate independence for Hong Kong and Taiwan under the 'one country, two systems' formula. Journalists are puzzled and worried that it will be up to the authorities to determine arbitrarily what is objective reporting and what is advocacy. The attacks from pro-China media against the RTHK do not augur well for the preservation of unfettered freedom for the media when Article 23 is put on the agenda of legislative program.

Who will defend the media?

The China factor aside, the future of freedom of the press and speech rests with the resolve of SAR leaders and the community at large to uphold it. Before the handover there was no shortage of comforting promises. In January 1997, Anson Chan urged all Hong Kong journalists to

practise their profession after 1997 as they have practised it, continue to write the stories and editorials that deserve to be written, responsibly, objectively without fear or favour...How well they do their job after the transition will to a very large extent decide how well our other freedoms will be protected (Fang On-sang 1997).

Behind the upbeat note from Anson Chan was the idea that the main threat would come from China, after the handover. Instead, the direct threat from China failed to materialise and the Hong Kong press began to pose a more imminent threat to the authority of the SAR, prompting new local pressures on journalists. Against this background, it is interesting to note the shift in emphasis by Tung Chee-hwa and Anson Chan on the need for the media to fulfill its social responsibility and behave themselves. Conspiracy theorists believe it may be a curtain raiser to some form of future controls over the media.

A tighter grip on the media would be likely to receive the blessing of the central government in Beijing. Speaking to a group of senior journalists

in mid-July, a deputy director of the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office Liu Minqi said that news media 'should explain government policies' and 'reflect public opinion to the government' (*South China Morning Post*, 20 July 1999). His remarks are in line with the calls by SAR leaders for officials to fulfil their social responsibility while exercising their freedoms.

Like other freedoms and rights, the concept of a free press is entrenched in Hong Kong values. Anyone in the street will speak highly of the importance of a free press which works without fear and favour. But when asked by pollsters from the Baptist University of Hong Kong what is the most important area for more government effort, protecting freedom of the press ranks fourteenth. It follows areas such as luring more tourists, reducing pollution, improving people's livelihood and ensuring economic growth (Hong Kong Transition Project 1999). Positively speaking, it could be seen as a vote of 'everything is fine' with press freedom. Yet it might also reflect the prevalent feeling in the community that the problem with the news media now is not a question of whether or not they are free. Rather it is a question of whether they are excessively free to publish unwarranted criticism of officials, to indulge in trials by media and gross distortions of truth, all of which, in themselves, pose a threat to other freedoms in society. Some media analysts fear the public might become so frustrated and fed up that they are ready to accept some kind of press controls. If the credibility of the media continues to decline, there is a stronger likelihood of public support for curbs on the media.

In his annual Policy Address delivered on 6 October 1999, Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa warned that press freedom should not become a pretext for disregarding media ethics. He said, 'it is inexcusable for any media operator to resort to pornography, violence, libel or misrepresentation simply for profit'. Professional ethics and social responsibilities of the media, Tung Chee-hwa pointed out, 'is an issue of prime public concern which deserves the Government's due attention... The SAR Government awaits with interest the outcome of the public consultation exercise' (Chee-hwa 1999).

Tung Chee-hwa was referring to a set of controversial proposals published by the quasi-official Law Reform Commission in August 1999 for a four-month consultation concluding at the end of November. The key proposal is the establishment of a statutory Press Council appointed

by the Chief Executive to handle complaints and initiate investigations over privacy intrusions by the media. The Press Council would be empowered to impose a maximum fine of HK\$500,000 on a newspaper for a first offence in a serious breach of a privacy code. For a second or subsequent offence a publication would face a maximum fine of HK\$1 million.

The proposal has already been met with strong opposition from all journalists' groups, newspapers and many academics. They are worried the new body could mark the beginning of curbs on press freedom. However, opinion polls reflect a mixed response from the public. One major finding was that the public generally considered the media to have acted irresponsibly and to have intruded into the privacy of individuals. The government has said it remains open minded about the proposal, despite a strong hint from Tung Chee-hwa that his administration will have to do something if the media fails to introduce some kind of self-regulating measures.

The Independent Law Reform Commission, which is chaired by a university professor and plays an instrumental role in legislation, will make its final proposal to the government after taking into account the range of views collected during the consultation. The ball is then in Tung Chee-hwa's court for a final decision on the long-standing issue of media excess.

Two years after the change of sovereignty, life in Hong Kong remains much the same as it was under British rule. Following months of consecutive negative economic growth, in mid 1999 signs emerged that the worst is over. Politically, there have been no mass arrests of dissidents. Demonstrations remain part of the daily life. The annual 4 June candle-light vigil in Victoria Park, marking the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre, attracted a higher-than-expected turnout—70,000 according to the organisers. Many media organisations gave prominent coverage to the memorial activities, now seen as a symbol of the preservation of Hong Kong's civil liberties and free lifestyles under Chinese rule.

In her speech in March, Anson Chan said there are new problems to be explored and solved as the policy of 'one country, two systems' is implemented. The media can play a much bigger role in the historical

process. Apart from monitoring the operations of the government and reflecting public opinion, the media play an important role in shaping community thinking and raising civic awareness. Media proprietors, executives and journalists, however, have yet to show a broad consensus on the need to define their role and the boundaries of press freedom in the new political game. The challenge is for them to give full play to the fourth estate to contribute to the development of a stable, equitable, free, democratic and compassionate society under the formula of 'one country, two systems'.

Indonesia

Dancing in the dark

Andreas Harsono

T*he sad lessons from East
Timor*

In February 1999, as tensions over East Timor were building, scores of personally addressed faxes went out to Australian journalists, bringing a message of death into their offices and homes.

An Australian journalist would suffer the ultimate sanction—murder—as a protest against Australia’s role in urging Jakarta to approve a ballot on independence which would cut the restive province free from Indonesian control. The threat to the press was then expanded to take in Australian diplomats and Australian Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, too, was shown a written ‘death notice’ by two commanders of pro-Jakarta militia units from East Timor during a visit to Jakarta. The militia units, Mr Downer said at the time, were ‘very aggressive and very angry’ and vowed to make a bloody ‘sacrifice’ over Australia’s policy switch on East Timor, which prompted the then Habibie government to approve United Nations’ supervised ballot. But, there was still a sense of disbelief that in post-Soeharto Indonesia that such blatant terror tactics could be used against the media, and—in particular—foreign reporters. Under the former authoritarian President Soeharto a number of Indonesian journalists had died mysterious deaths which were never properly investigated, silenced for their part in challenging the power élite within their own society.

However, under the supposedly reformist government of President, Dr B. J. Habibie, and with the nation virtually bankrupt and relying on a massive International Monetary Fund bail-out, the calculated murder of a foreign journalist would be likely to attract considerable pressure in western nations to cut ties with, and suspend this aid to, Jakarta.

As a tactic, the threat to journalists was hardly new. Prior to the 1975 invasion of East Timor by Indonesian troops—who forcibly annexed the former Portuguese colony as Jakarta’s 27th province—the Indonesian military broadcast similar menacing messages across the border. Six Australian journalists who stayed behind as the Indonesia military advanced were murdered, five at Balibo and one on the docks in Dili. Their deaths soured bilateral relations between Australia and Indonesia for decades and, in some ways, have coloured Australian reporting on Indonesia. There is ongoing debate over how the men died, but it now seems clear that five members of two television crews seeking refuge in Balibo were killed by an Indonesian special forces unit ahead of the invasion, and the sixth, ABC journalist Roger East, was executed in Dili, according to published accounts of interviews with witnesses.

The aim of the death threats both in 1975 and 1999, said James Dunn, former Australian diplomat and author of ‘Timor: a people betrayed’, was ‘to scare journalists away so that the military could operate with impunity, without witnesses’. In 1975, he said in a recent interview, the tactic was largely successful. The Indonesian military invasion, one of great brutality, was carried out without the watching eyes of satellite TV or foreign reporters.

But, in 1999, both politics and technology had already changed the face of Indonesia and the international media. Hundreds of foreign and local journalists moved into Dili, many with their own satellite phones and satellite dishes to uplink photos, images and stories. In the lead up to the UN-supervised ballot, the violence by pro-Jakarta militia units against journalists escalated. First, journalists were merely stopped at roadblocks and machetes and knives were waved angrily in the air. Then journalists were chased with weapons and beaten. Specifically, the targets were western journalists—symbols of western governments pressuring Indonesia over human rights abuses and supporting the right of the East Timorese to choose their own fate.

But carnage was unleashed when the 30 August 1999 ballot to end Indonesia rule was supported, with 78.5 per cent in favour of independence according to the UN-organised vote (UN Press Release SC/6721, 3 September 1999). So terrifying was the violence, that the majority of foreign and local journalists did flee and—in a sense—the Indonesian military and their militia allies were able to plunder and pillage at will,

Losing control

either in a losers' orgy of revenge or as a calculated scorched earth message to other restive provinces.

In the UN compound in Dili, however, enough foreign journalists and international staff stayed to keep lines open to the world. On satellite telephones, with bullets flying overhead, those huddling inside the compound told the story as best they could both from the accounts of those who came to seek refuge inside, and their own first hand experiences. The militia and their allies in the Indonesian military cut all telephone links in the province, even the mobile phone network, destroyed the radio relay stations and switched off the power. But, battery powered satellite phones could not be cut. 'We were getting a call every 90 seconds or so, 24 hours a days, from all over the world', said one UN staffer. As such, the story of East Timor in 1999 was dramatically different to the virtual silence which met the invasion in 1975. Headlines all over the world urged governments to pressure Jakarta and, finally, in the last week of September 1999, peacekeepers were allowed in.

Tragically, one day after Australian-led peacekeepers had fanned out across Dili and an end to the violence was finally in sight, militia units, reportedly mixed with Indonesian troops, led two direct attacks on western journalists. Sander Thoenes, a Dutch national, who worked for the *Financial Times*, was brutally hacked to death just a couple of blocks away from the ruins of the Turismo Hotel where most of the press were staying. He was a tall, blonde young man, obviously a westerner. Two British journalists escaped a similar attack, but their driver was disfigured and their translator kidnapped, presumed to have been murdered. Several days later a 26-year-old Indonesian cameraman, Agus Muliwan, who worked as a stringer for the Tokyo-based Asia Press, was also killed by a mixed unit of militia and Indonesian troops. He was apparently targeted because he was travelling with a group of East Timorese Catholic clergy.

In war zones journalists are not offered, nor should they expect, any special protection, unless they choose to travel directly under the supervision of a military force. But, in East Timor in 1999 the media was part of the conflict, because of the perception on the Indonesian side that international reporting from East Timor over the years was largely responsible for exposing decades of serious human rights abuses and maintaining pressure for independence.

Much of Indonesia's political and military power élite were both furious over and humiliated by the results of the UN vote, which so overwhelmingly rejected Indonesian rule despite the militia's pre-poll terror campaign. For over 23 years the Indonesian government had told the world that the East Timorese wanted them there. With the arrival of Australian-led peacekeepers the Indonesian media was again cranked up, this time in the name of nationalism.

The government wire service, Antara, which had been moving towards a more independent editorial position since the fall of Soeharto, led the condemnatory reporting of Australia's actions in East Timor, claiming gross human rights abuses on the part of Australian troops. Local newspapers carried photographs of supposed victims of Australian atrocities (actually the corpses of those murdered by pro-Jakarta militia units) and rent-a-mob demonstrators besieged the Australian Embassy. Again, the media was a crucial element to this new bilateral standoff. In a statement issued in October 1999, the Institute for the Studies on Free Flow of Information, said,

We demand that the Indonesian intelligence community end its practice of infiltrating the press corp...this results in reports which sound like propaganda and hurt the reputation of Indonesia in the international community. Let journalists look for the truth and do their job. It is wrong for the intelligence community to fill the media with lies that only serve to inflame anti-Australian sentiment (Goenawan Mohamad 1999).

However, the Institute also bemoaned the absence of Indonesian journalists on the ground in East Timor and difficulties in complying with Darwin registration requirements. At the same time, however, decades of information control under Soeharto meant few Indonesians have much sympathy for the East Timorese. Too often they see the East Timorese as voracious and ungrateful consumers of aid budgets—an image promoted in Indonesian government propaganda about the conflict. On East Timor, the manipulation of the local press was not difficult.

In the bigger picture of political developments in Indonesia, East Timor may historically be viewed as the last desperate attempt by elements of the Indonesian military and political élite to maintain control over the press. At a national level censorship was formally defeated with the

Losing control

collapse of the Soeharto regime in May 1998. Advances in information technology, particularly the Internet, contributed significantly to an underground alternative news network in the last years of the Soeharto regime, and offered practical communications tools for the organisation of mass protests.

However, those accustomed to power rarely exit the stage overnight. When the state relinquishes control of the press, particularly after years of censorship which have stifled the development of an independent media industry, a vacuum is left behind. Into this vacuum rush any number of forces—elements of the old power élite such as the military, businesses or politicians. The result may be that censorship is replaced by corruption and unprofessional practices as the new forces in society shake out and a new power structure is built.

In October 1999 incoming President Abdurrahman Wahid, announced his new Cabinet. Missing, for the first time in more than three decades, was a Minister of Information. Stunned, hundreds of employees of the now defunct Department of Information, the Minister had controlled, spilled out onto the streets to try to protest. Under former President Soeharto they had been amongst the bureaucracy's most powerful figures, charged with monitoring both the local and foreign media and dishing out the appropriate censures, such as the suspension of licences, harrassment and cancellation of visas. Control of information was central to Soeharto's hold on political power. Now, they were to be unceremoniously absorbed into other government departments. 'Information is not the Government's business, it is the people's business', said President Wahid (1999).

The dismissal of the censors is an enormously symbolic step in the move towards press freedom, but most media analysts agree that Indonesia still faces a myriad of structural, practical and historical barriers to the effective operation of a free and independent media.

Indonesia's presidents inherit colonial controls

The annals of the Indonesian media date back to 1744 when a Dutch national in Batavia, the Dutch-name for today's Jakarta, published the *Bataviase Nouvelles*. The paper was the first publication in the Dutch East Indies, and primarily chronicled business activities and the arrivals and

departures of ships through the port. But, the Dutch, fearing the potential for criticism of their tough administration in the resource-rich colony, closed the newspaper within two years and discouraged other members of the public from taking similar initiatives. It was not until five decades later that a Dutch language publication, the *Bataviaasche Coloniale Courant*, was accepted, and members of society, including local Indonesians and Chinese immigrants, began to involve themselves in newspapers.

By the beginning of the 20th century many Indonesians appreciated the power of the media to spread the message of the independence movement, realising the Dutch administration's early fears that newspapers could be turned against them. Many Indonesian freedom fighters were also writers, including Soekarno who was to become an independent Indonesia's first President following the end of World War II. Indonesia's most widely recognised novelist, Pramoedya Ananta Toer, also used a Javanese journalist as the inspiration for his main character, Minke, in his *Buru Tetralogy* series of novels which have been translated and distributed internationally, but were banned in Indonesia until 1999. The novels are set in the 1900s on the Dutch-ruled island of Java and Minke is based on journalist Raden Mas Tirta Adisoerjo, who published the Malay-language *Medan Prijaji* newspaper and was repeatedly imprisoned by the Dutch for his writings.

Writers such as Adisoerjo and Soekarno created so many problems for the Dutch government that in 1931 it introduced a law (*pressbreidel ordonantie*) which allowed the Dutch Governor-General to temporarily ban a publication (for up to eight days) which 'disrupted public order'. If the banned publication continued to 'produce a disturbance', the Governor-General could implement a second banning of up to 30 days. The Dutch colonial government also introduced the notorious 'hate sowing' articles (*haatzaai artikelen*) of the Dutch Criminal Code, regularly used to punish independent journalists. Three of these articles forbid the publication of statements that 'incite feelings of hostility, hatred or contempt towards the government' and prescribe jail terms of between four-and-a-half and seven years for doing so. Another article, which provides for up to 18 months imprisonment for 'insulting a government authority or body', has also been used.

Ironically, these articles were adopted by the new independent Indonesia. The Indonesian governments of both Soekarno (1945–65) and

Losing control

Soeharto (1966–98) simply made some modifications in the language, for example, changing the word Governor-General to President. The hate-sowing articles were used extensively during Soeharto's rule.

When the Japanese military occupied Indonesia in March 1942, the military administration immediately closed down all the local newspapers and then permitted only a handful to re-open. Unlike the Dutch rulers, who preferred punishment over preventive measures, the Japanese introduced a publishing licencing procedure to control the media. Although the Japanese surrendered and pulled out three years later, the licencing procedure, too, was incorporated into the armoury of the independent Indonesian government and was used particularly vigorously by former President Soeharto (Luwarso 1999).

Soekarno and Mohammad Hatta declared Indonesia's independence on 17 August 1945, establishing a new constitution which states, 'Freedom of speech and of the press and similar freedoms shall be provided by law'. But in practice, severe restrictions on freedom of speech, assembly and association, including a raft of regulations and laws, have been imposed in post-independence Indonesia.

The departure of the Japanese and the declaration of independence brought Indonesia a brief media honeymoon, with many new newspapers emerging. But Soekarno, the freedom fighter and writer, resorted to authoritarian measures to shore up his own power base and by 1959 had declared martial law, giving the military the right to censor the media. Soekarno controlled the press but failed to control the economy, and with inflation spiralling out of control and the people hungry, he was toppled in a military-sponsored *coup* in 1965, accused of links with the growing communist movement.

A second false dawn for the media followed the ascension of the then Major-General Soeharto to the Presidency. In 1966 the parliament passed Indonesia's first Press Law which provides that 'no censorship or bridling shall be applied to the national press' and calls on the press to 'fight for truth and justice based on freedom of the press'. But a caveat was inserted denying such freedoms to those publications 'conflicting with the state ideology, Pancasila, such as those inspired by Communism, Marxism and Leninism'. Soeharto, too, proved to be an authoritarian strongman and by 1974 had consolidated his political power. Student protests that year were brutally suppressed and more than a dozen newspapers were closed

because of their coverage of the uprising. Soeharto's mantra was stability and economic development ahead of democracy and transparency, a formula which initially fuelled economic growth and made Indonesia the darling of international institutions despite tough restrictions on freedom of speech.

In 1982, Soeharto upgraded the Japanese-inspired licencing requirements for publications, introducing an even more restrictive Press Publications Business Licence and the proviso that the press must be 'free and responsible'. Soeharto and his assistants were fond of the word 'responsible' as it allowed them to impose informal censorship on the media on a day-to-day basis. The satirically named 'telephone culture' was born in this era, referring to telephone calls to editors from Ministry of Information officials or the military 'advising' them on how to report on particular issues (Schwarz 1994). Officials also made unexpected visits to newspaper offices to persuade editors not to run a particular story. This form of censorship relied on the implied threat that a publication's licence would be withdrawn, making it both confusing for editors and effective for the government because there was no clear line over which editors should not step. Known taboos included coverage of the Soeharto family's business dealings and those of other corrupt officials, but editors often self-censored beyond these limits. For journalists and editors who crossed the invisible line there was personal financial ruin, unemployment or worse—harassment, intimidation, imprisonment or, sometimes, death.

Soeharto's crackdowns

For foreign journalists similar threats were used—expulsion and the closure of the bureau. All Australian journalists were banned from Indonesia in 1986, over a *Sydney Morning Herald* article about the accumulated wealth of the Soeharto clan. As Australian journalists were gradually readmitted over the next decade, it was made clear they were expected to 'understand' the Indonesian government's perspective. Quiet pressure was also applied on Australian journalists by their own diplomats, who saw the press as one of the most difficult bilateral issues between Jakarta and Canberra. Within the then all-powerful Department of Information in Jakarta censors poured over copies of local and foreign articles, looking for references to bring to the attention of their bosses for

Losing control

their potential offence to the ruling élite. Foreign journalists were also banned from travelling to the troubled provinces of East Timor, Irian Jaya and Aceh or were expelled if caught without a special permit.

One of the most dramatic—and eventually costly—decisions made by the Soeharto administration was to close the popular and relatively courageous, *Tempo* magazine and two other weeklies, *Detik* and *Editor*, in 1994 (Lindsey 1999). Information Minister, Harmoko, himself a former journalist, ordered the closures, accusing the publications of pitting government officials against each other over a controversial purchase of East German warships. At this time Indonesian society was feeling pressures for openness that a market-based economy delivering rapid growth, brings. The magazine closures prompted nationwide protests of journalists, students, lawyers, artists and other professionals and forced key groups of media professionals out of the industry at a time when there was growing public demand for alternative information sources

The state-sponsored Indonesian Journalists' Union (PWI) issued a statement saying it could 'understand' the government's decision, angering many journalists and splitting the profession into two groups—those who were prepared to continue to toe the line and protect their own personal interests and those who were willing to take some risks. Many younger journalists formed an illegal union, called the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI), to fight for press freedom and to offer advocacy services for media workers (Luwarso 1999). It gained considerable support in Jakarta and other large cities such as Surabaya, Yogyakarta and Bandung and challenged the government's licencing requirements by publishing an underground newspaper, *Suara Independen* (Voice of Independence). The state-sponsored union, came down heavily on the government's side calling for a ban on the employment of rebel journalists associated with the publication. Three AJI journalists were eventually jailed for 'sowing hatred' against government officials and publishing an unlicensed newspaper. But, perhaps more importantly, hundreds of rebel journalists were barred from the industry (International Centre Against Censorship 1996).

At that time former *Tempo* editor, Goenawan Mohamad, began assisting young, unemployed journalists to use their time more profitably. 'Let us not curse the darkness, let's light the candles', was a popular slogan in the early days of the underground press. While some ex-*Tempo* journalists

apologised and returned to the state-controlled press, many did not. Instead, they set about trying to create a genuine political movement, studying pro-democracy movements elsewhere and establishing networks of their own.

One of the critical tools of the mid 1990s was the Internet. Some former *Tempo* journalists established *Tempo Interaktif* which became an electronic version of the banned magazine. Another former *Detik* journalists set up 'detik.com', which offered a free daily service of uncensored news. For those not connected to the Internet there was a printed version available on a confidential mailing list.

According to Tedjabayu Basuki, an Internet specialist at the Jakarta Institute for the Study of the Free Flow of Information, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly when the Internet was transformed into a weapon of dissent in Indonesia. But, the banning of the weeklies was a significant turning point. However, Indonesians abroad had discovered the Internet's potential earlier than their compatriots back home. Indonesian students overseas set up many online conferences, discussing political developments in Soeharto's Indonesia.

Then, there was also John McDougall, an American Indonesianist based in Maryland, who had established his own information company in 1984. McDougall's firm specialised in research findings and other quality articles about Indonesia. Initially, he sold the service commercially but, encouraged by such an enthusiastic response, he established a free Internet-based mailing list in 1990 called *Apakabar* (literally meaning, 'How are you?'). It offered a wide range of views from the most radical to the conservative, from pro-democracy activists to military intelligence officers masquerading as Internet enthusiasts. It also distributed various news reports from a wide range of mainstream media sources, both foreign and Indonesian, such as *Kompas*, *Forum Keadilan* (Justice Forum), the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, the *Asian Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*. A number of Indonesian journalist-based news groups also joined the mailing list, distributing their news reports, without the censorship of Indonesia's mainstream media newsrooms.

'The *Apakabar* mailing list subsequently played a central role in spreading up to date information about Indonesia' (Basuki 1999). The number of actual recipients was quite small, but photocopy machines were used to boost circulation. *Apakabar* had also inspired Indonesian Internet

Losing control

users to establish their own mailing lists. The response from the Soeharto government to Internet sites appeared to be largely ineffective. Soeharto's regime was accustomed to wielding a large black pen to black out offending articles in foreign publications, not chasing challenging views across an international electronic network.

Within Indonesia student publications were also a source of alternative views. Some, such as the *Balairung* magazine and the *Bulaksumur* tabloid in Yogyakarta, established websites to enlarge their audiences. Student newspapers are, of course, mostly read by students and swapped between campuses. However, the Internet was later used as a powerful organising tool for student protests against the Soeharto regime—from informing foreign correspondents of the latest protest sites to appealing for food and drinks for the exhausted demonstrators.

Alternative media outlets began to play a crucial role in mid 1996 when the Soeharto government organised a rebel conference of the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI) to topple its popular chairwoman, Megawati Sukarnoputri. The reason behind this clumsy political manoeuvre was Soeharto's fear of competing against Megawati, the eldest daughter of founding President Soekarno, in elections scheduled for 1997. The Internet mailing lists provided the public with information about the plot to topple Megawati, and her enraged supporters rioted for two days in Jakarta following her ouster—protests which can, in retrospect, be seen as the beginning of the end of Soeharto.

The alternative media proved to be an effective medium for Megawati, who has more than a dozen websites dedicated to her struggle. Soeharto forced Megawati out of the PDI, and banned her from politics, but failed to sideline her from a growing national democratic struggle. From a relatively untested party leader, the housewife-turned-politician became a national symbol of integrity, against the backdrop of the corrupt Soeharto regime. Her hugely popular party won the largest share of the votes in the first post-Soeharto election in June 1999, with 34 per cent. She was relegated to the Vice-Presidency because of a deal cut within parliament to give the top job to her old friend, Muslim leader, Abdurrahman Wahid.

The Internet also provided the public with information about a wide range of Soeharto-linked businesses. Journalist-turned-activist George Junus Aditjondro, from his self-exile in Australia, used the Internet to

post details of dozens of companies controlled by the Soehartos, as did other activists. This information was downloaded and circulated in photocopy form while Soeharto was still in power. After his resignation, the mainstream international media, including *TIME* magazine, began to quote Aditjondro's research as publishing houses raced to print his books.

The crisis hits, the students hit back

When the East Asian currency crisis hit Indonesia in August 1997, the rupiah began its spectacular collapse, dropping from 2,400 to the US dollar to a low point of 17,000 in January 1998. Without economic development, the Soeharto mantra was meaningless. What point bowing to draconian political controls when the rice bowl was now empty. However, Soeharto appeared to be unable to understand the inevitability of his own fall, as did many members of the ruling élite and the main stream media. In March 1998, the Indonesian parliament elected Soeharto for his seventh successive five-year term. His new cabinet was filled with cronies, including his wealthy eldest daughter, Siti Hardiyanti Rukmana, and his golfing buddy, tycoon Bob Hasan.

The students reacted and a wave of protests began—at first cautiously, with sit-ins confined to campuses, but gradually spreading out onto the streets. At this time the Internet became more and more important, as an organising tool and as a means of spreading the opposition's views. When military sharpshooters killed four students fleeing riot troops at Trisakti University on 12 May 1998, the regime had crossed the public's line. Massive riots across Jakarta ensued and Soeharto was forced to resign—the eyes of the world's media were on the tanks and troops roaming the streets of Jakarta and the airport filled with evacuating foreigners.

When the line had been crossed Soeharto's power structure simply collapsed. Censorship can only be imposed when a regime holds genuine power to punish or hurt. With chaos on the streets the mainstream Indonesian media jumped into the fight, on the other side, broadcasting images of the students' protests and—arguably—contributing to the success of the students' campaign. The usually conservative, government-controlled *Televisi Republik Indonesia* (TVRI) even repeatedly ran an eulogy of the dead students, galvanizing public awareness of the tragedy in

Losing control

Jakarta, and indicating that those at the top were no longer in control. Many government officials and military officers did not understand the winds of change. They harassed and intimidated journalists right up to the last minute, when Soeharto offered his humiliating resignation to his people, in a live national broadcast.

And even beyond Soeharto the dark elements of the military continue to intimidate media figures. Military elements were behind the arson attack on the home of Riza Primadi, the news director of *Surya Citra Televisi* (SCTV), when he was leading his journalists in a live television broadcast of the shooting of protesting students in November 1998 by riot troops. Primadi, a former BBC journalist, is known to be an independent producer. Many of his reporters were threatened but the station continued to lead the news coverage on such formerly taboo issues as military violence against civilians, the fall of Soeharto and consequent efforts to bring Soeharto and his children to justice.

On the part of the Soeharto regime, the dramatic events of May 1998 illustrated a failure to understand the international and local media, and the impact the media, and information technology, could have on politics in the late 1990s. The controls in place—such as visa restrictions for foreign journalists and threats to suspend the licences of local publications—relied on a bureaucracy which believed in the power of its political leaders. It also relied on that bureaucracy's power to control communication. But as technology developed this simply became more and more impractical. As the political power visibly crumbled, immigration officials happily waved through scores of foreign television crews on tourist visas, censors were unable to make decisions, and the regime found itself totally isolated from the media. Decades of telling the media what to report, and refusing to be questioned meant there was no infrastructure in place, such as press officers to provide an 'official' version of events, to put a more favourable spin on the crisis. The students and the opposition had centre stage, almost by default. Information controls had totally collapsed. Chanting students waving colourful banners facing down riot troops and a city devastated by riots were such powerful images that government restrictions on uplinking TV footage from Indonesia were reduced to a joke. Technology was such that foreign TV crews had the capacity to by-pass officially approved transmitters anyway.

Habibie bows to the inevitable

When incoming President Habibie took over in May 1998, he had little choice but to liberalise the country's political system, to hold democratic elections, release political prisoners and to support a free media. Independent organisations found it difficult to believe that a Soeharto crony such as Habibie, who spent 15 years serving in Soeharto cabinets, would implement the promised reforms.

But to the surprise of many, Habibie tried to keep his promises. He once told a delegation of foreign journalists, 'I will never, never tolerate an Indonesian government that interferes with the freedom of the press. Freedom of the press is very important. Not only for politics but also for economics.'

Then, just a month after taking up the position as Habibie's Information Minister, Muhammad Yunus announced that the media would be open to all. Journalists would be permitted to establish independent unions and professional organisations, undercutting the monopoly of the state-controlled Indonesian Journalists Association (PWI). Newspapers would no longer need political connections to secure a license to run a printing press. Private radio stations could also reduce the compulsory relay of the *Radio Republik Indonesia* (RRI) (government radio) news reports from fourteen to three times per day, a welcome relief for millions of Indonesians after decades of dry, boring government propaganda.

The result—many new newspapers immediately entered the market. One year after Soeharto's fall, the Ministry of Information had issued more than 1000 press licenses—four times more than the Soeharto regime issued in over 30 years in power. Yunus even suggested that the ministry be abolished, as it since has been, saying that it was nothing more than a state apparatus to control the press.

Even more so than Habibie, many were skeptical about Yunus' sincerity. Yunus, a three star General, was allegedly directly involved in the 1975 murder of the five Australian journalists in Balibo, where he served as a special forces officer. But his decisions did spark a rush of new national and community newspapers and publications, not only in Jakarta, but in many smaller cities and towns. Private radio stations raced into news reporting, challenging an area which the government-controlled RRI had monopolised since 1945. Jakarta-based stations such as *Trijaya*, *Sonora* and

Losing control

Elshinta began producing their own news reports. *Elshinta* went even further, with live broadcasts of the BBC Indonesian Service since November 1998. The move was trailed by other private radios in other cities such as Prima in Banda Aceh or Smart FM network in Palembang, Manado and Ujungpandang. Other Indonesian-language programs of the Voice of America, Deutche Welle, Radio Australia and Radio Netherlands were also broadcast live in Indonesia for the first time in history. These were bold programming decisions in a nation where many government officials and army officers still consider the respected international radio services 'too critical'.

But the new openness has also sparked sensationalism. Many of the new tabloids publish speculative and irresponsible reports, which freely mix facts with opinion and conjecture. Tabloids tend to spice up their reports with sex and crime. The Jakarta police charged several editors with distributing pornography in June and July 1999, questioning voluptuous actresses like Sophia Latjuba, Inneke Koesharawaty and Sarah Azhari for posing nearly nude on magazine covers in a predominantly Muslim nation. The editors denied the charges, saying the photographs were used for aesthetic, not pornographic, reasons. The *Warta Republik* tabloid, for example, published a December report on how former Vice President Try Sutrisno and former Defense Minister Edi Sudrajat had allegedly competed to date a widow. Neither Sutrisno nor Sudrajat were interviewed—and neither was the widow. The tabloid later admitted that it did not even know the whereabouts of the widow. The aggressiveness of the new press can be startling, in a nation emerging from decades of control. One paper is called simply *Oposisi* (Opposition), and its regular broadsides against Soeharto's legacy of corruption and nepotism leave readers no doubt about what it is opposed to. Another is called *Gugat* which means, 'accuse' in Indonesian. The tabloid proudly claims its motto as 'Trial by the press'.

The result of this new culture of muckraking is a rash of lawsuits. The Jakarta military command, for example is suing the *Tajuk* bi-weekly. The military accused the magazine of tarnishing its reputation in a report which said former Jakarta commander Major General Sjafrie Sjamsuddin, a close associate of Soeharto's son-in-law Prabowo Subianto, was involved in instigating the massive riots of May 14–16, 1998. Prabowo himself was transferred from his position one day after the fall of his father-in-law

amid widespread speculation he was also involved in the kidnapping, torture and illegal detention of human rights activists as well as instigating the riots, in which more than 1,200 people died. Arnold Baramuli, an associate close to Habibie, also sued the *Gamma* magazine for publishing a taped conversation between Baramuli and a businessman who had allegedly help Baramuli to divert funds from a bank to the Habibie campaign. The police also questioned editors of the *Panji* magazine over a leaked telephone conversation between Habibie and then Attorney-General Andi Muhammad Ghalib. Habibie allegedly ordered Ghalib to 'pretend' to be going through the motions of questioning Soeharto, to appease the public as calls continued for Soeharto to be brought to justice.

Such stories are, understandably, a spectacular departure from the bland, censored fare of 1998. But the problem for the Indonesian media post-Soeharto is that new press freedoms are not backed up by a sound legal system, nor the checks and balances that a Press Council, for example, could provide. At the same time decades of hand feeding a compliant press has created an industry vulnerable to new forces of manipulation:, particularly money.

Take, for example, the concerns of Luzi Diamanda, a former journalist who now heads the *Voice of the Public*, a local media watch dog body in the provincial city of Padang, on the island of Sumatra. Every time a new newspaper hits the stands she becomes more concerned, she says. Most of the new publishers do not pay their reporters a fair salary, and the reporters themselves have little experience of how to conduct interviews and produce independent stories professionally. The main objective of the new publications is to increase the business influence or the political muscle of their owners, not to contribute to the flowering of a pluralistic media in post-Soeharto Indonesia.

'These journalists end up working without journalistic ethics. They work only to collect envelopes', she says of the common practice of handing out envelopes of cash to journalists to cover official events or business news. So coloured by money has local reporting become, that a group of 14 journalists was attacked by 300 farm workers on a plantation near Padang in March 1999. The journalists had been 'invited' by a local business figure to witness a land appropriation case, one of the most sensitive issues in Indonesia because much land is occupied by illegal settlers. So biased was the coverage, the workers believed, that they were

Losing control

provoked to smash the windscreens of the journalists' cars and seriously injure two reporters. Three months later, Padang journalists went on 'strike', clearly having learnt nothing from the plantation confrontation. Their complaint was that West Sumarta Governor D. Dunidja had failed to provide adequate transportation for them during their latest field trip with him.

'The odds are that Indonesia will remain in a chaotic situation for some time', said editor Goenawan Mohamad, of the re-opened *Tempo* magazine, 'Violence will be a constant threat and we will be the sick man of Asia. That frightens and saddens me. The best thing the press can contribute is to develop a culture of transparency and accountability in the government.' Goenawan, whose magazine was published again in October 1998, said, 'I hope *Tempo* will become a vehicle to help defend and expand our freedoms'.

Dancing in the dark

The fall of Soeharto is not the end of the struggle. In fact, it is the beginning of a more complicated and time-consuming struggle to institutionalise democracy and freedom of expression. Early positive signs include the establishment of media watch groups like Diamanda's in ten cities—the Institute for the Studies of Information and Mass Media in Ujungpandang in southern Sulawesi, the Institute for the Studies of the Press and Information in Semarang, about 320 kilometers east of Jakarta. Other previously established players have also strengthened their networks. Independent journalist unions, like the AJI, have established seven full branches and three smaller bureaus in ten Indonesian cities. Student journalists are also learning to improve the quality of their reporting and analysis. But, there is much homework to be done and young journalists need to learn from the failure of their elders during the Soekarno and Soeharto eras—a task which runs counter to the culturally ingrained respect for one's elders.

Two of the most active organisations in advocating changes to media laws are the Jakarta-based Indonesian Press and Broadcasting Society (MPPI) and the Indonesian Newspaper Publishers Association (SPS). Interestingly, both PWI and AJI, who used to be at loggerheads, are now

trying to work together under the MPPI umbrella. The four most urgent tasks are

- to change the Dutch and the Japanese-inherited laws on the media which include the hate-sowing articles, the publishing licence procedure, dozens of ministerial decrees on print, radio and film as well as the 1945 constitution on freedom of expression. The constitution should be amended to totally guarantee press freedom in Indonesia
- to strengthen media organisations as well as journalists' unions so they have the ability to defend newly established press freedoms. This strategy means that more media training is needed, especially for new journalists
- to set up independent media watch groups as well as newspapers ombudsmen. This proposal is based on the reality that information is power, and power can be corrupted. The media should be monitored and reprimanded if it uses its power corruptly. During the Soekarno and the Soeharto eras, their administrations took the role of controlling the media. Now who controls the media?
- to decentralise media concentration from the main island of Java to the other outer islands and small towns, thus providing more genuinely community-based services. By April 1998 the Ministry of Information reported 415 or 48.7 per cent of 852 publishing licenses issued by the government were for Jakarta-based publications.

Easier said than done. A transitional period always poses a very difficult question about how to draw the line between the past supporters of the *status quo* and the campaigners for democracy. In the post-Soeharto era many editors and journalists who complied with censorship are reinventing themselves as champions of media freedom. What role should they play? At the same time many of those who took the real personal risks of challenging Soeharto consider themselves heroes of the *reformasi* (reform) era and demand to be treated as such. But, courage, must be coupled with sound managerial skills and experience to produce new, quality media organisations. The situation is not black and white, but this political divide does complicate the picture.

In May 1999 two Indonesian journalist groups along with three other groups from Thailand and the Philippines helped set up a regional organisation to monitor abuses against the press in Southeast Asia and

Losing control

strengthen press freedom in the region, '[i]t is time for Asian journalists to work together to build press freedom', said Kavi Chongkittavorn, the chairman of the Southeast Asian Press Alliance (SEAPA). Kavi, executive editor of Thailand's daily *Nation* newspaper, said it was up to Asian journalists to defend themselves 'from attacks and threats', saying SEAPA aimed to develop an information network to research press laws, access to information, ethics as well as intimidation of, and physical attacks on, journalists.

But, the reality on the ground is that transitions can be both chaotic and dangerous. As the new rules are written, the losers smart and plot. An Indonesian journalist was found hacked to death in August 1999 in the troubled province of Aceh, where horrendous human rights abuses by the military have been exposed both under Soeharto and during Habibie's rule. And so died Sander Thoenes in a senseless, tragic murder committed after Indonesia had already lost the war in East Timor.

Media websites

X-pos weekly print magazine (underground), apchr.murdoch.edu.au/minihub/xp/

SiaR mailing list (online edn only and includes special sections on East Timor, Aceh, Irian Jaya and Indonesian military),
apchr.murdoch.edu.au/minihub/siarlist/maillist.html/

Indonesia-L mailing list (popularly known as 'apakabar' mailing list),
www.indopubs.com/

Joyo mailing list (no official website, contains English-language international media reports), [joyo@aol.com/](mailto:joyo@aol.com)

Kompas daily newspaper, www.kompas.com/

Tempo magazine, www.tempo.co.id/

Republika daily, www.republika.co.id/

Media Indonesia daily newspaper, www.mediaindo.co.id/

The Jakarta Post, English www.thejakartapost.com/

Japan

The warmth of the herd

Walter Hamilton

A black limousine approached along a narrow street of clipped hedges and freshly-swept garden paths and stopped outside the home of Yoshiyuki Kono, a middle-aged salary man plucked from anonymity in one of Japan's most spectacular, and ill-founded, trials by media.

For the three executives of the prestigious *Asahi* newspaper, this call was a humiliating duty they wanted to get over and done with as quickly as possible. Sensing their discomfort and alert to the least hint of insincerity, the shattered Kono brusquely pointed them towards the living room. Silently, the three dark-suited executives assembled in a row on the *tatami* mat floor and bowed low in apology towards the man whom the *Asahi*, and most of Japan's news media, had branded as a crackpot killer just a few months earlier.

The investigation of the sarin nerve gas release in the city of Matsumoto in 1994, when seven people were killed and Kono's own wife was left paralysed, marked a low point for both the Japanese police and the media. Based on weak circumstantial evidence, the police focused on an unlikely suspect—an ordinary salary man with a fancy for old Volkswagens and no criminal record. Reporters, feeding off police innuendo, turned the innocent Kono into a pariah, despite the fact he was never charged. Meanwhile, both the law and press missed the real culprits—the Aum Shinrikyo religious cult which, a year later, would unleash a deadly sarin attack on the Tokyo subway.

The Matsumoto episode highlights some important characteristics of the Japanese news media and the society they serve. While the law places few restraints on the right to gather and publish information, the exercise of a genuinely independent journalism is sometimes thwarted by other

Losing control

factors, such as the intense pressure to match competitors; the habit of Japanese reporters to work in groups; strong links between journalists and their official news sources; and a highly developed public taste for scandal. These factors don't always make the country's news media ineffective or irresponsible, but when contemplating the advantages in size, diversity and sophistication of the Japanese newspaper and broadcasting industries, it is well to remember Yoshiyuki Kono.

A huge market

Japan has one of the biggest newspaper markets in the world, with a daily circulation of 72.4 million copies. That is 576 newspapers per one thousand population—the second highest diffusion rate after Norway, and 2.5 times the rate in the United States. In the years 1950–85, newspaper production in Japan outstripped population growth three to one. There are now 107 general-readership newspapers made up of five national dailies, three regional papers and 99 local papers. Between two and five newspapers are competing in every market.

The Japanese passion for newspapers can be put down to near universal literacy, high urbanisation and the cultural imperative of a people who feel they need to keep themselves informed in order to belong. Surveys which find that 90 per cent of Japanese regard themselves as middle class reflect the wide penetration of a shared standard of information via the mass media (Feldman 1993).

An abundance of newspapers, though, does not necessarily signify a market abundant with choice. In content and presentation Japan's major dailies are remarkably alike. This is due, in part, to the fact that 99 per cent of general-readership papers are sold by subscription and delivered to the home or office (Haruhara 1997; Amenomori 1997). There is little scope for selling additional copies of a one-off 'scoop' on the streets. Editors, it seems, live more in fear of missing a story which the other papers have, than in hope of publishing something which the others have ignored (Fujiwara 1997). This culture keeps the 'herd' together, closely watching each other's moves and trying to match them.

Television too, is a dominant fixture in the lives of the Japanese. Virtually every household owns a television—they are often found in

offices and restaurants and even in taxis. Almost one in three homes is connected to a dish to receive satellite TV. Cable television, though comparatively slow to develop, now reaches millions more. Foreign news broadcasts, including BBC World and CNN, are widely available in the Japanese language, and NHK also carries original news bulletins from the United States, China, France, South Korea, and several other countries.

But, while the Japanese public tell pollsters they regard newspapers as 'trustworthy' and 'reliable', they perceive television as 'a medium for quick information' (Shimbun Kenkyu 1989). Stations invest heavily in 'live' coverage of breaking news, with regular doses of crime, accidents, earthquakes and typhoons. Even high-quality documentaries seek to inform their viewers rather than challenge them. This may be explained by the fact that the main source of ideas and planning for documentaries on commercial television is Dentsu Corporation—the world's biggest advertising agency (Westney 1996).

Behind the safety of the 'herd' and the predominance of 'facts', over-critical analysis, lies a unique system of press clubs. Every government ministry, city hall, court, police headquarters and major economic organisation has a press club on its premises. Press club journalists eat and drink together and practice what is often described as 'pack journalism'. The physical confinement of the 'pack' means its members will notice immediately when one journalist is missing, and will all rush off to try to match the 'scoop'. The journalists' fear of censure hands a powerful control to the organisations that host the clubs. Those members who break ranks can find themselves cut out of essential information briefings and effectively unable to do their jobs.

There are two major news agencies, Kyodo News and Jiji Press, which conduct both domestic and international newsgathering. Four of the national dailies, the *Asahi*, *Yomiuri*, *Mainichi* and *Nihon Keizai*, have English-language editions. The *Japan Times*, which publishes only in English, was founded in 1897. The only party-political daily of any note is the *Akahata* (the Communist Party paper). Foreign newspapers such as the *Asian Wall Street Journal* and the *International Herald Tribune* have comparatively small circulations, though magazines such as *TIME* and *Newsweek*, which are among more than thirty foreign publications with Japanese-language editions, enjoy a wider readership.

Circulation of Japanese newspapers, daily editions

	Morning	Evening
<i>Yomiuri Shimbun</i>	10,209,977	4,268,331
<i>Asahi Shimbun</i>	8,287,310	4,174,348
<i>Mainichi Shimbun</i>	3,961,301	1,846,567
<i>Nihon Keizai Shimbun</i>	3,019,783	1,659,195
<i>Sankei Shimbun</i>	1,961,869	911,502
<i>Chunichi Shimbun</i>	2,661,168	758,475
<i>Hokkaido Shimbun</i>	1,228,890	751,739
<i>Nishi-Nippon Shimbun</i>	847,295	192,394

Source: *Nihon Shinbun Kyokai*, 1999

Control gives way to conformity

Modern newspapers date from the 1870s when Japan was starting to open to the west. The Meiji oligarches initially encouraged the press because of its ability to spread new learning, but then turned against press freedom as newspapers began clamouring for representative government. Many papers were begun in support of new political parties, although they found that this inevitably limited their readership. The *Yomiuri*, established in Tokyo as the first paper for the common people, was also hamstrung by its own partisan politics. When the *Yomiuri*'s newly built offices were destroyed in the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, the *Asahi* and the *Mainichi*—two newspapers founded in the merchant-city of Osaka along strictly commercial lines—stole a march on the field (Lee 1985). 'Impartiality' in the treatment of news, as a declared policy, went hand-in-hand with commercial viability, and a new era of mass newspapers was born.

When Japan went to war against Russia, and then expanded its empire in China, the national press cheered the military on. Circulations boomed as papers competed furiously to 'scoop' the latest troop movements (Young 1998). (For future generations of Japanese journalists the term 'scoop' became synonymous with 'being first', rather than necessarily 'being original'.) However, support for expansion abroad coexisted, in the press, with advocacy of universal suffrage and democratic reforms at home. These two postures reflected the popular mood (Lee 1985).

The authorities reacted sharply against the anti-government temper of the press in domestic affairs. Three hundred journalists were jailed after the first Newspaper Ordinance came into force in 1875 (Lee 1985). But, for the next half century, press control was exercised mainly through bureaucratic surveillance and warnings, rather than prosecutions and closures. After 1937, many newspapers were forced to amalgamate and, as the New Order state embraced total war, writers were blacklisted and 'communist' journalists were jailed and even tortured and killed. Totalitarian Japan did not have a 'party newspaper', nor did it completely eliminate criticism, but it found highly effective means of harnessing an existing commercial press to state policy (Shillony 1981).

At the end of the war, Japan's commercial press remained intact. Indeed, some of its wartime features persist even today. For example, the present *Sankei* and *Nihon Keizai* newspapers are the result of the fusion of all trade newspapers, by decree in 1941, into one daily each for Osaka and Tokyo (Kasza 1988). The New Order curbs on newspaper ownership and profits, which have left the country's biggest newspapers still controlled by their own staffs, was a more significant legacy.

Yomiuri

The extraordinary career of Matsutarō Shōriki (1885–1969) illustrates the strange continuities of Japan's turbulent century. Shōriki came to prominence as chief of police intelligence, responsible for crushing the Rice Riots of 1918 and arresting Japan's first communist leaders. He quit the police in disgrace in 1923 after an assassination attempt on the prince regent Hirohito. But a year later, using right-wing political connections, he took over the ailing *Yomiuri Shimbun*. With a mix of innovation and populism he turned the business around and, with the success of the *Yomiuri* Giants baseball team, formed in 1934, the paper was set on a path to becoming the world's biggest-selling daily. But the *Yomiuri* was also an ardent supporter of Japan's war aims and Shōriki took a leading role in the 'state party' Imperial Rule Assistance Association. Purged by the Occupation powers in 1945, he was forced to sell out of his paper and was imprisoned as a Class 'A' war criminal. Yet, by the end of the Occupation, this staunch anti-communist former police chief was again back running the *Yomiuri*. In 1952 he founded Japan's first commercial television station (NTV), ran for parliament and returned to the front-rank of public influence serving in two post-War ministries.

But, after 1945, the environment in which the Japanese press operated changed dramatically. Restrictive laws were repealed and a new constitution for the first time guaranteed 'freedom of speech, press and all other forms of expression' (Kodansha 1993). In recognition of their special role in society, newspapers were granted certain privileges, including concessional mail rates and exemption from local 'enterprise tax', a privilege, shared with broadcasting and publishing companies, that was abolished in 1998. Newspaper companies, even though incorporated under the Commercial Code, are allowed to withhold their shares from the open market. And an exemption from the Anti-Monopoly Law gives newspapers control over their retail price to prevent discount competition and keep a paper's price the same wherever it is sold.

No government body oversees the newspaper industry in Japan. No operating licence is required. Self-regulation is exercised through the Japan Newspaper Publishers and Editors Association (*Nihon Shinbun Kyokai*). The Association's member-companies must observe a Canon of Journalism whose principles are 'accuracy', 'reporting free of opinion', 'vigilance against propaganda', 'restraint in criticism of individuals' and 'editorial truthfulness'. The Canon, adopted in 1946, is actually a reassertion of the old commercially-proven dictum of 'impartiality'. The higher valuation it places on 'fact', over 'opinion', casts the mainstream press more in the role of 'teacher' or 'watchdog', than of 'advocate'.

None of the major newspapers has a declared party allegiance or ideology. At election time, they endorse no side. Profiles of their readerships reveal a great similarity in terms of age group, gender and socioeconomic background (Lee 1985). Each strives to be a mass newspaper, appealing to all interests. That is not to say the political 'colouring' of the press is all of one hue. The *Asahi* and the *Mainichi* sit left of centre, a position consistently expressed through their opposition to reform of Japan's war-renouncing constitution. The *Yomiuri* tends to occupy the middle ground, although, since the 1970s, it has grown closer to the ruling Liberal Democratic Party. The world's biggest-selling financial paper, the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* (or *Nikkei*, as it's familiarly known) keeps in step with its mainly conservative readership, while the *Sankei Shimbun* sits well to the right on the political spectrum. In recent years, there has been a greater polarisation between *Asahi/Mainichi* and *Yomiuri/Sankei*

as papers have felt a need to distinguish themselves from their competitors in a tough business environment.

A tension between conformity and competition characterises the Japanese press. It is best observed in the press club, or *kisha kurabu*, system. Essentially a *kisha* club is a room attached to a government ministry or commercial organisation where reporters from the big media outlets spend their day attending briefings, processing news releases and cultivating official contacts. The 'pack' not only works but also socialises together. There are estimated to be 400–500 press clubs and the information generated within this closed system significantly influences the content of the news available to the public. Of Japan's 25,000 newspaper journalists half are assigned to press clubs (Hall 1998). Broadcast journalists, too, are represented.

Kisha clubs emerged early in the 20th century as a form of craft guild which journalists used to gain right of access to cover the Diet (Parliament), as well as to protect their own jobs. But, soon governments found them a convenient way to regulate the flow of public information, effectively corralling journalists in a pleasant professional environment which discourages independent research (Yamamoto 1989). The mere fact that 'pack' journalists spend the entire day looking over their shoulders at their competitors ensures that any one reporter trying to work alone will be both noticed and pursued. Defenders of the system say it produces news reporting that is better informed and more accurate and, that by ensuring equal treatment for all club members, prevents official Japan from playing favourites (Aida 1999). Critics say the *kisha* clubs turn newspapers into government gazettes (Shimoyama 1999).

One of the most familiar television images of 'government-in-operation' in Japan is of the Prime Minister standing on the steps of his Official Residence surrounded by journalists, three and four deep, furiously transcribing his every word. The *Nagata kurabu*, named for the Nagata-cho district of Tokyo where the Official Residence is located, has some 370 members representing 70 news media outlets. A core group of *ban kisha*, or beat reporters, are permanently assigned to the Prime Minister, noting all his meetings and following him wherever he goes. As a result, political reporting is smothered in 'diary' details but often lacks clear explanations of events. Context and background disappear behind the

Losing control

'foreground' of daily comings and goings. Knowing their every word will be reported, politicians are expert at exploiting the native imprecision of the Japanese language to conceal their real views (Feldman 1996).

Keenly aware of the wide gap between the *tatemae* (principle) of the public news conference and the *honne* (reality) of the private thought, beat reporters accept that most of their best stories will come from unattributable consultations (*kondan*) with politicians and bureaucrats. These prearranged get-togethers are augmented by other, less formal contacts. Beat reporters engage in so-called *yo uchi* ('night attacks') and *asa gake* ('morning calls') on a politician's home, expecting to be invited in for a chat, often over snacks and drinks served by his wife; the reporters afterwards checking their interpretations with each other before phoning the office. Sources are protected behind vague phrases like 'persons concerned say' or 'conditions are tending more towards'. In keeping with this journalism of inspired hints and shared information, bylines have traditionally been rare.

Some estimate that 80 per cent of the information picked up through *kisha* clubs is off-the-record and not meant for publication (Feldman 1993). The system keeps members in line and a direct breach of confidentiality is easily traced. When Kakuei Tanaka became Prime Minister, he reportedly told a dinner group of reporters: 'If you don't cross a dangerous bridge, I will be safe. So will you. If I think a particular reporter is dangerous I can easily have him removed' (Kim 1981). In turn, Japanese politicians rely to a considerable extent on what they learn from friendly reporters. For bureaucrats, too, constantly engaged in turf-wars, the newspapers are often the best place to find out what's going on within a rival department. The climate of public opinion is especially important in a country where few people belong to a political party (Lee 1985). Most 'leaks' to the press, therefore, are purposeful: one ministry trying to outmanoeuvre another; politicians pressuring bureaucrats and vice versa; everyone testing the breeze.

The closer the intimacy between a reporter and his source the greater the dependency, of course. The story is told of one reporter covering the Secretary-General of the LDP who spent so long in his company he started to walk like him (Feldman 1993). Though journalists in Japan do exert a professional autonomy and, like journalists in other societies, exercise a degree of scepticism in their dealings with authority, perhaps the greatest

weakness of the *kisha* club system is that it does not encourage reporters to seek alternative sources of information.

But the system is not as 'watertight' as it is sometimes made out to be. The threat that Prime Minister Tanaka made to his beat reporters *did*, for instance, become public. Indeed, a good deal of the '80 per cent' of information which *kisha* club reporters cannot publish themselves sees the light of day in other ways. Reporters sometimes pass on sensitive information to the Opposition parties who can take up the fight in the Diet. Often *kisha* club members are the source for articles in Japan's many weekly and monthly current affairs magazines. The magazines (though several are affiliated with big newspapers) cannot join *kisha* clubs because they do not belong to the Nihon Shinbun Kyokai. By staying outside the Association, the magazines are free to indulge in a more speculative journalism: in some cases highly respectable, in others thoroughly scandalous. They often break the stories the newspapers dare not print.

In 1974, the *Bungei Shunju*, a leading monthly, published an exposé on the 'money politics' of Kakuei Tanaka. The 'insiders' of the *Nagata kurabu* at first ignored the 'outsider' magazine. It wasn't until Tanaka was challenged over the *Bungei Shunju* articles, during an appearance at the Foreign Correspondents' Club, that the mainstream Japanese media were galvanised into action. Within two months Tanaka had resigned. Several Prime Ministers since have been forced from office as a result of scandals or loss of public trust following media disclosures. The newspapers have not always led the way but their influence in building a public consensus, once information filters out, can be decisive.

The Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan (FCCJ), formed in Tokyo soon after the war, though less exclusive than the *kisha* clubs, is as much a professional association as a social gathering place. The Foreign Press in Japan is the FCCJ's own lobby group. There are more than 700 accredited foreign correspondents who are issued a special identity card to assist with their newsgathering. It is possible to work without official status but for visa purposes alone accreditation is usually necessary. Accredited and visiting foreign journalists can make use of a well resourced Foreign Press Centre that is funded privately but has close government links.

The scandal-ridden 1970s and 1980s eventually led to the collapse of the old conservative ascendancy of the Liberal Democratic Party, and in 1993 a coalition government led by Morihiro Hosokawa took office. After

decades of drift, Hosokawa initially brought a new sense of urgency to decision-making. His hallmark was the 'midnight' news conference, carried 'live' on television, which fed rising expectations of a more transparent and accountable style of politics.

The newspaper-dominated *kisha* clubs were disoriented by these changes. Clubs attached to each of the LDP's many factions lost importance when the factions themselves withered. *Ban* reporters had rarely bothered to make 'night attacks' on the homes of Opposition politicians; indeed, quite a few journalists regarded the press as Japan's real Opposition and held the minority parties in disdain. Now they were in government, this neglect produced a huge information gap. The sole *kisha* club for the entire Opposition had, by tradition, been located at the Socialist Party headquarters. Suddenly, space was in such demand there was pandemonium. When one of the new power-brokers, the former-LDP's Ichiro Ozawa, argued with his press corps he seized the chance to make some further renovations—and banned behind-the-scenes contacts with journalists, their precious *kondan*.

Television influence switches on

The power shift at Nagata-cho had parallels in the media, where broadcast journalists for the first time began to exert as much, if not more influence than their newspaper colleagues. The final acts that broke the LDP's 38-year hold on power demonstrated the new influence of television news anchors. On TV Asahi, 20 million viewers tuned in nightly to watch Hiroshi Kume lampoon LDP corruption (Altman 1996). The criminal links of party boss Shin Kanemaru were forensically laid bare. Kume looked the viewer in the eye and asked: 'Hard to believe they run the country this way, isn't it?' (Sherman 1995). Then came a fateful interview which Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa gave on rival network, TBS. Agreeing to forgo the customary requirement only to accept questions on notice, Miyazawa was led into giving an unqualified commitment to electoral law reform. The interview pledge was held against him when he failed to deliver, forcing him to resign.

By 1993, a survey found more people were influenced by political reporting on television, than in the press (Altman 1996). The newspapers' old formula of anonymous news stories set alongside rather pedagogic

A *n agent for change*

Japanese have a strong sense of resignation. '*Shikata ga nai*' ('It can't be avoided') is a common expression. Some regard this mindset as 'masochistic' and link it to political passivity (Minami, 1998). 'The Japanese public', says one writer, 'maintain what is probably the world's highest threshold of indignation' (Gibney, 1996). If so, the rise of the influential newscaster Hiroshi Kume (1944–) represents a boiling over of that indignation in the form of a new media assertiveness. Kume is not a trained journalist. His first 20 years in broadcasting were spent hosting singing and cooking shows. A freelancer, with his own production company, he was an unlikely choice to front the current affairs program, *News Station*, which TV Asahi launched in 1985. Kume injected humour, movement, stage props and, most tellingly, his personal opinions into the daily news. 'Reporting things impartially', he declared, 'is just impossible' (Sherman 1995). *News Station*, fashionably long and late (in the 22:00–23:20 timeslot) became the nation's most-watched news show. Taking on corrupt politicians, Kume's rapid-fire, straight-talking style broke the mould of media 'impartiality'. Fourteen years on, his stocks aren't as high as they were. *News Station* still rates a respectable 15 (the best of any commercial TV news), but Kume's energy seems diminished. Recently, a false pollution scare, leading to an on-air apology, dented his image. Japan's political story has also lost its sting. On reflection, it may be that, even at the peak of his success, Kume was more a product of the times than a free agent of change.

opinion pieces by professional 'commentators' paled in comparison with the networks' heady mix of serious and light-hearted, factual and opinionated treatment of national affairs. Political 'amateurs'—often *talento* from the entertainment world—joined panel discussions of current events, bringing issues closer to the people (Kodansha 1993). Former newspaper journalists, their images transformed by television exposure, became opinion-leaders. Politicians were flushed out of their 'smoke-filled rooms' and put before the cameras in 'live' debates. What some have described as the 'trickster' role of the media in Japan—having allegiance to none, but playing the jester or fool to the Establishment—found its sharpest expression through television (Pharr 1996).

Broadcast news as an investigative and opinion-forming influence has come a long way, though this should not be overstated. Until 1947,

Losing control

broadcasting was a government monopoly. During the war, radio was harnessed for propaganda purposes much more directly than newspapers (Kasza 1988). Japanese first heard of the attack on Pearl Harbor through radio, and were told of Japan's surrender the same way. The Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) continues to hold a special status as a voice of authority. The non-profit public broadcaster raises a budget of 635 billion yen (A\$ 8.5 billion), 98 per cent of it through license fees. (It does not carry advertising.) It has 13,000 full-time employees maintaining three radio networks; two terrestrial and two satellite (DBS) domestic television networks; Radio Japan's international service; and satellite television broadcasts beamed to audiences in Europe, North America and Asia (NHK 1999).

The Prime Minister with the approval of the Diet appoints NHK's Board of Governors. On a day-to-day basis it aspires to be free of political influence. NHK broadcasts Diet sessions and all formal news conferences by the Prime Minister. At election time, it carries the publicly funded personal 'introductions' of every candidate. News and current affairs occupy the biggest share of content on both its terrestrial TV (40 per cent) and AM radio (48 per cent) networks (Omori 1997), and NHK currently leads the television news ratings (Video Research 1999). The Corporation's approach to news is cautious, factual and unfailingly serious: devoting much attention to government decisions, proposals and ceremonies (Krauss 1996). Some foreign journalists who have worked for NHK have expressed discomfort with its 'sins of omission' and tendency to 'pull its punches' on anything controversial (Sherman 1994). As one astute observer has written: 'For the average citizen who watches NHK, the state appears not only the most frequent and important definer of events in Japan but also as conflict manager in almost all aspects of social and economic life' (Feldman 1997).

There are five commercial broadcasting networks, all affiliated with major newspapers. Nippon Television (NTV) and Fuji Television, the ratings leaders, each has sales of around 300 billion yen (A\$4 billion). The 'big five' generate 80 per cent of the programming seen on the 125 member-stations of the National Association of Commercial Broadcasters (not including the Association's six satellite station members) (Omori 1997). Unlike the newspaper industry, broadcasters are subject to direct

Newspaper and TV station links

<i>Newspaper</i>	<i>TV station</i>	<i>No. of affiliate stations</i>
<i>Asahi</i>	TV Asahi	23
<i>Yomiuri</i>	NTV	24
<i>Sankei</i>	Fuji Television	27
<i>Mainichi</i>	TBS	27
<i>Nikkei</i>	TV Tokyo	5

Source: *Facts and Figures*, 1999.

government supervision by the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications; a broadcasting licence is required. (A commission set-up during the Occupation as a buffer between the industry and government was abolished soon after the Americans left.) The Broadcast Law allows stations freedom from specific interference as long as they keep within the law (Luther and Boyd 1997). It does not prescribe content in detail, but says programming must conform to 'good morals and manners', 'not disturb public security', be 'truthful' and maintain 'political impartiality' (Kodansha 1993).

The stations' historical dependence on a supply of news from their associated newspapers retarded the development of a strong, separate identity for broadcast journalism in Japan. It's no coincidence that after TBS pared back its financial links with *Mainichi Shimbun* in the 1970s the network's own news division grew in stature. Apart from NHK, though, Japan's broadcasting companies employ far fewer journalists than the big US networks.

Ownership issues

The pattern of ownership and influence within the Japanese media is complex and, in some respects, highly unusual. Related business interests, like Dentsu, are conspicuous on the share registries, as would be expected. The banks, trading houses, electronics firms, and industrial giants like Nippon Steel are there too. But across both newspapers and broadcasting no single player has anything approaching ownership dominance in any

single market. Even the Fujisankei Communications Group, Japan's most powerful commercial media conglomerate, with 100 companies and 12,000 employees, is a minnow compared with News Corporation.

For broadcasters, a ministry ordinance limits the number of stations a person can own or control. Licensing criteria in principle prohibit control of three media enterprises, that is, newspaper, radio and television. If a newspaper also owns radio and television interests in the same market, 'control' has been interpreted to limit involvement to 10 per cent of voting shares and 20 per cent of directors in common (Omori 1997). This does not prevent affiliated companies taking up shares, nor prevent larger cross-shareholdings in the case of just two media enterprises; for example, a newspaper and a television station. In the latter case, the shareholding must remain below 50 per cent.

Neither newspapers nor broadcasters are restricted from pursuing other avenues of investment, and earnings from real estate, fun parks, museums, books and movies, among other things, provide a significant portion of revenues. Competitors also join forces, from time to time, as they did when Japan's first commercial satellite broadcasting company (WOWOW) was formed (Nakada 1999). In recent years, regulations to restrict concentration of ownership have been relaxed in the broadcasting industry to allow for the development of new types of media (Otsuka 1996). In the interlinked world of Japanese business, entities divide and merge somewhat mysteriously.

Look into the ownership record of the *Asahi Shimbun* and the names Murayama and Ueno appear right back to the paper's creation last century. But, unlike media dynasties in other countries, the *Asahi's* founding families have long since become owners without editorial influence. The remainder of the paper's shares are held by staff until they leave the company, when they must be 'sold' into a trust. The same is true at the *Yomiuri*. The *Nikkei* is also 'staff-owned'; the *Mainichi's* staff-ownership was greatly reduced after it had to be bailed out by the banks; and the *Sankei* is mainly owned by Fujisankei group companies.

Newspapers are protected from hostile takeovers by these tight holdings. The downside is that they cannot raise capital on the stock market and are heavily dependent on bank finance. Massive investments in labour-saving technology over the past two decades have made this indebtedness even greater. Some regard it as unhealthy, and believe it's

influenced reporting on corporate Japan (Wolferen 1989). While newspapers may pick up on episodes of pollution, bid-rigging or unsafe products, the argument goes, there's been little questioning of the economic system itself.

Legal freedoms, cultural controls

Like ownership, the issues of press freedom and journalistic independence cannot be separated from the forces of history and culture. Within weeks of Japan's surrender in August 1945, newspaper staff were clamouring for democratic reform. First at the *Yomiuri*, then at other papers, they demanded that management quit to take responsibility for backing the militarists. For a time, the workers had control of the presses, until General MacArthur took fright, sent in police to break up union sit-ins, and ensured that the newspaper owners' prerogative over 'editorial rights' was reasserted (Lee 1985).

Most staff today are organised in company unions. The print media's umbrella labour organisation is the Federation of Newspaper Workers' Unions, which has lost influence as automation has thinned the ranks of printers. The Japan Congress of Journalists (an association of some 1,500 'progressive' journalists) is a member of the International Organisation of Journalists. Labour, on occasions, will still confront management over editorial issues. At the *Mainichi*, for instance, staff rebelled over the paper's support for the US–Japan Security Treaty in 1969, and again in 1975 when an article critical of the Emperor was suppressed (Lee 1985). On neither occasion did the paper change its policy.

The journalism profession retains considerable respect in Japan—despite recent controversies. Competition for a job with a major newspaper or broadcaster is severe and a university degree is essential. But traditions die hard. Among new recruits, degrees in Law or the Humanities greatly outnumber those in Communications or Media; 90 per cent of journalists are men (Haruhara and Amenomori 1997); and newspapers demand allegiance to company before profession, and will not hesitate to reassign a reporter who does not make the grade to a job in advertising or sales. Like other Japanese industrial enterprises, media firms are hierarchical and insiders speak of a factory-like 'production line' of news that can stifle originality and dissent (Emmott 1989). On the other hand, freedom

Losing control

from the influence of proprietors and a 'bottom up' newsgathering method (entrusting young reporters to identify and shape their own stories) are both consistent with an active free press (Kim 1981).

Outside controls on the media are comparatively light. One study has rated Japan among the twelve countries with the lowest tendency to control the press (Feldman 1993). An action for libel against a published report will not succeed if what it says is true. On a matter of public interest, if a journalist makes a mistake in good faith, Japanese courts are unlikely to convict for libel. Privilege attaches to reporting of official announcements, Diet proceedings and court evidence. Public figures (with the exception of the Imperial Family) have learnt to expect only a limited right to privacy.

However, the constitutional 'freedom of reporting' is not the same as 'freedom of news gathering'. Restrictions apply, for example, to the recording or filming of court proceedings. There is no explicit protection for news sources (Kim 1981). Courts have been found to have the power to demand television footage and other material as evidence. State 'secrets' are protected by a law that targets the public servant who provides restricted information, rather than the reporter who obtains it. In a famous case, a court imposed a suspended jail sentence on a female secretary in the Foreign Ministry for 'leaking' information, while acquitting the journalist who'd seduced her to obtain it. (The Supreme Court later punished the journalist for using 'inducements'.)

One area where, by law and convention, unusual restrictions do apply is in the coverage of elections. The pursuit of 'impartiality' is taken to mean that a news story identifying a particular candidate should give equal exposure to all his or her opponents. Especially on television, it makes in-depth coverage so unwieldy that often no candidate is identified, but is instead represented by a shot taken from behind or by a white-gloved hand clutching a microphone. Candidates cannot buy time on TV or space in newspapers, although since the law was changed, political parties can. The Election Law prohibits the publication of 'popularity polls'. Media companies have long been allowed to argue that surveys of voting intentions are not 'popularity polls', a tolerance that is currently being challenged. In the final analysis, the national newspapers are considered to have little impact on results in specific electorates because

of the overwhelming influence of parochial issues and local supporter groups in Japanese politics (Lee 1985).

Informal pressures and cultural habits can distort reporting and hinder public access to information. Japan's complex relationship with China has led news organisations into special pleading and self-censorship. In the 1960s, the major newspapers did a secret deal with the Chinese government to abjure from 'hostile' reporting as the price for keeping correspondents in Beijing (Thayer 1975). While it hasn't always worked (the *Sankei* was only recently allowed to reopen its bureau after 31 years), frequently Japanese reporting of China turns a blind eye to human rights abuses. Other subjects handled 'delicately' in the media include the *burakumin* (descendants of feudal Japan's lowest caste, still the subject of discrimination), the *yakuza* criminal gangs and religious groups (notably the powerful Soka Gakkai lay-Buddhist sect). On occasions, the Imperial Household Agency has gained a news 'blackout' on sensitive topics. For more than a year, the mainstream media ignored the public interest in the Crown Prince's search for a bride, until the *Washington Post* revealed his choice in 1993. The couple's failure to produce an heir is a continuing object of media 'restraint'.

Lese majesty used to be a crime punishable by death. These days Japan's right-wing extremists will sometimes take it upon themselves to apply the ultimate sanction. Cruising Tokyo's government district in their loudspeaker vans, the rightists are a constant reminder of the dangers of upholding liberal democracy, not only to the nation's bureaucrats and politicians, but also to the many journalists who work among them. In 1987, in the midst of a right-wing crusade against the *Asahi Shimbun*, two young staff were killed when their branch office was sprayed with shotgun blasts. Threats against the so-called 'leftist' press, usually over matters of security policy or concerning the Imperial Family, are not uncommon.

In 1999 the Diet finally passed a Freedom of Information (FOI) bill—17 years after the first of many local government ordinances was enacted as a result of pressure from citizens' groups. The bill, which goes into effect in 2001, stipulates that the government must be accountable, although it does not formally enshrine a 'right to know'. The final push for a national FOI law came after disclosures about the Health and Welfare Ministry's involvement in the deaths of haemophiliac patients through

Losing control

the secret use of HIV-contaminated blood. However, just as in the campaign for the FOI bill, this scandal broke not because of stories in the press, but because the victims and their supporters demanded (and finally got) bureaucratic accountability.

Looking ahead

A sea change is occurring in the Japanese news media. Technological innovation, commercial deregulation, foreign pressure for market-opening, calls for tighter editorial controls, and community unrest over media abuses are bringing some fundamental assumptions into question. The weakened economy is itself a factor, both in business terms and for what it has again revealed about the professional shortcomings of the Japanese news media. Journalists and commentators were slow to recognise the severity of the recession Japan entered in the 1990s, and have struggled to offer any clear picture of what needs to be fixed. Reporters in the Bank of Japan *kisha* club even helped conceal the full extent of the banks' bad debts (though some fed tips to *The Economist* magazine which kept well ahead of most of Japan's own publications), and editors at the venerable *Nikkei* were persuaded to the official view that corporate collapses could be avoided by withholding information (Landers 1999). All of this 'restraint' and dependence on overly optimistic official forecasts, of course, only made the problems worse.

The *kisha* club system is under sustained attack. Foreign correspondents, once barred from the clubs, have lately broken down the doors to a dozen or more key ministries and economic organs. Meanwhile, some local citizens' groups have been agitating to close the *kisha* clubs in their city halls, and for the return of public money spent entertaining reporters. There's unease, too, about the presence of journalists from elite media organisations (especially NHK and the *Nikkei*) as members of no less than half of all government advisory bodies (*shingikai*). These advisory bodies play a crucial role in policy formation—and critics contend that journalists should not allow their independence to be compromised (Harari 1997).

The reputation of television news suffered a heavy blow in 1996. In the uproar over the Aum Shinrikyo case, it was revealed that, seven years earlier, the TBS network had bowed to pressure not to air an interview in

which serious allegations were first raised against the sect. Worse still, a TBS producer had secretly shown Aum leaders the taped interview with a human rights lawyer. The lawyer, his wife and infant son disappeared soon after—kidnapped and murdered by the Aum, as it turned out. The episode sparked calls for greater outside controls over broadcasters, if stations themselves could not uphold ethical standards (Goto 1997).

The Liberal Democratic Party, under fire from Kume's *News Station*, had pressured companies, including Toyota, to withdraw advertising. When comments by an executive of TV Asahi, that the station had set out to 'crush' the LDP, were made public, he lost his job and was hauled before the Diet and forced to apologise, just days before the station's license was up for review (Altman 1996). It was a sharp reminder of the broadcasting industry's statutory obligation to be politically 'impartial' (even though, in the view of this executive, his station had been 'under the thumb' of the LDP for years).

Back in power again, the LDP is looking at setting up an around-the-clock monitoring system to respond to alleged 'bias' in television reporting (Landers 1999). Advocates of greater media control often argue their case—whether ingenuously or not—on the grounds of 'human rights'. The notorious habit of certain Japanese media to 'convict' criminal suspects, sometimes before they're even charged, leaves them wide open to attack. When a weekly magazine recently published the photograph of a minor who was charged with murder, some shops unilaterally withdrew the publication from sale because of the public outcry: an appeal to 'human rights' was now being used to justify censorship (Foreign Press Center 1997).

The newspaper industry is worried. It depends for more than half its income on subscriptions, underpinned by a price cartel (Sato 1999). This arrangement, it argues, is essential for maintaining a public-interest ethic unsullied by the newspaper 'bingo'-type price wars seen in other countries (Kono 1999). But deregulation is the order of the day. A new code has opened the way for a measure of discounting; and the threat of more radical deregulation of the newspaper industry remains a powerful weapon in the hands of the government.

Newspaper profits have tumbled in recent years. Some are running at a loss (Ono 1999). The arrival of new entrants only adds to the pressure. Rupert Murdoch stunned Japanese business in 1996 when he and a local

Losing control

partner, Masayoshi Son, grabbed 21.4 per cent of TV Asahi (foreigners are limited to holding 20 per cent of a broadcasting company in their own right), after Murdoch had declared his intention to tap 'one of the world's last media gold mines' through a new digital satellite service, JSkyB. The industry closed ranks. Two years later Murdoch had exited TV Asahi, merged JSkyB with an existing satellite company, PerfecTV!, and sold down his investment (to 11.4 per cent) by inviting Fuji Television, Sony Corporation and several other Japanese 'heavyweights' into the deal. Sky PerfecTV! and its digital competitor, DirecTV (substantially owned by Hughes Electronics), represent the first significant foreign incursions into Japan's media marketplace.

Thirty years ago, 60 per cent of Japanese men in their twenties read newspapers. Today the proportion is half that (NHK Institute 1999). The proliferation of alternative sources of information, including direct access through the Internet, is displacing journalists working for conventional mass media from the centre-stage of opinion leadership. Digital multi-channelling, which grants flexibility as to when and in what form the user can consume information, dilutes the importance of newspaper 'scoops' or fixed-schedule news bulletins.

Some responses are already evident. The content of Japanese newspapers grows increasingly diverse; journalists' bylines are appearing

Softbank

Masayoshi Son (1958 –) is a Japanese-born ethnic Korean who spent his formative years in the United States. After returning to Japan in 1980, he founded Softbank, a company that's ridden the Internet and computer software booms and carried him from obscurity to financial stardom. Son is Rupert Murdoch's partner in the digital satellite provider, SKY PerfecTV!, and a prime example of the 'new money' that's begun to challenge Japan's media Establishment. His strategic partners are not the familiar city banks and manufacturing firms, but a mobile telephone company, the owner of McDonalds Japan and a financial services group. Satellite TV is forecast to grow to a third the size of the terrestrial market—hundreds of new channels to draw upon the public's reading and viewing time. Softbank more than trebled its profits to 37.5 billion yen (A\$536 million) in the year to March 1999, at a time when newspaper profits were in sharp retreat.

more often; readers are given space to tell their own stories; and the many Internet editions of papers allow for instant feedback on topics. The tone once adopted by papers of a teacher addressing pupils has become more like a discussion among friends. At the same time, some newspapers are trying to sharpen their identities by taking on a greater 'advocacy' role. For example, the *Yomiuri Shimbun* has produced its own detailed proposals for a new Constitution—once almost a taboo subject. Companies are also renovating their image through technology: introducing more use of colour and opening printing plants overseas to reach expatriates. Once the challenge was to sell the newspapers that were produced, now it's to produce newspapers that will sell.

In radio, new licenses have spawned many low-powered FM stations, which identify closely with their local audience. In television, the pursuit of ratings has given rise to more opinionated journalism, as well as blurring the line between entertainment and news. The industry is having to fight off those who would turn back the clock to greater outside editorial control.

Nevertheless, history suggests that the quality of press freedom in Japan ultimately will not be determined by overt regulation, or diversity of ownership, or technological innovation. It will rest, instead, with the preparedness of individual journalists and editors to resist their own cultural habits of deferring to authority and falling in line with shared opinion; dangerously comforted by the warmth of the herd.

Media websites

Asahi Shimbun, www.asahi.com/

Yomiuri Shimbun, www.yomiuri.com.jp/

Nihon Keizai Shimbun, www.nikkei.com.jp/

Mainichi Shimbun, www.mainichi.com.jp/

Sankei Shimbun, www.sankei.com.jp/ *

The Japan Times, www.japantimes.co.jp/

Japan Newspaper Publishers and Editors Association, [ww.pressnet.or.jp](http://www.pressnet.or.jp)

NHK, www.nhk.or.jp/

National Association of Commercial Broadcasters, www.nab.or.jp/

Fuji Television, www.fujitv.co.jp/

TBS, www.tbs.co.jp/

NTV, www.ntv.co.jp/

Losing control

TV Asahi, www.tv-asahi.co.jp/ *

TV Tokyo, www.tv-tokyo.co.jp/ *

Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan, www.ns2.fcccj.or.jp/

Foreign Press Center, www.nttls.co.jp/fpc/

Japan Congress of Journalists, www.tky.3web.ne.jp/

* Japanese only

Malaysia

In the grip of the government

Kean Wong

I began to see the Malaysian journalist as one of the saddest creatures in the nation. Our readers dismissed us as lapdogs of the government; the government considered us instruments of policy. But the truth was that Malaysian journalism was replete with people of intelligence and integrity, good and honourable Malaysians, who were finding that their careers demanded enormous efforts of conscience...Malaysia's journalists would be among those most personally damaged by the Mahathir years, and their tragedy was that it was their idealism that kept so many of them going as long as they did (Rashid 1993).

The Malaysian media, like the nation itself, has evolved a great deal since independence in 1957. In the immediate post-war years, the media was predominantly comprised of privately owned newspapers, while the state had a monopoly on radio and television that was broken only in 1983 when the first private television channel was established. Malaysia has experienced fairly rapid growth since independence, and the media industry's expansion has been a close reflection of this. The media's commercial growth has been matched by the progressive introduction of stricter legislation controlling its output, with most of the media owned by interests close to the government. These conditions have led to more censorship and shrinking democratic space for the media.

The decade between 1987 and 1997 has been the most tumultuous period so far for the Malaysian media. In 1987, four newspapers were closed down in a crackdown on dissent. By 1997, an unprecedented decade of strong economic growth had transformed the media business, as new money and newer technology flooded a newly middle-class market eager

Losing control

for fresh media. Newspapers, magazines and terrestrial and satellite television stations were established, hiring media workers at previously unheard-of wages. But the brief moments of heady optimism among journalists and readers alike soon faded, as Southeast Asia's economic crisis swept through Malaysia in 1997. Compounding the media's economic bruising of the past two years has been the political crisis brought on by the sacking and arrest of former deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. As a consequence, the Malaysian media business has retreated and regrouped, its brief flirtation with an expansive optimism—reflected in new investment and a tolerance of liberal elements—was soon discarded as growing ownership paranoia and shrinking revenues took hold. Senior editorial management linked to Anwar Ibrahim resigned or were ousted, while biased reporting and editorial attacks against dissenters appeared more regularly in print and on the airwaves. Recent crises experienced by neighbours such as Thailand and Indonesia may have given rise to new independent media and a diversity of voices, but it has not been a feature of Malaysia's mainstream media.

Why this has been the case is a question best answered by examining the mix of legislation, licensing and ownership that has helped stifle the media's culture. It is also important to consider how the practice of Malaysian journalism in recent times has been marked by expensive lawsuits, a culture of self-censorship and fear, and a decline of professionalism. Moreover, the past year has seen the marked rise in the mainstream media's role as a propaganda tool for the establishment; it has also witnessed an information battle waged by opposition forces using new technologies such as the Internet and video CDs.

Growing authoritarian culture

After 42 years of independence from British colonisation, Malaysia has effectively wiped out poverty for most of the population, successfully raising standards of work and employment, healthcare, education and social security. For a younger generation of Malaysians who have come to expect such material well-being as a fact of life, the quest for broader political participation and a stronger civil society has become more apparent. Rubbing up against these desires has been the state, dominated

since independence by a coalition government known as *Barisan Nasional* (or the National Front).

The BN, as the coalition is known, is dominated by its biggest party, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), whose leader is the Prime Minister, while the coalition's multi-ethnic composition includes the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), along with a variety of smaller parties. The coalition has held power since independence, and Dr Mahathir Mohamad became the fourth Prime Minister in 1981. After 18 years in power, he is now the longest-serving Prime Minister of Malaysia. Dr Mahathir has overseen the growth of a burgeoning middle-class, an essential part of the urban areas where more than half of Malaysia's population now lives (Malaysian Department of Statistics 1991).

At the same time, he has nurtured a foreign policy that proposes a theme of 'Asian values'. The Prime Minister has pushed for a new global agenda that speaks on behalf of a poor south against the rich developed countries of the north; within this debate, Dr Mahathir has argued against the universality of the concept of human rights and the fundamental freedoms it contains. Specifically, he has questioned the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the general understanding of article 19, which guarantees the right to freedom of opinion and expression. He has argued instead the importance of framing the concept of human rights around economic and social rights rather than basing it on civil and political rights.

As lawyer and human rights activist R. Sivarasa once noted, Malaysia has a constitution guaranteeing freedom of speech, 'but not freedom after speech' (Sivarasa 1995). The constitution allows the government to impose restrictions, as it deems necessary, to protect national security. Under such provisions, Dr Mahathir's government has passed and amended laws in parliament that severely curb freedom of expression.

An authoritarian political culture has developed both pervasively and deeply. Not surprisingly, the media in Malaysia reflects the culture of 'soft authoritarianism'—where the institutions of a democratic state and the division of its powers may exist in principle but have been made ineffective or absent in practice. 'In spite of fairly regular multi-party elections and some other features requiring accountability of the regime', write Edmund

Losing control

Terence Gomez and K.S. Jomo in *Malaysia's Political Economy* (1997), 'the Malaysian state has been authoritarian since the colonial period, though analysts have characterised the political system as semi-authoritarian, semi-democratic, or quasi-democratic...some features of authoritarianism have been pronounced since Mahathir Mohamad became Prime Minister in 1981'. Malaysia's rapid development has revealed a basic contradiction, as these political economists explain—the authoritarian style of Dr Mahathir's government has on the one hand enhanced economic growth and material well-being while on the other hand led to abuses of power and a shrinking of democratic space.

The Malaysian Human Rights Report, published in 1998 by the human rights group *Suaram*, describes Malaysia as a severely restricted democracy, where the government maintains its control with a 'sophisticated combination of draconian laws, controls on civil liberties, with social and economic policies favouring élite and middle-class sectors' (1998).

The media as an institution has been particularly vulnerable to such a culture; its independence as an institution has largely disappeared in the past two decades of legislative and licensing control. Mixed in with this has been the corporate manoeuvring of media assets and management further consolidating this control.

Using the laws to stoke fear

For most Malaysian journalists, the Printing, Presses and Publications Act (PPPA) of 1984 presents the frontline threat to free and critical reporting. The Act provides the Home Minister—until recently, a portfolio held by Dr Mahathir—the right to suspend or revoke publishing and printing permits. The threat of these laws to media organisations is very real, as was demonstrated in 1987 when four newspapers including the dailies *The Star* and *Sin Chew Jit Poh* had their permits revoked under the PPPA. Although no journalists were arrested, several were interrogated by the police.

Two months after the closures, the PPPA was further amended by Dr Mahathir's government, with parliament approving changes that removed the right of judicial review. As a result, the amended Act declared that the Minister's decision to revoke or suspend a licence or permit 'shall be final and shall not be called in question by any court on any ground

whatsoever'. The Prime Minister said at the time that such rights of review were based on notions inherited from the British and thus alien to Malaysian life. The Act also requires annual applications from printers and publishers for licences and permits, with stiff penalties mandated for editors, journalists, publishers or printers if found guilty of 'maliciously publishing false news'. Not surprisingly, establishing a media or printing business in Malaysia is a particularly risky investment. The PPPA has served as an effective deterrent to a culture of independent journalism, especially since 1987.

The PPPA has also been used in two well known cases against opposition activists: the Democratic Action Party (DAP) deputy leader Lim Guan Eng was released recently after a year in prison. He was convicted of 'maliciously publishing false news' after producing a pamphlet questioning the handling of a rape case involving a senior government leader and a young girl from his constituency. As a result of his sentence, he automatically lost his parliamentary seat and has been barred from running for election again.

The PPPA is being used against Irene Fernandez in a similar way. Ms Fernandez's organisation, *Tenaganita*, campaigns for workers' rights and as a result of research, issued a memorandum in August 1995 detailing allegations of deaths in the detention camps of migrant workers and calling for an independent investigation into these reports. But since March 1996, when Ms Fernandez was arrested and charged under the PPPA for 'maliciously publishing false news', her trial has been ongoing, making it the longest running in Malaysia's legal history.

Many journalists have therefore adopted a policy of 'don't rock the boat'. This common sentiment may be challenged if a petition by Malaysian journalists is sustained. On World Press Freedom Day on 3 May 1999, a memorandum calling for the repeal of the PPPA was signed by 581 journalists and handed over to the Home Minister and deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi. The memorandum drew attention to the various powers under the Act, including closing down publications and 'arrest without a warrant any person found committing any offence under the Act'. Despite the number of signatories, a key initiator of the memorandum (journalist Shaila Koshy) acknowledged that there had been much resistance among journalists to sign, with many expressing fears for their careers. In some newsrooms, senior journalists discouraged their

Losing control

colleagues from signing, arguing that it was disloyal to the government. Few journalists from the Malay-language newspapers and the *New Straits Times* signed, suggesting a media culture divided not only along language, but also ownership, lines.

Broadcasting is completely regulated by the Broadcasting Act of 1988. The Act requires licensing for radio and television stations. The Minister of Information has wide control over what goes on the air. Not surprisingly, the electronic media comprises only the state-owned Radio Television Malaysia (RTM1 and 2) and a handful of politically linked private stations.

The other tool of official control is the Internal Security Act (ISA). It has been used to suppress political criticism in the media as well as in civil society. The most notorious use of the ISA was the crackdown against dissent in October 1987, dubbed Operation Lallang (*lallang* means weed), when 106 people were detained, including most of the Opposition. Recently, the ISA has been used against Anwar Ibrahim and his supporters.

The ISA was originally introduced by the British colonial government as a means of containing the communist insurgency of the post-war years. The law was retained and enhanced after independence in 1957, with the declared objective of controlling internal subversion threatening the security of the state. Since independence however, thousands of Malaysians have been detained without trial under the ISA, many of whom have been social and religious activists and members of political parties.

The ISA allows for detention by the police for up to 60 days for interrogation of any person suspected of acting against the 'security' of Malaysia. After the initial 60 days though, the Home Minister can extend the detention for up to two years with no right of appeal by the detainee. Not only are detainees held but they are often at risk of ill-treatment—a risk that became most apparent when Anwar Ibrahim appeared in court after over two weeks in ISA detention, suffering from serious assault by the police while in custody. Other accounts of psychological and physical torture in detention have been documented in books by former detainees such as Dr Syed Husin Ali of the People's Party (1996), and former member of Parliament Dr Kua Kia Soong (1998). Though the government indicated its intention of reviewing the ISA in early 1996, the use of the Act since that time has actually increased in the wake of the political crisis in 1999. No journalist has been detained under the ISA, but its threat to the media is evident.

The Official Secrets Act (OSA) of 1972 is also a colonial legacy based on the British OSA of 1911, originally intended to stop information flows (to foreigners) that might endanger national security. But Malaysia's 1972 Act gave the authorities broad powers to restrict the unauthorised publication of any information held by the government, regardless of its insignificance or the fact that it is in the public domain. As the Act doesn't contain definitions of what constitutes an 'official secret', a compliant judiciary can distort the process of natural justice and logic.

Three cases in 1985 featured the use of the OSA against the media and in all three cases, hefty fines were imposed—the first for a story by *New Straits Times* journalist Sabry Sharif alleging irregularities in military aircraft purchases; the second for the investigations taken by two *Asian Wall Street Journal* foreign reporters (one of whom was expelled from Malaysia after being fined); and the third for the citing of an allegedly confidential government document by a *Far Eastern Economic Review* foreign correspondent (the essence of which had already been publicised by the Prime Minister at an earlier press conference). The government passed amendments to the Act in 1986, adding provisions for mandatory prison terms. Although the OSA has rarely been applied since, its intimidatory effects on civil society and the media have been highlighted by occasional threats of prosecution against journalists in 1992 and 1995.

The use of contempt of court and defamation laws to discourage debate and silence critics of the establishment have been a more recent phenomenon when compared with the use of laws such as the ISA and PPPA. The costs of defending and paying damages in defamation suits have become particularly onerous.

There are several cases involving the media and freedom of expression now before the Malaysian courts. The oldest of these related cases involves the veteran freelance journalist M.G.G. Pillai, who was ordered to pay damages of RM2 million (at the time, US\$800,000) after being found guilty in 1994 of defaming and libelling the reputation of Vincent Tan, one of the Prime Minister's closest business associates. He is awaiting the outcome of his appeal.

In November 1995, a foreign journal, *International Commercial Litigation*, published an article that discussed the issue of the Malaysian judiciary's independence and its conduct in a civil suit in unflattering terms. Several large companies and Mr Tan filed libel suits against the journal and the

people quoted in the article. Among those sued were the then secretary of the Bar Council Tommy Thomas and all the partners of his firm; the UN Commission on Human Rights Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, Param Cumaraswamy; and the *Asian Wall Street Journal's* Southeast Asia correspondent Raphael Pura, who is based in Kuala Lumpur. A total of 15 suits were filed, seeking nearly US\$200 million in damages.

The case against Mr Pura began with an ongoing dispute over the filing of additional defence documents. These documents allegedly substantiate the claims of complicity between top judges and lawyers representing the companies and Mr Tan. In a related case, the UN Special Rapporteur Mr Param is facing four defamation suits seeking damages totalling US\$108 million; the suits against him are for his comments used in the same journal, detailing his investigations into allegations of corporate interference with the Malaysian judiciary. The Malaysian government refused to advise the court of Mr Cumaraswamy's immunity, a matter that came before the International Court of Justice. In a 14–1 decision, the Court held that the Special Rapporteur is entitled to immunity from legal process as maintained by the UN Secretary-General. The Court held 'that the Government of Malaysia should have informed the courts of the finding of the Secretary-General...and now had the obligation to communicate the Court's Advisory Opinion to the Malaysian courts' (International Court of Justice 1999). The Malaysian government has not yet undertaken the action required.

'Scandalising the court'

The media's most recent brush with the law resulted in the jailing of Canadian journalist Murray Hiebert. Mr Hiebert had written an article about the Malaysian judicial process in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* (1997). An action was brought against him by the wife of a judge whose case Mr Hiebert had mentioned in the article. When sentencing Mr Hiebert for 'scandalising the court', Justice Low Hop Bing warned the media not to disrespect Malaysia's courts and its justice system. The Court of Appeal upheld this conviction though it halved the sentence to six weeks; Mr Hiebert was released after four weeks for good behaviour. His lawyers are appealing his conviction to the highest court, the Federal Court.

Unsurprisingly, Mr Hiebert's jailing for contempt of court raised many protests worldwide, the first time in 50 years that a journalist has been jailed for contempt of court in a Commonwealth country. A statement from US President Bill Clinton expressed deep concern about the jailing and the undermining of press freedoms. International journalists' organisations such as the US-based Committee to Protect Journalists and the Paris-based Reporteurs San Frontières (RSF) protested and said the decision by the courts represented 'a dramatic step back for press freedom in Malaysia, where local journalists are already pushed to self-censorship because of drastic laws' (press statements, CPJ and RSF, 14 September 1999).

A sister publication of Mr Hiebert's magazine, the *Asian Wall Street Journal*, warned that 'the Hiebert decision may presage other, even more draconian, uses of contempt' in Malaysia (13 September 1999). After the upholding of the conviction, the head of the Malaysian Bar, R.R. Chelvarajah, noted that Malaysian courts had drawn criticism in a number of recent cases, stressing that 'these comments should not be brushed aside' (1999).

'What happened to me is a shot across the bows for other journalists', said Mr Hiebert in Hong Kong, two days after his release from prison. 'It's a warning that in Malaysia, it's difficult for journalists to function ... Most countries in Asia are moving towards a more open press but Malaysia seems to be moving in the opposite direction' (Agence Presse France, 14 October 1999).

But none of this has blunted Prime Minister Dr Mahathir's defence of Malaysia's judiciary and due process. He has countered the criticisms in typical style, pointing out that he does not 'interfere' with the courts despite western pressures to do so in cases like Mr Hiebert's. He claims the condemnation of Malaysia for the jailing is because Mr Hiebert is a western journalist, not because the protests have been about media freedoms in the country; the inconsistent human rights records of the United States and other western countries are then lambasted, with Dr Mahathir lamenting in international fora the 'very distorted perception of right and wrong'.

His government's special envoy to the United Nations, Abdullah Ahmad, has already stated in a recent newspaper article the whispered part of the government's argument: 'The question is would they have taken as much trouble if S. Jayasankaran (Mr Hiebert's Malaysian colleague in the bureau) instead of Murray was jailed? The implication is

clear. Don't touch white journalists but the Malaysian court can sentence a Malaysian, coloured, Asian or Senegalese journalist' (1999).

It has become apparent through these cases that the right to freedoms of speech and expression is severely curtailed when threatened with such legal suits. It has had a 'chilling effect' on the freedom of expression and 'needs to be curbed,' advises Abid Hussain, the UN Special Rapporteur on the freedom of opinion and expression in a report on Malaysia (1998). The cases of Mr Pura, Mr Param and Mr Hiebert have all added to the culture of fear and intimidation apparent in the media in Malaysia.

These cases also reveal the intricate relationships the corporate élite has with the Prime Minister and his government, amidst allegations of judicial impropriety and a corruption of due process. The increasing use of the courts to resolve such disputes and the propensity to award extraordinarily large sums for damages echo the trend first noticed in Singapore, where opposition politicians have been bankrupted as a result of judgments against them.

In the broader politics, there has been a deepening cynicism and distrust amongst the public of the judicial process and its alleged use against the government's enemies. This has been highlighted in the past year by the trial and subsequent conviction of former deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim for corruption. This does not bode well for the media, already hamstrung by laws that contain mandatory jail terms and do not provide for judicial review.

The politics of the newspaper business

The media tradition in Malaysia has long been centred on a task of informing and educating its audience from a partisan position. This was apparent before independence, when Malay-language and Chinese-language newspapers featured nationalist campaigns against the British, whereas English-language newspapers such as *The Straits Times* were identified as journals of the colonialists. While the newsroom at *The Straits Times* continued to host British editors several years after Malaysia's independence, editors such as Said Zahari and Samad Ismail of the Malay-language *Utusan Melayu* and *Berita Harian* newspapers were jailed for their Malayan nationalist efforts. The Malay-language media supported

an UMNO-led coalition for independence, and this continued after independence as the coalition won at successive general elections.

For the most part, the Malaysian media did not question the government's economic agenda for the country. But the disparities of wealth that had become defined according to ethnicity soon resulted in the tragedy of the 1969 race riots. One explanation of the media's close alignment with the government after 1969 was that the riots, its casualties and the political aftermath had traumatised the media. Abdullah Ahmad, who was special assistant to the Prime Minister at the time, Tun Abdul Razak, argued that Malaysian media's traditions 'were in fact more westernised than many people might suspect. Something happened before and after 1969'. An 'excessive self-censorship' culture developed within the media. By the 1970s, the media participated in government efforts of 'nation-building', elaborating on concepts of 'developmental journalism' that were hailed as politically progressive and in tune with the Third World's agenda for change.

These themes worked in well with the moves by the dominant political party UMNO to gain control of the media. From around 1972, UMNO's investment vehicle Fleet Holdings began buying up a substantial share of Malaysia's biggest media company, the New Straits Times Press Bhd (NSTP); the company's assets included the Malay and English-language broadsheets, *Berita Harian* and the *New Straits Times*, as well as several tabloids and a magazine publishing division. The initial goal was to wrest control of the media-newspaper company from its traditional Singapore and British owners. By 1984, the party through its investment vehicles owned almost 76 per cent of the NSTP. It was also through this media company that Malaysia's first licence for a commercial television broadcaster (TV3) was secured.

The 1990s have proven somewhat more complicated, as the ownership of this media organisation has followed the course of the bitter split in UMNO which saw the ouster of Anwar Ibrahim. The 1993 management buy-out of the NSTP by a company called Realmild featured four senior editors of the group; three of whom were seen as close associates of the then deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. Realmild is the main shareholder in the NSTP group and TV3 through the heavily indebted conglomerate MRCB. In a sweeping ownership and management shake-

Losing control

up announced in July, the control of Realmild is now in the hands of Abdul Rahman Maidin, a little known businessman favoured by the political leadership. The only survivor of the original four editor-owners is Abdul Kadir Jasin, a Mahathir loyalist who as group editor-in-chief now oversees all of the group's media; this adds to the widely-held view of the NSTP's control being wrested away from Anwar Ibrahim's associates by Dr Mahathir's supporters.

The best-selling English-language newspaper in Malaysia, *The Star* is the centrepiece of Star Publications (M) Bhd, one of the most profitable companies listed on the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange. Through a complex web of holdings, the newspaper and its sister publications such as *Day&Night* magazine are indirectly owned by the investment arm of the MCA political party, a senior partner of the ruling coalition. Originally a small regional newspaper founded in Penang, *The Star's* migration to the capital and to a national audience was complete by the early 1980s. Although it lost its licence in the 1987 crackdown, the daily returned the following year and has charted a commercially successful course over the past decade. The company's listing on the stock exchange two years ago was a success, and its shares now trade at good premiums. *The Star* has the greatest share of print advertising in the country and its staff—with six-month bonuses and stock options—are the best paid in the mainstream media.

The top-selling Malay-language newspaper *Utusan Malaysia* is the lead product of Utusan Melayu (M) Bhd, a profitable listed company on the stock exchange. The majority controlling stake is held by the dominant party in the ruling coalition, UMNO. This shareholding was disclosed when the company listed on the stock exchange in August 1994.

The newest member of this exclusive club of licensed newspapers is *The Sun*, an English-language daily tabloid. Established at the height of the economic boom in 1993, the daily relaunched itself the following year with a series of modernisations that improved wages and introduced new editorial and advertising styles across the industry. The newspaper is mostly owned by Vincent Tan through one of his private companies. He has a reputation in Malaysia's business world as an active corporate player through his listed conglomerate, the Berjaya Group. This conglomerate has interests in everything from telecommunications, transportation, gaming companies to stock brokerages; it also holds or has held rare

licences and exclusive contracts in lucrative sectors such as the lotteries, cellular and long-distance telecoms, and the national sewerage system.

The two best-selling Chinese-language newspapers, *Sin Chew Jit Poh* and *Nanyang Siang Pau*, are also owned by corporate figures close to the political leadership. The latter newspaper has suffered circulation losses since the political crisis because of perceived imbalanced reporting of the crisis (see below). Like the NSTP group, the Nanyang Press group has been part of a politically approved corporate play during the 1990s: after a few change of hands by UMNO-linked businessmen such as Wan Azmi Wan Hamzah and his brother Wan Ariff, the media group was bought through a series of complicated transactions by the Hong Leong Group, an ethnic Chinese-controlled conglomerate led by Quek Leng Chan. Although Mr Quek has been perceived in the political crisis as an associate of Anwar Ibrahim, the newspaper has generally not reflected this partiality to the former deputy Prime Minister. The newspaper's market share has slid since the crisis began last year, and the gap has grown against the Chinese-language market leader, *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, which claims recent readership figures of over 300,000.

According to *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, the publication is alone among the mainstream dailies in all languages to have posted an improved circulation over the past two quarters (AC Nielsen readership polls). Especially significant are the drops in circulation of up to 20 per cent for newspapers identified with UMNO's interests, such as the *New Straits Times*, *Berita Harian* and *Utusan Malaysia*. The Chinese-language market leader is owned by Rimbunan Hijau, a regionally focused Sarawak company founded by low-profile timber tycoon Tiong. *Sin Chew Jit Poh* has had a relatively independent editorial management and it has probably benefited in sales because of this perception. Moreover, the Prime Minister has used this perception to counter allegations of a lack of media freedom in Malaysia (Chanda, Hiebert and Jayasankaran 1999; Jamaludin and Ahmad 1999).

TV as a government information service

The electronic media, however, has rarely been guilty of such sins, even though those in opposition to the government has often complained of its sins of omission. Parliamentary Opposition Leader, Lim Kit Siang, who has held this position for nearly 20 years, has not enjoyed 'a full minute

Losing control

on television at any time during that period' (Suaram 1998). Much of this bias can be blamed on its ownership and the working culture that dominates television and radio, where the typical career progresses from the state-owned Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM) to one of the four newer electronic media organisations of TV3, MetroVision, NTV7 or satellite service Astro.

The state's RTM broadcasts nationally on two television channels, RTM1 and RTM2 (often known as TV1 and TV2) and six radio services, mostly in Malay. All news and information is supplied from a centralised newsroom, with a great reliance on the state-owned news agency Bernama, for hourly news bulletins. Financed partly by the public through taxes and the annual licence fee, RTM also takes in advertising. Because of its comprehensive national reach and its status as the first national broadcaster, it remains popular with advertisers. Although commercial broadcaster TV3 has for several years taken the lion's share of total advertising spending, RTM's TV2 has been runner-up in the race by screening popular American programming to attract the wealthier, urban-oriented audience needed by advertisers.

In 1998, in spite of new competition and the economic crisis, TV2 and TV1 took the second and third-largest share of advertising after TV3, collectively taking in RM118.1 million (US\$31 million) or nearly 40 per cent of market share (AC Nielsen Adex Service). With a mandate to inform, educate and entertain, RTM has long been seen as a tool of government, with its senior management appointees of the minister of information—under Dr Mahathir's Prime Ministership, this portfolio is usually held by his party's propaganda chief and political whip. RTM's television and radio stations also commission and broadcast regular long-form advertisements and jingles promoting government campaigns of the day; in the past year, this has included campaigns for information technology, patriotism against foreigners, and unity in the face of economic adversity.

The Minister of Information and UMNO's Secretary-General, Khalil Yaacob, declared in June that RTM's airwaves were the sole preserve of the government, explaining that this was why the broadcaster would not be featuring any opposition voices in its news and other programs. This brought a storm of protest from the opposition and civil society. Social reform organisation Aliran accused the information minister of 'total ignorance', stressing that RTM was public property:

RTM can be used to explain government policies but the people also have a right to know what others, including opposition parties and non-governmental organisations, think about those policies. It cannot be used to broadcast propaganda only from the ruling party while denying access to opposition parties (Aliran 1999).

But as Dr Farish Noor of the social justice organisation JUST pointed out, the ruling coalition's claim on RTM 'would rob RTM of what little credibility it has left and as such deprive the government of one more channel of communication to the public' (Noor 1999). He added that the implications of this RTM ban on the opposition and its supporters is far-reaching and serious, as it demonstrates how 'the democratic culture of the Malaysian constitutional model is being eroded on a daily basis'.

This was illustrated in 1999 with two separate features on RTM's television channels. One was a multi-part dramatised series on the life and struggles of Prime Minister Dr Mahathir, offering an obvious propaganda tool in the run-up to the next general elections. The other, running throughout the week at prime time, involved multi-lingual and slickly produced long-form advertisements contrasting Malaysia's stable government and social conditions with riots, deaths and property destruction in neighbouring Indonesia—the voiceover message clearly urged viewers to support the ruling coalition.

The most successful broadcaster is the commercial station TV3 whose parent company Sistem Televisyen Malaysia Bhd (STM) has been part of a major corporate overhaul as a result of heavy debts and political realignment in the wake of Anwar Ibrahim's ouster from government. It has been a lucrative broadcaster for the political leadership to control, in terms of both audiences and revenue. In 1998, TV3 regularly captured upwards of two-thirds of the viewing audience and took in RM151million (US\$40 million), or half of all TV advertising spending. The first to be issued a commercial television license in 1983, STM's TV3 was part of a selective privatisation exercise by the government to politically linked corporate interests—its controlling shareholder then and now remains interests linked to Dr Mahathir's party UMNO. Aside from a first year loss the company has reported that pre-tax profits rose nearly fifteen-fold in five years. Unsurprisingly, the rise of Anwar Ibrahim as deputy Prime Minister in 1994 coincided with his business associates at listed conglomerate MRCB taking control of TV3 (Gomez and Jomo 1997). It is

Losing control

ironic then to witness how quickly TV3 has changed soon after the quiet resignations in August 1998 of various editorial managers seen as Mr Anwar's appointees. News programs became more overt in their editorial line against Mr Anwar's economic rescue plans, a month before his sacking as deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister. Since Mr Anwar's sacking and conviction, TV3's prime-time news has run disparaging and often inaccurate reports on the opposition and its supporters.

The new kids on the broadcasting block, MetroVision and NTV7, were launched in 1993 and 1998 respectively. Both have suffered badly in the economic crisis as a result of expensive borrowings by their owners in the boom years, and have also struggled to reach audiences as a result of their allocations on the UHF broadcast band. As a result of cost cutting, ministerial criticism of its broadcasts and management turmoil, MetroVision abandoned its newsroom altogether and has been rebroadcasting the various language news bulletins of RTM2 for over a year. With its mix of new and rerun seasons of mostly commercial US programming, MetroVision has not been producing any local programming of note since the economic crisis.

NTV7 has also faced reduced circumstances and has similarly adopted the target of a mostly urban, middle-class audience demanded by advertisers. Owned by the family interests of Effendi Norwawi, a Sarawak tycoon with interests in banking, education and property who is close to that state's premier and the Prime Minister, NTV7 was originally destined to be the Sarawak 'window' for other Malaysians. The broadcaster established a newsroom that introduced a more contemporary, American feel to its news bulletins, partly as a result of consultants' advice from Los Angeles and the hiring of key editorial staff from Europe and Australia—NTV7 billed itself as the 'intellectual news provider'. Unfortunately, while the form has changed for the better, the content remains much the same albeit with a slightly different running order than TV3 and RTM—the Prime Minister's events for the day do not always lead NTV7 news, unlike rival bulletins.

According to current and former staffers, substantial pressure has been brought to bear on daily editors of the news programs since the political crisis erupted. There is close scrutiny of productions for mentions and images of the opposition, and in-house 'political controllers' have been

installed to vet assignments and eventual output. In a brief flourish at the start of this year, NTV7 news and current affairs department produced a controversial discussion program called *Dateline*, hosted by youthful supporters of the government (one now an aide of the deputy Prime Minister and home minister, Abdullah Badawi, who licenses the media). For the first time on Malaysian television, the weekly prerecorded program featured opposition party members and non-government organisations that were critical of the ruling coalition, debating current issues such as whether the opposition is denied mass media access. Several of the program's discussants complained after broadcast that their views were selectively edited, taken out of context and effectively misrepresented.

Finally, the smallest electronic media organisation in terms of audience (but not of investment) is the satellite television service Astro, which last year captured 2.7 per cent of viewing audiences. With 25 channels and its five radio broadcasts it is part of Binariang Sdn Bhd, a RM3.5 billion (about US\$1 billion) satellite project launched in 1996. Binariang is part of the corporate empire of another of the Prime Minister's close business associates, Ananda Krishnan; Mr Ananda's interests have included shipping, petroleum, property and a series of lucrative gaming licences that have helped bankroll a media empire. In 1992, *The Star* estimated the net worth of Mr Ananda's corporate assets at about RM1.8 billion. Malaysians are only allowed to buy and use satellite dishes of the Astro service, which is subscriber-based and mostly a relay for foreign services such as CNN, CNBC and Bloomberg News. Astro produces one channel, RIA, which features only Malay-language entertainment and no news programming. The radio stations rewrite and broadcast news feeds from RTM and the Bernama news agency. At the height of the demonstrations in support of Anwar Ibrahim throughout 1999, reports on Malaysia run on CNN and CNBC feeds were censored for Malaysians with in-house advertising and promotional items. There have been reports of CNN's feeds being delayed by one hour to allow censorship while foreign media reports on Malaysia are rarely ever allowed to run. Satellite feeds of reports of Malaysian demonstrations in September by the BBC, the ABC and TVNZ were jammed for several hours, according to staff of the BBC; the Information Minister announced three days later that the facilities were not to be used for news reports.

Different languages, differing perspectives

The question of media freedom in Malaysia must also take into account the different languages of the media, a demarcation which has traditionally reflected ethnicity and class. For most of the 20th century, English was the language of the colonial ruling class, while Malay was the language of the majority Malay rural population. The two major Chinese-language dailies, on the other hand, were established earlier the 20th century to cater for the mass immigration of workers from China to the peninsular.

Today, these factors still bear some influence in perceptions of political and economic power. English is widely used in urban areas but this is not the case in the suburbs and beyond, where Malay, Chinese and Indian dialects are still more common. For example, the advertising industry's research reveals that while the biggest-selling news dailies in Malaysia have long been the Malay-language *Berita Harian* and *Utusan Malaysia*, and the Chinese-language *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, advertisers prefer to reach the mostly urban audience that reads English-language publications such as *The Star* and the *New Straits Times* newspapers. Similarly, the magazine publishing boom of the early 1990s was driven by new English-language consumer magazines competing for both affluent urban readers and product advertisers such as watch companies, computer and car manufacturers.

The Malay, English and Chinese-language media each put their own spin on thorny political issues. In late 1999, a list of election demands calling for greater liberalisation was endorsed by a large coalition of ethnic Chinese organisations. Over a two-week period, the Malay-language newspapers ran daily commentaries and reports attacking the integrity and loyalties of these organisations and amplified the Prime Minister's dismissal of these demands. The tone of the reports was antagonistic, appealing to racial sentiment and traditional resentments against the Chinese community; longer articles even revived long-retired political foes in order to condemn the organisations along racial lines; there was little or no discussion of the contents of the list. The English-language newspapers, however, adopted a more removed position, detailing the list's contents but sceptical of the organisations' motives. The criticisms of the demands were muted, on the one hand reflecting the Prime Minister's displeasure while on the other, still aware of its mostly urban

and discriminating readership. The Chinese-language newspapers generally reported the endorsement of the list's demands by parties in the ruling coalition; there was also discussion and examination of the specific demands for greater liberalisation.

Where to from here?

While a raft of restrictive legislation has played an important role in stunting the growth of a media culture of inquiry and debate, it is clear that the ownership of media organisations has played a critical part in curbing media freedoms. Both these constraints of legislation and ownership are the reasons commonly given by senior Malaysian journalists as to why there is hesitation (and some reluctance) to report on events deemed 'sensitive' by the authorities.

Responding to criticisms in the *New Straits Times*, sociologist and opposition politician Dr Chandra Muzaffar questioned the journalistic integrity of the mainstream media. He asserted that 'the NST has made Dr Mahathir into a sacred icon, beyond reproach and beyond criticism...the interrogation of power is, after all, the essence of democratic accountability. The NST cannot rationalise its subservient attitude to the Prime Minister in the name of press laws and media ownership.' He went on to point out that 'wealth, culture and social stability have conspired to thwart the emergence of such courageous and principled journalists in this country' (Muzaffar 1998). The relatively comfortable wages that allow for car and house ownership, annual bonuses of up to six months' wages and a broader social mobility for Malaysian journalists into the middle-class have indeed helped in obscuring journalism's ideals—the freedom to shop remains more attractive than the freedom to investigate the trading practices of such a shop.

At the 1998 Commonwealth Press Union conference, the editor-in-chief of the NSTP group, Abdul Kadir Jasin, said 'although the three (main) media organisations are independent and owned by publicly listed companies, they want to continue supporting the government. The government may not be too perfect, but it is not too bad either' (1998). His colleague at the best-selling English-language newspaper, *The Star*, shared this attitude and elaborated further at the same conference. According to news editor Wong Chun Wai, 'the responsibilities of the

local media are to help the country and its people develop by providing positive information which would keep the peace' (1998).

Throughout the 1980s, *The Star* captured a growing middle-class readership interested in and sympathetic to its relatively balanced news policy and populist verve. Its masthead continues to declare itself 'The People's Paper'. But by October 1987, this apparent popularity with the people went horribly wrong when it lost its printing and publishing licence along with its Sunday edition. *The Star* and two other newspapers were all casualties of Operation Lallang. *The Star's* attempts at journalistic balance, especially in its coverage of the bitter political contest between Dr Mahathir and a former finance minister Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, was a clear lesson to its owners and the staff.

Virtually overnight, a tentative culture of inquiry was cowed and eventually disappeared, as a generation of journalists left the trade taking their skills and experience with them. And not all of them were from banned newspapers; there were also refugees from other dailies like the *New Straits Times*. Rehman Rashid, embarked on his 'years of (self-imposed) exile' after the sacking of the Lord President (Chief Justice) and two other Supreme Court judges in 1988. 'Until then, I had doggedly kept believing we might recover from the rapid-fire concatenation of calamities that had assailed us...I could see causes and effects, and I could still rationalise what had happened...But when the Supreme Court got its head blown off, I gave up' (Rashid 1993:241).

The 'quiet resignations' of the two editors of Malaysia's best-selling newspapers, the Malay-language *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian*, in July 1998 suggest the media's fundamental problems of control and ownership have not gone away in the decade or so since Operation Lallang. It was the first media salvo in the political war between the Prime Minister's forces and Anwar Ibrahim's. Media commentator and academic Zaharom Nain was forthright at the time.

Calling these resignations 'a crackdown on the media' does appear a trifle overstated, primarily because there wasn't anything much to crack down on in the first place. Such assertions merely reinforce the myth of an independent Malaysian media. Malaysian media's role in shaping public opinion cannot be understated: most rural Malays glean information about what's happening in the country from state-

controlled television and radio stations—and from *Utusan* and *Berita Harian*' (Nain 1998).

Another commentator, Dr Mustafa Anuar of social reform group Aliran, added 'most of the local media are ready to 'co-operate' with the leadership under the concept of 'development journalism' so much so they practise self-censorship (quoted in Netto 1999).

The constraints of legislation and ownership have nurtured a media culture that reflects the wider society, where some freedoms and democratic rights have been traded away for promises of economic prosperity. There has been a process of socialising Malaysians to 'accept and even appreciate authoritarian rule, norms and institutions' (Gomez and Jomo 1997). Inadvertently confirming this view, the editor-in-chief of the state-owned Bernama news agency Syed Jamil Jaafar defended the mainstream media's self-censorship while acknowledging the culture: 'You can't blame the press for that. Because of the atmosphere you operate in, you tend to play safe. You follow the banker's maxim—err on the side of prudence' (*The Sun*, 1 July 1999).

But the traditional media's audience seems tired of playing safe, especially since September 1998. The political crisis has spawned new and unlicensed phenomena such as the Internet, full of Malaysian opinion, rumours and sometimes inaccurate news savaging Dr Mahathir and his government. There is also the cottage industry outside the realm of licensing, in the sales of cassettes, videos and video CDs featuring reports not found on domestic television—for example, at demonstrations and elsewhere, the consumer camcorder has played a popular role in documenting police brutality for audiences outside Kuala Lumpur.

The government's vociferous attacks on the Internet's news credibility and bias have not slowed the numbers of Malaysians surfing the web for alternative news and points of view; one result, suggests a journalist whose newspaper is affected, was a marked decline in mainstream newspapers' readerships in 1999. Another is the proliferation of cybercafes with cheap access (RM2 or US0.50 cents an hour) in even small towns across the country. Articles from such websites are also reprinted and copied for further distribution.

The *Bernama* chief Syed Jamil Jaafar has argued that media freedom will come about once the government realises the inevitable change

Losing control

brought on by technology and the Internet: 'In other words, governments can no longer suppress information... they might as well open up... unless the mainstream media open up, the public would rather turn to the alternative media,' he told *The Sun*. There are now three Internet service providers, more than half a million subscribers and many more thousands with free Internet access through work and education centres.

The foreign media have been similarly difficult for the government to control. While its reach is generally not as deep nor wide when compared with Malay or Chinese-language news reports, it has a substantial audience in urban areas. The regional news weeklies *Asiaweek* and the *Far Eastern Economic Review* have substantial markets in Malaysia. Malaysia has also attracted newspapers such as the *Asian Wall Street Journal* and the *International Herald Tribune*, both of which print there. It is fair to say that foreign media such as CNN, CNBC, the BBC's World Service radio as well as print remain, despite the government efforts, a small though influential part of the Malaysian media diet.

Finance Minister Daim Zainuddin claims the foreign media has played a large role in 'strenuously painting a negative picture of the Malaysian economy, politics and local leaders'. His solution to the 'negative' reporting was to establish a public relations team that has been more successful than previous attempts at putting out 'positive spins' to counter 'misinformation' on Malaysia (Reuters, 26 August 1999).

The political crisis has witnessed the booming sales of opposition newspapers such as *Harakah*, a members-only publication produced by the Islamist party PAS. The biweekly's sales have swelled from 40,000 a week to a peak of 200,000, a circulation much larger than that of most of the mainstream newspapers. It has done so illegally, as its publishing licence only allows for sales to its members yet there is evidence that suggests many non-Muslim and non-members are buying *Harakah* for its version of political events. While PAS has a substantial membership and controls the state government of Kelantan, smaller non-party organisations like *Aliran* have a much harder time with the authorities. Facing serious 'unofficial' hurdles—printers do not want to print the magazine after being pressured not to do so. As printers also require licensing under the PPPA, this hurdle of *Aliran Monthly* is another example of covert censorship; the organisation has again called for the repeal of the PPPA as the law

discourages honest journalism and 'retards the growth of a free and just society'.

In Malaysia, media freedom and sense of responsibilities have been historically determined by the wider society's tolerance of anti-democratic measures by the state. If the democratic process involves the scrutiny of the state, ensuring accountability of an elected government, the defence of an independent judiciary and the free flow of information, then the Malaysian media has often failed in serving this process. It can only be hoped that the present political crisis will give way to a more democratic and a larger civil society, so that the media can assume a critical role in dialogue and debate.

Media websites

Berita Harian, www.jaring.my/bharian/

Daily Express, www.infosabah.com.my/daily_express/

North Korea

A black chapter

Krzysztof Darewicz

As the sun rises over the world's most totalitarian and isolated state, intelligence officers begin the deliveries of *Bulletin No 1*. This top-secret document, a compendium of the most important local and international events of the day, would probably be called a newspaper anywhere else. But, true to the outdated teachings of Stalin, the hermit regime of North Korea continues to believe that as information is power, control of information equals total political control. Thus, the real news of the nation and the world is restricted to a limited number of top political leaders—all members of the Politburo and some members of the Central Committee. At the other end of the scale the masses are treated to total ignorance, the few drips of information coming their way through the formidable propaganda machine.

So few people even have access to the approved Communist Party newspapers that selected articles are read aloud and broadcast by a series of loud speakers. Foreign information is so highly suspect, that those tiny number of North Koreans who are permitted to venture outside their impoverished borders are subject to rigorous searches, with intelligence officers instructed to confiscate even old newspaper wrappings from neighbouring China. The penalty for North Koreans caught listening to hostile foreign propaganda such as the BBC World Service is several years of slavery in a labour camp for the entire family. In the past few years, North Korea's crippling economic crisis and famine has meant a great reduction in the volume of propaganda material disseminated locally and overseas, a welcome relief for the postmen of Nepal who used to go on strike over the tons of books sent by friendly North Korea to their fellow

Communists in the Himalayas. But, poverty has nothing to relieve the people of North Korea of the burden of the state's message: for all the people of North Korea know Dear Comrade Kim Jong Il just might be demonstrating North Korea's fame all over an unknown world, which lies outside their hermetically sealed nation.

Juche *democracy*

North Korea, which is officially named the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, bases its political system on the 'guiding idea of *Juche*'. In theory, *Juche* means 'self-reliance'. In practice, it means the total monopoly on power of the ruling Communist Party (the Korea Workers' Party), and the Party's total control over every aspect of life including the maintenance of the nation's isolation from the rest of the world. The mass media plays a crucial role in a system in which the Communist leaders deem themselves the ultimate authority in deciding what the masses are both allowed to know and to think. The mass media, according to the North Korean constitution, 'should serve the aims of strengthening the dictatorship of the proletariat, bolstering the political unity and ideological conformity of the people and rallying them solidly behind the Party and the Great Leader in the cause of revolution' (1975, Article 53, Chapter 4). As the late Great Leader Kim Il Sung observed 'Printed materials are the most important means of linking the Party and the masses—a powerful weapon for organizing the working masses in the crucial tasks of political, economic and cultural construction the Party has proposed'.

Obviously, there is no form of democracy or freedom of the press in North Korea. The leadership, having watched the collapse of the Soviet Union and many of the Communist regimes in former Soviet satellite states, is well aware of the media's potential to hasten the fall of totalitarian regimes. Thus, North Korean leaders attach such enormous importance to the 'guidance' of the media that they directly supervise the production of the daily newspapers. The official book, *The Great Teacher of Journalists*, explains that

The Great Leader, the Dear Comrade Kim Jong Il is always among journalists and teaches them (about) every detailed problem arising in their activities, and kindly leads them to write and compile excellent

articles that arouse the sentiment of the masses in keeping with the Party's intentions. He also brings up journalists to be the Party's reliable writers under his wings and takes meticulous care of every facet of their life and activity... The love and generosity he confers upon the journalists is indeed boundless (first published in Pyongyang in 1983).

Most North Korean citizens have no concept of a mass media free of government control. In the five years I worked as a correspondent of Polish Press Agency in North Korea, I was frequently asked—even by high ranking officials—who gave me my instructions on what I should write. When I answered, 'No one gives me instructions, I am free to write whatever I consider correct, I was met with disbelief and suspicion 'No guidance at all? Impossible!' At least I was, personally, able to understand their suspicions because my journalistic career had begun in Poland under Communist rule, when the press was still subject to strict controls.

A Stalinist model

To understand the role of the media in North Korea it is useful to examine the model of information control devised by Stalin, and copied in some form by most, if not all, of the former Soviet Union's satellite states. The system is based on a concept of two circles of information flow—the inner (internal) and the outer (external) circles. Within the inner circle, information is provided solely to the ruling élite—the party, government and army leaders. This task belongs to the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), which is a government press agency equal to the Ministry of Information and subordinated directly to the Propaganda and Agitation Department of the Party Central Committee. Every day KCNA publishes a series of 'special bulletins'.

Bulletin No. 1 is distributed every morning among a limited number of top leaders. This strictly top-secret bulletin updates its readers on most important events in the country and the world. News is gathered by a network of local and foreign correspondents of KCNA as well as from foreign press agencies, collected by KCNA at their headquarters in Pyongyang. The bulletin includes also translations of every possible wire or press report published abroad about North Korea. Another strictly top secret bulletin provides information on developments in South Korea

gathered by the KCNA who monitor the South Korean media. Less detailed bulletins are distributed among lower ranking officials, while local party cadres receive a bulletin with only selected international news, abridged translations of articles concerning North Korea and brief updates on South Korea. There are also special version of bulletins for the army, the police, worker's unions and other institutions in which news is selectively highlighted or deleted. The bulletins serve not only as a source of reliable information to party cadres but access to them is one of society's most important indicators of a citizen's position within the political élite. Ironically, the KCNA bulletins are not usually censored. Thus, information is genuinely equated with power.

Newspapers, TV and radio form an outer circle of information. Among newspapers published in North Korea, the major national daily is *Rodong Sinmun*, the organ of the Korea Workers' Party. The *Minju Choson*, the organ of the North Korea government, as well as some other organs of the army, workers and youth unions or professional associations are also circulated nationally. There are also several local newspapers, including the *Pyongyang Daily*, the *Hamnam Daily* and the *Pyongnam Daily*. North Koreans have access to two national TV channels and handful of local TV stations in the bigger cities such like Pyongyang and Kaesong. Radio is much the same, with Korean Central Radio and Radio Pyongyang broadcasts covering the whole country, while provinces, cities and counties also have their own local radio programs. They are all owned by the State and are directly subordinate to central or local propaganda departments of the party.

The outer circle serves as a channel of propaganda and agitation for party policies. Whatever national or international news it provides is simply reprinted from KCNA wire services for the outer circle. Some local news is gathered independently, but editorials are provided directly by the propaganda department of the Central of local party committees. National newspapers are not sold on the streets; they are distributed to subscribers only, according to their political or professional affiliations. So, members of the party are allowed to subscribe to *Rodong Sinmun*, administrative staff receives *Minju Choson*, officers of the armed forces read the army newspaper, teachers read *Teachers News* and the railway management reads *Railway News*. Local newspapers are sold in news-

Losing control

stands in big cities. But, the majority of North Koreans—the working class masses—do not have any access to newspapers. Excerpts from newspapers are read to them through loudspeakers in factories and villages or written out on blackboards. TV and radio broadcasts, due to the very limited number of receivers, cover only a small portion of the North Korean population. Due to the acute shortage of electricity of the past few years, the electronic media's reach has virtually collapsed.

Between the inner and the outer circles of information stands censorship. KCNA obviously produces different wire services for the inner and outer circles. Outer circle information is prepared in line with strict instructions from the Propaganda and Agitation Department of the Central Committee. But even then, the KCNA outer circle service is scrutinised again by censors before it reaches its subscribers' offices. News prepared locally is also subject to censorship, with the convenience of the 'special censorship cell' in every editorial office. 'The less the masses know the better'—this golden rule of the North Korean regime is confirmed by the way in which outer circle information is selected. Only national newspapers distributed among approved subscribers in Pyongyang and the few other bigger cities contain a column with international news. The same newspapers that go into the provinces have already been stripped of this column. And it is not difficult to guess that local newspapers carry no news from abroad except about North Korea's glorious diplomatic triumphs.

No foreign contagion

The regime takes no risks when it comes to broadcasting, despite the pitiful state of the television industry. On the one hand, foreign broadcasts are jammed, and on the other, those who own TV and radio sets must have them adjusted so they can receive only domestic broadcasts. Even foreigners coming into North Korea, must hand over their TVs or radios for the authorities 'to fix'. Car radios are especially suspect as foreigners' cars are regarded as one of the most dangerous locations for potential, unsupervised meetings between foreigners and North Koreans. North Korean drivers of foreign diplomats or businessmen are considered at risk of being exposed to the danger of listening to foreign hostile propaganda.

There are, of course, no foreign newspapers or TV and radio programs legally available to ordinary North Koreans. Law strictly prohibits reading such newspapers or watching or listening to foreign stations. Access is limited to the ruling élite only. Still, some North Koreans try to listen in secret to South Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Russian or US radio stations. But, the number of listeners is tiny because of the risk of being denounced by neighbours, and the harsh punishments meted out to those caught.

North Koreans are not allowed to lock their doors at night so security agents may check their activities at any time. Routine punishment in cases of 'illegally listening to hostile foreign propaganda' is several years of slavery in a labour camp for the whole family. Those North Koreans who travel abroad are subject to thorough searches on their return. Border guards or Customs officials confiscate any foreign-printed material as well as any tapes or photos. I remember during one of my train trips from China to Pyongyang, I was sitting in a compartment with a representative of a North Korean foreign trade company. He was returning from China where he was inquiring about models of Chinese tractors his company was intending to import. At the North Korean border station of Sinuiju, Customs officers very carefully combed through his luggage. They confiscated all Chinese newspapers in which he had wrapped boxes of cigarettes and bottles of vodka. Then, they confiscated all the documentation about the Chinese tractors, claiming the authorities concerned must examine them first.

The information barrier is just as hermetically sealed in the reverse direction. North Korea borders are closed to foreigners, except for a tiny number of escorted tourists. The regime is particularly wary of foreign journalists. Of those western journalists who have managed to get into North Korea, many have posed as tourists. Only a tiny group of foreign correspondents is accredited in Pyongyang—journalists representing the Xinhua news agency and the Renmin Ribao daily from 'friendly' China plus Russian journalists representing ITAR-TASS agency. They base their reports on news gathered from the outer KCNA service, whispers from within the diplomatic community and from observing life on the streets.

Because everything in North Korea is a secret, including statistics and phone numbers, there is not much news to gather from North Korean officials. It is possible to wait weeks, even months, for interviews with officials, only to hear them parroting the official line. Foreign

Losing control

correspondents' contacts with the regime are even more limited than those of diplomats and foreign businessmen residing in Pyongyang, because North Korea considers every foreign journalist a spy. The logic behind this assumption is a simple extension of the fact that every North Korean correspondent abroad is closely cooperating with the intelligence service. As in Stalinist Soviet Union or Maoist China, North Koreans are not allowed to talk with foreigners without authorisation. Interaction between foreigners and ordinary citizens is virtually non-existent.

Before the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe in 1989, there was a larger foreign correspondents community in Pyongyang, with journalists from the then 'friendly' countries such as Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria or Cuba. After 1989 only the Polish correspondent to North Korea was allowed to stay thanks to the agreement on the exchange of correspondents signed between KCNA and Polish Press Agency. I happened to be that correspondent and managed to report from North Korea for almost five years. I tried to portray the terrifying reality of poverty and totalitarianism and, finally, was expelled for this. The official pretext was an article I had published in *Far Eastern Economic Review*, warning of deteriorating North Korean–Chinese relations following the death of the Great Leader Kim Il Sung. Later, I was told by a reliable North Korean source that the article reached the son of Kim Il Sung, then the Dear Leader Kim Jong Il, who personally ordered my expulsion in 1995. I was arrested at the Pyongyang airport, proclaimed *persona non grata* and expelled back to China. In the official statement sent to the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the North Korean government accused me of 'insulting the DPRK leaders and whole nation' as well as 'spying'. By the mid 1990s, the North Korean authorities had expelled all correspondents of Russian newspapers but one on similar accusations—ITAR-TASS was allowed to maintain its office in Pyongyang.

The workers' paradise

The North Korean regime goes to a great deal of, largely wasted, effort to propagate the image of a 'workers' paradise', and promote its leaders abroad. An English-language weekly *Pyongyang Times* and some monthly pictorial magazines in English, Russian, French, German, Spanish, Arabic,

Korean, Japanese, Chinese and Esperanto are distributed abroad by North Korean diplomatic missions or sent to readers directly from Pyongyang. Radio Pyongyang also has broadcasts in these languages. The KCNA has wire news services in English, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, French and Spanish. Most recently, KCNA opened its website on the Internet in English, Japanese and Korean (www.kcna.co.jp). It is operated in cooperation with the Korea News Service, run by North Korean residents in Tokyo. The following is a typical example of 'news' from KCNA to foreign readers.

Pyongyang, September 13 (KCNA)—A delegation of the Khmer Democratic Party paid a congratulatory visit to the DPRK embassy in Cambodia on September 7 on the occasion of the 51st anniversary of the founding of the DPRK. The delegation laid a floral basket in the name of the party before the portraits of the President Kim Il Sung and General Secretary Kim Jong Il and paid respects to them. The head of the delegation said that the DPRK, founded by the great Kim Il Sung and led by the respected Kim Jong Il, is now demonstrating its fame all over the world, decisively smashing the isolation and suffocating moves of the international reactionaries. He said: 'We sincerely hope that the Korean people will achieve brilliant success in the struggle for building a powerful nation under the wise leadership of Marshal Kim Jong Il, true to the behest of Generalissimo Kim Il Sung' (1999).

After the war in the Persian Gulf, North Korean leaders realised that CNN, which promotes itself as 'apolitical' and enabled the Iraqi regime to present its position to the world, may also be of use for their propaganda purposes. They have invited CNN crews to Pyongyang, from time to time, for coverage of special events. However, CNN's hopes for establishing a permanent bureau in Pyongyang have not been realised. The crisis has also caused a major reduction in volume of propaganda magazines and books printed in Pyongyang in foreign languages for dissemination abroad, praising Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il's brilliant achievements. But, the message remains the same.

The conclusion cannot be optimistic. Hopes for change following the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, market economic reforms and the opening up of China and Vietnam have not materialised. The death of

Losing control

Kim Il Sung may have further sapped the regime's confidence. The besieged regime of Kim Jong Il seems to be clinging on ever more tightly to totalitarianism and isolation, its ideology almost comical in the late 1990s were it not for the consequent suffering of the people. The North Korean media plays only a minor role in providing information to its society, and remains a blind tool of propaganda and manipulation in the hands of the regime. With this reality, the paragraph of North Korean constitution guaranteeing freedom of speech, press, association and political activities is as meaningless as the 'news' North Korea produces.

Philippines

Free as a mocking bird

Sheila S. Coronel

For three days and nights millions of Filipino civilians, led by Catholic nuns armed only with flowers and prayers, faced down the soldiers of their dictator on the streets of Manila as the world watched. As a news story, the knifed-edge stand-off of 1986 was perhaps the most spectacular political tale of the decade. Here was a poor, developing nation cowed by years of authoritarian rule challenging the guns and tanks of the armed forces, women and children packing the crowds with the men as helicopter gunships swirled menacingly overhead. The leader of the opposition was merely a housewife, the widow of the nation's political martyr, Benigno 'Ninoy' Aquino, who had been assassinated after challenging then President Ferdinand Marcos three years earlier. Corazon Aquino, or 'Cory' as she was known, was a reluctant politician, a mother of five who preferred her home life, but had been thrust into the limelight by fate. As the drama played out, culminating in the extraordinary and bloodless defections of key elements of the armed forces to the side of the masses of demonstrators, the international and local media covered developments hour by hour.

But, importantly, the fall of President Marcos in February 1986 was not just a sensational story. The local Filipino media, itself, played a key role in the political confrontation and—it could be argued—tipped the scales in favour of the pro-democracy movement. Like many political confrontations which have followed, such as the middle-class uprising in Thailand in 1992, and the fall of President Soeharto in Indonesia in 1998, the media did not just cover the events, but contributed to the outcome. Two weeks before the final showdown, guerrilla editions of local

Losing control

newspapers exposed the massive cheating which Marcos had engineered in national elections, provoking widespread anger and stoking discontent. Since the assassination of 'Ninoy' Aquino in 1983, underground newspapers, and even xerox copies of articles from foreign newspapers, had challenged the views of the censored press, raising awareness that the dictatorship was not indestructible. Then, as the three-day stand-off unfolded Marcos's troops destroyed the transmitter of the Catholic radio station, *Veritas*, which had been used to rally the people. But, *Veritas* stayed on the air—broadcasting from a string of safehouses across the city—carrying calls from Cory Aquino and Catholic Cardinal Jaime Sin to mass on the streets. On 25 February 1986 Marcos and his family fled the country on board a US helicopter. After 14 years of dictatorship, the country—and the press—was finally free.

The role played by the anti-Marcos press, and to a lesser extent, independent radio stations, in raising awareness about the excesses of the Marcos government and in encouraging citizens to take part in protests, guaranteed that the media would play a central role in the post-dictatorship era. In the last years of the Marcos regime, opposition newspapers reported on anti-government demonstrations, showing Filipinos the extent of the protest movement and emboldening them to organise and participate in mass actions. The coverage of the massive cheating conducted by the government in the February 1986 elections that pitted Marcos against Corazon Aquino stoked the public's ire.

Nowadays, the Philippines boasts a rowdy and vibrant press which thinks of itself as the freest in Asia. With the fall of the Marcos regime, a 14-year-old system of media controls collapsed overnight. Into that vacuum rushed dozens of new newspapers, and radio and television stations, as old Marcos-controlled media outlets folded, or were taken over by the new government. A pluralistic, but somewhat anarchistic, media industry came into being. Today, Filipino journalists are noisy and powerful, their freedoms guaranteed by the constitution and the law. Media exposés make politicians quake, because negative coverage can mean the death of a political career. The media is among the most important influences on voting behaviour, and news anchors and talk-show hosts have become so popular that they have themselves been elected to national office.

Filipino journalists guard their freedoms fiercely and are strong believers in the adversarial role of the press as watchdog and the Fourth Estate. Thus, the media play an important role in democratic governance by forcing officials and institutions to account for their actions. The downside is that such an adversarial stance has meant sober debate is sometimes difficult in an atmosphere of media hectoring. Moreover, the media has been accused of irresponsible and sloppy reporting and of using their freedoms to exploit the public's taste for the sensational. Intense competition in a crowded market, the lack of trained journalists, 'checkbook' journalism, and the business interests of media owners are among the problems that stunt the professional development of Philippine journalism.

In the late 1990s, those who wish to silence or control the Philippine press do so through market mechanisms, rather than through the strong arm of state control. The more sophisticated methods—including the pulling of advertisements, bribery, and the linking of business success in other spheres to the editorial line of the owner's newspaper—may serve as useful examples of alternative threats to press freedom in the region's new democracies. President Joseph Estrada, for example, has lobbied advertisers and business-owners to put pressure on critical newspapers. For this, he has been widely attacked for muzzling the press, but these actions simply reflect his own understanding that the use of state power directly to control the press in the Philippines is not publicly acceptable.

Despite its excesses, there is strong support for a free press among Filipinos. Any attempt to muzzle the press is resolutely opposed. In part, this is because of fresh memories of the Marcos rule, when the press was the mouthpiece of dictatorship. But it also the legacy of a century-long tradition of a fighting, anti-colonial press.

From anti-colonialism to market forces

Philippine journalism's first influences were from the 19th century European press, when newspapers were the carriers of political ideas and were at the centre of political activity in the emerging nation states. In the 1880s and 1890s, clandestinely distributed newspapers helped raise awareness of the evils of nearly 400 years of Spanish colonial rule,

Losing control

germinating the idea of an independent Philippine nation (Corpuz 1989 and Schumacher 1997).

Over the next century, newspapers proliferated during periods of war, revolution and other political upheavals. When the political situation stabilised, many of the papers died. A longer period of relative inactivity followed until the next upheaval—and the next newspaper boom—took place. Successive waves of colonisers—the Spaniards, Americans and Japanese during World War II—used the press to promote the colonial agenda and impose stringent censorship. But a series of anti-colonial movements also employed clandestine newspapers in their fight against the colonial masters. To this day, the *samizdat* tradition remains strong, with anti-government groups continuing to publish clandestine newsletters.

One lasting and important legacy of 50 years of US colonialism is that of privately owned media outlets competing in a free market. As such there is no tradition of party or state-owned presses in the Philippines. After independence in 1945 and the subsequent establishment of a liberal democratic government, a free press patterned after that of the United States became a powerful weapon wielded by competing political, business and ideological groups to advance their interests and causes (Ofreneo 1986). This changed during the Marcos dictatorship from 1972–86, when the media system was controlled by the dictator's family and friends.

The commercial orientation of the Philippine media is most evident in broadcasting. Radio and television have a far shorter history than newspapers, with the first commercial radio station opening in 1930 and the first TV broadcast airing in 1953 (Feliciano and Icban 1967). Unlike other countries in the region, where radio and TV from the beginning were controlled by the state and used for propaganda, information and educational purposes, the broadcast media in the Philippines have always been commercially driven and profit oriented.

This is both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, the system has meant freedom from state control, except under Marcos. On the other hand, it has also meant that broadcast media content is oriented toward quick profits and is therefore largely fluff and entertainment. Programming is often frivolous and lightweight, with media personalities

overshadowing media content. The concept of public broadcasting is alien to the Philippines, and the potential of radio and TV for education and inspiring critical thought remains largely untapped.

The Philippine media operate under a lax system of state supervision. The post-Marcos constitution, influenced by that of the United States guarantees free expression. Article IV, Section 4 of the Bill of Rights says 'No law shall be passed abridging the freedom of speech, of expression, or of the press'. No government body oversees or supervises the press. No licence or permit is required to publish a newspaper or magazine. There is no prior review or censorship, and in theory, the press can report on what it wants, subject only to restrictions set by libel, slander and sedition laws.

Broadcasting, however, is subject to greater regulation. As in the pre-Marcos era, the power to give broadcasting franchises was turned over to Congress. The industry itself was placed under the supervision of the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC). A self-regulatory body for broadcasting set up by Marcos, known by its Tagalog acronym KPB, still exists and continues to set ethical and other standards for both radio and television. The Movie and Television Review Classification Board (MTRCB) has the power to classify, restrict or ban films and TV for public viewing. But, the MTRCB standards are more concerned with decency, violence and contemporary Filipino values than with politics (Stuart 1996).

There is considerable tolerance for critical foreign reporting in the Philippines. Although the constitution bans foreign ownership of the media, foreign newspapers and magazines circulate freely in the country. Only during the Marcos period were foreign publications banned. The wide use of English means that the Philippines is a significant market for English-language foreign publications. *TIME*, *Newsweek*, *Asiaweek* and the *Far Eastern Economic Review* enjoy brisk sales, although readership is limited to the Manila élite. Foreign TV programs are aired via cable and satellite without prior review or censorship. And, for foreign journalists, the Philippines is probably the easiest country in Asia in which to work. No special licences or permits are required apart from a work permit, and immigration regulations are rarely manipulated to harass journalists. So free are the regulations that many foreign journalists simply enter the country as tourists, then apply for an extension to stay.

Questionable quality

New freedoms unleashed by the 1986 uprising gave the media wide latitude to report on events and issues. Media exposés have caused the resignation of officials, raised public awareness about such issues as environmental destruction and the rights of women, and prompted investigations of official abuses and wrongdoing. Investigative reports have a wide audience, and are given prominence on both television and newspapers.

Unfortunately, the media have also used their freedoms to outdo rivals in the race to peddle newspapers and television programs. Intense competition has distorted the conduct of journalism, the content of newspapers, and the programming of radio and television. In the crowded and expanding media market that emerged after the fall of Marcos, the most aggressive media organisations emerged on top (de Jesus 1999). The model, particularly for television, was the United States, a media culture much more familiar in the Philippines than other parts of East Asia because of the American colonial legacy. The expansion of free-wheeling, muckraking type of news organisations was put on hold by Marcos, but they re-emerged once the controls were loosened.

Today, 'TV Patrol', the highest-rating television news program, serves a daily diet of skimpily clad starlets and bloodied corpses. It runs scandalous accounts of the private lives of celebrities and sensationalises crime. As it gobbled up the audience share, the program's rivals were forced to compete by offering more of the same. Competition has resulted in homogeneous reporting and programming because newspapers and broadcast stations produce news reports that are guaranteed to sell.

Another factor hobbling the development of Philippine media is the level of skills. There is a shortage of trained journalists and editors who can raise the quality of reporting and analysis. After the media explosion in 1986, there were not enough experienced journalists to staff newspapers and broadcast agencies. With insufficient on-the-job training, even young journalists are opting out of the profession in search of better-paying careers, contributing to a fast—and damaging—staff turnover at most media outlets.

The petty corruption of journalists by politicians or businessmen who are seeking stories twisted in their favour is almost routine. At press

conferences swarms of young, poorly paid journalists are frequently handed envelopes of 'taxi' or 'lunch' money for attending. 'Envelopmental journalism', refers to these widely expected envelopes of cash. A 1998 survey of 100 beat reporters conducted by the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism showed that 71 had been offered money by their sources. Of these, 33 per cent admitted they took the money, with 22 per cent keeping the cash, and 11 per cent turning it over to their editors (Chua and Datinguino 1998). The generally low pay of journalists in comparison to other professions is partly responsible for this situation. But other factors, including the reluctance or inability of editors and publishers to enforce ethical standards and the egregious practices of public relations people should also be cited.

Another problem is media ownership, which is concentrated in the hands of wealthy business houses that sometimes use their newspapers to defend and advance their business and political interests. The major dailies and broadcast networks are owned by the giants of Philippine business who operate a wide range of interlocking corporate concerns, including banking, manufacturing, telecommunications and real estate. While most owners rarely intervene in day-to-day editorial decision-making, they can nevertheless place clear constraints on the freedom of journalists.

Newspapers have been used by their owners to promote their businesses, denigrate rivals and, on occasion, contest the results of public biddings in which the press proprietors have been losers. At the very least, editors tone down or censor negative reporting on their owners' businesses. Many newspaper proprietors have also tended to take politically safe positions, discouraging reports or exposés that will incur the ire of government. Because business in the Philippines is subject to often whimsical government regulation, newspaper owners who run business empires are vulnerable to government pressure.

In October 1995, the *Manila Bulletin* ran daily front-page stories criticising the awarding of the purchase of the Manila Hotel to a Malaysian consortium, saying that the historic hotel was part of the 'national patrimony' and should therefore be sold to a Filipino company. The fact was that the *Bulletin* publisher Emilio Yap, whose other business interests till then lay mainly in banking and shipping, had lost the bid and used his paper to pressure then President Fidel Ramos to reconsider the sale. The

President did intervene, by asking his aides to work out a compromise with the Malaysians. In the meantime, Yap filed a case in the Supreme Court, using the national patrimony argument, and again, the *Bulletin*, to argue his point. The Supreme Court, in a controversial decision, decided in Yap's favour.

Likewise, in August and September 1996, the *Manila Standard* ran editorials and news stories questioning the awarding of the contract for port services at the Subic Freeport to the Hong Kong company Hutchison Ports Philippines Inc. One of the *Standard's* owners, the Razon family, who runs the International Container Terminal Services Inc. (ICTSI), had lost the bid. The paper campaigned for a reconsideration of the bid, and other papers followed with news reports of the controversy. In the end, as a result largely of the media brouhaha led by the *Standard*, President Ramos ordered the bidding rescinded (Coronel 1997).

These two cases demonstrate how press proprietors have abused their powers, setting aside the canons of good journalism by using the opinion and news pages of their papers to campaign for their business interests. In both instances, media owners have put the profitability of their business enterprises over the duty of their newspaper to report without fear or favour.

It would be simplistic, however, to say that newspapers are merely mouthpieces of their owners. The reality is more complex. Proprietors intervene in editorial matters to varying degrees and in different ways. Some owners meddle only when their business interests are directly at stake but otherwise leave their editors to decide on what the paper can print—the situation at the *Standard*. At the *Manila Bulletin*, on the other hand, the owner takes the place of the editors as gatekeeper of news and information, deciding what readers will find in their morning paper.

There are more liberal-minded owners who give their editors a wider freedom to choose. This is the case with the hard-hitting *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, whose owners realise that the paper's strength lies in its ability to report critically, even stridently, on current affairs. Some owners may refuse to intercede on behalf of their business interests, but will intervene only when they are under severe pressure from powerful officials to slow down on critical reporting. For example, the Gokongwei family, owner of the *Manila Times*, allowed its editors to print negative reports about senior government officials. The Gokongweis run a vast business empire that

includes shopping malls, manufacturing, telecommunications and banking. In July 1999, the family was forced to sell the paper (its editors claim) to appease President Joseph Estrada, who was offended by articles alleging corruption and anomalies in his administration. The paper was sold to a pro-government business group and it is widely believed that the Gokongweis sold it for fear of the government squeezing their other businesses (Singh and Lopez 1999).

An explosion of diversity

The media explosion that followed the fall of Marcos was largely a response to the public's hunger for news. There are currently ten English and two Tagalog broadsheets published in Manila and circulated throughout the country, compared to three broadsheets during the Marcos era. In addition, there are 17 Manila-based tabloids. Five Chinese-language daily newspapers serve the country's small but influential ethnic Chinese business community. In 1998, some 408 newspapers, mostly weeklies, were distributed in the provinces (Philippine Information Agency 1998).

The biggest and most influential newspaper is the Manila-based, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, which began as an opposition newspaper in 1985 and emerged as a market leader combining daring reporting with savvy marketing. The *Inquirer*, with its adversarial, reporting and strident tone has a loyal following built from its days as an anti-Marcos paper. It has an audited circulation of 240,000 on weekdays and 260,000 on Sundays.

The second biggest paper is the *Manila Bulletin*, which was founded in 1900 and is the oldest existing newspaper. The *Bulletin* is conservative—the *Inquirer's* complete opposite, it avoids controversy and is inclined to print headlines like, 'Schools Open Today.' *The Philippine Star*, which ranks third, adopted a sober reporting tone since its founding in 1986 but has a stable of star columnists who dish out sizzling political gossip and spicy commentary. Filipino readers love opinion—the more strident, the better. Columnists, rather than editors or reporters, are the crowd-drawers of newspapers.

All but two of the nationally circulated broadsheets are published in English, the language of the educated classes, from which newspaper readership is mainly drawn. Many of the provincial newspapers are in English as well. The biggest chain of community newspapers is run by

Losing control

the Sun Star Publications Network based in Cebu, the second largest city after Manila, and owned by the Garcia family, a prominent business and political clan in the Visayas (Chua 1996). *The Sun Star* has 14 papers throughout the country plus one based in Manila and launched in 1999.

Except for one government-run newspaper chain, all newspapers are privately owned. In the 1980s, journalists and entrepreneurs set up new papers to cater for the demand for news and information. Many of these papers eventually folded or were bought by prominent businesspeople. Within a few years, the owners of the nationally circulated newspapers were mainly businesspeople with a wide range of interests in other sectors of the economy. The exception is *BusinessWorld*, a respected business newspaper that is 70 per cent owned by its staff. Only four of the dozen broadsheets are profitable, the rest are subsidised by their owners, who finance loss-making newspapers for the prestige and influence they bring, giving credibility to the oft-repeated observation that Philippine newspapers are rich people's toys.

Even though there are close to 30 national newspapers, their combined print run is small and has remained stagnant over the years. It is difficult to estimate exactly what total circulation figures are, as newspapers, with the exception of the *Inquirer*, refuse to be audited. The informal consensus in the newspaper industry, however, is that the total circulation of the Manila-based broadsheets and tabloids is about 1.5 million. This is small, even allowing for a pass-on readership of 10 persons per newspaper copy, given that the Philippine population breached the 70 million mark in 1998.

In the last decade, while the real growth in terms of audience reach has been in radio and television, newspapers remain important in setting the agenda. The policy-making élite responds to newspapers rather than

Newspaper readership in metro Manila (per cent)

Broadsheets	21.9
Tabloids	54.4
Business papers	1.5
Foreign newspapers	0.3

Source: 1996 Media Index.

the broadcast media. Moreover, radio and TV take their cue from the broadsheets for reporting on news and public affairs.

Much more than print, the broadcast media experienced dramatic growth since the fall of Marcos. In 1996, the national organisation of broadcasters, the Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster sa Pilipinas (KBP), reported 517 radio stations throughout the Philippines, of which 283 were AM stations. The bulk of these are commercial radio stations although the government has retained ownership of 32 AM and one FM station. There are eleven religious stations and five educational stations, most of them FM. AM radio is still the dominant format nationwide, except in Metro Manila where FM radio controls 68 per cent of the listeners (KBP Website and AC Nielsen 1997).

The top radio station is DZRH, owned by the once fabulously wealthy Spanish mestizo Elizalde family. DZRH is 60 years old, and has maintained its leadership by combining witty and hard-hitting commentary with on-the-spot news coverage—in contrast to the business clout of the Elizaldes which has been much diminished. The other top-rating AM stations (DZMM, DZRV and DZBB) offer much the same menu—a brew of news, commentary, pop music, and soap. On FM radio, the main fare is music.

Radio is the medium with the greatest reach, with nearly all households owning a radio set. Radio is mainly broadcast in Tagalog and the other Philippine languages, although English is used by FM music stations. On the whole, radio reporting focuses on breaking news. There is no tradition of documentary or in-depth radio reporting in the Philippines. Radio commentators, much like newspaper columnists, have a wide following. Radio commentary, however, is known more for its piercing decibel level rather than its incisiveness or depth.

In 1986, the government took control of the television stations as part of the drive to ferret out the 'illegal wealth' accumulated by Marcos and his associates. To this day, government-appointed boards still run two of six TV stations (RPN-9 and IBC-13) pending their eventual privatisation. While these boards occasionally interfere to ensure that news reporting toes the government line, the stations have much the same commercially oriented programming as the private networks. The government has also kept PTV-4 as the official government TV station, broadcasting shows in support of government programs and initiatives.

Television and radio ownership (per cent)

Households with radio	
Philippines	84
Metro Manila	93
Households with TV sets	
Philippines	57
Metro Manila	91

Source: Media Pulse 1995.

Meanwhile, Channel 2 was handed back to its former owners, the Lopez family, who returned from exile in the United States after the fall of Marcos. The Lopez firm, ABS-CBN, turned Channel 2 into the most popular station through mass-oriented programming in Tagalog. The Lopezes run a diversified business empire that includes, apart from broadcasting, telecommunications, power, water and infrastructure. They also own radio station DZMM, the second largest in the country. In the Philippines, the owners of TV networks also operate radio stations, but they are banned from owning newspapers.

Major television networks

TV network	Radio affiliate	Owner
ABS-CBN (Channel 2)	DZMM	Lopez family
PTV 4	DZRB	Official government station
ABC-5	DWET (FM)	Tan and Yuchengco families
GMA-7	DZBB	Jimenez family
RPN-9	DWAN	Taken over by gov't after 1986
IBC-13		Taken over by gov't after 1986

In addition to the Manila-based networks which have a national reach, over 150 smaller TV stations operate in the provinces. There are also five UHF channels. Cable television has grown phenomenally in the 1990s, with some 300 cable operators currently operating throughout the Philippines at the end of the decade. The biggest among these is SkyCable, also owned by the Lopez family and accounting for about 60 per cent of some 450,000 cable subscriptions in 1996 (AC Nielsen 1997). The number is expected to double in the next 4 or 5 years, with SkyCable maintaining its lead.

Until quite recently, the television audience was largely middle class and programming consisted mainly of canned US entertainment programs as well as local news and public affairs shows in English. In the 1980s, only a third of all Filipino households owned TV sets. But economic growth in the 1990s spurred the demand for television sets and other consumer goods. In the high-growth years of the 1990s, broadcasting executives estimated that Filipinos purchased some 500,000 new TV sets every year. The consumer boom fuelled an advertising boom that financed the expansion of television networks. In addition, the re-establishment of democracy brought about a keen interest in uncensored TV news and no-holds-barred talk shows. A 1997 survey found that 84 per cent of Filipinos watched television, with the figure rising to 97 per cent in the capital (AC Nielsen 1997).

The television explosion caused major shifts in programming. ABS-CBN was the first to see the trend. From the bottom of the ratings chart in its first broadcast in October 1986, the station made it to the top in only 6 months. By 1993, it had an audience share of 62 per cent. This phenomenal rise was due largely to how ABS-CBN re-engineered the concept of news and public affairs, producing glitzy, if often trivial, programs that focused on crime, sex and the occult rather than news. Its model was US television's 'infotainment'. ABS-CBN also shifted to Tagalog and produced original programs in the local language instead of relying on shows provided by US distributors. The station was so successful that other networks soon followed suit. In the cut throat competition that ensued, ratings became the sole criterion for programming (Rimban 1996).

Today what are passed off as news and public affairs programs are fast-paced accounts of such wonders as a man who cracks coconuts with his teeth, dwarves who walk on water, or politicians who dance the tango.

Losing control

The chat-show format was recast, with starlets, rape victims and criminals crowding out experts and officials. The voice of television was also modified—gone was the sober, serious tone. In its place, the voice has become chatty, and often loud, arrogant, and hectoring.

While the fortunes of ABS-CBN rose, those of the government networks fell, in part because of mismanagement and corruption. Like privately owned networks, government stations are oriented toward profitability rather than education or public service. In the last decade, they have suffered from mediocre programming, diminished numbers of viewers and plummeting profitability (Tirol 1999; Chua 1998).

Continuing constraints

While the freedom Filipino journalists enjoy is the envy of their colleagues elsewhere in Asia, there are also real impediments on their ability to report freely and responsibly. The most alarming is the high casualty rate of community journalists. Although Manila journalists can accuse the highest officials of grave wrongdoing, there is less tolerance for critical reporting in the provinces, particularly in areas where political bosses or clans have ruled for decades. The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists puts the number of Filipino journalists killed since 1986 at 33 (Committee to Protect Journalists 1998). It is difficult to say, however, how many of these were killed because of their work. To be sure, a number were victims of the waves of criminality that have swept the country. But many of them were murdered because of their journalism.

One of the recent victims was Ferdinand Reyes, editor of *Press Freedom*, a weekly in Dipolog City, on Mindanao. Reyes was a crusading journalist who took on local officials, military officers, and even a faraway hotel that had mined the white sands of a local beach. He was only 33 years old when he was shot in his home on 12 February 1996. His killers have not been traced (Severino 1999).

A similar fate befell Nesino Toling, founder and editor of the *Panguil Bay Monitor*, also on Mindanao island. Toling was gunned down in 1991, just three years after he started his independent paper that ran exposés on the abuses of local officials, including a town mayor whom Toling had accused of stealing steel beams intended to repair a local bridge. The mayor is one of the suspects in the journalist's murder which, to this day, nearly

a decade later, remains unsolved (Rimban 1999a). Certainly, the impunity with which those wishing to silence journalists can operate contributes to the rising casualty count. The judicial and law-enforcement system in the Philippines is weak and prone to pressure from the wealthy and powerful, providing little protection for citizens, journalists included.

Philippine libel laws, which are patterned after those of the United States, are less restrictive than those elsewhere. But this has not stopped officials and other parties who feel offended by critical reporting from filing harassment suits against journalists. Libel in the Philippines is both a civil and a criminal offense, with penalties ranging from six months to six years. Journalists can be jailed for what they have written, and the law provides that even publishers, business managers and the entire cast of editors in a newspaper may be included in a case.

Fortunately, Philippine courts have tended to rule in favour of the freedom of journalists to report and comment. The Supreme Court has held that the media

should be given such leeway and tolerance as to enable them to courageously and effectively perform their important role in our democracy. In the preparation of stories, press reporters and editors usually have to race with their deadlines, and consistently with good faith and reasonable care, they should not be held to account, to a point of suppression, for honest mistakes or imperfections in the choice of words (Coronel 1991).

In 1987, a *Philippine Star* columnist was sued by the then President Aquino, who was also Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, for reporting that she had been hiding under her bed as rebel troops surrounded the Palace, in one of the bloodiest coup attempts of her first years in power. It was a pivotal moment for Philippine politics which had been marked by persistent questioning of the ability of a former housewife to run the country, and command the armed forces. For Cory the suit was a deeply personal battle against her detractors. The lower court ruled in her favour but the Supreme Court later reversed the decision.

In March 1999, President Estrada sued the *Manila Times* for P101 million in damages for reporting that he was an 'unwitting godfather' to a supposedly anomalous power contract. Estrada withdrew the suit after the owner of the *Manila Times* apologised for the 'anxiety' caused by the story, although the paper stood by its report.

Losing control

While many high-profile cases are withdrawn before they get to court, lawsuits filed against small newspapers and little-known journalists are often tried. Court cases are time consuming and expensive and often a damper on critical reporting. They can also lead to prison sentences. In 1997, journalist Joy Francisco, editor of a small weekly in Cotabato, was jailed after a local revenue official filed a case against her (Francisco 1997). The case had not yet been processed by the prosecutor but a warrant was already issued for her arrest, in clear defiance of court procedure. This was a case of 'local bosses' putting pressure on the courts, and journalists like Francisco, who work out of the protection of the limelight, are the most vulnerable.

The threat of advertising withdrawals in retaliation for adverse reporting is commonplace. Television, which absorbs the largest share of advertising revenue, tends to be the most cautious about incurring the ire of advertisers. One of the largest advertisers is beer and tobacco magnate Lucio Tan whose firms spent some P1.6 billion in advertising in 1997. TV advertising managers say that Tan's policy is to air commercials only in programs considered friendly to the tycoon—a man who has been accused of tax evasion and of being a Marcos crony. In 1996, when ABS-CBN anchor Korina Sanchez read a news report detailing tax evasion charges against Tan, the businessman's tobacco company promptly pulled out its ads from her program (Rimban 1999b).

Tan's case is not unique. In 1997, the Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. (PLDT), which for years ran a profitable telecommunications monopoly, withdrew its ads from a TV program which ran a story on how the firm was delaying interconnection with rival telephone companies (Rimban 199b). PLDT also pulled out its ads from *BusinessWorld* in 1993, after the paper ran critical reports about its monopolistic practices (Coronel 1998).

Article III(7) of the Philippine Constitution recognises 'the right of the people to information of matters of public concern'. It states that 'access to official records and documents, and papers pertaining to official acts, transactions, or decisions as well as to government research data used as basis for policy development, shall be afforded the citizen'. Other pertinent laws guarantee public disclosure of information and make it the duty of public officials to release information.

As a whole, Filipino officials tend to be more cooperative about releasing documents and information than many officials elsewhere in the region. Some government agencies even entertain information requests over the phone, although most require a written letter of request. But problematic areas remain. Officials are often not cooperative about releasing sensitive information, especially in the provinces. They normally delay disclosure for weeks or months or else provide only incomplete documents.

The quality of information that is made public often falls short of journalists' expectations. Partly this is because government recordkeeping is bad, but it is also because disclosure laws are sometimes a disincentive to filing complete or truthful information. For example, all government officials are required to file statements of assets and to release these to the public. But because journalists have used these statements to write reports on corruption or the accumulation of ill-gotten wealth, officials have tended to fudge their declarations or to leave out assets that may rouse the suspicions of inquisitive reporters.

Moreover, while there is a constitutional provision that guarantees disclosure, there is no freedom of information law that will ensure that the constitutional mandate is implemented. There is no system of appeal if requests for disclosure are turned down. Recourse can only be made through the courts and that means expensive and time-consuming litigation. The Philippine judicial system is clogged with cases and lawsuits often take years before they are decided.

Some conclusions

The problems of the Philippine media have less to do with state control than with the anarchy of a crowded and competitive market. Respect for a free press is institutionalised in the constitution and the law, and is deeply ingrained in the political culture. Most Filipino journalists agree that the killings of their colleagues in the provinces do not form a pattern of state repression. Rather, they appear to be isolated incidents that have more to do with the configurations of power and the breakdown of law and order in specific localities. In this sense, the problem is a weak state unable to enforce the rules and to protect its citizens.

Losing control

It is interesting to note that in the late 1990s, those who wished to control or silence the press were using market forces rather than state control. Increasingly sophisticated methods of controlling or influencing the media may serve as a good example of the novel forms the threats to press freedom can take in new democracies. One is 'envelopmental journalism' or the systematic bribing of journalists by business and government agencies to ensure favourable coverage. It is also well known that some journalists are on the monthly payroll of politicians or private companies.

Special pay-offs are made during periods like elections or the launching of new products. The bribes are so discreet that they are now often coursed through automated teller machines, so as not to leave a paper trail. Instead of openly distributing envelopes of cash or handing out checks, more sophisticated PR practitioners have resorted to depositing the bribes directly in the bank accounts of journalists, or more discreetly, the accounts of their friends or relatives (Hofileña 1998). But in whatever form the pay-offs are made, they result in some stories being silenced while others are unduly highlighted.

Another way to muzzle the press is by pressuring media proprietors. Ownership is the true chink in the armor of the Philippine media. The fact that most of the media are owned by big business houses makes them especially vulnerable to intervention from government or business. At the giant ABS-CBN, for example, the news department's unwritten rules say that topics that have some sort of connection with the extensive business holdings of the Lopez family, the network's owner, have to be treated carefully. This becomes difficult because the Lopezes are involved in, among other things, public utilities—from electric power to telephones to water. Moreover, the recent marriage of a member of the family to a daughter of President Estrada means that the network has to tread carefully when reporting on the president as well. In the Philippines, family and business interests often overcome most other considerations.

Neither former Presidents Aquino and Ramos exploited the vulnerability of media owners. But Estrada, angry at a barrage of negative media reporting, has made his displeasure known to media proprietors and has not baulked at pressuring them to tone down critical coverage. In February 1999, he criticised the owner of the *Standard* on the telephone

for a news report that insinuated that he was using a BMW that belonged to a congressman known for brokering shady deals. Enrique Razon Jr., who owns 50 per cent of the paper, was contrite and offered to fire his editors. After all, he runs a company that has cornered major contracts for servicing ports throughout the country (Coronel 1999).

Since the re-establishment of democracy in 1986, Estrada is the first Philippine president to employ non-state mechanisms systematically to clamp down on a critical press. In addition to putting pressure on the businesses of media proprietors, the president's open encouragement of an advertising boycott of the *Inquirer* was decried by citizens and media groups as a threat to press freedom. The manipulation of advertising budgets is another way in which the proxy battle between the government and the press is being waged.

Estrada, himself a former film star and movie producer, encouraged movie producers in July 1999 not to place ads in the *Inquirer*, which he said was unfairly critical of his administration. In addition, big companies with huge advertising budgets and sympathetic to the President have withdrawn ads from the paper (*Asiaweek*, 6 August 1999).

All these methods—bribery, pressure on owners and the withdrawal of advertising—silence the press in various ways and reduce the diversity of voices that can be heard by the public. The new-generation tactics, however, involve the 'privatisation' of media repression, allowing Estrada to argue that the government is not clamping down on the press. Rather than state mechanisms, so-called market forces are being used to silence critical reporting.

These developments have divided the journalist's community. Some newspapers and journalists argue that ad pullouts and the sale of newspapers are private initiatives that do not constitute a threat to press freedom. Others, however, are more critical of the government and accuse it of conducting a sustained campaign to intimidate the media. They think media corruption is insidious and harmful because it hampers the media's capability to report freely and responsibly.

There has been a public outcry about Estrada's attempts to clamp down on the press. Even if divided, Filipino journalists can rely on broad public support to defend a free press. But journalists also have to show greater responsibility if they want continuing public sympathy. There have been

Losing control

some attempts to address the problems of ethics and professionalism through a Codes of Ethics and training programs that improve investigative and reporting skills. But most observers of the Philippine media think these efforts do not suffice. After 12 years of democracy, they realise that it takes time—and great effort—to build a truly professional corps of journalists. But they also know that professional journalism is possible only if the press is free.

Media organisations

- **Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster sa Pilipinas (KBP or the Association of Filipino Broadcasters).** Formed in 1973, shortly after the declaration of martial law, the KBP is the trade organisation for the broadcast media. At the outset, the KBP—supposedly a self-regulatory body composed of industry representatives—was a fiction to mask government control of broadcasting. But the KBP was able to overcome initial difficulties and contribute to the professionalisation of broadcasting by drafting a Code of Ethics that became the basis for self-regulation. It also

Major Philippine newspapers

<i>Abante</i> *+	
<i>BusinessWorld</i>	bworld.com.ph
<i>Dyaryo Uno</i> +	
<i>Kabayan</i> +	
<i>Malaya</i>	
<i>Manila Bulletin</i>	www.mb.com.ph
<i>Manila Standard</i>	
<i>People's Journal</i> *+	
<i>Philippine Daily Inquirer</i>	www.inquirer.net
<i>Philippine Star</i>	www.philstar.com
<i>Sun Star</i>	www2.sunstar.com.ph
<i>Tempo</i> *	
<i>Today</i>	www.today.com.ph

Note: *Tabloid; +Tagalog

cooperates with the government in airing 'developmental messages' on such issues as AIDS awareness, drug prevention and other government programs. The KBP's Standards Authority acts as a quasi-judicial body and can impose fines and reprimands for violation of its code on such matters as decency and violence. It also sets a cap on the volume of advertising per broadcast hour. Website: www.kbp.org.ph

- **Philippine Press Institute (PPI)**. The association of newspaper publishers was formed in 1964 to represent the interests of the newspaper industry, to raise ethical and professional standards, and to provide support for community newspapers that make up the bulk of the institute's membership. The PPI set up a Press Council in 1965 to investigate ethical violations. Both the PPI and the Press Council closed down with the declaration of martial law. The PPI was reopened in 1987 and the Press Council was reconvened in 1993 but with a much more focused scope to investigate complaints involving the right to reply. The PPI has drafted a Code of Ethics and conducts regular seminars to upgrade ethical and professional standards. Website: www.pressasia.org/PFA/members/index.html/
- **National Press Club (NPC)**. An association of more than 1,500 individual reporters, the NPC was formed in 1954. Over the years, depending on the inclinations of its leadership, the NPC has sometimes taken a stand on press freedom and ethical issues but in recent years has become a purely social club.
- **Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR)**. Founded in 1989 as a private, independent initiative to monitor the media, the CMFR publishes a quarterly review of the press, the *Philippine Journalism Review*. It also conducts seminars and workshops on issues concerning the media and brings journalists together for consensus-building discussions. The Center is a non-profit organisation with a board of trustees composed of academics, journalists and businesspeople. Website: www.cmfr.com.ph/
- **Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ)**. An independent, non-profit media organisation that specialises in investigative reporting, the PCIJ was founded in 1989 by journalists who saw the need for newspapers and broadcast agencies to go beyond routine, day-to-day reportage. The PCIJ was set up to promote

Losing control

investigative reporting and to create a culture within the Philippine media. The Center funds investigative projects, publishes books on current issues and manuals on reporting, and publishes a quarterly investigative reporting magazine. It also organises training seminars for journalists in the Philippines and the region. Website: www.pcij.org/

Singapore

Information lockdown, business as usual

Garry Rodan

Within the neat, high rise towers of Singapore's economic success sit hundreds of thousands of personal computers, the gateways into the global information age in one of the world's most technologically sophisticated societies. Yet, behind the gentle whirring of the browsers and the email, lie the gatekeepers of the global information age, the officials of the Singapore government. Earlier this year, that government wandered into almost half of the 400,000 computers of Internet users, without their knowledge, in what was explained as a sweep for computer viruses. Five years earlier a similar search of private and business computer files was attributed to a crack down on pornography. By the year 2000, through the government-contracted Singapore One Cable Network, all 750,000 households on the island will be connected to a comprehensive national computer web, including broadband coaxial and optical fibre networks, linking homes to businesses, schools, government departments and libraries. In the world's first fully interactive nation state, all citizens will have the facility to carry out commercial transactions, access interactive services and communicate with each other via the Internet. And the Singapore government will have cyber access to every home on the island.

Confounding the theorists

For decades Singapore has fascinated political observers with its apparently contradictory mix of free market capitalism and political controls—Asia's big brother or big father society was making it in the freewheeling international marketplace. Founding Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, contributed significantly to the regional debate of the mid 1980s

Losing control

to the late 1990s over Asian values. Lee Kuan Yew argued that in Singapore the curtailing of western-style freedoms such as freedom of speech and freedom of the press met a 'higher' goal of social stability in turn paving the way for rapid economic development. Thus, a government had the moral right to curtail an individual's freedoms in exchange for economic rights, the right to be richer and more comfortable in Singapore's carefully planned high rise residential developments. Critics contended that Singapore worked only because of its size—Singapore was confounding conventional political theory because it was small enough to manage, more a moderate sized modern city than a nation.

But, as Asia enters the new millennium Singapore seems poised to confound theorists yet again, this time by defying the explosive forces for change unleashed by rapid developments in information technology. While other authoritarian governments are chasing dissidents flashing ideas and information across the Internet and attempting to build electronic firewalls when the fire is already burning, the Singapore government is building the entire system itself. While there is considerable evidence to demonstrate that new information technology has directly contributed to the collapse of authoritarian regimes, Singapore is applying sophisticated strategies to control both the local and foreign media. Ironically, Singapore is poised to become the world's second-most dominant information society, after the United States, by the year 2000 (Chellam 1999), yet there are no signs of media controls being loosened. What is lost to the local population is not just freedom of speech to a political end, but the right to scrutinise the economy, including the investments worth S\$100 billion dollars made by the government using tax payers' money (Ong 1999).

Singapore's impressive economic development over recent decades has been accompanied by a tight regime of controls over all media, including the Internet. While the East Asian economic crisis, which began in 1997, has fuelled forces for political change elsewhere, the comparatively moderate impact of the crisis on Singapore has strengthened the authorities' belief that existing social and political systems are essential to the country's economic well-being.

This is not to say there are no challenges ahead for Singapore's leaders. In particular, the ambitious new goal of turning the city-state into an

international finance centre could entail functional, if not political, pressure for a freer media. Is it any coincidence that leading international finance centres such as London, New York and Frankfurt boast free and critical media? Yet Singapore is already an important Asian media centre. Thus far, then, a flourishing volume and range of media forms and activities have been reconciled with selective and strategic control over information and critical analysis. Against this background, the capacity of authorities to respond to new challenges should not be underestimated.

Any understanding of how media operate in Singapore must be coupled with an appreciation of the political system. Uninterrupted rule by the People's Action Party (PAP) since self-government in 1959 has involved the establishment, and consolidation, of a state that systematically limits political competition. The space for critics and opponents of the PAP is highly conditional and channelled almost exclusively through the controlled electoral process. Organisations that engage in politics are expected to be specifically registered for that purpose, otherwise they risk dissolution under the Societies Act. Individuals who publicly criticise the government are challenged to join a political party and warned not to use independent social organisations as a front for a 'hidden agenda'. Thus, critical comments about amendments to the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act in 1986 by Law Society office bearers aroused official rebuke (Duthie 1986), followed by changes to the Legal Profession Act. This prohibited the Society from, *inter alia*, commenting on existing or proposed legislation unless the government specifically requested its views (Seow 1997). Similarly, novelist Catherine Lim's (1994) lamenting in a *Sunday Times* article that Goh Chok Tong's promise of a more consensual approach was not materialising sparked a series of fierce public denunciations by the Prime Minister (Chua 1994; Fernandez 1994). The concept of 'out-of-bounds' or OB limits to public engagement was introduced with Lee Kuan Yew declaring '[y]ou want to move the OB markers, then you come out (into politics) and persuade the electorate' (Ng 1995).

This suppression of civil society deprives opposition parties of the opportunity to forge social links and to mobilise support through interest groups. The political risk of elections for the ruling party is thereby considerably reduced.

Losing control

Within this system, there is also little scope for critical media. Contests with, and challenges to, the ruling party through the media are regarded as covert political activities which should also be reserved for the electoral process. Nevertheless, the domestic media loom large in Singapore politics, being systematically harnessed to the exercise of explaining PAP policy and generating support for it. As the government and local editors admit without apology, they are partners in nation building. Local newspapers are full of bland reports on community-based activities, the pinnacle of which seems to be the annual 'Singapore Swing' dance in the city streets, as well as self-congratulatory articles on upstanding members of society. Meanwhile, editors and reporters from the international media have learnt to report cautiously on local affairs or face the consequences of costly legal cases and commercially injurious circulation limits.

In neighbouring Indonesia and Malaysia, economic and political crises in the last two years have dealt major blows to the credibility, and effectiveness, of government-controlled media. The appetite for accurate and speedy accounts of the tumultuous recent events drew domestic populations to alternative sources of information, such as Internet 'culls' of more critical reports from foreign publications bounced back into both Malaysia and Indonesia. There has been no parallel in Singapore. Nevertheless, the regional crisis has set in train an unprecedented emphasis by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and influential economic analysts on the importance of transparency. With international investors in mind, the Singapore government has been quick to embrace the rhetoric of transparency. This language at least gives advocates of a freer media in Singapore something to exploit. If international business in Singapore were seriously committed to a comprehensive transparency agenda, and valued the role of a free media to it, the prospects of some change might be enhanced. Thus far, there is no evidence of either.

The local press remains tongue tied

At the beginning of self-government in 1959 and well into the 1960s, Singapore boasted a wide range of independent newspapers. These provided a significant measure of scrutiny and critical examination of public policies and issues, and newspapers owned and run by families or

individuals were relatively free from government intrusion. However, sensitivity to media reporting intensified after 1961 as the PAP set about defeating its formal political opponents, the breakaway Barisan Nasional (BS). Incrementally, a new regime was installed through a combination of pressures on media organisations and journalists. This included general harassment of journalists, some of whom were detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA), such as four senior executives of the Chinese-language daily *Nanyang Siang Pau*, and the closure of the English-language dailies *Eastern Sun* and the *Herald* (Seow 1998). Under the ISA, suspected subversives can be detained without trial and the relevant minister is empowered to prohibit the printing, publication, and sale, *inter alia*, of subversive publications (Seow 1998). But, it was structural changes to the newspaper industry which had the most profound and lasting impact.

The decisive step was a set of amendments to the Newspapers and Printing Presses Act (NPPA) in 1974. The official rationale for the changes was to 'safeguard public interest by ensuring undesirable foreign elements do not gain control of our newspapers and use them against the welfare of our society' (Hansard quoted in Seow 1998). The amendments required the compulsory divestiture of ownership shareholdings, which allowed governments to own newspapers, and forced all newspaper organisations to become public companies. It also created different classes of shares—ordinary and management—with the latter carrying more votes and owned only by people approved by the Ministry of Culture (as it was then known). Subsequently, in 1977, a further amendment prevented any person from owning more than three per cent of the ordinary stock issued by a newspaper. The purpose of the amendments was to ensure that private families and individuals could no longer own newspapers and that the government could secure reliable management of the press.

In the early 1980s, the government's ability to control the local media was extended further through a major restructuring, in the guise of commercial rationalisation. This involved the establishment of a new government-initiated company, Singapore Monitor Ltd., to produce a new English-language afternoon daily to complement *The Straits Times*. Meanwhile, leading daily Chinese-language rivals, *Nanyang Siang Pau* and *Sing Chew Jit Poh*, were merged into a single holding company, Singapore News and Publications Ltd. (SNPL), of which the Singapore Monitor became a subsidiary. The management of SNPL was entrusted

Losing control

to senior government officials. By March 1983, *Sin Chew Jit Poh* and *Nanyang Siang Pau* had been replaced by two new dailies—*Lin He Zaobao* (*United Morning News*) and *Lian He Wanbao* (*United Evening News*). These changes meant there were now two newspaper groups, each producing a morning and afternoon daily in English or Chinese. However, the concentration of ownership and control of Singapore's press was consolidated further still when in 1984 the Straits Times group, which comprised the Straits Times Press and its sister company Times Publishing, merged with the SNPL to form Singapore Press Holdings (SPH). Capitalised at S\$1.4 billion (US\$660 million), it constituted the largest industrial group in Singapore and the country's sixth largest listed company (Lent 1984).

This restructuring cemented, what was by then, a powerful capacity by government to exert control over domestic newspapers. The subsequent purchase in 1995 by SPH of *Tamil Murasu* made the holding company the

Singapore media profile

Today there are eight daily newspapers in Singapore: *The Straits Times*, *The New Paper* and *The Business Times* (English); *Lianhe Wanbao*, *Shin Min Daily News* and *Lianhe Zaobao* (Chinese); *Berita Harian* (Malay); and *Tamil Murasu* (Tamil). All of these publications have online editions and all but *The Business Times* produce a Sunday edition. Daily circulation of newspapers has risen steadily from 743,334 in 1988 to 1,054,802 by the end of 1998. The greatest gains have been made by English-language publications, the daily circulation of which rose from 340,401 to 530,628 in the same period. By the early 1990s, this eclipsed daily circulation of Chinese-language dailies, which increased from 354,840 to 454,651 over the decade. *The Straits Times* is the dominant English-language newspaper, with a daily circulation in 1998 of around 396,000 and an estimated total daily readership in 1997 of 1,228,000. *Lianhe Zaobao* is the Chinese-language equivalent, with daily circulation in 1998 of 203,000 and a total daily readership in 1997 of 696,000 (Singapore Press Holdings 1999). These figures tower over the circulation of the publications servicing Singapore's minority ethnic groups. Nevertheless, between 1988 and 1999, daily Malay-language newspaper circulation grew from 42,458 to 59,690 and Tamil-language newspaper circulation rose from 5,635 to 9,833 (Singapore Department of Statistics 1999). Significantly, the advent of the Asian crisis has not stymied the growth of the local press.

owner of all daily newspapers published in Singapore. SPH has used its massive capital base to ensure the highest technological standards of production and the commercial prospects of the group remain extremely bright.

While journalists working for the SPH group are well paid and have excellent infrastructure, they operate within a political context that conditions reporting and editorial orientation. This is most conspicuous in the lengthy and uncritical reproduction of government policy and ideological statements. Equally, the government's critics or detractors are often lampooned, ignored, or alternately, subjected to a relentless scrutiny of the sort those actually wielding power in Singapore are spared. In recent times there has been some increased space for non-establishment (but not opposition) figures to express criticisms of government policy through the forum pages of local newspapers. In the main, though, this concerns details of policy rather than any fundamental challenge to the PAP agenda or philosophy. By contrast, local press coverage of regional and international affairs is of a high standard. Even local business reporting is, within limits, of a reasonable standard—invariably more probing in its exposure and scrutiny of private organisations not under the considerable umbrella of government-linked companies.

Charges against Singapore's government-controlled press of political interference are common from neighbours, especially Malaysia. Throughout 1998 there was a string of complaints from Kuala Lumpur about negative reporting from Singapore's domestic media, including reports on the new international airport, tourism and the economy. Similar accusations are made from Singapore about reporting in Malaysia's government-controlled media.

One of the latest episodes concerns an editorial in the 18 June 1999 edition of Singapore's *The Business Times*. Among other things, in an analysis of issues surrounding a looming Malaysian election, the editorial lamented the possibility that Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir would 'end up hogging the stage for longer than he should'. Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong's Press Secretary, Ong Keng Yong (1999), subsequently wrote to *The Business Times* describing the editorial as 'rash, unwise and inappropriate'. Essentially, the problem is not so much one of poor reporting. Rather, it is in frank and critical analysis of the region where local journalism is generally at its best. However, given that both

governments understand the degrees of control each exert over local media, critical reports are invariably interpreted as having an imprimatur. At times, these conflicts can also be a useful way of shoring up nationalism and diverting attention from domestic issues.

The international press bites its tongue

The Singapore government was irritated by critical international press reporting in the 1960s and 1970s, but it did not seriously dedicate itself to combating it until the mid 1980s. With the domestic press now well under control, and against a background of a general election in 1984 in which the government vote slipped 13 per cent, authorities embarked on a clever and effective strategy to curb critical coverage of local affairs. The essence of this strategy has been to exploit the commercial instincts of international media organisations. Despite Singapore's size, its educated and affluent population represents a prize market for English-language publications in Asia—at least as much for its advertising dollar as its circulation sales. Costly legal cases have combined with measures to restrict access to this lucrative market to enforce a high degree of self-censorship among even the most reputable international media organisations operating in Singapore.

Under amendments to the NPPA in 1986, the Minister of Communications (now Information) can restrict the local circulation of newspapers published outside Singapore considered 'engaging in the domestic politics of Singapore'. Conveniently vague, the meaning of this phrase is a matter of the Minister's discretion. This of course leaves editors guessing where the line of tolerance might be drawn. The Act was further amended in 1988 to allow the reproduction and sale of restricted, or 'gazetted' publications in Singapore, on the proviso that advertisements are deleted. On this basis, the Singapore government rejects claims that it is obstructing critical comment. Instead, it contends, it is merely preventing newspapers and magazines from commercially profiting by 'engaging in the domestic politics of Singapore'. Additional amendments in 1990 introduced an annual permit system for 'foreign publications', involving a substantial bond that could be drawn on to cover any legal liabilities incurred in the local courts as a result of an offending story. Each publication was then required to appoint an agent in Singapore to ensure

legal action encompassed the publisher as well as other parties, such as the author and distributor.

During the mid-to-late 1980s, *TIME*, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, *The Economist*, *Asian Wall Street Journal* and *Asiaweek* all incurred substantial circulation cuts—often amounting to *de facto* bans. With the exception of the case involving the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, a central theme to the disputes was the Singapore government's assertion of the right for its replies to articles to be published in 'offending' publications. At that time, Fred Zimmerman, of the *Asian Wall Street Journal*, insisted

[i]t is the fundamental condition of a free press that newspapers should be free to decide what they will print without fear or favour from any external source, and that it is the judgement of the editor and not the dictates of any government which should determine what appears in the newspaper (quoted in Dow Jones & Co. 1990).

In conjunction with circulation cuts, various international journalists were expelled or had their visa applications denied. A string of legal actions were also exchanged between the government and publishers, including an unsuccessful attempt by Dow Jones to challenge circulation restrictions imposed on the *Asian Wall Street Journal*.

Despite the initial protests by members of the international press, by the early 1990s they had resigned themselves to the special conditions associated with reporting on Singapore. Government responses were being printed in full and, under new Vice-President Karen House, Dow Jones withdrew an appeal against a court decision in favour of Lee Kuan Yew. The Singapore government reciprocated by gradually restoring circulation levels and in 1997 granted the *Far Eastern Economic Review* permission to again locate a correspondent in the city-state. Without doubt, exclusion from the strategic Singapore market inflicted economic pain on these publications. Commercially, it made little sense to be in Asia but not in Singapore.

An equally effective means of discouraging critical reporting is the pursuit of publications through defamation, libel and contempt of court cases. The *International Herald Tribune* has been the major casualty of this practice. The first suit was in reaction to an article written by Philip Bowring entitled 'The claims about Asian values don't bear scrutiny', published on 2 August 1994. Lawyers for Lee Kuan Yew and his son, Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, complained to the *Tribune* that

Circulation of Singapore's media

For the full year of 1998, average weekly circulation for specialist regional publications of *Asiaweek* was 15,867, *The Economist* 11,482 and *Far Eastern Economic Review* 7,892, while *TIME*, which now produces an Asian edition, averaged 30,181. The average daily copies sold by the *Asian Wall Street Journal* was 8,078 and for the *International Herald Tribune* 6,348 (Hong Kong Audit Bureau of Circulations 1999; US Audit Bureau of Circulations 1999; UK Audit Bureau of Circulations 1999).

the piece inferred that nepotism was responsible for Lee junior's political rise. Although the *Tribune* published an apology which many observers believed unwarranted, this didn't appease the Lees. Instead, the newspaper finished up in court and ultimately had to pay S\$950,000 in total damages, with Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong joining in on the action.

Subsequently, in response to the 7 October 1994 edition of the *Tribune* carrying a piece by Christopher Lingle, an American academic at the National University of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew embarked on further law suits. Lingle had observed in 'The smoke over parts of Asia obscures some profound concerns' that some authoritarian regimes in the region use 'a compliant judiciary to bankrupt opposition politicians'. Lee interpreted this as an oblique reference to Singapore and the Singapore government mounted contempt of court actions against Lingle, the *Tribune* and the newspaper's distributors. Lee himself took civil libel suits out against Lingle and the executives of the *Tribune*.

Significantly, there was no attempt by the *Tribune* to defend its actions on the grounds of fair comment. This was deplored by leading international jurist and human rights activist Michael Kirby (Merritt 1995). Yet again Singapore's courts showed little mercy on the *Tribune* for coming quietly. All defendants in the action by the government were found guilty of contempt of court by way of 'scandalising the Singapore judiciary' (Lague 1995). The fines and costs amounted to in excess of S\$100,000. Additionally, in Lee's separate action, damages of S\$100,000 were awarded. After the major showdowns between publishers and the Singapore government over how local affairs are reported, international

newspapers and magazines have been able to restore circulation levels—their lessons learned.

While circulation cuts and costly legal actions vividly demonstrate government preparedness to punish reporting it finds unacceptable, these measures are intended to foster self-censorship, and avoid more draconian measures. For the most part, this is how things work as editors cautiously interpret the nebulous concept of ‘engaging in the domestic politics of Singapore’. Periodically, however, miscalculations occur, serving only to instil even greater caution thereafter. The *Tribune* cases centred on two of the most sensitive topics—the interests of the Lee family and the judiciary—where there is virtually no margin for critical reporting. The net effect of the punitive consequences of upsetting authorities has resulted in most major international press organisations routinely drawing on legal advice before publishing reports that even remotely contain critical or sensitive content.

Self-censorship in Singapore is also encouraged by less conspicuous means. Employment passes are renewed on an annual basis, with an official policy of two to three years maximum stay. This is, however, selectively waived—apparently as a reward to those journalists deemed to have shown due sensitivity. The Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA) has an extensive infrastructure monitoring in great detail what is being reported by international journalists. Official and unofficial communications through letters and phone calls—either from MITA or the Prime Minister’s office—quickly educate journalists of this. Even the tone of an article can be enough to precipitate a phone call. These calls are not always hostile, and indeed sometimes quite friendly. But they invariably impress upon journalists that their reports are the subject of intense scrutiny. Journalists are also acutely aware of the possibility that their telephone conversations are being tapped.

The impact of this working environment means international media organisations—in varying degrees—fail to employ the same standards of investigative and critical reporting as elsewhere. One of the clearest illustrations of the way the international media has ‘acclimatised’ itself to local conditions was the coverage in 1996 of the controversial discounts on purchases of luxury private condominiums received by Senior Minister Lee and his family from HPL Limited. Reports were almost uniformly

Losing control

descriptive, repeatedly making the point that nothing illegal had occurred. The critical question of political morality was almost totally ignored—something one journalist volunteered he would elsewhere make the central issue in such a case (Rodan 1998). Details of the extent of Lee family purchases of private condominiums were eventually revealed in 1998 in an obscure offshore publication entitled *Singaporeans for Democracy*, produced by an organisation of the same name (Singaporeans for Democracy 1998).

The paradox is that none of these obstacles to the free practice of journalism have prevented Singapore from becoming Southeast Asia's pre-eminent media centre. How do we explain this? The answer lies in the fact that reporting on Singapore at all, let alone specifically on potentially controversial social and political issues, represents a minuscule component of total international media activities from the city-state. The vast bulk of reporting is either about the region or involves business data and information that steers well clear of the government's concerns. Singapore's advanced infrastructure renders it a very attractive base for regional reporting and Singapore boasted a total of 203 accredited correspondents and camera crews representing 73 international media organisations by the end of 1998.

Broadcasting: business is business

Over 90 per cent of Singaporean households own radios. The average number of daily hours of collective radio transmission increased from 653 to 2,828 between 1988 and 1998 (Singapore Department of Statistics 1999). A total of 18 domestic radio stations are available through Radio Corporation of Singapore (RCS), NTUC Media Cooperative Limited, SAFRA Radio, the National Arts Council (NAC) and the commercially run Rediffusion (Singapore) Pte Ltd, all of which are wholly or partly government owned. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) World Service is also available on a local radio frequency—the only foreign free-to-air and completely independent station in Singapore. Foreign programming, including German, French and Japanese, is available on an international radio station operated by RCS.

There are four terrestrial channels operated by the government-owned Television Corporation of Singapore (TCS) and Singapore Television

Twelve Pte Ltd (STV12). In addition, Singaporeans have access to all three Malaysian free-to-air channels—the government-owned RTM1, RTM2 and TV3. Terrestrial television licenses increased from 554,133 in 1988 to 704,296 a decade later (Singapore Department of Statistics 1999). TCS captures in excess of 90 per cent of the population and has a weekly audience reach of 82 per cent (Foo and Kwok 1999).

In broadcasting, though, it is undoubtedly the dramatic developments in satellite and cable television throughout the 1990s that are most noteworthy. The Singapore government continues to ban satellite television for all but selective business and diplomatic uses domestically. However, beginning in 1993 it started promoting the city-state as a regional base for the penetration of satellite and cable television markets in the rest of the region. Thus far it has attracted some 20 private broadcasters, including such major international networks as CNBC Asia, Discovery Asia, ESPN Star Sports, Walt Disney Television, Sony Entertainment Television (SET), Home Box Office Asia and BBC Worldwide.

The minor exceptions the government makes for domestic access to satellite television are explained in terms of the commercial imperative of up-to-the-minute information. But the government is also dedicated to preserving what it refers to as 'cultural values' and is not prepared to leave this to market forces (George 1994). It is therefore putting in place a comprehensive cable system to meet domestic demand for international broadcasts. This way it retains the technical ability to screen out 'objectionable' material. Cable television in Singapore is run by a conglomerate called Singapore Cable Vision (SCV). This is comprised of the three state companies Singapore International Media (31 per cent) Singapore Technologies Ventures (24 per cent), Singapore Press Holdings (20 per cent), and the third largest cable operator in the United States, Continental Cablevision (25 per cent). Currently it offers 46 channels, but when the infrastructure is completed, SCV will be able to offer around 70 channels to all Singaporean households. Cablevision subscriptions have risen from 22,214 when the medium was introduced in 1993 to 144,000 by the end of 1998 (Singapore Department of Statistics 1999). CNN, CNBC and BBC World can be received through SCV's single cable news network.

To date, self-censorship among international companies eager to secure a position in the Singapore market has avoided the need for authorities to exercise much direct control over the content of cable television companies.

CNN has gone as far as to alerting SCV of potentially sensitive material, as it did before screening coverage of a report involving US teenager Michael Fay who was caned after being found guilty of vandalising cars in Singapore (Atkins 1995). More generally, cable service providers have offered material that is either apolitical, such as music or sport, or that is family oriented and reinforces the sort of conservative values championed in government rhetoric. These companies are demonstrating the pragmatic nature of business; that there are profits to be made from accommodating rather than challenging authoritarian leaders in Asia.

Nevertheless, in March 1999, TCS launched an 18 hour all-news free-to-air television channel—Channel News Asia (CNA). The express purpose of the new station, as explained by George Yeo, Minister for Communications and the Arts between November 1990 and June 1999, is to provide an ‘Asian viewpoint’ on current events. The advertisements preceding the station’s launch proclaimed that CNA understands the region’s sensitivities and complexities (Dolven and Granitsas 1999). The government views with alarm the enhanced stature and influence of foreign satellite and cable television, linked to dramatic coverage of the tumultuous events in the region associated with the Asian crisis. Yeo remarked in parliament on 12 May 1999, ‘[j]ust look at the way foreign channels have become part of the domestic politics in Malaysia and Indonesia. We should worry for ourselves’ (Fernandez 1999).

The Singapore government was especially irritated by international media coverage of the civil disobedience campaign of oppositionist Chee Soon Juan. Chee, Secretary-General of the Singapore Democratic Party, was twice jailed in early 1999 for speaking in a public place without a permit and refusing to pay fines for the offence. Yeo could not conceal his annoyance that editors would take Chee’s push for free speech so seriously: ‘[w]e have witnessed many interviews on CNBC and BBC with some populist politicians in Singapore of late for frivolous causes’ (Associated Press 1999). The Minister put international cable television stations operating in Singapore on notice that there would need to be less coverage of government critics by the time of the next election. Yeo added, ‘[d]uring election time, the rules of campaigning must apply to these foreign channels, as they apply to TCS and STV 12. Otherwise, some candidates may be tempted to lobby channels or even buy airtime from them’

(Fernandez 1999). Exactly what that might entail is not clear. The practice that has been adopted by government-controlled media is for broadcasting time for political parties to be allocated in proportion to the number of candidates they are running at an election. The concept of 'right of reply' would be technically difficult to impose on this medium (Political & Economic Risk Consultancy 1999).

The promotion of cable television is one component of a broader government strategy to transform Singapore into a leading global information technology society. Through the Singapore One cable network, all 750,000 households on the island will be connected to a comprehensive computer network by the end of 2000. Households, businesses, schools, government departments, libraries and statutory authorities will be electronically inter-linked to facilitate commercial and other transactions, as well as interactive services and communication through the Internet. According to Yeo (1995), this infrastructure drive is necessary for Singapore to 'remain a junction for goods, services, people, information and ideas' in the 21st century. But as with other electronic media, the government's aggressive promotion of the Internet is fundamentally driven by commercial objectives and accompanied by a desire to maintain a high degree of content control.

With approximately 40 per cent of its population now having direct Internet access, Singapore has one of the world's highest rates of Internet use. The number of Internet users in Singapore doubled between 1996 and 1998 to more than 500,000, while the number of websites in the city-state jumped from 900 to over 4,000 in the same period (Foo and Kwok 1999). As elsewhere in the media industry, the government's indirect presence looms large. All of Singapore's three Internet Service Providers (ISPs)—*Cyberway*, *Pacific Internet* and *Singnet*—are either government-owned or government-linked companies. In corporatist Singapore, this necessarily leads to speculation about the level of cooperation between ISPs and authorities in surveillance of the Internet.

The technical capacity for surveillance has been amply demonstrated. In 1994, a total of 80,000 files were searched for 'GIF' (Graphic Interchange Format), in what authorities explained as a swoop on pornography (Shenon 1995). Then in early 1999, the computers of almost half of Singapore's 400,000 Internet subscribers were scanned without

Losing control

subscribers' knowledge. This involved the Ministry of Home Affairs and *Singtel*, both of which claimed the purpose was to identify which subscribers' computers were virus-infected (Sesser 1999).

Internet usage is regulated via a licensing system and guidelines that include the requirement of ISPs to filter material via proxy servers. Political parties and religious organisations must be licensed and ISPs have to obstruct access to web pages identified as objectionable by the Singapore Broadcasting Authority (SBA). According to The Internet Code of Practice '[p]rohibited material is that material that is objectionable on the grounds of public interest, public morality, public order, public security, national harmony, or is otherwise prohibited by applicable Singapore laws'. Currently the SBA screens out 100 such sites. They are not publicly identified, but all are pornographic according to authorities.

When opposition political parties attempted to employ the Internet in the lead-up to the 1997 election, they were instructed by the SBA to remove biodata and posters of candidates from their web sites. They were deemed to have contravened the Parliamentary Elections Act, which predates the technology of the Internet, because the rules pursuant to the Act did not provide for campaigning on the Internet. Incidentally, amendments to the Films Act in 1998 also ban political advertising using films or videos. Authorities' attempts to limit the political impact of new electronic technologies also draws on the same libel and defamation laws that have intimidated other media. The PAP's ideological hegemony is another factor in the moderate political impact of the Internet in Singapore. Discussion groups operate within self-imposed and unconscious boundaries. The inclination to draw on alternative sources of analysis and information through the web is also conditioned by political motivation or lack thereof.

Constraints range from the bland to the sophisticated

Already the discussion has touched on various factors constraining the media in Singapore, including the various provisions of the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act, the use of defamation, libel and contempt of court suits, the Official Secrets Act and the Internal Security Act. Additional legislation that can be harnessed to restrict what is published are the Sedition Act and the Undesirable Publications Act. The former prohibits speeches and publications with 'seditious tendency', which includes

arousing people's disaffection with the government and the judiciary and between races and classes. Under the latter Act, which covers books and magazines, such publications as *Playboy*, *Penthouse* and *Cosmopolitan* are banned in Singapore, but so too are some religious and political materials. In 1998, the Act was amended to include CD-ROMs, sound recordings, pictures, and computer-generated drawings.

An additional constraint on reporting in Singapore is the difficulty of getting information other than that which authorities are promoting. This problem involves state bureaucrats and the private sector, as well as politicians. However, the government sets the tone for this in two important respects: first, by its view on information as a matter for strategic control, and second, by its political resistance to citizenship claims about the right to information.

Official rhetoric about transparency reform is currently high in Singapore, as part of the government's ambitious attempt to promote the city-state as an international financial centre. Indeed, there have been some important improvements towards greater corporate disclosures. Local banks, for example, are now required to publicly declare the extent and nature of bad loans and previously undisclosed reserve assets. These changes are certainly helpful for business journalists as well as shareholders. Meanwhile, however, state control over a great deal of information is likely to be retained for both commercial and political reasons.

A few examples illustrate how strategic control restricts some basic data, with obvious implications for reporting. Singapore—Indonesia trade figures are not published. These data are sensitive politically because during *Konfrontasi* in 1963 there was supposed to be an embargo on trade between Malaysia (of which Singapore was a part at the time) and Indonesia. They are sensitive commercially because they could reveal a discrepancy with Indonesian records of what has been exported to Singapore and, by inference, demonstrate the extent of smuggling into the city-state. Information about the number and nationalities of permanent residents and guest workers in Singapore is also not freely available. This limits informed analysis of the domestic labour force—whether in terms of supply questions or the social impact of imported labour. From the government's perspective, though, these are sensitive ethnic and racial issues to be managed through information control

Losing control

(Dolven 1999). The government may periodically release unpublished data on such issues, but this will be a matter of discretion.

One of the most significant information black holes concerns the operations of the government's investment arms, an issue over which Singapore earned the criticism of the IMF in March 1999 (IMF Public Information Notice No. 99/26). They are shielded from any detailed public record or scrutiny, despite the enormous scale and importance of the capital involved. The Government Investment Corporation (GIC) manages more than S\$100 billion of taxpayers' money in overseas investments. Its sister firm Temasek Holdings presides over S\$34 billion, most of which is invested among the more than one thousand government-linked companies (GLCs). Singapore's legal and regulatory regimes exempt both from routine external reviews of operations. The GIC is especially secretive, exempted from any purview by the Auditor General or Accountant General and with no requirement to report to parliament. It reports only to its board, which is chaired by Lee Kuan Yew. Temasek Holdings reports selectively and only to the Finance Minister and a small parliamentary budget committee (Vennewald 1994).

GLCs listed with the Stock Exchange of Singapore (SES) do divulge investment details as required by regulations. However, little extra is volunteered. With few exceptions, GLCs are amongst the poorest performers in independent rankings of corporate transparency in Singapore (Teo 1999). They are also distinctly uncooperative with financial journalists and openly discriminatory towards the international media. The international media have also been excluded from press conferences by the SES and statutory boards, resulting in letters of protest from both the Foreign Correspondents' Association and individual media companies.

Another problem for journalists is that state bureaucrats tend to act as custodians of the ruling party's policies and interests. This often translates into political judgements in information management. The suppression of civil society since the mid 1960s has also freed bureaucrats from interest group pressure to reveal more detail than they wish about government activities. Singapore's outgoing President and former Second Deputy Prime Minister, Ong Teng Cheong, dramatically highlighted the absence of transparency within the public sector in a recent speech. The President's most important constitutional responsibility is to safeguard official reserves. Yet Ong revealed that in 1993, when he asked the Accountant-

General what total reserves were, he was told the data had not been systematically collected and the value of assets was difficult to determine. His request for an inventory, he was told, would take '52 man years' to accommodate. He finally received a list of properties in 1997 (Ibrahim 1999). Obviously journalists without Ong's degree of authority face even greater difficulties in extracting information.

On one of the rare occasions that a journalist was able to penetrate state control over sensitive data, the repercussions were serious. In 1992, the *Business Times* reported seemingly innocent official 'flash estimates' of economic growth ahead of official release. Two years later an economic director from the Monetary Authority of Singapore, the editor and the journalist from the *Business Times*, and two economists from a stockbroking firm were found guilty of breaching the Official Secrets Act and fined.

Not surprisingly, nothing approximating a Freedom of Information Act exists in Singapore, nor is it being contemplated. On the contrary, there are signs that the government is drawing a clear distinction between improved corporate transparency and broader dimensions of open governance. The Prime Minister's private secretary, Tan Tee How, dismissed the establishment recently of an Open Singapore Centre by two opposition politicians. According to Tan, there is no need for such a centre because Singapore is widely recognised as an open society, practising transparency and democratic accountability (*The Straits Times Interactive* 1999b). It was an almost comic irony that the tea party launch of the Open Singapore Society on 12 June 1999 appeared to attract official surveillance (Gomez 1999). In Singapore, it seems, advocacy of political transparency arouses suspicion of subversion.

Finally, journalists face the problem of the deep reluctance of those with dissenting views to put their opinions on the record. The Singapore government has an extensive range of commercial interests and therefore dispenses a great many contracts. It also has a record of legal recourse against critics. There is a widespread perception that there is nothing to gain and everything to lose from being quoted.

None of the above observations mean that there is not a lot of official and publicly available information in Singapore. On the contrary, there is an abundance of it—much very helpful to journalists. But it is also predominantly information that either reinforces state economic, social and political agendas or cuts the costs of business transactions. In other

words, it is information functional to state strategic objectives. Journalists are courted with this through extensive and well-resourced public relations machinery.

Assessment: a love-hate relationship

In Singapore, the influence of the government over the media is considerable—both through a string of regulations and also more indirectly through the dominance of government-linked companies in the industry. This influence over the local media translates into a marked reporting bias in favour of the ruling party. Scrutiny of the PAP's exercise of power is therefore minimal and debate over alternative political ideas is systematically restricted. Not surprisingly, in Freedom House's 1999 worldwide assessment of press freedom, Singapore was ranked 'not free'. In terms of the safety of journalists, the city-state was awarded the highest possible ranking, but in the laws and regulations governing content and the extent of political pressures imposed on reporting, it fared poorly. Under such a regime, the media are limited in the capacity to assist informed public debate and the development of a genuine civil society—a fundamental precondition for liberal democracy—is not possible.

However, from the perspective of the Singapore government, these observations are predictable and grounded in a false assumption. The PAP doesn't share its critics' views on the virtues of liberal democracy. On the contrary, it wants to avoid the sort of competitive politics championed by its critics. In its place, it remains committed to the consolidation of a political system that embodies a high degree of state-sponsored consensus. Clearly, the media have a critical ideological role to play in producing that consensus. Securing this, however, is an ongoing exercise that must take effective account of the dynamics of contemporary Singapore and the international context within which Singapore operates. Technological developments and the information requirements of an increasingly sophisticated market system are among the more obvious challenges to the city-state's control-minded authorities.

Whatever the challenges, the capacity of the Singapore government to reconcile high levels of media control with market development is impressive. In spite of the absence of media freedom, Singapore has become both a regional media centre and Southeast Asia's most advanced

economy. The economy has also withstood the Asian crisis far more effectively than other economies in the region with freer flows of information and critical analysis.

The likely trajectory is for the Singapore government to continue to maintain high levels of media control, and to engage in periodic clashes with the international media for not playing by the same rules as their local counterparts. Yet for all the friction that characterises relations with the international media, the government—and Lee Kuan Yew in particular—has used them very effectively to both promote the local economy and to project views onto the global political stage. The local media also selectively harness their reports in the service of domestic political agendas. The international media and the Singapore government seem to need each other, but for a while yet it may continue as a love-hate relationship.

Media websites

AsiaOne-Lianhe ZaoBao, www.asia1.com.sg/zaobao/

Asia Business News, www.abn-online.com/abn/

Berita Harian, <http://cyberita.asia1.com.sg/>

Business Times, <http://business-times.asia1.com.sg/>

Cy Berita, <http://cyberita.asia1.com.sg/>

Lianhe Zaobao, www.asia1.com.sg/zaobao/

NTUC News, <http://web1.asia1.com.sg/ntuc/news/>

Singapore Business Times, <http://business-times.asia1.com.sg/>

Straits Times Interactive, <http://straitstimes.asia1.com.sg/>

South Korea

Fear is a hard habit to break

Roger du Mars

On the outskirts of Seoul, among those vast, grey industrial plains of factories and dull, uniform high rise apartments, the first editions of the day's newspapers are being 'touched up' by senior editors, government officials looking over their shoulders. This is not censorship as most South Koreans understand it; having lived through military regimes so brutal that journalists were beaten, tortured and murdered for challenging totalitarian rule, and entire newspaper groups were unceremoniously swept up by the power holders. As we begin the 21st century, South Korea presents a democratic face to the world, government officials 'hint', 'request', 'entreat' or even 'cajole' editors into self-censoring sensitive articles. That this is tolerated points to the history of the media in South Korea: fear of authority, say journalists, is a hard habit to break.

After decades of authoritarian rule, South Korea has a largely tame media, unaccustomed to challenging the power brokers and, in many ways, professionally ill-equipped for their role in the democratic system. While blatant government control has been removed, new forces are threatening press reform while it is still in its infancy and, therefore, most vulnerable. Media ownership is concentrated in very few hands and business interests can fill the vacuum left by the state. At the same time, the government seems to be finding more sophisticated ways of managing editorial directions—the latest, a series of aggressive tax evasion investigations of executives of newspapers critical of the President.

Struggling to find the right path

After decades of strict censorship which reduced the press to a convenient mouthpiece of the dictators of the day, the media in South Korea is evolving

towards genuine democratic standards. Stories critical of the government no longer attract the violent attentions of the secret police, nor do they precipitate phone bugging or harassment. Since President Roh Tae Woo repealed the notorious Basic Press Law in 1987, censorship laws have been removed from books. Apart from the National Security Act, there are few laws that can interfere with the dissemination of information. If newspapers steer clear of pro-North Korea stories, journalists and editors can expect to publish almost anything without fear of being jailed.

Official monitoring, however, continues despite the democratically reformed government. The extent of this monitoring and the ensuing censorship it produces is difficult to gauge. There are no defined 'untouchable' subjects, but government officials still actively monitor every issue of the major dailies. First editions are sent to the outskirts of Seoul where they are used as a 'rough copy' to be amended ahead of printing later editions. By and large there are no direct instructions to kill a story or change a headline: pressure nowadays is more personal, and moments of recalcitrance on the part of the media are tolerated.

'In the past the state restricted the media through repressive reporting guidelines. Now "private control" takes the place of overt restrictions. Government authorities call the media desks in private and coax them. They eventually persuade the media to accept a kind of self-censoring by using their private relationships,' says Lyu Eun-suk, of the human rights group Sarangbang.

Further undermining press freedom is the reality that Korean journalists are not accustomed to searching for news. Rather, they let the news come to them. The press releases issued by government ministries are typically regurgitated in the newspapers. Government policies questioned by reporters are usually those which have already attracted public opposition, the media does not lead the scrutiny of the administration. Being willing to go out on a limb to challenge authority, or conducting extensive research in pursuit of the truth is rare. Exerting the minimum effort is not a stigma in Korean journalism. Korean articles, frequently short exercises in stilted, formal language, use limited background material and few direct quotes. The sources, unnamed more often than not, are complemented by the reporters' own opinions.

So superficially are many issues considered in the press that this restricted mode of reporting brings with it an intrinsic 'self-censorship'.

Losing control

Press release journalism is practised across the board. Public relations people working in the culture industry, the huge business conglomerates and other commercial sectors are all too willing to provide reporters with prewritten stories. Businesses take great care to cultivate amiable relationships with reporters. Perks, such as cash gifts (*chonji*) are sometimes used to strengthen the relationship. It is a mutually beneficial relationship—business has their tailored stories printed and reporters are provided with convenient access to material. Meanwhile, the public is deprived of professional journalism which attempts to analyse or discuss current affairs seriously.

The backdrop to South Korea's ideologically weak media industry is decades of war, military rule and colonial subjugation. Forty years of harsh Japanese colonial rule and 47 years of war or military rule have produced a media culture in which journalists still expect to submit to some kind of pressure from authority figures. While reporters are no longer tortured or killed for pursuing an independent line, the legacy of totalitarianism and the cultural overlays of Confucianism run deep. In *The Unfolding Lotus*, Jon Vanden Heuvel and Everett E. Dennis argue there is little incentive for South Korean journalists to pursue the news aggressively.

The pressure on journalists to blend into the establishment fabric cannot be underestimated. This coziness between those in power and the press is tolerated and even encouraged because it does not seem the least bit unnatural to most Koreans. There is a very homogenous, Confucian society, where harmony, cooperation and consensus between the powers that be and the press are more valued than a journalist's exposés of injustices and individual bravado. In the pantheon of Korean journalism there is little investigative reporting in the US style of Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein of Watergate fame (1993).

The paths leading into the journalism profession tend to reinforce a culture of bowing to authority and fitting in with the system, rather than breaking new ground. The field is extremely competitive, with about ten jobs for every 1,000 applicants. Entering the profession is about as difficult as entering one of the country's most prestigious universities. As a result, applicants with strong general knowledge, good writing skills and foreign languages win the entry-level jobs. However, the best academic qualifications do not necessarily equip young journalists to seek out the truth. South Korea's education system is highly conformist and reflects

the community values—it does not seek to produce graduates who question that system. ‘Today’s journalist is not very much of a true journalist who is charged with a public mission’, says Chung Yeon-woo, assistant professor of advertising and media at Semyung University. ‘He is just a salaried man who has to make a living. Journalists need to be more professional and to have more dignity.’

Working within the establishment and writing inoffensive stories cultivates another form of self-censorship when reporting on foreign news. For example, stories on Japan invariably conform to Korea’s view of the Japanese as unrepentant oppressors. When Kwon Hee-ro, the Korean who in 1968 killed two Japanese gangsters who called him a ‘little dirty Korean pig’, was released from prison and returned to South Korea in September 1999, not one newspaper suggested that murder was an inappropriate method of protesting discrimination. The press unanimously joined the national celebration for this hero who valiantly raised awareness of the cruelty, and arrogant superiority, of the Japanese. If the media defines the perimeters of the news, the public’s perception of daily events, too, seems to be trapped within this limited range of reporting.

A century of oppression, a decade of freedom

Notwithstanding the democratic reforms of the past 12 years, the people of South Korea have been victims of successive, oppressive governments for much of the 20th century. The Japanese effectively usurped control of the government in 1905 when it made Korea a protectorate. After formal annexation in 1910, the Japanese exercised unremitting and brutal authority over the neighbours they considered an inferior race. The end of World War II drove out the Japanese, but opened the way for the establishment of Soviet Communism, giving birth to the Stalinist regime of Kim Il-Sung which occupied the northern half of the Korean Peninsula. Two years later the Korean War devastated this relatively small and crowded stretch of territory. The division between the North and South at the 38th parallel remains to this day, with the two Koreas each bidding warily for reunification on its own terms and enduring the ever present threat of each other’s military and intelligence apparatus.

Throughout decades of threats to stable government and the severe poverty and famine which followed the Korean War, a free media was

Losing control

consistently viewed as a potentially destabilising influence that the fragile society could not support. With no historical tradition of democratic principles in South Korea, the media has never had the opportunity to blossom within the intrinsic principles of freedom. 'While the notion of the freedom of the press and of democracy have literally evolved hand to hand in the west, the South Korean media have lacked such an institutional foundation', notes Lee Jae-kyoung, professor of journalism at Ehwa Women's University in Seoul. 'Simply put, the idea of the free press in South Korea was nothing more than a superficial imposition of a foreign idea which completely lacks indigenous institutional support' (1993a:6).

The United States, which tried to establish law and order in South Korea following World War II, imposed US press concepts that never took root and were only ever in force theoretically. An ordinance designed to promote a free press in 1946 was simply too advanced for such an insecure country. 'As of today all the laws and decrees with legal authority shall be rescinded if their judicial and administrative applications result in discrimination because of race, nationality, creeds or political beliefs' (Youm Kyo-ho 1996:38). Designed to set Koreans free from the harsh yoke of the Japanese, such laws invariably crumbled under the more pragmatic realities of wielding political power in a starving, chaotic land.

When South Korea's first president, Syngman Rhee, guaranteed freedom of expression as a basic constitutional right in 1948, for example, he promptly undermined the integrity of his own proclamation by issuing a set of tough decrees, ostensibly intended to protect South Korea from communist-inspired activities. The press was prohibited from publishing

- articles which run contrary to the national ideals and policies of the Republic of Korea
- articles which defame the government
- articles which propagate and praise communism and the puppet regime of North Korea
- articles based on fabricated facts which agitate the general public
- articles which interfere with relations between the Republic of Korea and other friendly allies and that damage the national prestige of Korea
- articles that, in addition to inciting the people through provocative and radical editorials or reporting, affect the national unity harmfully
- articles that divulge the national secrets detrimental to the security of the Republic of Korea.

So overwhelming were these restrictions that almost any controversial issue could be considered taboo.

During the Korean War of 1950–53 President Rhee upgraded restrictions with total military censorship of the Korean press. But after the war, the Rhee government, itself crippled by widespread official corruption, called on the National Security Act to prohibit ‘problematic views’. A few anti-government newspapers, however, survived, fuelling public discontent and stoking the April 1960 student’s uprising which toppled the Rhee administration. Under the shaky rule of Rhee’s successor, Chang Myon, long-suppressed voices erupted into a rash of new newspapers. Ten days after Chang rescinded the laws stifling the press, 49 new media outlets were opened. News agencies increased 20-fold and the number of daily newspapers tripled by the end of Chang’s brief rule. But, press freedom did not necessarily bolster democracy. Bernard Lavine, former director of the United States Information Service recalls living in South Korea during Chang’s brief foray as leader, ‘when President Yun Bo-sun and his Prime Minister Chang Myon took control of the government in July 1960, it was a heady time for political “wanna be’s”, the press and other media. Unrestricted freedom for 10 months, which many Koreans understood to be democracy in action, created a chaotic situation which resulted in the military coup d’etat by Major General Park Chung Hee on May 16, 1961.’

Park immediately set out to ‘purify’ the Korean press. He spearheaded the Supreme Council for National Reconstruction which imposed standards designed to ‘clean out those phony journalists and press which were catering to defile the sacred freedom of press, and to establish a fresh order in journalism and develop a truly democratic press’ (Youn Kyo-ho 1996:12). This cleansing campaign included the arrest of 960 reporters and the closure of 1,200 news organisations, newspapers and periodicals. Government officials routinely dropped by newsrooms to check for unfavourable content. Under Park’s 16-year authoritarian rule, journalists who took too many liberties were either thrown into prison, tortured or on occasion, even killed.

Under Park’s military junta, the Revolutionary Court sentenced to death in August 1961 three executives of the *Minjok Ilbo* newspaper for ‘advocating political and ideological doctrines similar to those of North Korea such as—neutralization of Korea, negotiations with the North

Korean communists, exchanges of mail with North Korea and student meetings between North and South Korea' (Youn Kyo-ho 1996). One of the three was executed in December 1961. The other two had their sentences commuted to life imprisonment. In 1964, student protests were growing, culminating in massive demonstrations over Park's decision to restore diplomatic relations with Japan. Park blamed the upswing in street opposition on the media, which in turn demanded more freedom; opening a new confrontation between journalists and the regime. Park's answer was the Press Ethics Commission, which added yet another raft of restrictions to the code of ethics for the Korean press.

Suppression of the press under Park seemed to intensify every few years. Journalists were required to carry government-issued press cards and access to information was confined to government offices. A series of Presidential Emergency Measures enacted in 1974, however, peremptorily mocked his ridiculous claims of support for a free press. The decrees prohibited criticism of the constitution, demonstrations and reporting on them, and the 'act to publish, produce, process, distribute, exhibit and sell papers, books, disks and other presentations relating to the National Federation of Democratic Youths and Students', an important student organisation which Park outlawed in April that year. The *Dong-A Ilbo* newspaper attempted to strike back, launching a free press movement on 24 October when it issued the *Declaration of Freedom of the Press*

The unprecedented crisis of our society, today can only be overcome through the practice of freedom of speech. There can be no reason to suppress freedom of speech which is the fundamental task we must fulfill. It is not a task which can be permitted by the government or granted by the people. We will never kneel to any pressure which comes from the opposition to free speech. We declare that we will do our best to practice free speech.

With these forceful words, the newspaper vowed to stand up to the formidable Korean Central Intelligence Agency.

Not surprisingly, Park responded by threatening the newspaper's advertisers. By January 1975, *Dong-A Ilbo* had lost 98 per cent of its advertising revenue. Supporters both within and outside South Korea tried to offset the losses by increasing circulation. But, Park dealt the finishing blow by sacking 133 of its reporters. The few remaining journalists who clung to the free press movement were imprisoned.

As a business, however, the media actually expanded considerably under Park. Total newspaper circulation figures, nationwide, hovered around the three million mark in 1970. Ten years later this figure leapt to 6.2 million. Park's strategy was to expand the economy and in so doing he empowered a select group of businesses. From within this group of entrepreneurs he helped the media owners who helped him. A handful of newspapers which toed the official line thrived, while others which still attempted more independent reporting were systematically purged and forced to close. The increase in circulation figures reflected the overall growth in the economy as South Korea began to industrialise rapidly, rather than any improvement in the quality of the press. Professor Park Yeong-gyu at Sangji University observed at the time

The press has developed rapidly through all kinds of preferential treatments and benefits granted in exchange for accepting suppression. These pressures lead the press to join hands with the 'power brokers' and seek only profits. Naturally, the press lost their sense of duty and purpose, bringing about a distortion of public opinion and the suppression of civil rights.

A false dawn

Arguably though, the assassination of Park in October 1979 and the inauguration of his successor General Chun Doo Hwan ushered in an ever more repressive era for the media. Chun's constitution grossly belied the true state of affairs, stating 'All citizens shall enjoy freedom of speech and of the press, and freedom of assembly and association; neither speech nor the press shall violate the honour or rights of other persons nor undermine public morals or social ethics. Should speech or the press violate the honour or rights of other persons, claims may be made for the damage resulting therefrom' (Article 20(1)(2), amended in 1980). But such high-minded ideals were swiftly buried under Chun's paranoid, dictatorial regime.

No sooner had he declared himself President than he swiftly sacked 700 reporters and editors for indulging in unethical conduct or lacking proper journalistic abilities. With the elements most detrimental to a free and prosperous country out of the way, Chun proceeded to overhaul the entire media industry. He merged 27 daily newspapers into 21, dumped

Losing control

the two commercial television networks, and added an additional state-run network. The hallmark of Chun's notorious clampdown on the media, the Basic Press Act, forced the media to adopt a set of practices that thoroughly adulterated the process of reporting, and shifted the engine of democracy into reverse at a time when it most needed to go forward. From the time it was enacted in December 1980 until it was repealed in June 1987, this draconian law not only extinguished the spirit and professionalism of the media, but caused diplomatic tensions between South Korea and critics in democratic nations.

Characterised by journalism scholar Lim Sang-won as 'one of the most restrictive and comprehensive laws in capitalistic societies', the Basic Press Act imposed complicated technical standards for publication facilities, preventing the growth of existing newspapers and the opening of new publications. It turned what the government defined as the 'responsibility' of the press into a legal obligation; gave the whip to the Ministry of Culture and Information which issued press guidelines instructing the media on how events should or should not be reported. Headlines were selected by the Ministry as were article lengths and the pages where they could be printed. The Ministry also limited the number of pages newspapers could print and determined which correspondents were stationed in provinces outside of Seoul. The Ministry retained the right to suspend or close any publication, radio or television station at any time.

In reality, the Basic Press Law was seldom employed, nor was it ever challenged in court by the journalists, editors or proprietors it controlled. 'The fact that the law was never challenged in court demonstrated how the judicial system had forfeited its role as the guardian of the Constitution and how effectively the press itself had been cowed', says journalism scholar Chang Hosoon. Afraid of offending the government, the press became even more removed from any concept of responsibility in reporting the daily news. Chun also frequently employed the Korean Army Security Command and the Korean National Security Planning Agency (formerly the Korean Central Intelligence Agency) to intimidate and, occasionally, force the press to submit to its demands. When the *Chosun Ilbo* took the risk of reporting on opposition politician Kim Young-sam's hunger strike, for example, KNSPA agents harassed the political reporter who wrote the story, pressuring other reporters not to continue to follow the issue.

According to a report issued by the International Press Institute, the KNSPA literally beat into submission the *Dong-A Ilbo*. In reporting on the Chinese H-5 bomber which crash-landed in Korea on 24 August 1985, the newspaper contradicted official announcements when it noted that Korean fighter planes failed to intercept the Chinese aircraft. Embarrassed by the revelation and livid over *Dong-A Ilbo's* rash decision to break a government news embargo on a 'diplomatically sensitive' issue, KNSPA Director Chang Se-dong hauled in the newspaper's managing director and two other journalists. Inside his office, Chang ordered his lieutenants to punish the three men physically. They left the office severely beaten and less eager to defend high journalistic ideals. The *Dong-A Ilbo* also agreed not to run a story on the KNSPA's intimidation tactics.

A good example of Chun's control of the media resulted in widespread confusion over the truth about the Kwangju incident, arguably the most tragic and controversial event since the Korean War. What started as routine street demonstration on 18 May 1980, deteriorated into violent clashes between the citizens of Kwangju and the military. The masses, who took up home-made arms, managed to rule the streets of the city for about a week. To regain control, the military unleashed a wave of terror, killing at least 200 civilians. In his dissertation, *Anti-Americanism in South Korea: The Media and the Politics of Signification*, Lee Jae-Kyoung describes how Chun deceived the public.

The reporting of the Kwangju incident was under the control of the military regime. In fact, it seems that every major editorial decision was made and enforced by the military censors, and the media were simply reduced to propaganda organs of the regime. The South Korean media completely neglected even the occurrence of this extraordinary incident for nearly four full days, indicating well the intensity of the regime's media control. Every major news item, from the top front-page story to entries in the society and cultural sections, including editorials, bylined columns and comments, was meticulously screened, placed and constructed to serve the military's political objectives (1993b:100).

Chun's blackout on the massacre instigated a rash of anti-American sentiment that continues to linger today. Many Koreans were expecting the United States, which has maintained significant military bases in South

Losing control

Korea, to intervene on the side of the people. Regardless of the validity of these expectations, the absence of US intervention was interpreted in some quarters as categorical proof that Washington supported Chun and that the US government was actively plotting to control Korean society to serve the interests of US citizens at the expense of Korean liberties. A document issued by the US embassy in Seoul explains

It is clear that one cause of increased anti-Americanism in Korea in the 1980s is the false impression held by many Koreans that the US was directly involved in, and significantly responsible for the Kwangju tragedy—a misperception in part fostered by the deception of the Korean authorities at the time, and in part by the restriction on the dissemination of facts about the Kwangju incident during the Fifth Republic (*Backgrounder*, 19 June 1989:26).

New freedoms, old habits

In the summer of 1987, the streets of Seoul were filled with the sting of tear gas and the pounding of military boots. Day after day, highly-organised student protesters faced down the ranks of anti-riot troops, their own sense of courage preventing them from donning the gas masks which protected the security forces and the swarms of foreign reporters from the suffocating clouds of tear gas. Some smeared their faces with toothpaste and wrapped their eyes with 'cling wrap', innovations of the mass protest movement. But, among the students stood ordinary citizens and many of the students' mothers, their hand bags swinging, their twin sets buttoned to the neck; a sign the regime had truly lost its power. Finally, with two million people on the streets backing the student protests, the city was paralysed, and the government squirming uncomfortably in the international spotlight as the upcoming host of the 1988 Olympic Games, Chun was forced to step down. Chairman of the ruling Democratic Justice Party and presidential candidate, Roh Tae Woo, was handed control, vowing to break Korea's 'cycle of authoritarian rule' despite his own military roots. Roh, who went on to serve as president from 1988–92, was in many ways as corrupt as his predecessor. But, in terms of press freedom Roh took the first steps towards a new era.

Roh got off to a promising start when the Basic Press Law was repealed in November of 1987, and the new liberties he granted the media made

his administration seem like a shining light of democratic principles. But, for three decades the press had been an integral part of a corrupt and authoritarian power structure and so thoughtful, honest reporting could not spring up overnight. Himself a past master of taking bribes, Roh nonetheless proclaimed an end to envelope journalism. The practice of *chonji* reached its height during Chun's rule but seems to have steadily waned thereafter. In a press survey of 700 journalists conducted by the Korean Press Institute in 1989, 93 per cent of the respondents said they received bribes from their news sources. But five years later, another survey showed that this figure had dropped to less than 30 per cent and today most reporters say the practice is uncommon.

But, some reporters continue to be hooked on the white envelopes, and have resorted to extortion to have their 'benefits' reinstated. In just three months, from May 1998 to July 1998, the Ministry of Culture alleged 43 journalists were involved in 70 cases of extortion. In these cases, journalists typically approach a company with scandalous information which they threaten to expose if they are not given *chonji* money.

Roh's reforms, while far from sweeping, were nonetheless sufficient to produce an atmosphere in which ethically minded, liberal publications could prosper. In a signal that times had truly changed, a group of dissident journalists banded together and formed *Han-kyoreh Shinmun*, in December 1987, a completely new type of newspaper which not only prohibited the practice of taking *chonji*, but dared to adopt a left of centre political posture. After a lengthy struggle to obtain government approval and with its coffers filled with US\$7 million donations, *Han-kyoreh* published its first paper on 15 May 1988. Owned by citizen shareholders and written entirely in the Korean alphabet, *hangul* (as opposed to featuring the customary spattering of Chinese characters), the newspaper was founded as a grass roots publication that could empathise with North Korea, support opposition politicians and attack the Korean establishment.

While the mainstream press has remained reluctant to expose the malfeasance of the power élite, *Han-kyoreh* has come to represent a voice willing to challenge entrenched power structures.

Korean journalists cannot shake overnight the habits acquired during decades of repression. There is still a tendency to avoid attacking someone in power, someone who could later exact revenge upon a troublesome reporter. For instance, during the 1992 elections, it became

known that the central government and the Seoul city government were funneling money into the ruling Democratic Justice Party's election coffers. This blatant misappropriation of funds was largely ignored by the Seoul press, except for *Han-kyoreh Shinmun*, which ran the story (Vanden Heuvel and Dennis 1993:21).

Broadcast journalism under the government's thumb

The government has always regarded broadcast media as the most powerful and influential medium and has consequently afforded it the least amount of freedom. The airwaves were strictly controlled under Park Chung-hee's dictatorial regime, Chun Doo-whan's Basic Press Law and Roh Tae-woo's Broadcast Act.

While the repeal of the Basic Press Law significantly freed up the print media with the Periodicals Act, the corresponding Broadcast Act of 1987 continues to constrain broadcast media to government-approved material. The three TV stations, two of which, KBS and MBC, are owned by the government, are still bound to the 'public responsibility' provisions of Broadcast Act to the 'improvement of national culture' and are prohibited from undermining public morality and social ethics.

Ever since the Broadcasting Law was amended in 1990, reforms were regularly debated. The integrated broadcasting law was finally passed by the National Assembly on 28 December 1999. The National Broadcast Labor Unions had frequently warned about the President's control over the commission to be established under the new law, which they said, should operate with autonomy, a measure of objectivity, and without undue foreign influence. The commission influences programming under the ostensible objective of promoting morality, free democracy, national identity, pure family life, proper guidance for children and social ethics.

The government naturally congratulated itself on the passage of the integrated broadcasting law. The opposition Grand National Party (GNP), however, boycotted the vote and complained of the ruling party unfairly setting up a censorship mechanism. Comprised of nine members, three selected by the president, three by the chairman of the parliament and three by the culture and tourism committee, the Opposition charges that the new commission will be under undue government control.

‘With the passage of the integrated broadcasting law, the government is still controlling the press,’ says Chung Byung-joon, Secretary General of the Korean Federation of Press Unions. ‘If the government is responsible and chooses good commissioners who have large capacities and talents, then there might be some progress. But the ideal is not happening yet. There is still a clear line linking the press and government authorities.’

The new broadcasting law settles a second controversial point concerning outside investment. The trade unions had lobbied vigorously to prevent foreigners and the *chaebol* from investing in the media. The Ministry of Information and Communication had insisted that foreign capital and expertise were necessary to make competitive the range of new media, such as satellite-based, digital and cable TV, and optic cable projects. The new law restricts foreign firms and the *chaebol* from owning more than a 33 per cent stake in local media companies. With the door thus open for joint ventures, cash and technology are expected to stimulate the industry.

Launched in 1995, the nation’s 28 cable TV channels have racked up losses in the neighborhood of US\$1 billion. With only 830,000 subscribers, paltry advertising revenues, numerous operators are teetering on the verge of bankruptcy. Says Eom Ju-woong, Director of the People’s Coalition for Media Reform: ‘The censorship has changed from direct to indirect but with the government still controlling the media and intervening, it’s even more important to have citizens participate in the political process’.

Where to from here?

The establishment press is chiefly owned by Korea’s behemoth business conglomerates called the *chaebol*. Long criticised for obvious conflicts of interests, two influential newspapers have apparently severed ties with the *chaebol*. South Korea’s second largest *chaebol*, Hyundai, announced its managerial withdrawal from *Munhwa Ilbo* on 16 January 1998 and Samsung from *JoongAng Ilbo* on 21 January 1998. However, an informal survey indicates a skeptical public assumes the previous business relationships still exist. This is a particularly worrisome relationship because the power vacuum left by the authoritarian governments has been filled by big business. Kim Tak-hwan, senior researcher at the Korean

Losing control

Press Institute says, 'It cannot be denied that newspapers have been inclined to represent a particular group of business interests instead of representing public opinion, as collaborators of the powerful and not as watchdogs'.

The power of one particular business sector over the press was demonstrated in late 1997 as the full impact of the regional financial crisis was starting to take hold. The *Maeil Kyungje*, a local economic daily, reported that a major Seoul bank was virtually dry of funds, and published a special supplement examining Korea's banking industry. The first copies of the supplement news-stands in the late evening, causing many depositors to swarm into the bank's headquarters to protest. Later that evening, the members of the union of the bank stormed the offices of the newspaper.

In a more subtle form of control, South Korean governments have taken advantage of ubiquitous tax fraud to shadow the press. By threatening to conduct tax audits on individual newspapers or their companies, the government finds plenty of editors all too willing to allow the government to influence content.

Since the repeal of the Basic Press Law media analysts agree that South Korea has been moving steadily towards freedom of the press. However, recent accusations levelled against the incumbent administration hark back to the dark past. A vocal critic of the present Kim government, the *Segye Times*—run by Rev. Moon Sun-myong of the Unification Church—was recently the subject of a special tax audit. Then, there is the friction between a popular daily, the *JoongAng Ilbo* and the South Korean government, which points to a more troubling case of media autonomy being short-circuited by the ruling administration. In September 1999 a tax audit was ordered on the sundry financial operations of Hong Seok-hyun, publisher and president of the *JoongAng Ilbo* and the largest shareholder of the Bokwang Group. Prosecutors arrested Hong for evading 1.33 billion won in taxes by failing to report 3.23 billion won inherited from his mother; evading 950 million won in taxes on 79,000 shares that he received from three executives from former Samsung executives; and evading another 50 million won by understating the amount he paid for 20,000 shares of an electronics firm. The *JoongAng Ilbo* claims its regular reporting on the scandals that have dogged the administration eventually landed it in hot water.

Suspicious of the government's motives in taking the unusual move to carry out the probe, the International Press Institute fired off a letter to the Government Information Agency which states

If our sources of information are correct, there have been several audits of the Bokwang Group over the past years, the most recent one in 1997, which ended with a clean bill of health...The tax probe which started on 29 June 1999, was not a routine one, since without prior notice—approximately 50 tax officers searched the company and confiscated its accounting books...Since the case is now in the hands of the prosecution, we do not see any legal grounds for an arrest and detainment, as all confiscated material is available to the prosecuting attorney's office anyway; the danger of suppressing relevant evidence is minimal and there is certainly no danger that the accused person would try to escape out of the country (Korean law prevents such an attempt by requiring exit visas). We agree that it is a democratic principle for legal investigations of irregularities or violations of law to be applied to every citizen equally. A publisher or president of a newspaper is no exception to that. However, a fundamental legal principle holds that a person is innocent until proven guilty by the courts.

But, the case is more complicated than it may seem. Tensions between the *JoongAng Ilbo* and Kim Dae-jung began escalating when he was campaigning for the 1997 presidential elections and believed the newspaper was unfairly supporting his opponent, Lee Hoi-chang. Reports circulated that money had illicitly flowed from Lee's campaign war chest to the coffers of either the *Joong-ang Ilbo* or the Samsung Group, the huge conglomerate that owned a major stake in the newspaper. The various rumours are difficult to confirm. But, what is evident is that neither the newspaper nor the government regards each other as neutral.

The prosecution pressed for a six-year term and a 5.1 billion won fine shortly after Hong Seok-hyun was arrested in October. When the Seoul District Court meted out a suspended 3-year sentence and a 3.8 billion won fine, the opposition Grand National Party (GNP) accused the government of cutting a deal with the *JoongAng Ilbo*.

'The *JoongAng Ilbo* had a plan to make an all-out assault on the government after Hong Seok-hyun's arrest in order to get the Kim Dae-jung administration to back off', said a member of the GNP. 'As far as I

see, the plan only partly worked because the prosecution tried to get a severe punishment and the judge gave him a major fine.'

Consequently, Lee Hoi-chang, leader of the opposition Grand National Party, claims *JoongAng Ilbo* is waging a struggle to protect the freedom of the press. The GNP launched a special in-house panel to break up 'increasing government repression of the press', and submitted a dismissal motion to the National Assembly against Culture and Tourism Minister Park Jie-won, a former spokesman for President Kim who allegedly pressured the *JoongAng Ilbo* to tone down its criticism of the government. The GNP has also accused Mr Park of trying to influence major staff appointments at the paper, control the treatment of stories and intimidating Mr Hong by throwing a glass at him. During the National Assembly's annual policy evaluation meeting in early October, Mr Park explained his actions, 'As I drank a lot that night, there are some things I can remember and some things I cannot'.

President Kim Dae-jung insists there is no relationship between the attention the National Tax Administration and his public relation officials are giving to the *JoongAng Ilbo* and an attempt to control the media. 'This government of the people respects freedom of the press and it never intends to suppress the press', he says.

If the rift between the *JoongAng Ilbo* and the Kim Dae-jung administration simply centered on allegation of the government pressuring the press to toe the line, the conflict would simply fall into a long tradition of Korean authoritative practices. But the conflict takes on the trappings of an all too common political drama, rife with stealth and multiple accusations, all difficult to verify.

For all the antipathy marking the relationship, it seemed initially peculiar that a *JoongAng Ilbo* reporter was accused of trying to help the Kim Dae-jung Administration. In November, Moon Il-hyun, on the apparent behest of the ruling coalition, faxed to Lee Jong-chan, Vice President of the NCNP, a list of suggestions designed to help the ruling party gain more public favour. The suggestions covered various ways in which the government could exploit the press to encourage the public to muster support for Kim Dae-jung's reforms.

The plot thickened when Lee Do-joon, a reporter for Pyonghwa Broadcasting Corp. visited Lee Jong-chan's office, discovered the letter, turned it over to GNP lawmaker Chung Hyung-keun who paraded it at a

National Assembly hearing as evidence of the president manipulating and controlling the media.

The GNP found more fodder for its offensive when rumors spread that President Kim had received illicit contributions from the *JoongAng Ilbo*. While apparently intoxicated, National Intelligence Service chief Chun Yong-taek told reporters 'off the record', that Hong Seok-hyun had indeed supplied Mr Kim with secret political funds prior to his presidency.

Issues such as hidden motive and shifting alliances sparked much speculation. The rival parties exchanged accusations, the public assumed the worst and numerous questions remain unresolved. Such is the state of politics and the media in South Korea.

Media websites

Chosun Ilbo, www.chosun.com/

Dong A Ilbo, www.dongailbo.co.kr/

Han'guk Kyeongje Sinmun, www.ked.co.kr/

Han'guk Ilbo, www.korealink.co.kr/

Ilgan Muyeok, www.tradenews.net/

JoongAng Daily News, www.joongang.co.kr/

Korea Economic Daily, www.joongang.co.kr/

Kyong-Hyang, www.khan.co.kr/

Munhwa Ilbo, www.munhwa.co.kr/

Seoul Shinmun, www.seoul.co.kr/

Taiwan

All politics, no privacy

Ma-li Yang and Dennis Engbarth

In the scramble to outdo the competition, one Taiwanese television station recently reported on an alleged case of wife swapping. It solved the problem of having no available footage by broadcasting scenes from an illegal pornographic VCD, with the helpful label 'simulation' overlaid. In a recent news report on a police crackdown on 'girlie' bars another television station gave over six full minutes of air time to the opinions of the establishment's 'public relations ladies', the camera scanning their bare thighs and skimpy tops. So fierce is the battle for viewers, and the accompanying advertising revenue, in Taiwan's crowded television market that it seems there is no limit to the violence, sex, drama or gore. Television cameras have taken to following suspects into police interrogation rooms and accident victims into emergency surgery in hospitals; often resulting in distressingly detailed coverage of brutal or bloody scenes. 'Privacy, what is this?', lamented a Taipei-based journalist. 'I mean people are being filmed in the last moments of their lives while doctors are giving them heart massage, with no permission from anyone.'

In its March 1999 annual report the US-based Committee for the Protection of Journalists concluded that Taiwan boasted the freest press environment in Asia. Twelve years after the lifting of the draconian press restrictions of martial law, newspapers, radio and television stations and magazines are booming in an often raucous media industry. The democratisation of politics is reflected in the democratisation of the media, with radio talk back shows offering new opportunities for ordinary people to have their views heard, as well as directly question members of their government on air. The scrapping of the last of the press laws in 1999, the Publication Law, means anyone in Taiwan can own or publish newspapers

or magazines. There are no limits on foreign ownership in the media, nor is there any form of censorship.

But, at the same time there are signs which suggest freedom of expression is still curtailed by the highly politicised ownership structure of much of the media and by the business interests of media owners themselves. The mere expansion of the number of media outlets does not necessarily imply a positive trend in the industry. So oversupplied have parts of the industry become that competition has pushed the media into a downward spiral of sensationalism and voyeurism. In the race to be first, accuracy and professionalism are being sacrificed, particularly in the popular live-to-air broadcasts in which reporters are on-the-spot without the means to check the facts they are presenting as truth. To protect certain sensitive state information from the voracious appetite of the media, the government is now considering an official secrets act, in the spirit of the controls of the past. Journalists, on the other hand, are campaigning for a freedom of information act as a balance. At the same time the first independent media organisation has been formed and, although it represents a minority of Taiwan's journalists, work is underway on voluntary codes of ethics and standards of professionalism.

Martial law: China's other dictators

In almost half a century under martial law Taiwan's citizens learned to read the fine print. The government issued only 32 newspaper licences nationwide and restricted each publication to between four and twelve pages; thus forcing editors to employ the smallest possible typefaces. Radio, too, was strictly controlled, with frequencies reserved for military and official use, and licences restricted to government agencies or the ruling party. While there was no official limit on the number of magazine licences, new magazines were required to demonstrate that they were promoting the national interest. Operating under these vague guidelines, many magazines were later banned or had specific issues confiscated in lightning swoops by security officials. So too were a number of editors, publishers, writers and printers arrested and jailed on the same grounds. Even more disturbing was the use of journalists by the feared secret police to collect intelligence from within the media; a practice which strained relations between the press and the underground opposition.

Losing control

Taiwan was ruled under a martial law decree imposed by the Kuomintang (KMT), or the Nationalist Party of China, from 1949, led by Chiang Kai-shek and his son, Ching-kuo. Chiang, his army and his supporters had fled mainland China after losing the civil war to the forces of the Chinese Communist Party. Arriving on the offshore island, formerly known as Formosa, Chiang suspended civil freedoms and imposed severe restrictions on the press. Taiwan had enjoyed a brief period of freedom with the end of half a century of Japanese colonialism in 1945, but a new authoritarian regime was building in its wake. In the late 1940s and early 1950s Taiwan endured the ‘white terror’ purge of left-wing dissidents and suspected communists or communist sympathisers as the Chiang regime established its dictatorship in direct opposition to the communist victors on the mainland. The last liberal media outlet, the *Free China Review* biweekly, was finally closed down in 1960 after the arrest of its founder, Lei Chen. Lei was himself a senior member of the KMT and had attempted to bring liberal mainland Chinese and local politicians into a China Democratic Party. But, for all its anti-communist rhetoric, the Chiang regime was setting up an authoritarian state—despite his ideological commitment to free market capitalism—employing many of the same political controls used by his communist enemies.

During the martial law period the media was virtually entirely owned and controlled by the KMT, and its allies in the armed forces. The dominant *Central Daily News* was operated by the party itself, and other key publications, such as the *China Times* and the *United Daily News* were each owned by a member of the KMT central standing committee. The only daily newspaper which was relatively independent of the KMT was the non-partisan *Independent Evening Post*, which was operated by a Taiwanese textile group. Only three television stations were permitted

- Taiwan Television, established in 1962 by the Taiwan Provincial Government, which held 49 per cent ownership with the KMT holding 12 per cent
- China Television, established in 1969 with the KMT holding 68 per cent of the shares
- China Television System, opened in 1971 with the Ministry of National Defence holding 76 per cent of its stock and the Ministry of Education, 10 per cent.

Such an ownership pattern served as an effective back-up to restrictive media laws.

With the airwaves virtually owned or controlled by the KMT and their political supporters, the media produced blatantly slanted news programs, serving largely as a propaganda tool for the power élite.

Taiwan's closed political system, however, was increasingly challenged as rapid and successful industrialisation built a better-educated middle class. In the 1950s Taiwan was a poor, agrarian-based society of farmers with little education. By the 1970s, aggressive industrialisation policies had propelled the island state into the ranks of East Asia's economic tigers, alongside South Korea and Singapore. With education and affluence came new pressures for information and openness.

While the government-approved media remained in the hands of the ruling party, the loophole in the restrictions on new magazines was exploited to the limit by opposition activists. Members of the Tangwai movement, a grass roots opposition movement which defined itself outside the all-pervasive KMT, published a whole range of magazines. Most survived only for a couple of editions before being banned, but they served their purpose nonetheless. In the politically turbulent years between 1979 and 1982, 23 out of 28 opposition-linked magazines were shut down. Among the best known of the dissident publications were the monthly magazines, *Taiwan Political Review* (1975), *China Tide* (1976–79), *Our Generation* (1977–79), *The Eighties* and its sister publication, *The Asian* (1979–mid 1980s) and *Formosa* (September to December, 1979). *Formosa* served as the focus for an attempt by opposition figures to form an opposition political group, without specifically breaching martial law regulations banning new political parties. After a major human rights rally in southern Taiwan erupted into a riot, probably due to provocation by the security forces, most of *Formosa's* key staff were arrested in a nationwide crackdown. Eight opposition leaders were sentenced to 15 years in jail for sedition. Many have since been elected as legislators.

In mid 1987 martial law was finally lifted. Chiang Kai-shek was old and ill, and his system of controls overtaken by economic prosperity. In January the next year he died. The lifting of the martial law decree immediately sparked dramatic growth in all sectors of the media. A virtual storm of press exposés of previously taboo issues followed as the

Losing control

frustrations, which had built under authoritarian rule, were unleashed. From the limit of 32 dry 12-page newspapers of the past, emerged scores of new dailies, with 367 being published in 1999. Magazines boomed, from almost 1,500 in the early 1970s to close to 6,000 today. Radio stations leaped from 33 to 80 and by the end of 1999 there were 140 cable and satellite TV operators in the market (see tables opposite).

The stranglehold of the KMT declined sharply as new private owners entered the media industry. Directly KMT-owned and managed media outlets fell into an apparently irreversible decline as consumers rejected the newspapers which had served as propaganda mouthpieces. The *China Times* and the *United Daily News*, once controlled by senior KMT members, distanced themselves from party politics to compete with the new market leader, the privately owned *Liberty Times*. However, direct control has been replaced by more subtle political influence. In 1999, the KMT still ruled Taiwan through a multi-party democracy. As such, the main newspapers continued to play an important role in bolstering the government and individual newspapers had aligned themselves with factions within the KMT or the opposition. The result is a press with little pretence to balance, consumed by a public which expects political pressure behind the scenes. 'To get all sides of the story you really have to buy all the newspapers', is a common observation.

In local free-to-air television the power of the KMT is still considerable. It continues to control three of the four wireless TV stations, TTV, CTS and CTV. Appointments to these stations are usually politically motivated and executives often have little professional experience of broadcasting. Numerous surveys of television coverage of election campaigns have shown that the KMT still receives the lion's share of air time; in quality, editorial slant and quantity. The only exception in the TV sector is the Formosa Television Network (FTN), which was formed in 1997 after the Government Information Office granted a fourth wireless TV licence to a consortium led by opposition politicians. Predictably, FTN has been accused of favouring the opposition but the public has also complained that Formosa is not sufficiently anti-KMT, demonstrating that expectations of political interference in the media continue.

The political control of the management of Taiwan's four television stations points to a serious problem for press freedom, regardless of the recent entry of the opposition into the sector. Television is entirely

Media growth in Taiwan, 1950s–1999

Number of newspapers increased ten-fold, 1954–99

	<i>Number of newspapers</i>	<i>Pages per issue</i>
1954–87	31	4–8–12
1988	123	32–40
1989	196	as above
1990	212	as above
1994	303	as above
1998	357	as above
Jan 1999	367	as above

Magazines grew 40 per cent in ten years

	<i>Number of magazines</i>
1951	157
1971	1478
1981	2244
1989	4242
1994	5225
1999	5975

Number of radio stations more than doubled

	<i>Number of radio stations</i>
1950–93	33 total (of which) 20 privately owned 12 state owned 1 KMT owned
Jan 1999	80 (another 65 under construction)

Cable and satellite TV service providers joined the market

	<i>Over the air</i>	<i>Cable TV</i>	<i>Satellite TV</i>
1962	1	0	0
1969	2	0	0
1971	3	0	0
1993	3	Cable TV law passed	
1997	4	~ 140	~ 100
Jan 1999	5	~ 140	~ 100

Note: ~ means approximately.

Source: Government Information Office, Taiwan, ROC.

Losing control

controlled by political parties, meaning programming cannot be neutral, nor news and current affairs coverage free from political influence. The major newspapers have adopted clearer editorial positions aligning themselves with political interests and have taken up the interests of different KMT factions in recent years. Under martial law the island's main newsagency, the Central News Agency, was directly controlled by the KMT. It is owned and operated by the KMT to this day. A 1993 survey of readers by National Chengchi University Professor, Huang The-fu, concluded that there this an obvious political identification of readers with individual newspapers, reflecting the political stance of the newspapers. Balance then, can only be discussed in a wider context, in that alternative media outlets now exist, meaning people have a choice to switch off the KMT.

There is also the issue of business influence. Commentators are concerned that the press can be used to promote the commercial interests of its owners directly. In the years of the post-martial law period, the media was filled with dramatic exposés of the former regime, particularly human rights abuses of the Chiang era. Nowadays, business and financial magazines are becoming more and more popular and make up about one-fifth of all publications. Two of the most popular current affairs magazines which had their roots in political commentary—*The Journalist* and *The Global View*—recently announced they would increase their financial and business coverage.

The sources of pressure on journalists to restrict or distort news coverage have now shifted from the heavy-handed influence of the KMT regime to a more subtle mix of both political and economic influences, often combining the purchases of newspapers of other media outlets by politically ambitious leaders of conglomerates, or by the formation of media conglomerates. One consequence is that the quality of news coverage and professional and ethical standards of reporters has come under intense social criticism (senior Taiwanese journalist, Cheryl Lai Shou-lu, 1995).

So much TV, so little news

From the rubble of the tragic 1999 earthquake which killed hundreds of Taiwanese and razed vast swathes of buildings, a small child was plucked.

As in so many tragedies of this scale, this was the miracle people were looking for, that tiny ray of hope in a sea of death and destruction—that magic story for television executives. But as rescue workers pulled him into the open, a swarm of television cameras crushed so forcefully around the boy that he was almost buried again in panic. So disturbing were the images of the media swarm that the Taiwanese government strongly criticised the television coverage of the earthquake. Beyond the real threat to the fragile, little survivor was the reality that television crews were reaching sites ahead of rescue teams and broadcasting live the graphic, gory scenes, with no thoughts of the distress of relatives, the rights of the victims themselves or the impediments they were creating for emergency services. Television stations slammed the government's slow response in reaching the victims, however journalists privately conceded that they did get in the way of legitimate emergency efforts. So shocked were the cable TV operators by the incident that they agreed, for the first time ever, to form pool television crews and to share footage, so that fewer cameras would be on the spot.

The earthquake coverage marked a peak in a rising trend of sensationalism in the media, particularly on television. With party political interests dominating local free-to-air stations, more and more Taiwanese have been turning to cable television, seriously threatening the influence of the local broadcasters. More than 70 cable channels are offered by 140 providers around the island including NHK from Japan, HBO, CNN, Disney, as well as sports, home shopping services, music video channels and talk shows. According to an AC Nielsen survey, cable television subscriptions had reached 79.1 per cent of households by 1998, the highest rate of cable TV viewing in Asia. Recently changes legalising satellite dish receivers have also opened up the way for direct satellite broadcasts.

Of the cable channels four are devoted entirely to news, down from a peak of eight, in a nation of only 22 million people. The local cable TV news operators are attempting to copy a CNN-type 24-hour news format. These news services, however, mainly cover local news which, in itself, is unlikely to provide sufficient material for endless news broadcasts. Increasingly, crimes, fires, gang conflicts, sex, violence and drugs are making TV headlines. President, Lee Teng-hui, recently lamented that the obsession with crime in the cable TV evening news bulletins could have a negative influence on the young generation. But, with so much TV for so

Losing control

few viewers, sensationalism is seen as the commercial formula which will attract the largest slice of the market.

Another recent trend has been the introduction of spot-news gathering using satellite technology. This means more and more news is being transmitted unedited live from the scenes of various accidents and disasters. As we know from similar broadcasts in the west, reporters are often underprepared or simply do not know what is happening. As such, this type of reporting frequently features stunned looking journalists discussing conjecture and rumours on air as though they were facts, abandoning the basic journalistic principle of verifying news first. Fires, in particular, are getting more and more air time, simply because they make good pictures. Serious news is being pushed further and further down the news bulletins as viewers are served up a dramatic, but often meaningless, series of shocking images night after night.

The media under control or out of control?

During the long years of martial law only one newspaper offered anything approaching balanced news reporting: *The Independent Morning Post*, and its sister evening edition. The *Post* was owned by the Taiwan Spinning Group, a large textile company which was not directly influenced by the KMT. But, in 1994 the *Post* was bought out by a construction company controlled by a senior KMT politician and businessman, Chen Cheng-chung. Chen wanted to use the respected and popular publication to expand both his business empire and his political clout. He also purchased *The Great News* and *Freedom Times*. Chen's first move as a media magnate was to end editorial autonomy and sack journalists he considered hostile to his new editorial line. The buyout was seen by many supporters of press freedom as a demonstration of the new power of money, that commercial controls in a democratic era could be just as effective as the martial law decrees in determining editorial content.

In September 1994, in the driving rain on the streets of Taipei, hundreds of journalists staged their first-ever demonstration, backed by a full page advertisement purchased in local newspapers calling for editorial autonomy. The advertisement carried more than 1,000 signatures. Following the protest, hundreds of Taiwanese journalists formed the first independent professional association, The Association for Taiwan

Journalists (ATJ). The ATJ now has close to 250 members, but represents only a small minority of working journalists. However, it is a start and is working on a range of issues including editorial autonomy, ethics, self-discipline and working conditions. The most serious problems identified by the ATJ are the politicisation of the media and ethics. 'Members of the public very much expect ownership affiliations to affect the nature of coverage', said one ATJ representative. 'In a sense there is a lack of independent thinking both in society and the media, and a poor understanding of history, which is a legacy of a tightly controlled education system and press restrictions during decades of martial law.' On the issue of ethics the ATJ codes are purely voluntary, but, 'the earthquake case was a start, it shocked people into thinking a bit more about their role'.

Other issues under review by the ATJ are corruption, or the culture of the red envelope, and violence against journalists. A detailed survey of bribes offered to journalists found corruption was petty, but ranged from gifts of cash and watches to reporters attending a press conference called by a chain of beauty salons, to the payment of cash for travel expenses to reporters attending seminars presented by KMT officials and the military. While small in scale these incidents reflect a culture of co-optation—journalists are seen as agents of propaganda, not impartial reporters of facts. During election campaigns in particular, budgets are allocated by political parties for cash gifts and other incentives such as the hosting of 'overseas tours' for journalists covering particular candidates. Journalists refusing to participate in these junkets find they have limited access to the politician in question, or are shunned by their media peers. Another recent and worrying trend has been the infiltration of powerful gangs into local governments, real estate and construction, particularly in provincial areas. Gang control has made the 'monitoring' of local governments, and their decisions on issues such as building permits, by the media more difficult. There have been recent reports of local journalists being beaten or intimidated by members of local gangs.

At the same time legislators are now reviewing drafts of two new laws—one to protect sensitive government information from the media (an official secrets act) and another to open government information formally to the public and the press (a freedom of information act). Every year, for example, the Defence and Foreign Affairs Ministries put up secret budgets, considered highly sensitive by the government because of

Losing control

continuing tensions with mainland China. In the free press environment, however, the budgets are on the front pages of the national newspapers the next day. Media commentators believe the government may be able to win the battle for an official secrets act with a trade off, a freedom information act, offering the media wider pastures on which to graze.

Media websites

CCC News, www.cccnews.com/bingif/

Central News Agency, www.cna.com.tw/

China Times, www.chinatimes.com.tw/

Esplanade Newslines, www.ewslines.com/

Min Sheng, www.sinanet.com/minsheng/

Taiwan Economic News, www.news.cens.com/

Taiwan Economic Daily News, www.wlbd.com/twnews/

Taiwan Headline News, www.dailynews.sinanet.com/

Taiwan News, www.dailynews.sinanet.com/

Taiwan Today News Network, www.ttnn.com/cna/

Thailand

A troubled path to a hopeful future

Kavi Chongkittavorn
(additional material by Louise Williams)

The weight of this sad time we ought to obey, speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.' So ran the editorial of Thailand's *The Nation* newspaper on 20 May 1992. The quote from the last act of Shakespeare's *King Lear*—when the good and the bad, the strong and the weak, all die alike, and the stage is so littered with corpses that it is left to Edgar to stammer the curtain down—was edged in the editorial in the black of mourning. The remainder of the editorial box was left blank, for the point had been made.

During the previous three days soldiers of the regime of former military chief, General Suchinda Krapayoon, had opened fire on hundreds of thousands of pro-democracy protesters at Sanam Luang, one of Bangkok's most famous parks set amidst the golden domes and spires of the Buddhist temples which line the Chao Phraya river. How many people actually died is still unclear, but hundreds of local and foreign journalists witnessed the massacre and trailed the bands of brutal troops through the eerily empty streets of the Thai capital as they hunted down fleeing demonstrators.

The 1992 pro-democracy uprising in Thailand was dubbed the 'mobile phone revolution' because it was the first major political movement in Southeast Asia in which new communication technology—combined with rising levels of affluence due to rapid industrialisation—meant that a crucial protest movement could be pulled together by phone. The protesters were predominantly middle class, those who had benefited from economic growth under authoritarian regimes but believed Thailand could now afford to open up its political life.

Losing control

At that time the Thai media was, supposedly, under strict government control, following the bloodless military coup of 1991 and imperfect elections which left the country with an appointed, not elected, retired General as Prime Minister. Thai TV and radio stations continued on behalf of the besieged regime, to lie and fabricate reports, which bore little resemblance to the terrifying scenes on the streets. But technology had already defeated the censors and the propaganda departments. With satellite TV functioning and with enough receivers of live and recorded pictures from services such as CNN and the BBC, it was impossible to shield the Thai people from the truth. Pro-democracy activists made thousands of video copies of the carnage, which were sold on the streets and passed from neighbour to neighbour. Rising income levels of the past few years meant many Bangkok homes had their own video compact discs (VCDs).

The Thai government tried to block the newspapers and several did not print normal editions during the chilling 72-hour stand-off which brought Bangkok to a standstill, most of the city's residents huddling inside, the dull roar of the traffic replaced by cracks of gunfire. But, with rumours racing across the city that the General's tanks were moving on the offices of *The Nation*—and after an acid bomb attack on the home of the newspaper's editor-in-chief—the journalists and editors inside decided to go ahead with an uncensored edition anyway. For freedom of the press in Thailand, *The Nation's* bold stance marked a critical turning point which has since shaped the media's future. For Thailand as a nation, the pro-democracy movement marked the beginning of the end of the direct political control of the Generals, and the cycle of *coup d'états* marring the development of democracy.

How the drama was resolved is already history. Thailand's deeply revered King Bhumiphol Adulyadej intervened. On national television General Suchinda and pro-democracy leader, Chamlong Srimuang, were seen crawling along the carpet to prostrate themselves at the King's feet, as commoners must. The military was effectively banished from political life, but without the punishment for their excesses many would have liked. A transitional government led by a respected former diplomat, Anand Panyarachun, was put in its place to prepare for new elections.

Nowadays, Thailand boasts one of the freest presses in East Asia. In recent years significant changes to the regulations controlling the media

have allowed newspaper, radio and television reporters to carve an important role as social 'watchdogs', focusing on government corruption and incompetence, as well on social issues such as the impact of the recent economic crisis on Thai society. In 1997 a new constitution was promulgated, including 37 articles which promote a free press, freedom of speech, and individual rights. For the first time the constitution stipulates that the airwaves belong to the people—and not the government or the military—and, as such, must be managed by an independent commission.

But the legacy of decades of military and government control, as well as the power of big business groups and individual politicians means that the Thai media is still struggling to establish a new balance between the demands of commercialism and the responsibility of a free media. Many Thai newspapers, for example, have been accustomed to taking partisan positions, their stories freely mixing facts with opinions and reflecting the views or political positions of their owners. Thai newspapers, too, have continued to pursue the commercially successful formula of sex and violence, with some tabloids using extraordinarily gory photographs of horrific accidents alongside bikini girls, with little thought for serious political news.

Recently, some sectors of the serious press have been subjected to harassment and threats by political power brokers. The incidents are described by the government as 'personal matters' between the politicians and the newspapers, but they represent a form of potential censorship. At the same time the Thai media industry is starting to realise that its history has stunted the development of a core of professional journalists with the skills to operate effectively within the new environment.

Corruption, or the culture of the white envelope, has long been part of the industry due to low wages and long working hours as well as the partisan tradition of the media. But, ironically, just as new laws have secured press freedoms, and provided expanded opportunities for the media to hold bureaucrats and politicians to account, some journalists and editors have also been exposed. Working in the field, journalists and TV personalities do not always practise the ethics espoused by their bosses. Proud of its watchdog role, the press was rocked recently by the disclosure of a list of names of alleged bribe-taking journalists from established newspapers. What was new was the scale and audacity of the

Losing control

arrangements journalists are willing to make with politicians and businessmen. Traditional bribe-giving through the so-called white envelope has given way to direct deposits, stock options and gifts of cars and houses.

As Thailand approaches the end of the century media analysts agree much has been accomplished, but the new question which must be answered is 'Who will watch the watchdogs?'

From dictatorship to democracy

The history of the Thai media parallels the nation's political history: a roller coaster ride of military coups and anti-government uprisings, the rapid rise and fall of governments, but the appearance and reappearance of many of the same old political players through the revolving door of power.

Thailand was ruled by the Royal Family until 1932, but western-inspired democratic forces pushed King Rama VII into accepting a shift from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy. However, the success of early democratic forces was limited to shuffling aside the King. For the following four decades the country remained under the control of the successive authoritarian, military governments of Field Marshals Phibun Songgram, Sarit Thanarat and Thanom Kittikacharon. Press censorship by the state was routine, and was justified on the grounds that media controls were essential to protect the monarch and to counter the communist insurgency, which threatened Thailand's domestic stability from the 1950s to the 1980s. During this period numerous newspaper editors were accused of being communists or collaborators and subsequently jailed. Critical newspapers were closed down and others hijacked by politicians and military leaders to serve as mouthpieces for their own personal interests.

The printed and electronic media came under the direct control of the feared Police Special Branch and the Public Relations Department. These two arms of government monitored the media and took appropriate action against those acting counter to the national interest. The police had the power to revoke printing licences and confiscate publications, and their role as guardians of the national interest meant charges could be pressed against journalists on almost any pretext. More specifically the media was

prohibited from commenting on the Royal family, national security issues, or making statements which could incite disturbances or insult Buddhism.

In 1973, a popular uprising ushered in a new period of democracy and openness, celebrated with the establishment of a number of new daily newspapers. However, despite the government being in the hands of the democratic forces, restrictive press laws and regulations of the past remained in force, a constant reminder to journalists and editors that the winds could change at any time. The relationship between the press and the new government improved dramatically, but much of the goodwill and tolerance of criticism from the media relied on personal relationships between editors and the power brokers and not on any kind of impartial legislative protection. Government press officials granted the media much wider boundaries for reports on corruption, crime and scandals, but retained sensitive local taboos such as reporting on the Royal family or insulting Buddhism. The result, though, of this personalised system of press freedom was partisan reporting. Newspapers came to identify with particular, friendly powerholders and their ongoing access to information—and in a sense their commercial survival—relied on supporting their patrons on their pages.

Thailand lapsed back into right-wing dictatorship following the bloody suppression of students in 1976. The restrictive media laws were still in place. The new government tried to take control of the press one step further by publishing its own newspaper, *Chao Phraya*. But, so unpopular was this daily that it folded after only three months. The print media remained in the hands of the private sector, but under the watchful eyes of the censors; the electronic media continued to be directly controlled by the government or the armed forces. Journalists' and editors' associations mounted a concerted campaign against the restrictive press laws, because the country's cycle of military coups—17 in all since 1932—meant the media was always vulnerable. During political transitions police and press officials sometimes directly intimidated journalists, or used other forms of harassment, to control the content of newspapers. At times of intense political uncertainty journalists, themselves, often became the victims. Between 1979 and 1984 at least 47 Thai journalists were killed, mostly in provincial areas.

The 1980s marked the beginning of high economic growth and the gradual movement away from military dictatorships. As the economy

boomed, the restrictions on the press were relaxed under the government of Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanond. This was a period of political stability, rare in Thai politics. The country retained the same leader for almost a decade, despite successive cabinet reshuffles. Compared to other East Asian nations at the time, Thailand enjoyed relative press freedom. But, there were still attempts by the Prem administration to blunt criticism, particularly in the final years of his rule.

Boom times for the newspaper business

The economic boom spurred the growth of the media as an industry. Dozens of new, mainly business-oriented publications were published, to compete for an increasingly middle-class readership. Radio and television stations spiced up programming formats with more business and economic information. The new business papers, however, were largely advertorials, their editorial content driven by the interests of advertisers or the business stables of their owners. But, at the same time economic growth stirred underlying social pressure, exacerbating the gap between the rich and the poor and the disparity between the developed urban areas and the poor provinces. The vernacular press began to report on these issues, which more and more were bringing the people into conflict with the state.

Populist Prime Minister, General Chatchai Choonhavan, who succeeded Prem at the end of 1988 was a defender of press freedom, despite his military roots. Riding high on years of double digit growth and increasing international optimism about the sustainability of Thailand's economic boom, Chatchai saw a free press as a means of promoting Thailand both regionally and globally. Editors and journalists used the buoyancy of the late 1980s to agitate for the scrapping of archaic press laws. The most stringent of all, known as the Revolutionary Decree No. 42, was enacted by the military junta in 1976 and gave overwhelming powers to the Interior Ministry to withdraw licences simply because the government or military did not like critical articles or editorial content.

From 1988 the decree was finally scrapped and the media industry boomed. About 150 new publications, including dailies, weeklies, fortnightlies and monthly newspapers and magazines, entered the highly competitive market. Significantly, the scrapping of Decree No. 42 opened

the way for Thailand's media to enter the regional media market. For decades, Bangkok had been an important base for foreign correspondents covering the region, particularly Indochina. But, Thailand's own strict anti-communist regulations governing the press had prevented the Thai media from actively engaging in reporting on their nearest neighbours. From 1988, however, first-hand reporting from the Communist Party-ruled states of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia—then in the process of a UN-supervised transition—was encouraged and both Thai and English-language dailies despatched their own correspondents to begin exploring the social and economic conditions of their neighbours for the first time in decades.

But, unlike newspapers, the electronic media remained in government hands, partly due to the long-term concessions handed out in the past to the armed forces and various government agencies, but also partly due to relatively successful programming formats. Since 1954, when television was first broadcast in Thailand, it had been under military or government control. Television continued to broadcast news reflecting the opinions of government with little analysis or current affairs. Popular games, quiz shows and sit-coms dominated prime time slots. Radio has always been more popular in rural areas and continued to reach the majority of people. Of more than 400 radio stations nationwide, all were owned by the government or military, with the armed forces directly controlling more than 200. Both television and radio stations were used as tools by the government and the security apparatus and, in contrast to the increasingly outspoken print media, the electronic media broadcast news bulletins heavily influenced by their masters. To boost their own financial fortunes various military officers leased radio stations to private operators. These deals bred large-scale corruption and the huge concessional fees for control of radio stations did not find their way into the military's coffers.

The 1980s and early 1990s changed Bangkok, and much of Thailand. So rapid was economic growth that building continued 24 hours a day, the capital rumbling under the weight of delivery trucks, the air filled with dust as scores of new high-rise towers edged their way upwards, transforming streetscapes and laying out a new middle-class dreams for millions. In Thailand everyone had a job; tourism was booming thanks to a successful international advertising campaign promoting the soft land of smiles, industry was booming because wages were still low, real estate

and construction was booming, and infrastructure was booming as the demand for roads, gas and power rose exponentially. But, just as quick to rise were expectations. And with the boom came a sharp rise in housing costs, horrific traffic jams which destroyed the social fabric of the city and forced family life into the car—complete with portable potty and meals—and caused industrial accidents and pollution so severe that it threatened the tourist industry. The progressive Thai Research Development Institute predicted that unless economic growth could be held above seven per cent, raised expectations could not be met, and the downside of roaring industrialisation would overtake the optimism for the future. Coincidentally, perhaps, growth dropped to 6.8 per cent at the beginning of 1992, just as the military regime of General Suchinda was due to hand over power to an elected government. In March that year the elections did go ahead, but Suchinda moved to appoint himself Prime Minister and the scene was set for the bloody confrontation on the streets of Bangkok.

The May massacre and its aftermath

The 1992 May massacre shook Thailand to the core. Those charming, sunny images of the kingdom of Thailand, sold by travel agents around the world, would never be quite the same again. The King replaced Suchinda with Anand Panyarachun, a respected civilian, who set about trying to catch up with the social and political problems created by the economic boom. One of his first bold steps was to deregulate the electronic media, allowing both independent operators and owners. A new non-government TV station was approved and private operators were handed radio concessions previously reserved for the armed forces. The result was Thailand's first independent TV station, iTV, a new 40-channel cable TV operator, United Broadcasting Co-operation, and a raft of special interest private radio stations ranging from those focusing on women's affairs to agriculture and business.

Thailand's revolving door of political power continued to turn through the 1990s, with the nation facing several leadership changes, each one affecting press freedom in different ways. During the reigns of former Prime Ministers Banharn Silapa-archa and General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, repeated attempts were made to influence the press

through rewards and incentives. Certain newspapers received more advertisements from government agencies and state enterprises. Selected columnists enjoyed access to government leaders. Under Banharn, a select group of top editors was granted special access to him and his cabinet members. But, even with such a patronage system in place, the independent press continued to be critical of the government. Responding to bad media reviews of his government, Banharn sought to ban some radio and television programs and applied pressure to have anti-Banharn journalists dismissed. In the prevailing post 1992 political environment these tactics tended to reflect badly on the government in the eyes of the public, rather than functioning to tame the press effectively.

Chavalit tried a similar strategy but became more openly hostile and manipulative. In June 1997, the Chavalit government set up a Media Monitoring Centre under the auspices of the Interior Ministry. Its announced purpose was to clarify inaccurate reporting and limit sensationalism in the media. Although the Centre had no power and did nothing more than issue occasional warnings to journalists, it did harm the atmosphere of press freedom in Thailand. After five months, it collapsed and was ridiculed as one of the biggest fiascos of the Chavalit government. Apart from a critical press, the growing number of public opinion polls—a new phenomenon since 1992—also contributed to Chavalit's downfall. At its peak in 1995–96, at least three dozen pollsters, took daily samples of the public's reaction to government policies. Opinion polls became an integral part of freedom of expression, and the marriage of media and the polls was inevitable. Not a single day passed without a newspaper citing an opinion poll. But, by the end of 1998, only a few credible and independent pollsters survived.

The financial crisis

The devaluation of the baht in July 1997 which triggered the East Asian crisis was both a blessing and a curse. The economic crisis, coupled with a critical press, literally drove out the unpopular and incompetent Chavalit government and its hostile attitude to the media. The new government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai, was a welcome change. The government acted quickly to restore local and international confidence. With a decent, clean image, Chuan has been reasonably

Losing control

successful in rebuilding confidence amongst key foreign investors and winning support for his government's ongoing economic and financial reforms. Chuan's new slogan was that the public should know what the government knows. Through the print and electronic media, the Chuan government was able to present its policies for overcoming the crisis which saw the new middle class facing unemployment and reduced to hawking the goods of their recent success—their snappy clothes, expensive furniture and electronic goods—in sidewalk markets reserved for the new poor.

During the first year of the Chuan government, the media was generally supportive of the government, particularly its economic reforms and financial restructuring. But as the crisis worsened and began to hurt ordinary people, the Thai-language media became predictably more critical of the government's failure to protect disadvantaged groups from the impact of reforms. More and more negative assessments of the government's economic recovery policies frustrated officials. Despite the Chuan administration's repeated assurances that it would uphold press freedom, many politicians and officials have been unable to hide their hostility toward the independent press and have, from time to time, urged them to be cautious with their commentaries.

It is true that certain hard-hitting newspapers have acted as if they are campaigning against Chuan. It is also important to note that during the economic crisis the public has increasingly relied on the press to provide them with information and analysis of the economic collapse. The public has little trust left in officials who failed to take note of impending signs of economic disaster, nor the public relations machinery which had wrongly assured everyone that Thailand was on the right track. The press has been responsible for reminding the authorities of the painful, social consequences of economic restructuring. Before the crisis, financial reporting was mediocre at best. Many reporters failed to detect early signs of economic problems partly because the government did not tell the truth about Thailand's economic conditions. The government refused to divulge reliable statistics and figures and misled the public about the severity of the crisis. But, with the imposition of the International Monetary Fund restructuring package, transparency has been forced on the administration and information is now much more readily available.

The press has since exposed corruption, incompetence and overspending. During the financial crisis, newspapers expanded

corruption investigations to virtually all government agencies, both at the national and local levels. In the past, the press would concentrate on key cabinet ministers, but with the recent decentralisation of political power towards provinces and districts, the press has also begun to focus on sub-national politics. The result is more and more corruption stories, exposing even low ranking bureaucrats. Even the extensive vote-rigging at the 1999 council election in Samut Prakarn was extensively covered by the local and national media, an event which would have been largely ignored in the past.

In the second half of 1999, the unblemished record of the Chuan government on freedom of the press has been tarnished by incidents of abuse and intimidation. Within the Thai context, there is a correlation between the level of press freedom and the length of government's reign of power. It has almost become an axiom that the longer the government lasts, the more hostile its attitude towards the press. Since the democratisation of 1973, no Thai government has completed its four-year parliamentary term. In July, a private aide of a deputy Prime Minister together with seven men, some armed, burst into the newsroom of the *Thai Post* around midnight. The aide demanded the paper, a three-year-old hard-hitting daily, correct a news report which referred to the deputy Prime Minister as a coward. The incident led to widespread condemnation by local and foreign media organisations and academics. The Chuan government treated the incident as a personal matter between the newspaper and the Minister, but the Prime Minister urged the press to exercise self-control and become more responsible and ethical. Media associations and academics expressed deep disappointment over the government's response, labeling its indifference as 'growing arrogance'. Because the authorities took no action against the minister and his men, there are fears that such blatant acts of thuggery may be repeated with impunity. Press organisations have urged the government to investigate the incident and punish the culprits, but apparently the Chuan government remains so confident of its 'free press' image that it feels there is no need to act.

The economic crisis has also, of course, greatly impacted on the media as an industry. Media proprietors expanded their operations considerably during the 1980s and 1990s, focusing on expected new gold mines such as property and hotels. Consequently, the economic collapse has forced

Losing control

significant contractions. Both the dominant Wathajak and Phujadkarn groups, whose ambitious projects included newspapers, business publications and satellite communications, collapsed under the weight of bad debts as the baht tumbled, leaving only their flagship newspapers in operation today. In the two years since Thailand's baht crisis triggered the region's financial tsunami, a dozen newspapers and magazines have been closed, including the English-language *Asia Times* and *Thailand Times*, and about 3,500 journalists and other media-related personnel laid off. The number of pages in major newspapers has been halved and the use of colour reduced due to soaring newsprint prices. Advertising revenue has plunged 60 per cent. Each of the failed newspapers had its own early retirement and compensation plans, but half of the journalists laid off were not paid out in full or adequately compensated. Surviving newspapers have had to restructure debts to reflect the baht's lower value, and slash the salaries of their administrators and journalists by as much as 50 per cent.

The difficulties have increased competition and forced editors to be more creative just to survive. Press organisations have been re-engineering and downsizing. Surviving dailies are biting the bullet and their editorial staff, hit with huge cuts in salary and fringe benefits, are working overtime. To lower costs, reporters are no longer assigned specific stories, but cover broader issues and take up additional beats. With fewer pages and journalists, proprietors and editors have to change the way their newspapers are run—most importantly to improve the accuracy and accountability of news reporting. Thai journalists have had to tighten their usual pompous and long-winded style of news coverage. Most Thai and English-language papers now feature more investigative reports and analysis. But, the mass circulation sensational dailies, such as *Thai Rath*, *Daily News* and *Khao Sod*, continue to rely on their successful formula of combining gossips, crime, social and political scandals and exposés with bikini-clad women. These papers still publish grotesque pictures of accidents and crime scenes.

In a similar vein, foreign language publications, mainly English and Chinese, have had to reorganise to stay alive. The country's two major English-language newspapers, *The Bangkok Post* and *The Nation*, were forced to cut down staff and page numbers and suspend foreign and domestic expansion plans. New marketing strategies were adopted to

maintain and increase subscription and readership levels. Overseas bureaux of both newspapers, mainly in Indochina, were shut down and foreign assignments trimmed or discouraged to decrease costs. Stringers are now used instead. Specialised journalists were urged to expand their news beats and become roving reporters taking up general assignments. In the case of the Chinese-language press, the financial crisis has had less impact, because of their small editorial staffs and low-cost operation. However, the combined circulation of the six Bangkok-based Chinese newspapers was down by 20 per cent last year. With less advertising, their pages were also reduced, as was colour printing, to save money. Two Japanese-language weekly papers continue to rely on advertisements from Japanese companies.

High hopes, disturbing reality

There are high hopes that the Thai press will emerge from this crisis as a more professional industry. However, the evidence to date suggests the press has not improved enough in response to trying times. Even though Thai society is now more open, the issues tackled by the press remain narrow and parochial. Most news reports continue to lack proper backgrounding, or clear interpretations of the news. Despite the increase in exposés of corruption by the media, few journalists have serious investigative skills. Editors and mid-level Thai journalists at the major Thai dailies are fiercely independent, highly opinionated, and often partisan. The voice of a newspaper is often that of the proprietor, or of his or her political allies and connections outside. Cooperation between editors and journalists from competing newspapers on issues such as responsibility is virtually non-existent. Cooperation is only seen when dealing with issues of press freedom, but under Chuan legislative controls are no longer a problem.

The struggles over the past decade have resulted in press freedom becoming one of the main pillars of Thai society, and one which has shaped the country's journey towards a civil society. The new constitution, promulgated in 1997—containing 37 articles promoting freedom of the press, freedom of expression and individual rights—is one of the most comprehensive in the world. It also stipulates that the airwaves used by the electronic media belong to the people—effectively preventing the

Losing control

government and the armed forces from ever again asserting complete control over radio and television. Some of the highlights are as follows.

- A person shall enjoy the liberty of communication by lawful means (Article 37).
- A person shall enjoy the liberty to express his or her opinion, make speeches, write, print and publicise; the closure of a press establishment or a radio or television station is forbidden; the censorship of news or articles before their publication in a newspaper, printed material, radio or television is not allowed (Article 39).
- An independent newspaper body will distribute the frequencies and supervise radio and television broadcasting (Article 40).
- Newspaper, radio or television broadcasting enterprises shall enjoy the liberty to present news and express their opinions without the mandate or direction of any government agency (Article 41).
- A person shall enjoy the right to have access to information held by the government, its agencies or state enterprises (Article 58).

With the new constitution in place, over two dozen existing anti-press laws are considered unconstitutional and must be abolished. The Chuan government has repeatedly pledged to do just that. But the government's refusal to act after the July intimidation incident has raised suspicions amongst some journalists and the public that the government will keep a card or two up its sleeve, such as the archaic Printing and Advertisement Act of 1941. The Act permits police closures of newspapers or printing presses in time of war or national emergency, but only with a court order. Police can also reprimand the press if they publish reports deemed to be disturbing the peace, or offending public morals. Even though press officials claim to be convinced of the need for a free press, they insist that there must be some new laws in place of the 1941 Act to oversee the local and foreign press, and retain some form of media registration process.

Press associations strongly object to the idea citing the new constitution's guarantee of a free press without any licensing. But they agree with the government's proposal that any new publication in Thailand must notify an independent bureau, outside the purview of the Interior Ministry or the police, for the sole purpose of keeping records. Conservative quarters of the Chuan government, particularly some lawmakers, are still deeply skeptical about granting wide-ranging

freedoms to the foreign press. *Newsweek's* negative coverage of the state of Thai economy in July 1999 upset the Thai leaders and has been cited by conservatives as a justification for controlling the foreign press and distribution of foreign publications. In October 1999, the cabinet unanimously approved the new bill called, the Press Notification Act of 1999, pending deliberations by the parliament. It obliges all new publications to notify the authorities of details of their new titles, names of publishers and editors and their addresses.

In the Southeast Asian region, Thailand is the most progressive nation in terms of the dissemination of publicly held information. The Official

The foreign press

The first printing press was introduced to Thailand by a western missionary, and in 1844 the first newspaper was born. Since then the foreign press has enjoyed press freedom because of extra-territorial laws. Using satellite technology, foreign newspapers began to publish on a daily basis in Bangkok in 1993. The Japanese-language *Yomiuri Shimbun*, the world's largest circulation daily, was the first foreign newspaper to be printed via satellite in Bangkok. Later, the *Asian Wall Street Journal* joined in the satellite-editions. Since May 1999, the *International Herald Tribune* has been printed locally. Furthermore, a local Chinese-language daily printed in Bangkok, *Universal Daily*, has its front pages and entertainment sections prepared in Taipei.

With more than 300 foreign journalists representing 110 major news organisations from around the world, Bangkok is second only to Hong Kong in terms of the number of foreign correspondents. Japanese correspondents are still the largest single group based in Bangkok since the 1980s, mainly due to massive Japanese investment in the Thai economic boom of the time. Despite negative news reports by Bangkok-based foreign correspondents in recent years, the government has so far resisted the temptation to ban correspondents it has identified as unfriendly. In the past two years, the government has also been trying to lower costs of satellite feeds and telecommunications because of complaints by foreign media organisations and journalists. With cheaper services and improved traffic conditions, the government hopes to attract more media organisations to use Bangkok as a regional base. The government has also recently published a handbook for foreign press with contact addresses and phone numbers of all spokespersons from all government agencies and enterprises.

Information Act was enacted in October 1997 as part of the overall political reforms. Among 16 countries, mostly in the west, which have a freedom of information act, Thailand is the only developing country in East Asia to adopt a law authorising public access to government information. Japan followed suit and passed a similar act in July 1999. The Thai Information Act has been hailed regionally and internationally as a means to promote transparency, good governance and accountability of the government and the civil servants. The public hopes the Act will serve as a deterrent to corruption and inefficiency on the part of officials, as journalists or pressure groups will have access to records of their decisions and performances.

In the past 12 months, nearly 200 petitions were filed with the Office of the Information Act Committee requesting various government agencies to release basic information ranging from details of government contracts and state examinations to budget allocations and past minutes of the Bank of Thailand. The high number of petitions reflects the lack of understanding of the spirit of the new Act, as officials continue to resist giving the public access to information under their control. The Thai media has only made two dozen applications for government-held information, all of which related to telecommunications contracts and TV concessions. Journalists appear to be relying on traditional sources of classified and personal data—their own personal connections. Their reliance on politicians to leak documents, however, means they can become tools within political power plays. It will require more than a change in the information law to change long-standing work practices and ethics.

Some sectors of the media have been less than enthusiastic about the new information laws because they can also be used to expose how well known journalists and televisions personalities abuse their own power and influence. The most damaging case for the media was the release in 1999 of a list of journalists, many from influential media outlets, allegedly involved in accepting bribes and exploiting their press privileges and connections. The bribe list highlighted the low wages and long working hours within the industry, particularly since the economic crisis. Some journalists work second jobs to make ends meet, but for others the solution lies with politicians and business people who are more than willing to pay for favourable reports. More shocking to many Thais than the reality of bribe taking by journalists was the scale of the corruption. The industry has long been accustomed to the culture of the white envelope, tips of

taxi money handed out to journalists and press conferences, for example. But it appears the white envelope has given way to direct deposits, stock options, gifts of computer laptops, mobile phones and vehicles.

After some initial stalling, the Reporters' Association of Thailand and the self-regulatory Press Council of Thailand (PCT) launched their own investigations into the scandal. The PCT has still to prove it can monitor and regulate the local press—especially the sensational dailies—and make it more responsible. The corruption probe has prompted editors to review their newsroom ethics and phase out journalists who might have abnormal relationships with the power brokers. One of the corruption cases involved a reporter, who used his connection with a Cabinet Minister to speed up the delivery of a car he had ordered. The Minister paid the deposit on the

The provincial press

There are more than 300 provincial newspapers spread throughout 76 provinces including weekly, fortnightly and monthly publications. They are competing in a small market and have only a handful of staff each, who do the reporting, page layout and map advertising and marketing plans themselves.

Focus Songkhla, a Thai-language weekly, is a successful community newspaper in Southern Thailand, selling well with a circulation of about 5,000. The weekly has filled the gap left by national dailies by focusing on issues affecting local communities in the four southernmost provinces, ranging from investment opportunities to the misappropriation of government funds. Regional newspapers can play the role of an early warning system with the first reports of local scandals or malfeasance, which are later picked up by the Bangkok press. With decentralisation and the spread of economic growth to remote areas, these small provincial publications have played an important role in providing local economic data and other useful information, including a local advertising service. Only Chiangmai and Nakhon Ratchasima have daily provincial newspapers.

However, the overall quality of provincial newspapers is poor, often reflecting the views of local interest groups and their connections with the editors and publishers. Politically, these newspapers can have influence in their local communities, as they can mobilise sentiment much better than national newspapers. During political campaigns, especially prior to local district or provincial elections, they are the primary sources of information on local politics.

Losing control

car. The incident came to light after the Minister's personal memo was leaked to the press. In a letter to the PCT 68 journalists demanded an investigation as they considered the incident a violation of press ethics. After a six-week investigation, the council reached the verdict that the journalist in question must not use his connection or any form of influence for personal interest as it was considered inappropriate. Before the council reached the decision, however, the journalist in question resigned from his newspaper. But he was immediately given a job a pro-government newspaper. As such, questions have been raised about the effectiveness of the PCT in providing social sanction against corrupt journalists.

Who will watch the watchdogs?

Clearly, more education and training is needed for the media, the bureaucracy and the public on how to use the new Information Act effectively. There are two key provisions of the act.

- A person has the right to scrutinize and obtain a copy of official information. All government information is considered open and the public may have access to it, except in specific cases related to the royal family, security and lawsuits.
- Any person who considers a state agency has failed to make the information available for public inspection is entitled to lodge a complaint with the Official Information Act Committee after seven days.

In other areas, the Thai media also needs to make serious efforts to improve professional standards. Because of fierce competition, the press tends to report quickly on stories which focus on scandals and personal matters. Inaccurate news, intentional or otherwise, is common. Entire stories are sometimes based on quips or off-the-cuff comments, without any background research or attempts to verify the information. News coverage is also heavily focused on Bangkok, and especially Government House, ignoring many important social issues in the rural areas. The predominant writing style continues to mix facts and the personal opinions of the writers, without any clear distinction. Moreover, inaccurate translations from Thai (particularly of colloquial political discourse), into English and Chinese have increased factual distortions without malicious intent.

One of the most serious problems is the quality of journalists. Without proper training nor a clear understanding of press ethics, reporters are out in the field struggling to understand the labyrinth of Thai politics and the complicated social and economic environment the recent crisis has produced. With inexperienced reporters and heavy work loads, journalists tend to concentrate on single issue stories such as comments made by political leaders. Although there are 53 universities and colleges offering media-related subjects, few new graduates choose to work as journalists, perhaps because of the low pay rates. Editors have also complained that the graduates are not well equipped to take up the challenges of journalism. At the end of 1998 representatives of journalists' associations and institutions, which used to treat each other as adversaries, met for the first time and immediately agreed to work out a syllabus for future journalists. They shared the common view that Thai journalists need sound basic training in interview techniques, writing styles and verification of news stories. Field experience and on-the-job training could also help enhance media professionalism.

Now that Thailand has undertaken far-reaching reforms in media laws, questions have been raised about reforming the press itself, 'Who will watch the watchdogs?' In response to growing public pressure for a more responsible and accountable press and to counter future press restrictions, 25 publishers and editors from all national newspapers met and established the long-envisioned PCT in July 1997. The main aim of the self-regulatory body is to monitor press ethics and promote greater professionalism. Since its establishment, more than 50 public complaints have been filed with the PCT mainly concerning sensationalism and obscene pictures as well as inaccuracy and right of rebuttal. Despite the PCT composition of editors and publishers from all the major dailies, they have failed to enforce a uniform code of ethics. The 1999 corruption scandal has, instead, prompted individual editors to issue their own codes of conduct to ensure journalists do not misbehave. In the past two years, a few non-government organisations have been established to monitor the media, but their work has had little impact so far.

Currently, ten professional associations represent the interests of various groups of journalists including photographers, crime and entertainment reporters, both in the capital and in the provinces. The Reporters' Association of Thailand (RAT), established in 1955, is

Losing control

considered the main press organisation, because it boasts the largest number of members and the most comprehensive agenda including scholarships, and training programs. But only 60 per cent of active journalists have joined the organisation, and some continue to view professional associations with disdain. To broaden its membership base, RAT last year admitted broadcasters as associate members. In the foreseeable future, the remaining press associations could merge with RAT due to overlapping functions and memberships. As a core professional body, RAT will soon merge with the Journalists Association of Thailand.

With increased public expectation and more democratisation, the Thai press has to clean up its own house. It must also demonstrate that greater freedom will raise newspaper quality and make journalism more responsible. Otherwise the hope that the Thai press will be a force to be reckoned with, at home and in the region, will remain just that.

Media websites

The Nation, www.nationmultimedia.com/

The Bangkok Post, www.bangkokpost.net/

Thai Rath Daily, www.thairath.com/

Daily News Daily, www.dailynews.co.th/

Matichon Group, www.matichon.co.th/

Vietnam

Propaganda is not a dirty word

Peter Mares

Every morning in cities, towns and villages across Vietnam, people go about their business to the crackle of loudspeakers. The monotonous daily broadcasts, courtesy of the local level administration, the peoples' committee of the ward or commune, is a mix of patriotic music, official news, decrees and mundane announcements. People may be reminded not to clutter the pavement with motorcycles or ordered to be alert to the threat of 'peaceful evolution' (the coded catchphrase for attempts to undermine communist rule).

The nationwide network of around 900,000 loudspeakers dates back to Vietnam's revolutionary struggle, when party cadres would travel from village to village to proselytise, or to warn people about the latest military advance by French colonial troops. The cadres would often set up a portable loudspeaker to amplify their message. During the 'American War' a more permanent loudspeaker system was established to warn of impending raids by US B-52 bombers. At a time when few people had radios, it served as a broadcast network, providing news from the front, solace and motivation in the face of war.

These days, no one pays much attention to the loudspeakers. In some places, villagers have lobbied to get the broadcasts turned down, or turned off, or shifted to a later hour in the morning. But, mostly the broadcasts have become background noise and people just do not hear them any more. When the Communist Party held its National Congress in 1996—a landmark political event that takes place once every five years—General Secretary Do Muoi's closing speech was carried live via the network of loudspeakers strung from lampposts and trees along the streets of Hanoi. But no one bothered to stop and listen.

Losing control

The ritual of the loudspeaker neatly symbolises the Communist Party's continuing efforts to control the flow of information in Vietnam through a dogged attachment to the idea that the media is, first and foremost, a vehicle for state propaganda. On one level the strategy is a miserable failure because, like the loudspeaker broadcasts, much of the media output in Vietnam goes unheeded. There are newspapers and magazines that remain neatly folded on desks, television shows that command far less attention than the advertisements that precede them, radio programs that babble on like white noise. Much of Vietnam's media output fails to engage or entertain and the audience is often cynical about the value of the information it carries.

In a negative sense, however, the Communist Party's media strategy succeeds remarkably well. While the party may no longer be successful at generating revolutionary fervour and commitment through the media, it does efficiently circumscribe the type of news, information and ideas reaching a general audience, blocking criticism of the regime and critical debate about its policies and performance. In this sense the morning loudspeaker ritual is a daily reminder that the party's power still reaches deep into society.

Colonialism to communism

Vietnam has a long history of scholarship and learning linked to the mandarin tradition of civil service which it shares with China. In the late nineteenth century, this élite of educated Vietnamese formed the corps of the colonial administration in Indochina, but also provided the kernel of nationalist opposition to French rule.

After the turn of the century, members of this small *litterati* began to publish newspapers and periodicals in French and Vietnamese in Saigon and Hanoi. Circulations were small, reflecting low literacy levels, and editors were constrained by censors who would quickly shut down any publication which challenged the colonial order too directly.

Nevertheless these journals were an important venue for debating nationalist ideas, including the growing conviction that it was superior knowledge and technology that enabled the Europeans to subject the Vietnamese to their colonial yoke. This reasoning led early nationalists to view education as the key to liberation. They began to push for the popularisation of the Romanised Vietnamese script *quoc-ngu*. *Quoc-ngu*

had originally been developed by a 17th century French missionary Alexandre de Rhodes, primarily in order to aid in his own language learning and proselytising. The nationalists now adopted the script to replace the complex *nom* characters in which Vietnamese texts had traditionally been written and to establish Vietnamese as an acceptable language for intellectual debate. Previously classical Chinese and French were regarded as the only languages of higher learning and discourse. As publisher Phan Van Truong argued, reaching a tiny minority of Francophones was of 'very little benefit'. The aim was to produce writings on every conceivable subject so that 'all of our people are able to study' (Marr 1981:162).

By the 1930s, Vietnamese writers were experimenting with contemporary journalistic forms recently pioneered in Europe, such as investigative journalism and first person reportage (or *phong su*).

One of the most celebrated examples was an exposé of the suffering of Hanoi's rickshaw coolies called, *I Pulled a Rickshaw*. Foreign visitors to contemporary Hanoi are often charmed by the (now disappearing) cyclos, but these pedal trishaws are essentially a modern phenomena. The rickshaw coolies of the 1930s were human horses, running bare-foot between the shafts and hauling their passengers behind them. In 1932, in a deeply shocking and socially courageous act for an educated man of the time, journalist Tam Lang donned a coolie's garb and went 'undercover' to investigate the conditions of the rickshaw pullers. His florid reports were published as a series of newspaper articles.

With the friend that I met on the road, I slipped into an eating booth that was dark and as constricted as a rat's hole. I breathed in the air of fetid, choking smells. This stench was called the 'chopping board smell', but this was only partly correct, because aside from the smell of stale fat, rotten fish, tainted meat, raw onions and a hundred other kinds of food, there was, if you analysed it carefully, also the smell of excrement mingling with that of habitual sweat.

To lower a powerless person from his status as a human being to that of a horse, to give him two wooden shafts and say 'I will sit up here while you pull me' is the same as saying 'You are not a human being' (Tam Lang 1932).

Parallel to the rise of reportage in the 1930s, other writers were attempting to redress social injustice through literary realism. The novel, *Impasse* (*Buoc Duong Cung*) by Nguyen Cong Hoan, was published in 1938

Losing control

and banned soon after by the French authorities because it described how farmers struggled to pay exorbitant French taxes only to see their money squandered by a lazy, corrupt Vietnamese official.

Representative Lai's villa is located in the very centre of the village of An Dao. But his villa and the village of An Dao are two completely separate worlds... Representative Lai is frightfully rich. Other people's money, rice, paddies, and dwellings can slip into his possession with a wave of his hand (Ngo Vinh Long 1991).

Impasse is set in the northern coastal province of Thai Binh, where grievances over unfair taxes were at the heart of peasant rebellions against the French and their local collaborators—rebellions that helped give birth to Vietnam's communist revolution.

Ironically, it was in Thai Binh in 1997 that farmers echoed the complaints of their forbears. They were infuriated to see district officials constructing elaborate private homes while promised local roads remained unbuilt. A considerable portion of the farmers' precious rice harvest was consumed by a plethora of different taxes, including such arbitrary imposts as a tax on ducks crossing the road. When local officials failed to respond to peaceful demonstrations and petitions, the farmers' anger finally boiled over into violent protests. Officials' houses were burnt down and in one village some twenty policemen were taken hostage by farmers wielding sticks. But in the 1990s, under communist rule, no Vietnamese journalist or writer was able to give voice to the frustrations of the Thai Binh farmers.

In his introduction the English translation of Tam Lang's, *I Pulled a Rickshaw* Greg Lockhart writes that a democratic transformation in the political, social and literary consciousness during the colonial era produced 'a new way of writing' but he also notes that this type of writing 'has failed to flourish since the revolution of the 1940s'.

During the struggle against the French from 1945 to 1954, many journalists and writers were content to bend their pens to the service of the party and the cause of national liberation. Improvised presses were set up in the jungle, cranking out the first copies of the underground newspaper, *Thang* (Victory).

After the French were defeated at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 and independence was achieved in the north, journalists, artists and intellectuals began pushing for a more liberal approach during the so-called *Ngan Van/Gai Pham* (Humanism/Works of Beauty) movement. They were encouraged by external events such as Khrushchev's 1955 denunciation

of Stalin and by Mao's Hundred Flowers Campaign in China. But by late 1956 the party's threshold of tolerance had been reached and it reasserted control. One person who suffered was the poet/composer Van Cao, who wrote Vietnam's national anthem along with other well-known ballads that chronicle and celebrate the liberation struggle. Because of his role in the *Nhan Van/Giai Pham* movement Van Cao's work was no longer played in public or broadcast. The only exception was the national anthem and in the early 1980s the party even tried to find a replacement by organising a nationwide competition for alternatives.

Van Cao was rehabilitated in 1987 when another ray of light broke briefly through the oppressive clouds that hover over Vietnam's media landscape. Again influenced by developments elsewhere in the communist world, particularly Europe and the Soviet Union, party leadership relaxed controls over the media. There was a sudden re-emergence of *phong su*, socially engaged, critical reportage, particularly in the weekly journal *Van Nghe* published by the Writers Association.

But in 1989, with communism crumbling in Eastern Europe and massive pro-democracy protests erupting in China, the pendulum swung back towards control. Even though there is more apparent diversity in the media today than ten years ago, the past decade has seen a tightening of media laws and increased surveillance over journalists and editors.

One of Ho Chi Minh's first acts after declaring independence in 1945 had been to decree a nationwide campaign to stamp out illiteracy. In less than eighteen months, some 100-thousand volunteer instructors had reputedly taught more than two and a half million people to read and write.

One characteristic of the newly independent Vietnam was the bare-footed peasant walking to evening classes, tiny oil lamp in one hand, battered *quoc ngu* primer in the other...For those who could not or would not attend evening sessions, there were special classes at the marketplace, in the rice fields, and aboard fishing boats. Study words were scrawled on the sides of buildings and train cars, and even on the mud encrusted flanks of water buffalo (Marr 1981:184).

It is a sad irony of Vietnam's communist revolution that just as the party succeeded in dramatically expanding literacy, it simultaneously set strict limits on the range of material available. In 1958 the Communist Party declared that the press was to be 'the collective agitator, propagandist and organiser, an instrument of the party to lead the masses, a sharp

weapon in the class struggle against the enemy'. In late 1996, not much had changed—politburo member Lt. General Le Kha Phieu (who became party chief one year later) reminded journalists that they were 'revolutionary soldiers in the field of culture ideology' and that the newspaper was 'a weapon for struggling on the political and ideological front'.

Newspapers: an extensive menu serving the same dish

At first glance, Vietnam appears to have a lively press scene, with around four hundred separate titles appearing as daily, weekly or monthly publications. They range from serious literary journals, to tabloid crime blotters; from science and technology manuals to glossy fashion magazines. The menu of newspaper choice has expanded dramatically since 1986, when the Communist Party formally endorsed the economic reform policy known as *doi moi* at its landmark 6th National Congress, opening the way for private enterprise to operate in many sectors of the economy. Before, the entire country had about ten newspapers, weeklies and journals owned by the central authorities and stories about sport, culture, science and social affairs had not been recognised as proper food for public thought.

In Vietnam's limited market economy, some newspapers (though not all) now have an economic incentive to attract readers. The new element of competition has helped to push out editorial boundaries. Newspapers vie to print stories of genuine interest, rather than just reams of tired ideological rhetoric or proud socialist statistics. This has had a particular impact on the coverage of popular but politically safe topics like sport. One of the big commercial success stories of recent years has been the special supplements published by Vietnam Newsagency (VNA) to coincide with international soccer tournaments such as the World Cup. The first supplements were so popular they caused major traffic jams when they hit the streets, at a time when most of the population was still riding bicycles. Officials, however, bristled, arguing that readers were not supposed to be pre-occupied with football at the cost of political awareness (Do Phoung 1997). Ten years later, however, there is an awareness within the Party of a need for more diversified, accurate information.

Advertising and competition have also had an impact on the language of journalism, though stultified, meaningless announcements are still

common in reporting the activities of top officials. This quote from *Vietnam News* is typical.

General Secretary Le Kha Phieu said foreign delegations to the eighth National Confederation of Labour Congress have brought warm sentiments of friendship and solidarity to the Vietnamese people. He told the foreign delegations that he appreciated their organisations' valuable assistance and solidarity during Viet Nam's past struggle for national liberation and reunification and current drive for national construction and defence (7 November 1998).

This type of language still characterises such august publications as 'The central organ of the Vietnam Communist Party', the national daily *Nhan Dan* (The People) which proclaims on its masthead that it is 'The Voice of the Party, the Government and the Vietnamese People'. The turgid language employed by *Nhan Dan* is shared by its military equivalent *Quan Doi Nhan Dan* (The People's Army) and such newspapers as *Hanoi Moi* (New Hanoi), published by the Hanoi branch of the Communist Party.

However, in the search for readers there has been a shift by some newspapers to employ more direct and active prose. Leading the charge are the police, with highly successful tabloids that corner the market in their own special area of expertise—stories of crime and punishment. Sidewalk vendors spruik out the juiciest story lines from *Cong An Thanh Po Ho Chi Minh* (Ho Chi Minh City Police), such as 'the father chopped his son into many pieces and put them in a bag...' or 'the girl wearing a thin nightdress lay under the dim lamp and the vile old man could not control himself...'

Thu, who has been selling newspapers on the same corner since the war, says that everyone reads *Cong An Thanh Pho Ho Chi Minh*, 'from cyclo drivers to office workers'. In 1997, the paper's weekly special edition sold 550,000 copies and its regular daily sold 100,000 copies, returning a per edition profit of about US\$10,000 in a country with an average per capita annual income of US\$300.

Nearby at police headquarters, chief editor Ha Phi Long denies that *Cong An Thanh Pho Ho Chi Minh* trades on sensationalism and scandal. He says crime stories make up just five per cent of the paper's coverage and he protests that readers do not like sensationalism. 'What they are interested in' he lectures me sternly, 'is the lessons that they can learn in order to contribute to the authorities' efforts to ensure law and order'(1996).

Losing control

While there is little evidence to bear out his claim, it does point to the fact that for all their entertainment value, police newspapers like *Cong An Thanh Pho Ho Chi Minh* carry a conservative ideological message. For example, they are often at the forefront of attacks on writers and artists who dare to test the limits of cultural expression. The paper accused leading young author Pham Thi Hoai of 'insulting the Vietnamese people' when she published an innovative collection of short stories, which offered a biting satire on contemporary Vietnam and such sacred cows as the institution of the family. More recently the police newspapers directed their barbs at Vietnam's emerging new generation of pop stars, claiming various male singers were gay.

In Vietnam, all singers must audition before a panel of cultural officials and have their lyrics approved by censors before they perform in public. But this is clearly not producing the level of patriotism and skill demanded by another similar weekly, *An Ninh The Gioi* (Security World) 'Their money making performance has killed any creativity, many sing like machines, their voices are not rooted in their soul, they contain the smell of money' (Reuters, 27 August 1999).

As author and journalist, Robert Templar, points out in his recent book, *Shadows and Wind* the police tabloids glorify the Interior Ministry, the main apparatus of political repression in Vietnam, while promoting the idea that yet more social controls are needed. 'Like many tabloids, the police paper plays on the public's capacity for cognitive dissonance by sending out a very mixed message; it offers up a dystopia of rampant crime and deviancy and at the same time reassures the public that the police have got it all under control' (Templar 1998:173).

By comparison to *Cong An Thanh Pho Ho Chi Minh*, the party daily *Nhan Dan* is struggling. Officially *Nhan Dan* claims a circulation of more than 200,000, but the paper relies heavily on a captive audience of readers (or at least of people who receive the paper). According to Politburo instruction 11CT/TU issued in January 1997, 'each party cell, municipal peoples committee, peoples councils at district and board level and each cell of the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth League all over the country' should have a copy of *Nhan Dan*. Usually the paper lies neatly folded until it is eventually collected for re-cycling. The most avid readers of *Nhan Dan* are foreign journalists and diplomats, who comb the arcane language for any hint of official shifts in policy or personnel within the secretive upper echelons of the Communist Party.

Between the extremes of the police tabloids and staid party organs, a number of other newspapers have earned a degree of popular respect for their willingness to print real news and provide more thoughtful comment on a range of pressing social issues, from the abuse of factory workers to the spread of HIV-AIDS. The youth newspaper *Tuoi Tre* (estimated circulation 200,000) and the labour newspaper *Lao Dong* (70,000) are good examples, though the editorial space in which they operate is strictly circumscribed.

There is no private ownership of the media in Vietnam. All newspapers and magazines are published by official organisations answerable to the Communist Party leadership. *Tuoi Tre* is published by the Ho Chi Minh Youth League and *Lao Dong* by the Confederation of Trade Unions. Both have evolved from their sectoral origins into general newspapers, and according to local journalists, *Tuoi Tre* at least, is a relatively profitable enterprise, operating as a semi-autonomous business and paying above average salaries in order to attract the best writers to its editorial team.

However, *Tuoi Tre* and *Lao Dong* remain on a short leash. Apart from answering to their own supervisory bodies, editors also come under scrutiny from the Ministry of Culture and Information and more importantly, from the Culture and Ideology Department of the Communist Party. No editor will ever be appointed to a newspaper without the approval of these authorities, and once in the job, editors are expected to 'drink tea' each week with department officials to ensure that they are following the correct line on key issues. Such constant monitoring ensures editorial conservatism and, as Robert Templar points out, while newspapers are now writing about official corruption they rarely initiate investigations and much of what they publish amounts to official exhortations to better behaviour.

Corruption has replaced ideological correctness as a means of overpowering opponents in political battles. Now that accusations of straying from the correct path of Marxism have no resonance, the best way of attacking a political opponent is to catch his hand in the till. Most newspaper stories on corruption or fraud are either about pervasive petty graft or they are officially approved (Templar 1998:169).

Party leaders frequently encourage journalists to expose corruption, but the experiences of Nguyen Hoanh Linh prove that it is dangerous to take them at their word. Linh wrote a series of investigative articles for the business newspaper *Doanh Nghiep*, in which he detailed high-level

Losing control

corruption in the purchase of four patrol boats from the Ukraine by Vietnam's Customs Department. Linh was subsequently arrested and charged with revealing state secrets. After spending thirteen months in jail, he was finally brought to trial, found guilty, given a thirteen-month sentence, and released.

The party also keeps a watchful eye over foreign language magazines and newspapers published in Vietnam, such as the daily English-language *Vietnam News*, the *Weekly Vietnam Investment Review* and the monthly *Vietnam Economic Times*. One morning in 1996, embarrassed staff from *Vietnam Investment Review* were sent out door-knocking seeking the return of the latest issue of the magazine. The problem was a front-page photograph of the State Bank building in Hanoi, with a cyclist riding past in the foreground. The photograph accompanied a financial story, and in the corner was an inset of Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet. Apparently the relative size and placement of the Prime Minister's image (with the cyclist riding over his head) caused so much offence that the entire issue had to be recalled. *Vietnam Investment Review* also produces a weekly leisure insert called *Time Out*. In July 1996 the cover of a special summer edition of *Time Out* showed a young woman lying on a blue and white striped beach towel with a piece of green star fruit over each eye. Staff at the magazine were chastised for surreptitiously trying to reproduce the American flag.

Vietnam Investment Review is a joint venture between Vietnam's Ministry of Planning and Investment and Australian business interests, including media tycoon Kerry Packer. Former Managing Director Alex McKinnon did not deny that the magazine's links to the government set the overall editorial agenda.

'Well I don't think we are afraid to say that we are in fact, if you like, a public relations department of the Ministry of Planning and Investment' he said in an interview for ABC Radio. 'I mean that's why we came here, to promote Vietnam' (McKinnon 1996). *Vietnam Investment Review* has a resident censor from the Ministry of Culture and Information who holds the post of Deputy Editor and who in, McKinnon's words, 'monitors all the material...to make sure it is okay.'

McKinnon admitted that 'there's still an incredible amount of paranoia' when it comes to the press in Vietnam but he also says that *Vietnam Investment Review's* editorial team put up a solid fight to push out the boundaries of acceptable journalism. Certainly the magazine has nurtured

some skilled, young Vietnamese journalists, although the more prominent and successful they become, the more likely they are to face professional difficulties.

Despite continuing suspicion towards domestically produced foreign language publications, government agencies also seek to use them to their own advantage, albeit rather clumsily. On 28 July 1997, *Vietnam Investment Review* ran the text of an exclusive interview between Reuters newsagency and politburo member Nguyen Tan Dung, a rising star within the Communist Party. In reality no interview had taken place. Reuters Hanoi office had requested an interview and submitted (as is required) a proposed list of questions. In return *Reuters* received written answers. Because no face-to-face interview had taken place, and because the answers were of little interest, Reuters did not file any stories based on the copy. However, some official decided to share the transcript of Dung's exclusive interview with *Vietnam Investment Review*, who dutifully published it in full.

Radio and television: politically correct

Despite the large number of press titles in Vietnam and the undoubted importance of the printed word to an educated urban élite, newspapers have limited relevance to the vast majority of the population who live in rural areas (except perhaps to provide convenient wrapping for food). According to a survey by Radio the Voice of Vietnam (VOV), only 8 per cent of people have regular access to newspapers in the northern provinces of Hai Hung and Ninh Binh and most are teachers, pensioners and government employees (*Vietnam News*, 6 October 1996). Radio is by far the most accessible medium for the 80 per cent of people who live outside Vietnam's cities and who may be literate enough to write their name, or to read signs, but who would struggle to comprehend the relatively complex language of the urban press.

The Voice of Vietnam first went to air on 7 September 1945, five days after Ho Chi Minh declared independence. During the following nine years of nationalist war against the French, The Voice of Vietnam's rudimentary transmitters were constantly relocated to different points in Vietnam's rugged northern mountains. As a symbol of that struggle, the Voice of Vietnam broadcasts still begin with the original signature tune *Smashing Fascism*.

Losing control

Today The Voice of Vietnam transmissions reach more than 80 per cent of the country, with five domestic channels (including a channel broadcasting in minority languages such as Khmer and H'Mong) and a network of 53 local radio stations throughout the country. The Voice of Vietnam also has an international shortwave service broadcasting in eleven languages. There are no private radio stations in Vietnam and foreign investment in the electronic media is not allowed.

With its reach and accessibility there is no doubt that The Voice of Vietnam plays an important role in disseminating essential information (such as weather reports or health messages) to far-flung parts of Vietnam. However as an institution, The Voice of Vietnam is staid and conservative with the majority of staff over 40 years old. In press terms it is more like *Nhan Dan* than *Tuoi Tre*, with the explicit duty to disseminate the party line and state policies.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that Radio The Voice of Vietnam attracts listeners with music and sport, but fails to win much of an audience for its talk-based programming. The editorial straitjacket imposed on The Voice of Vietnam means that international shortwave transmissions in Vietnamese (and to a lesser extent French and English) remain a crucial source of information. The BBC's Vietnamese service is the most widely listened to, provoking both public admiration and official ire for its series of extended interviews with dissident journalist Bui Tin, former editor of *Quan Doi Nhan Dan*—broadcast after he went to Paris in 1990. The French service RFI and Voice of America also attract strong audiences, as did the Vietnamese Service of Radio Australia until its signal strength was severely compromised by 1997 federal government cuts which shut down Radio Australia's Darwin transmitters. More recently the Washington-based Radio Free Asia has begun Vietnamese language broadcasts, provoking repeated tirades in *Nhan Dan* and other newspapers.

Abusing modern broadcasting technologies under the pretext of 'freedom' and 'democracy', a handful of hostile forces in the United States have been pursuing a plan of 'peaceful evolution' in an attempt to interfere in other countries' internal affairs, destabilise and eventually overthrow political regimes out of their favour...[they] intentionally use information and cultural means as an invasive instrument [and] persist in realising their scheme cooked up carefully for heinous purposes (*Nhan Dan*, 22 February 1997).

By contrast to the Voice of Vietnam, Vietnam Television (VTV) has been more innovative in its programming. For example its student quiz show SV96 was a hit with young viewers, even though it was loaded with heavy handed moral messages. For example, competing university teams were asked to improvise a skit on the theme of countering social evils, so that young viewers would be warned away from such vices as gambling, alcohol and pornography. VTV also has the advantage of being able to re-broadcast high quality (or at least slick) foreign programming, which can vary from re-runs of such dated Hollywood dramas as *Charlies Angels*, to recent Australian productions like *Blue Heelers* or the hit Taiwanese series *The Judge*, about a Chinese mandarin who dispensed justice with a fair but iron hand. VTV also wins huge audiences for its sport broadcasts, especially live transmissions of major soccer matches, which draws about half the population. In the middle of the night, across Vietnam, neighbours crowd around shared television sets out on the pavement to escape the oppressive July heat, watching matches half way around the world.

These broadcasts are funded by advertising or, more correctly sponsorship. An advertising agency will negotiate to buy the rights to a foreign show, or sports telecast, and will then provide the programming to VTV in exchange for the right to sell the advertising spots around the broadcast. (Most soccer telecasts in Vietnam are sponsored by Dunhill for example.) The strict legality of such arrangements remains murky and the Communist Party has explicitly ruled out direct foreign investment in television (much to the frustration of Australia's Mr Packer and Mr Murdoch, who invested large sums of money to build goodwill with VTV).

While VTV has adapted its general programming to appeal to audience tastes, there is still a heavy dose of dour war films in the programming mix and VTV's news broadcasts remain clumsy and stilted. Domestic news bulletins consist almost entirely of an announcer's script-over vision of official handshakes and greetings. Foreign organisations working in Vietnam find that it is relatively easy to get coverage of their activities on an evening news bulletin by 'inviting' a news crew to cover an event and offering to pay them for their trouble. (In fact envelope journalism, where lunch money or taxi money is placed in an envelope in the press kit, is common in all media in Vietnam.)

The advent of satellite television has allowed VTV to re-broadcast items of international news recorded from such sources as CNN and the ABC,

Losing control

but strict editorial judgments are made about its suitability. Satellite dishes are not widespread in Vietnam, and the Communist Party is keen to keep it that way, concerned that foreign TV could undermine its efforts to shape the political and cultural values of Vietnamese citizens. Under a decree issued in late 1996 only senior party, government and state officials, media organisations, sections of the security apparatus and up-market hotels are authorised to receive satellite broadcasts.

The Internet—taking the slow lane down the information superhighway

In December 1997, after years of procrastination and debate, Vietnam finally allowed computer users to gain access to the Internet. The first reason for the delay was Communist Party concerns that the Internet would be a source of counter-revolutionary information and propaganda generated by exiled Vietnamese groups deeply antagonistic to the Hanoi regime. And like governments elsewhere around the world, Hanoi was also worried about Internet pornography. While the issues were debated, teams of Vietnamese officials were despatched to Singapore and China, to study tactics in building firewalls and monitoring online content. The reason for the delay was more prosaic; it was a question of money and who would control the anticipated income. A major bureaucratic and political tussle ensued to be finally resolved in favour of the General Department of Post and Telecommunications which has a monopoly on the provision of Internet connections through its subsidiary Vietnam Data Communications. Service costs are five to ten times higher than in other Southeast Asian countries and this has proved the key barrier to Internet use in Vietnam.

At the end of 1998, there were an estimated 400,000 computers in use in Vietnam, but only about 15,000 Internet subscribers. Around half the subscribers were foreigners and a fifth were government ministries or other state agencies. It is believed that only 5 per cent of Internet subscribers are private citizens. Internet services can also be frustrating for users in Vietnam. For example, firewalls make it impossible to use RealAudio to access radio broadcasts via the Internet.

The Vietnamese authorities are attempting to use the Internet for their own benefit. For example *Nhan Dan* has established its own website (www.nhandan.org.vn) as has the Vietnam News Agency. Vietnam

Airlines and the Vietnam Tourism Authority have also established a presence on the net, but it is unlikely that critical websites will proliferate, as any organisation or individual wishing to provide Internet content must first be licensed to do so by the Interior Ministry. The Ministry's attitude towards the Internet is summed up by its actions in shutting down a cyber cafe in Ho Chi Minh City, because foreign backpackers were allegedly sending unsavoury messages to their friends back home. Outside Vietnam, dissident groups critical of Hanoi are enthusiastic users of the Internet (see for example the California-based Vietnam Insight, www.vinsight.org and the Paris-based Free Vietnam Alliance www.fva.org), and even before Vietnam connected to the Internet, when only limited email exchange was available, some critical messages did get through. 'The Saigonese', an acerbic Ho Chi Minh City-based critic, sent detailed postings which revealed what he claimed were the past misdeeds of leading party figures.

Bitter tea: Vietnam and the foreign media

Foreign journalists working in Vietnam are expected to engage in a process of mutual cooperation with the Press and Information Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In essence this means adhering to an elaborate and, at times, opaque set of controls.

The first condition is that foreign media can only set up bureaux in Hanoi and not in the larger, more open, southern business capital Ho Chi Minh City. Second, reporters need a permit for any professional travel outside the capital. The permit must be applied for well in advance and requires approval from local officials in the province to be visited as well as authorities in Hanoi.

All foreign correspondents in Vietnam must also hire via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a press assistant, who is supposed to act as interpreter, guide and monitor whenever the correspondent undertakes any journalistic activity. Each Saturday afternoon the press assistants attend a weekly briefing at the Ministry and may be singled out and chastised over the activities or reporting of 'their' correspondent. Press assistants, and other Vietnamese nationals who assist foreign journalists, may also find themselves subject to questioning by security officials from the Interior Ministry. At worst this turns the correspondent's assistant into a spy—at best it put the assistant in the invidious position of having to serve two masters.

Losing control

The frustrations of these controls were acutely felt in 1997 by foreign reporters attempting to cover the unrest that rocked the province of Thai Binh, just 60 km from Hanoi. All formal requests for permission to travel to Thai Binh were refused. One foreign journalist based in Hanoi who did break the government ban was spotted and immediately 'invited' into the Press Department 'to drink tea'—a euphemism for being reprimanded and officially warned. All correspondents rely on the Press Department for assistance in the six-monthly renewal of their visas, otherwise they can be forced to leave the country when their current visa expires. This happened in 1996, when Adam Schwarz, correspondent for the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, was effectively expelled from Vietnam. And for correspondents there is also the problem of trying not to expose a Vietnamese bureau assistant to unacceptable risks. While a foreign journalists may be let off with a warning a local assistant could find their chances to study denied, their application to travel overseas stalled or, at worst, end up in jail for revealing state secrets.

Correspondents also rely on the Press Department for assistance in obtaining official interviews and travel permits, a power which can be turned against those who refuse to 'cooperate'. Behind that power lies Article 13 of the Regulations on Press and Information Activities of Foreign Journalists, Offices and Organisations in Vietnam, which states 'In order to carry out journalistic activities mentioned in the Regulations, the resident journalists must send their requests on a case-by-case basis to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at least 5 days in advance and are not allowed to carry out those activities before the issuance of the 'Press Permit' by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs'.

Taken literally, Regulation 13 means a foreign journalist should request written permission from the Foreign Ministry five days before picking up the telephone to their own embassy. The Press Department insists it is 'flexible', but flexibility means the regulation is arbitrary. Like so many Vietnamese laws, the regulations governing foreign media activities are broad-brush provisions that can be applied to prevent a journalist from engaging in any activity that any official body at any time decides is off-limits. Sensitive meetings between foreign journalists and dissidents are often observed by secret police who appear to make themselves obvious as a form of intimidation. At other times appointments are cancelled at short notice, presumably because the people involved have been warned.

The government is also concerned that foreign correspondents could glean sensitive information from Vietnam's new crop of young, enthusiastic and increasingly critical domestic journalists. In order to address this issue the government introduced new regulations in September 1997 explicitly banning Vietnamese journalists from providing their foreign colleagues with information, photographs or articles without prior approval from the government. The interaction between local and foreign media was already sadly limited because foreign journalists are excluded from most domestic media conferences organised by government departments or agencies in Vietnam. The Communist Party clearly wants to limit ideas or information flowing in either direction. In August 1997, the head of the Ho Chi Minh Political Academy, politburo member Nguyen Duc Binh, launched a blistering attack on western influence on the Vietnamese media, saying such 'cultural and political trespassing...destroys the boundaries of social order and national sovereignty in press and information activities' (*Nhan Dan*, 26 August 1997). There also appears to be an unofficial ban on Vietnamese journalists going to the United States to study, though countries like Australia or the United Kingdom still appear to be acceptable destinations.

Despite its role in regulating and reprimanding foreign journalists, the Foreign Ministry must still be regarded as one of the most open and progressive of all Vietnamese government agencies and the Ministry's Press and Information Department seems to respond to other more security-minded sections of the state apparatus, particularly the Interior Ministry. With the important exception of television stories, the Press Department has no means of exerting direct control or censorship over the material that foreign journalists file from Vietnam. Radio reports, for example, are generally filed directly over a standard telephone line and without rigorous monitoring.

Television is an exception. Any video or film footage shot in Vietnam must be cleared by the Foreign Ministry prior to its export or transmission via satellite. Courier companies will refuse to carry a tape that has not been cleared. Vietnam Television will refuse access to satellite ground station facilities unless the appropriate clearances are obtained first. When the subject of filming is controversial, it has usually been shot without a permit and the journalist must find an unofficial route to get it out of the country.

Losing control

In the print media, particularly US citizens working for influential regional magazines like the *Far Eastern Economic Review* or the Asian edition of *TIME* were closely scrutinised. *Far Eastern Economic Review* and *TIME* appear once a week; the index can be easily checked for stories on Vietnam and officials know that articles are easily photocopied and passed around. A government agency has the monopoly on the import of foreign publications to Vietnam and *Far Eastern Economic Review* and *TIME* are routinely censored, with paragraphs or even entire stories blacked out before magazines are distributed domestically. Journalists and editors are routinely called in to 'drink tea' and forced to mount a line-by-line defence of their copy.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s many western journalists who arrived in Hanoi to open up offices on behalf of foreign news organisations harboured a considerable residue of sympathy for Vietnam as a result of the war years and the subsequent economic embargo. Their initial reporting of the country focused on business opportunities for foreign investors, and on the nation's own attempts to reform and rebuild its economy and society. Much of this coverage was broadly optimistic in tone, supportive of the reform process and enthusiastic about the nation's achievements.

By late 1997 the mood had soured dramatically. The advances made in journalistic and editorial independence in the Vietnamese media in the late 1980s had been reversed and controls on the activities of both the foreign and domestic press had been tightened. With a slowdown in investment, Vietnam was producing few positive news stories and with inward-looking Communist Party policies, the country was producing very few stories at all, leaving foreign news organisations with flagging enthusiasm for the frustrating daily battle against the bureaucratic restrictions. In addition, the restrictions hinder the accurate and timely reporting of real problems which can, ironically, lead to a more exaggerated version of the story appearing in the foreign press.

Vietnamese officials repeatedly stress that they want foreign journalists to 'understand Vietnam' but the real intention of existing regulations is exactly the opposite; the aim is to corral correspondents into acceptable corners where they can cause minimal embarrassment to the regime. When foreign journalists are summoned to the Press Department for criticism sessions, it is usually because their understanding of what is going on around them is too acute. It is knowledge, rather than ignorance, which

generally causes offence. Older revolutionaries may be gradually moving on but their technocratic younger comrades, trained in the former Soviet Union, Cuba or East Germany, are not necessarily any more sympathetic to notions of press freedom.

The Communist Party was deeply disturbed by the collapse of European Communism—more recently it watched with alarm as the apparently enduring edifice of Soeharto's New Order crumbled in its own neighbourhood. The Communist Party has attempted to shore up its leading role in society by reinvigorating its nationalist credentials (and allowing its rather tattered Marxism to fade into the background) and, above all, by delivering the prosperity and economic stability that it knows the population craves. Yet by unleashing the creative and destructive power of the market, the Communist Party has created a new set of social forces that it cannot hope to control. Rapid growth creates a yawning gap between rich and poor and between city and country. It accelerates the dramatic demographic migration from rural to urban areas and encourages a psychological shift from austerity to consumerism. Established notions of solidarity are under pressure from a new individualism; the lure of easy wealth corrupts the values of public service and altruism; commercial development puts new pressure on limited resources like land and water. In short, new contours of conflict are emerging in Vietnam, as the society undergoes fundamental and rapid change. Yet the Communist Party has a limited repertoire for dealing with conflict; and when confronted by critics, usually reaches for the trusty tools of repression.

Recent protests in north and south Vietnam are a sharp reminder that Vietnam's veneer of political stability is brittle, but the Communist Party's dogged determination to project an outward image of harmony precludes it from engaging in frank and constructive exchanges, let alone allowing others outside its ranks to conduct such exchanges through the media. The pressures building up in Vietnamese society are still a long way from boiling point, but in its determination to keep the lid firmly on the pot, the Communist Party is only helping to speed up the process.

Abbreviations

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
AFP	Agence France-Presse
AJI	Alliance of Independent Journalists (Indonesia)
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
ATJ	Association for Taiwan Journalists
ATV	Asia Television
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BMW	Bayerische Motorwerke
BN	Barisan Nasional (formerly the Alliance, now known as the National Front)
CAN	Channel News Asia
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCTV	Central China Television
CD-ROM	compact disc-read only memory
CMFR	Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (Philippines)
CNBC	Cable National Broadcasting Company
CNN	Cable Network News
CPP	Cambodian People's Party
DAP	Democratic Action Party (Malaysia)
DBS	Direct Broadcasting Satellite
DDSI	Department of Defence Services Intelligence (Burma)
DVB	Democratic Voice of Burma
FTN	Formosa Television Network
GIC	Government Investment Corporation of Singapore
GIF	Graphic Interchange Format
GLC	Government linked companies (Singapore)
GNP	Grand National Party (South Korea)
HIV-Aids	human immunodeficiency virus—acquired immune deficiency syndrome
HPL	Hotel Properties Limited (Singapore)
ICTSI	International Container Terminal Services Incorporated (Philippines)

Abbreviations

IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISA	Internal Security Act (Malaysia and Singapore)
ISP	Internet Service Provider
JUST	International Movement for a Just World
KBP	Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster sa Pilipinas, or Association of Filipino Broadcasters
KBS	Korean Broadcasting Service, South Korea
KCNA	Korean Central News Agency (North Korea)
KMT	Kuomintang (Taiwan)
KNSPA	Korean National Security Planning Agency
LPRP	Lao People's Revolutionary Party
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
MHRR	Malaysian Human Rights Report
MIC	Malaysian Indian Congress
MITA	Ministry of Information and the Arts (Singapore)
MPPI	Indonesian Press and Broadcasting Society
MPRP	Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party
MRCB	Malaysian Resources Corporation Berhad
MTRCP	Movie and Television Review Classification Board (Philippines)
MTRD	Myanmar Television and Radio Department
NAC	National Arts Centre (Singapore)
NCNA	New China News Agency
NLD	National League for Democracy (Burma)
NPC	National Press Club (Philippines)
NPE	News and Periodicals Enterprise (Burma)
NPPA	Newspapers and Printing Presses Act (Singapore)
NST	New Straits Times (Malaysia)
NSTP	New Straits Times Press Bhd (Malaysia)
NTC	National Telecommunications Commission (Philippines)
NTUC	National Trades Union Congress Cooperative Limited (Singapore)
NTV	Nippon Television
OB	out of bounds
OSA	Official Secrets Act (Malaysia)

Losing control

OSS	Office of Strategic Studies (Burma)
PAP	People's Action Party (Singapore)
PAS	Parti Islam SeMalaysia
PCIJ	Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism
PCT	Press Council of Thailand
PDI	Indonesian Democratic Party
PLDT	Philippine Long Distance Telephone company
PPI	Philippine Press Institute
PPPA	Printing, Presses and Publications Act (Malaysia)
PR	public relations
PSB	Press Scrutiny Board (Burma)
PWI	Indonesian Journalists' Association
RAT	Reporters' Association of Thailand
RCS	Radio Corporation of Singapore
RFA	Radio Free Asia
RRI	Radio Republik Indonesia
RSF	Reporteurs Sans Frontières
RTHK	Radio Television Hong Kong
RTM	Radio Televisyen Malaysia
SAFRA	Radio Singapore Armed Forces Reservists' Association
SAR	Special Administrative Region (Hong Kong)
SBA	Singapore Broadcasting Authority
SCTV	Surya Citra Televisi (Indonesia)
SCV	Singapore Cable Vision
SEAPA	Southeast Asian Press Alliance
SES	Stock Exchange of Singapore
SET	Sony Entertainment Television
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council (Burma)
SNPL	Singapore News and Publications Limited
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council (Burma)
SPH	Singapore Press Holdings
SPS	Indonesian Newspaper Publishers Association
STM	Sistem Televisyen Malaysia Bhd
STV12	Singapore Television Twelve Private Limited
TBS	Tokyo Broadcasting System
TCS	Television Corporation of Singapore

TVB	Television Broadcasts
TVRI	Televisi Republik Indonesia
UHF	ultra-high frequency
UMNO	United Malays National Organisation
UN	United Nations
UNTAC	United Nations Transition Authority in Cambodia
VCD	video compact disc
VCR	video cassette recorder
VOA	Voice of America
VTV	Vietnam Television
YCDC	Yangon (Rangoon) City Development Committee

References

- AC Nielsen Adex Service, various dates, readership polls.
- , 1997. 'Media pulse 1995', in *Media Factbook 1996–97*, AC Nielsen, Manila.
- , 1997. *Media Factbook 1996–97*, AC Nielsen, Manila.
- Agence France-Presse, 1999. 'Jailed reporter unrepentant after release from Malaysian prison', 13 October.
- , 1999. 'Media squeeze claims first casualty', 15 January.
- , 1999. 'UN damns lack of press freedom: Malaysian media live in climate of fear', 26 February.
- Ahmad, Abdul R., 1999. 'The Chinese factor in run-up to election', *New Straits Times*, 9 October.
- Ahmad, Abdullah, 1999. 'Putting the Malaysian media in the right perspective', *The Business Times*, 19 October.
- Aida, H., 1999. Address to Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan Professional Dinner, 24 June.
- Aliran, 1999. Executive Committee Media Statement, 3 July, Aliran, Penang.
- Altman, K.K., 1996. 'Television and political turmoil: Japan's summer of 1993', in S.J. Pharr and E.S. Krauss (eds), *Media and Politics in Japan*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu.
- Article 19, 1994. *The Press Under Siege: censorship in Indonesia*, Article 19, The International Center Against Censorship, London.
- , 1996. *Muted Voices: censorship and the broadcast media in Indonesia*, Article 19, The International Centre Against Censorship, London.
- Associated Press (AP), 1999. 'Mahathir's regime listed among 10 worst for fair journalism', 3 May.
- , 1999. 'Singapore seeks to curtail foreign TV reporting of elections', 14 March.
- Atkins, W., 1995. 'Friendly and useful: Rupert Murdoch and the politics of television in Southeast Asia, 1993–95', *Media International Australia Incorporating Culture and Policy*, 77.
- Balgos, C., 1998. 'The coming of Compañero', *iMagazine*, July–September, www.imagazine.com.

References

- Bamathi Khin Aung, 1998. 'Hands off our nation', *Hluttaw Cannot Be Convened Forcibly and Selected Articles*, News and Periodicals Enterprise, Rangoon.
- Basuki, Tedjabayu, 1999. 'Indonesia: the web as a weapon', in C.C.A. Balgos (ed.), *News in Distress: the Southeast Asian media in a time of crisis*, Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, Quezon City.
- Boo Teik, Khoo, 1995. *Paradoxes of Mahathirism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Borsuk, R., 1998. 'Singapore state-owned TV firm to launch Asian news channel', *Asian Wall Street Journal*, 29 October.
- Bowring, P., 1994. 'The claims about Asian values don't bear scrutiny', *International Herald Tribune*, 2 August.
- Brent, W., 1998. 'China: Cable using its noodle', *Variety*, 21 December.
- Bui, Tin, 1995. *Following Ho Chi Minh: the memoirs of a North Vietnamese colonel*, C. Hurst and Co., London.
- Chanda, N., Hiebert, M. and Elegant, S., 1999. Interview with Dr Mahathir Mohamad, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 24 June, Hong Kong, www.feer.com/9906_24/mweb1.html.
- Chee-hwa, Tung, 1999. Quality people, quality home, positioning Hong Kong for the 21st century, Policy Address by the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region at the Legislative Council, October 6.
- Chellam, R., 1999. 'S'pore expected to become 2nd most dominant info economy by 2002', *Business Times Online*, 8 April.
- Chelvarajah, R.R., 1999. Speech at the Commonwealth Law Conference, 13 September, Petaling Jaya.
- Chua, M.H., 1994. 'PM: No erosion of my authority is allowed', *The Strait Times*, 10 December.
- Chua, Y.T., 1996. 'The sun star also rises', *iMagazine*, January–March, www.imagazine.com
- , 1998. 'Sequestration blues', *iMagazine*, July–September, www.imagazine.com
- and Datinguino, V.M., 1998. 'The media as marketplace', in C.F. Hofileña (ed.), *News for Sale: the corruption of the Philippine media*, Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, Quezon City.

Losing control

- Committee to Protect Journalists, 1998. *Attacks on the Press in 1998*, Committee to Protect Journalists, New York, www.cpj.org.
- Coronel, A., 1991. *Libel and the Journalist*, AFA Publications, Quezon City
- Coronel, S.S., 1997. 'Media responsibility and the politics and business of media ownership', in M. Coronel Ferrer (ed.), *Civil Society Making Civil Society*, Third World Studies Center, Quezon City.
- , (ed.), 1998. 'Monopoly', *Pork and Other Perks: corruption and governance in the Philippines*, Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, Quezon City.
- , 1999. 'The new lords of the press', *iMagazine*, April–June, www.imagazine.com.
- Corpuz, O.D., 1989. *The Roots of the Filipino Nation*, Vol.2, Aklahi Foundation, Quezon City.
- Dadang, R.H.S. and Pakpahan, R. (eds), 1996. *Jurnalists Independen Diadili: pledoi tiga terpidana*, lembaga Bantuan Hukum Jakarta and Aliansi Jurnalists Independen, Jakarta.
- Das, K., and Suaram, 1989. *The White Paper on the October Affair and the Why? Papers*, Suaram Komunikasi, Petaling Jaya.
- de Jesus, M., 1999. 'The problem with freedom', in C.C.A. Balgos (ed.), *News in Distress: the Southeast Asian media in a time of crisis*, Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, Quezon City.
- Do, Phuong, 1997. 'Vietnam's new journalism: a grandfather remembers', *Vietnam News*, 22 June.
- Dolven, B., 1999. 'The China factor', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 18 March.
- and Granitsas, A., 1999. 'The local angle', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 1 April.
- Dow Jones and Co., 1990. *Lee Kuan Yew vs The News, A History*, Dow Jones and Co., New York.
- Dunn, J., 1996. *Timor: a people betrayed*, ABC Books, Sydney.
- Duthie, S., 1986. 'Singapore's press proposal generates unusual debate', *Asian Wall Street Journal*, 2 June.
- Emmott, B., 1989, *The Sun Also Sets: why Japan will not be number one*, Simon and Schuster, London.
- Fan Li., (ed.), 1999. *A Practical Handbook on the Chinese Media*, Dongfang Keyuan Centre, Beijing.
- Fang On-sang, A.C., 1997. Speech by the Chief Secretary for Administration, January 7.

References

- , 1999. Speech by the Chief Secretary for Administration, Hong Kong Jockey Club, March 7.
- Farley, M., 1999. 'Dissidents hack holes in China's new wall', *Los Angeles Times*, 4 January.
- Feldman, O., 1993. *Politics and the News Media in Japan*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.
- , 1996. 'Nagatacho beat: messengers or minions?', *Japan Quarterly*, 43:4.
- , 1997. 'Review of media and politics in Japan', *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 23(2).
- Feliciano, G.D. and Icban, C.J., 1967. *Philippine Mass Media in Perspective*, Capitol Publishing House, Quezon City.
- Fenby, J., 1999. 'Hong Kong Journal; a free-spoken editor won't be back', *New York Times*, 31 July.
- Fernandez, W., 1994. 'Politics for politicians only?', *The Straits Times Weekly Edition*, 24 December.
- , 1999. 'Foreign TV stations: same rules must apply', *The Straits Times Weekly Edition*, 20 March.
- Flatin, P., 1999. 'Internet Guerilla thwarts Beijing's 'cyber police'', Kyodo News Service, 1 June.
- Foo, Siang Luen and Kwok, Toi Chi, 1999. *Singapore 1999*, Ministry of Information and the Arts, Singapore.
- Foreign Press Center, 1997. 'Publication of juvenile suspect's photo stirs debate', *Japan Brief*, 31 July.
- , 1999. *Facts and Figures of Japan 1999 Edition*, Foreign Press Center, Tokyo.
- Francisco, J., 1997. 'In jail for libel', *iMagazine*, April-June, www.imagazine.com.
- Freedom House, 1999. *Press Freedom Survey 1999: country ratings—press freedom worldwide*, January, freedomhouse.org/pfs99/reports.html.
- Fu, H.L. and Cullen, R., 1996. *Media Law in the PRC*, Asia Law and Practice Publishing Ltd., Hong Kong.
- Fujiwara, S., 1997. 'Fear and favor in the Japanese print media', *Look Japan*, May.
- Gan, S., 1997. 'Self-censorship in Malaysian media: a personal experience', Consultation on Ownership and Control in the Media Industries in Southeast Asia, 5 August, Bangkok.

- , 1997. Consultation on Ownership and Control in the Media Industries in Southeast Asia, 5–8 August, Bangkok, Thailand.
- George, C., 1994. 'Satellite TV should foster understanding: BG Yeo', *The Straits Times Weekly Edition*, 7 May.
- Gibney, F.B., 1996. '100 years, 100 views: put Ieyasu's ghost to rest: let the third opening begin', *Japan Times*, 34(905), May 3.
- Goenawan, M., 1997. *Himpunan Berkas Perkara Gugatan Goenawan Mohamad Atas SK. Menteri Penerangan RI, No. 123/KEP/MENPEN/1994 Tanggal 21 Juni 1994 Tentang Pembatalan SIUPP Majalah Mingguan Tempo*, Direktorat Publikasi, Direktorat Jenderal PPG, Departemen Penerangan, Jakarta.
- , 1999. Statement by the Institute for the Studies on Free Flow of Information, October.
- Gomez, E.T., and Jomo, K.S., 1997. *Malaysia's Political Economy: politics, patronage and profits*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Gomez, J., 1999. 'PAP's "kindergarten cops"', *Singaporeans for Democracy*, 4th edition, July.
- Goodale, J.C., 1999, 'China great internet trial', *New York Law Journal*, Communications and Media Law Section, February 5.
- Goto, K., 1997. 'Freedom of speech, freedom of the press', *Look Japan*, 4(491).
- Government Decree, 1996. No 67/CP, dated 31 October.
- Hall, I.P., 1998. *Cartels of the Mind: Japan's intellectual closed shop*, W.W. Norton, New York.
- Ha Phi Long, 1996. Interview with Peter Mares, recorded for ABC Radio, Ho Chi Minh City, March.
- Harari, E., 1997. 'The Government–media connection in Japan: the case of public advisory bodies', *Japan Forum*, 9(1).
- Haruhara, A. and Amenomori, I., 1997. 'Newspapers', *Japan's Mass Media*, 7, Foreign Press Center, Tokyo.
- Heng, Russell Hiang–Khng, 1998. 'Media in Vietnam and the structure of its management', in D.G. Marr (ed.), *Mass Media in Vietnam*, Political and Social Change Monograph 25, Department of Political and Social Change, The Australian National University, Canberra.
- Hiebert, M., 1997. 'See you in court', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 23 January.
- Hill, D.T., 1994. 'The press in new order Indonesia', *Asia Paper*, 4, University of Western Australia Press, in association with Asia Research Centre

- on Social, Political and Economic Change, Murdoch University, Nedlands.
- Hofileña, C.F. (ed.), 1998. *News for Sale: the corruption of the Philippine media*, Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, Quezon City.
- Hong Kong Government, 1999. *Hong Kong SAR: the key issues 1998/99*, Hong Kong.
- Hong Kong Journalists Association and Article 19, 1999. *The Ground Rules Change: freedom of expression in Hong Kong two years after the handover to China*, Hong Kong Journalists Association and Article 19, Hong Kong and London.
- Hong Kong Transition Project, 1999. *The Matrix*, Baptist University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong.
- Hoong, Chua Mui, 1994. 'PM: no erosion of my authority is allowed', *Straits Times*, 10 December.
- Husin Ali, S., 1996. *Dua Wajah (Two Faces: Detention Without Trial)*, Insan, Kuala Lumpur.
- Hussain, A., 1998. Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and the protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, 23 December, The United Nations, New York.
- Ibrahim, Z., 1999. 'President Ong will not run for second term', *The Straits Times Interactive*, 17 July.
- International Commercial Litigation*, November 1995, London.
- International Court of Justice, 1999. ICJ Press Communiqué 99/16, 29 April.
- International Monetary Fund, 1999. 'IMF concludes Article IV consultation with Singapore', IMF Public Information Notice No.99/26, www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pn/1999/PN9926.HTM
- International Press Institute, *World Review*, www.freemedia.at.
- Ismail, A.S., 1987. *Journalism and Politics*, Singamal Publishing Bureau, Kuala Lumpur.
- Ismail, N., 1999. 'Towards press freedom', *The Sun*, Petaling Jaya, 1 July.
- Jamaludin, F. and Ahmad, Z.A., 1999. 'Tell the truth, PM reminds newspapers', *The Star*, 28 July, Petaling Jaya.
- Jasin, A.K., 1998. Speech at the Commonwealth Press Union Conference, 23 October. From the personal notes of Kean Wong.
- Kasza, G., 1988. *The State and the Mass Media in Japan, 1918-1945*, University of California Press, Berkeley.

- Khin Maung Win, 1999. 'The Burmese way of muzzling dissent', in C.C.A. Balgos (ed.), *News in Distress: the Southeast Asian media in a time of crisis*, Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, Quezon City.
- Kim, Y.C., 1981. *Japanese Journalists and Their World*, University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville.
- Kodansha, 1993. *Japan: an illustrated encyclopedia*, Kodansha, Tokyo and New York.
- Kono, I., 1999. 'From prohibition to restriction', *The Japanese Press 1999*, Nihon Shinbun Kyokai, Tokyo.
- Korean Central News Agency, 1999. 'Congratulatory visit to DPRK embassy', *KCNA Daily News Service*, 13 September, www.kcna.co.jp/item/1999/9909/news09/13.htm#10.
- Krauss, E.S., 1996. 'Portraying the state: NHK television news and politics', in S.J. Pharr and E.S. Krauss (eds), *Media and Politics in Japan*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu.
- Lague, D., 1995. 'Singapore's tarnished reputation', *The Australian Financial Review*, 23 March.
- Lam, Willy Wo-Lap, 1991. 'The media: the party's throat and tongue defend the faith', in Kuan, Hsin-chi (ed.), *China Review*, Hong Kong Chinese University Press, Hong Kong.
- , 1999. *The Era of Jiang Zemin*, Prentice Hall, Singapore and New York.
- Landers, P., 1999. 'Toeing the line', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 4 March.
- Lang, T., 1932. 'I Pulled A Rickshaw', in *The Light of the Capital: three modern Vietnamese classics* (translated by G. Lockhart and M. Lockhart, 1996), Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur and New York.
- Langfitt, F., 1999. 'Taking dissent online in China', *Baltimore Sun*, 11 May.
- Lee, J.B., 1985. *The Political Character of the Japanese Press*, Seoul National University Press, Seoul.
- Lee, J-K., 1993a. A Crisis of the South Korean Media: the rise of civil society and democratic transition, unpublished paper.
- , 1993b. 'Anti-Americanism in South Korea: the media and the politics of signification', unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Iowa.
- Lent, J.A., 1984. 'Restructuring of mass media in Malaysia and Singapore: pounding in the coffin nails?', *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 16(4).
- Lim, C., 1994. 'One government, two styles', *Sunday Times*, 20 November.
- Lindsey, T. (ed.), 1999. *Indonesia: law and society*, The Federation Press, Sydney.

References

- Lingle, C., 1994. 'The smoke over parts of Asia obscures some profound concerns', *International Herald Tribune*, 7 October.
- Liu, Ji, 1996. *Jiang Zemin's Counselors*, Mirror Books, Hong Kong and Toronto.
- Louyot, A., 1999. 'Enquête-Cambodge-Révelations sur un crime d'état', *L'Express*, 2518, 7 October.
- Luther, C.A. and Boyd, D.A., 1997. 'American occupation control over broadcasting in Japan, 1945–1952', *Journal of Communication*, 47(2).
- Luwarso, Lukas, 1999. 'The liberation of the Indonesian press', in C.C.A. Balgos (ed.), *News in Distress: the Southeast Asian media in a time of crisis*, Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, Quezon City.
- Malaysian Department of Statistics, 1991. *Population and Housing Census of Malaysia*, Malaysian Department of Statistics, Kuala Lumpur.
- Marr, D.G. *Vietnamese Anticolonialism 1885–1925*, University of California, Berkeley.
- , 1981. *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial 1920–1945*, University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Maung Kya Ban, 1998. 'Don't break more laws to commit more offences', *Time To Go Home and Selected Articles*, News and Periodicals Enterprise, Rangoon.
- Maung Saw Tun, 1998. 'Those going to dig for treasure in the forehead of the father', *Hluttaw Cannot Be Convened Forcibly and Selected Articles*, News and Periodicals Enterprise, Rangoon.
- McCargo, D. and Bowra, R., 1997. *Policy Advocacy and the Media in Thailand*, Institute of Public Policy Studies, Bangkok.
- McKinnon, A., 1996. Interview with Peter Mares, ABC Radio, Hanoi, October.
- Merritt, C., 1995. 'Singapore law in time capsule', *Australian Financial Review*, 9 February.
- Minami, H., 1998. 'The Edo period's legacy of masochistic pessimism', *Japan Echo*, 25(3).
- Muzaffar, C., 1998. 'The press–elite tie', unpublished letter to *New Straits Times* printed in *JUST newsletter*, 5 November, Kuala Lumpur.
- Nain, Z., 1998. 'Pathetic press', *Aliran magazine*, August, www.malaysia.net/aliran/high9908.html.
- Nakada, G.G., 1999. 'Stay tuned for satellite TV', *Japan Quarterly*, 46(1).

Losing control

- Netto, A., 1999. 'Replacement of top editors puts spotlight on 'negative reporting'', *IPS*, 29 July.
- News and Periodicals Enterprise (NPE), 1998a. *Time To Go Home and Selected Articles*, News and Periodicals Enterprise, Rangoon.
- News and Periodicals Enterprise, 1998b. *Hluttaw Cannot Be Convened Forcibly and Selected Articles*, News and Periodicals Enterprise, Rangoon.
- Ng, I., 1995. 'Only those elected can set OB markers', *Straits Times*, 3 February.
- Ngo, Phuong Lan, 1998. 'Making live radio in Vietnam', in D.G. Marr (ed.), *Mass Media in Vietnam*, Political and Social Change Monograph 25, Department of Political and Social Change, Australian National University, Canberra.
- Ngo, Vinh Long, 1991. *Before the Revolution: the Vietnamese peasants under the French*, Colombia University Press, New York.
- NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute, 1999. 'Japanese time use in 1995', *Studies of Broadcasting*, 34, Nippon Hoso Kyokai, Tokyo.
- NHK Data, 1999. 'Japanese broadcasting data', *Broadcasting Culture and Research*, Nippon Hoso Kyokai, Tokyo, www.nhk.or.jp/bunken/BCRI-news/bcri.html.
- NHK, 1999. *Annual Report 1999*, Nippon Hoso Kyokai, Tokyo.
- Nihon, S.K., 1999. 'Facts about Japanese newspapers', *The Japanese Press 1999*, Nihon Shinbun Kyokai, Tokyo, 31 May.
- Noor, F., 1999. 'RTM needs to retain its credibility', *JUST Newsletter*, 15 July, International Movement for a Just World, Petaling Jaya.
- North Korean Constitution 1975. Article 53, Chapter 4, Socialist Constitution of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Pyongyang.
- North Korean Government, 1983. *The Great Teacher of Journalists*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Pyongyang.
- Ofreneo, R.P., 1986. *The Manipulated Press: a history of Philippine journalism since 1945*, Second edition, Solar Publishing Corporation, Manila.
- Omori, Y., 1997. 'Broadcasting', in *Japan's Mass Media*, 7, Foreign Press Center, Tokyo.
- Ong, C., 1999. 'GIC splits into three in major revamp', *BT Online*, 13 April.
- Ong Keng Yong, 1999. 'BT editorial was unwise and rash, says PM Goh', *The Business Times*, 21 June.

References

- Ono, R., 1999. 'Newspaper management in 1998', in *The Japanese Press 1999*, Nihon Shinbun Kyokai, Tokyo, 31 May.
- Otsuka, H., 1996. 'The legal framework for media and channel multiplication in Japanese broadcasting', *Studies of Broadcasting*, 32, Nippon Hoso Kyokai, Tokyo.
- Patten, C., 1996. 'Transition', Policy Address to the Hong Kong Legislative Council, October 2.
- , 1998. *East and West: the last governor of Hong Kong on power, freedom and the future*, Macmillan, London.
- Pauksa, 1998. 'Go back...go back' and 'Agents-saboteur who fell in front of a tiger', *Time To Go Home and Selected Articles*, News and Periodicals Enterprise, Rangoon.
- Pharr, S.J., 1996. 'Media as trickster in Japan: a comparative perspective', in S.J. Pharr and E.S. Krauss (eds), *Media and Politics in Japan*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu.
- Philippine Information Agency, 1998. *Philippine Media Factbook 1998*, Philippine Information Agency, Quezon City.
- Political & Economic Risk Consultancy, 1999. *Asian Intelligence*, 530, 10 March.
- Rashid, R., 1993. *A Malaysian Journey*, self-published, Petaling Jaya.
- Reuters, 1999. 'Foreign press hurts Malaysian economy, minister says', quoting Daim Zainuddin on the foreign media, 26 August, Kuala Lumpur.
- Rimban, L., 1996. 'The empire strikes back', *iMagazine*, July–September, www.imagazine.com.
- , 1998. 'Like a shooting star', *iMagazine*, July–September, www.imagazine.com.
- , 1999a. 'Not just a business', *iMagazine*, April–June, www.imagazine.com.
- , 1999b. 'We love Lucio', *iMagazine*, January–March, www.imagazine.com.
- Rodan, G., 1998. 'Asia and the international press: the political significance of expanding markets', *Democratization*, 5(2).
- Sato, Y., 1999. 'Japanese newspapers on the move despite hard times', in *The Japanese Press 1999*, Nihon Shinbun Kyokai, Tokyo.
- Schlesinger, D., 1992. 'China dissident not allowed to sue government', Reuters, 17 January.

Losing control

- Schumacher, J., 1997. *Propaganda Movement, 1880–1895: the creation of a Filipino consciousness, the making of a revolution*, Ateneo de Manila University Press, Quezon City.
- Schwarz, A., 1994. *A Nation in Waiting: Indonesia in the 1990s*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney.
- Sen, Amartya, 1999. 'Democracy as a universal value', in *Journal of Democracy*, 10(3).
- Seow, F., 1998. *The Media Enthralled: Singapore revisited*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder, Colorado.
- Sesser, S., 1999. 'SingNet apologizes for virus scanning', *Asian Wall Street Journal*, 7–8 May.
- Severino, H.G., 1999. 'Death of a journalist', *iMagazine*, April–June, www.imagazine.com.
- Shenon, P., 1995. 'Two-edged sword: Asian regimes on the internet', *The New York Times*, 29 May.
- Sherman, S.A., 1994. 'East meets West in the newsroom', *Columbia Journalism Review*, March/April, www.cjr.org/year/94/2/nhk.asp.
- , 1995. 'Hiroshi who?', *Columbia Journalism Review*, July/August, www.cjr.org/year/95/4/hiroshi.asp.
- Shillony, B.A., 1991. *Politics and Culture in Wartime Japan*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Shimbun, K., 1989. 'National survey on the reliability of newspapers', *Shimbun Kyokai*, 458, Nihon Shimbun Kyokai.
- Shimoyama, S., 1999. Address to Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan Professional Dinner, 24 June.
- Singapore Department of Statistics, 1999. *Yearbook of Statistics, 1998*, SNP Corporation Ltd, Singapore.
- Singaporeans for Democracy, 1998. 'Corruption in Singapore: the H.P.L. saga', *Singaporeans for Democracy*, 2nd edition, December.
- Singer, M., 1997. 'Media law in the PRC', *China Business Review*, 13 March.
- Singh, A. and Lopez, A., 1999. 'The president and the press', *Asiaweek*, 6 August.
- Sithu Nyein Aye, 1998. 'Fallen prey to the awards', *Time To Go Home and Selected Articles*, News and Periodicals Enterprise, Rangoon.
- Sivarasa, R., 1995. Personal discussion with Kean Wong.
- Smith, C., 1999. 'Online in China', *Asian Wall Street Journal*, 18 January.

References

- Society for Truth and Light, 1999. 'The state publishing industry on the brink of bankruptcy', *Ming Pao Daily News*, 2 April, Hong Kong.
- , 1999. 'Survey', *Ming Pao Daily News*, 26 April, Hong Kong.
- Soong, Kua Kia, 1989. *Behind The Wire*, The Research and Resource Centre of Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall, Kuala Lumpur.
- Stuart, T.H., 1996. 'Media monitors in the Philippines', in *Media Monitors in Asia*, Asian Mass Media Information and Communication Centre, Singapore.
- Suaram, 1998. *Malaysian Human Rights Report*, Suaram Komunikasi, Petaling Jaya.
- Surjomihardjo, A. (ed.), 1980. *Beberapa Segi Perkembangan Sejarah Pers Di Indonesia*, Proyek Penelitian Pengembangan Penerangan, Departemen Penerangan R.I. and Lembaga Ekonomi dan Kemasyarakatan Nasional, Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia, Jakarta.
- Suzuki, T., 1999. 'Advertise newspapers now', *The Japanese Press 1999*, Nihon Shinbun Kyokai, Tokyo.
- Templer, R., 1998. *Shadows and Wind: a view of modern Vietnam*, Little, Brown and Company, London.
- Teo, A., 1999. 'NEL voted most transparent listed firm', *Business Times Online*, 8 April.
- Thadindaok Thetsay, 1998. *Hluttaw Cannot Be Convened Forcibly and Selected Articles*, News and Periodicals Enterprise, Rangoon.
- Than Eint Hmu, 1998. 'The Byanma's Head-2', *Time To Go Home and Selected Articles*, News and Periodicals Enterprise, Rangoon.
- Thayer, N.B., 1975. 'Competition and conformity: an inquiry into the structure of Japanese newspapers', in E.F. Vogel (ed.), *Modern Japanese Organization and Decision-Making*, University of California Press, Berkeley.
- The Business Times*, 1999. 'Waiting for Mahathir's next move', 18 June.
- , 1999. 'Dr M defends newspapers for pro-govt stance', 30 June.
- The Nation*, 1992. Editorial, 20 May.
- The Star*, 1999. 'S'pore slams Malaysian media', *The Star*, 7 July.
- , 1999b. 'Govt rejects request for grant: Jeya-Chee plan for Centre', *The Straits Times Interactive*, 21 July.
- Tirol, S., 1999. 'Bankrupt but (almost) free', in S.S. Coronel (ed.), *From Loren to Marimar: readings on the Philippine media in the 1990s*, Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, Quezon City.

Losing control

- U Mingala, 1998. 'Time to go home', *Time To Go Home and Selected Articles*, News and Periodicals Enterprise, Rangoon.
- United Nations, 1998a. 'On access to the media', Report of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Human Rights in Cambodia, 25 June 1998.
- , 1998b. 'Media and the Elections', Report of the UN Secretary General for Human Rights in Cambodia, 23 July 1998.
- , 1999. 'Secretary-General informs security council people of East Timor rejected special autonomy proposed by Indonesia', Press release SC/6721, 3 September, www.un.org/News/Press/.
- van Wolferen, K., 1989. *The Enigma of Japanese Power: people and politics in a stateless nation*, A.A. Knopf, New York.
- Vanden Heuvel, J., and Dennis, E.E., 1993. *The Unfolding Lotus*, The Freedom Forum Media Studies Center, Columbia University.
- Vennewald, W., 1994. *Technocrats in the State Enterprise System of Singapore*, Working Paper 32, Asia Research Centre, Murdoch University, Perth.
- Video Research Ltd, 1999. 'Top 10 news and current affairs programs', Video Research Ltd., Vol. 29, 12–18 July.
- Wai, Wong Chun, 1998. Speech at the Commonwealth Press Union Conference, 23 October. From the personal notes of Kean Wong.
- Westney, D. E., 1996. 'Mass media as business organizations', in S.J. Pharr and E.S. Krauss (eds), *Media and Politics in Japan*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu.
- Win, Khin Maung, 1999. 'The Burmese way of muzzling dissent', in C.C.A. Balgos (ed.), *News in Distress: the Southeast Asian media in a time of crisis*, Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, Quezon City.
- Yamamoto, T., 1989. 'The Press Clubs of Japan', *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 15(2).
- Yeo, G., 1995. 'Information Technology – Positioning Singapore in Asia', Speech at launch of Singapore Technologies (ST) Teleport, 23 April, www.gov.sg/government/speeches/new/i.htm.
- Youm, K., 1996. *Press Law in South Korea*, Iowa State University Press.
- Young, L., 1998. *Japan's Total Empire—Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism*, University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Zhengqin, X., 1998. *The Coming Challenges of Premier Zhu Rongji*, Pacific Century Institute, Hong Kong.

INDEX

A

Abdul Kadir Jasin 126, 133
 Abdullah Badawi 119, 131
 Aceh 82, 88, 92
Agence France Presse 19, 41, 44, 46, 49, 50
 Aida 99
 Akahata 95
 Aliran 128, 129, 135, 136
 All India Radio 24
 Alliance of Independent Journalists
 (Indonesia) 82
 Altman 102, 111
 Amartya Sen 13
 Amenomori 94, 107
 An Ninh The Gior 246
 Antarakum 34
 Anwar Ibrahim 116, 120, 124, 125, 126,
 127, 129, 131, 134
Apple Daily (Hong Kong) 58, 60, 61, 62,
 66
 Aquino 147–8, 161, 164
 Ardyn Erkh 29
Asahi Shimbun 93, 95–6, 98–9, 102, 106,
 109, 111–4
Asiaweek 24, 63, 151, 165
 Asian values ii, iv, 7, 117, 170, 177
Asian Wall Street Journal 42, 54, 95, 121,
 123, 136, 177
Associated Press 182
 Astro 128, 131
 Atkins 182
 Aum Shinkrikyo 93, 110
 Aung San Suu Kyi 16, 18, 22–3
 Australia 74–7, 81, 84, 87–8
 autarky 5
 authoritarian government/rule i, iii, 1–
 5, 8, 9, 11, 13, 16–8, 30, 52, 116–8,
 135, 147, 190, 195, 200
 autocrat 5, 9, 13

B

Balairung 84
Barisan Nasional (the National Front)
 (Malaysia) 117, 173
 BBC World Service 9, 23, 43, 48, 95, 138;
 180–2, 250

Beijing 1, 6, 8–10, 12, 15, 58–9, 62, 66–70
 Belgrade 38, 50, 53
 Berita Harian 124, 125, 127, 128, 129,
 130–1, 133, 135
 Bloomberg News 13
Borneo Bulletin 31–2
 Brent 43
 Bui Tin 250
 Bulaksumur 84
 Bulgaria 144
 Burma 1, 5–7, 15–25
BusinessWorld (Philippines) 156, 162

C

Cambodia 2, 14–5
 Canada 45
 Ceasescu 5
 Cebu 156
 censor, censorship 1–6, 8, 10, 12, 16–
 7, 19, 21, 25, 30, 33, 38, 43, 53,
 190–1, 193, 195, 202–3, 220–1, 223,
 232, 240, 246, 255
Central Daily News (Taiwan) 210
 Central News Agency 214, 218
chaebol 203
 Chamlong Srimuang 220
 Chan Fang On-sang, Anson 64–6, 70, 72
 Chanda, Hiebert and Jayasankaran 127
 Chandra Muzaffar 133
 Chang Hosoon 198
 Chao Phraya 219, 223
 Chatchai Choonhavan 224
 Chavalit 226, 227
 Chellam 170
 Chen Cheng-chung 210, 216
 Chen Ziming 47
 Chiang Kai-shek 210, 211, 214
 China ii, iii, 1, 5–7, 10, 12, 14–5, 58–71,
 95–6, 109, 138, 143, 144, 145, 240,
 243, 252
 China Democracy Party 53, 210
 China News Service 40
 China Television 210
China Times 210, 212, 218
 Chinese Communist Party (CCP) 6, 37–
 46, 48, 49, 50, 53, 55, 56, 210
 Ching-kuo 210

Losing control

Chongkittavorn 92
chonji 192, 201
Chua 153, 156, 160, 171
Chua and Datinguino 153
Chuan Leekpai 10
Chung Byung-joon 203
City News (Burma) 20
civil society 4, 5, 17, 38, 41, 51, 116, 120,
121, 128, 137, 171, 186, 188
Clinton 38, 39, 123
CNBC 131, 136
CNN 9, 30, 35, 43, 48, 63, 95, 145, 251
Confucianism 192
Committee to Protect Journalists i, iii,
49, 123, 160, 208
communist origins (Laos) 26, 28,
Communist Party (Mongolia) 30
Communist Party (North Korea) 138–9
Communist Party (Thailand) 225
Communist Party (Vietnam) 239–40,
243–7, 249, 251–2, 255–7
communist regime (Cambodia) 16, 17,
32, 33
Communist Youth League (China) 42
Corpuz 150
corruption ii, iv, 11–13, 39, 40, 55, 102,
109, 111, 152, 155, 160, 163, 165,
217, 221, 223, 225, 228–9, 231, 234–
5, 237, 247–8
Cuba 144
Cultural Revolution 37, 44, 49, 53
Cultural Times of Guangzhou 49
Czechoslovakia 144

D

Dalai Lama 43, 61
Daily News (Thailand) 230, 238
Daim Zainuddin 136
Dateline 131
de Jesus 152
democracy/democratic i, ii, iii, v, 96,
98, 101, 107, 111, 147, 149–50, 159,
161, 165–6, 219, 220, 222–3
Democratic Acton Party 119
Democratic Voice of Burma 24
democratisation i, v, 229, 238
demonstration 72, 242
Deng Xiaoping 37, 40, 48
Department of Defence Services
Intelligence (Burma) 19, 21

Department of Human Rights
(Indonesia) 3
Department of Information (Indonesia)
3, 12
Detik 82–3
dictatorship 16
Dili 75–6
Doanh Nghiep 247
Do Muoi 239
Dong-A Ilbo 196, 199
Do Phoung 244
Downer 74

E

East Asian economic crisis/downturn
55, 60, 170, 227
East Timor 74–7, 82, 92
Eastern Sun (Singapore) 173
economic miracle 4
economic reform 45, 55, 244
Editor 77, 81, 82, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92
elections 28, 3–6, 117, 125, 129, 171,
175, 176, 182, 183, 184
Elshintar 88
Emmott 108
Eom Ju-woong 203
Estrada v, 149, 155, 161, 164–5
ethical standards 153

F

Falun Gong 6, 14, 41, 53, 57, 69
Fang On-sang 64, 65, 70
Far Eastern Economic Review 19, 63, 121–
2, 136, 151
Feldman 94, 100, 104, 108
Fernandez 119, 171, 182, 183
Figaro 47
Financial Times 63, 76
Flatin 53
Foo and Kwok 181, 183
foreign journalists/media/reporting
143, 151, 219, 225, 253–5
Foreign Press Center 111, 114
Formosa 210–2
Fourth Estate 149
France 95
Free China Review 210
Freedom of Information Act (Taiwan)
209, 217

Freedom of Information Act (Thailand)
11

Freedom of Information Bill (Japan) 109

Fu and Cullen 46

Fuji Television 104, 112, 113

Fujiwara 94

G

Gao Yu 49

global information age 169

George Junus Aditjondro 84

Goh Chok Tong 178

Goenawan Mohamad 77, 82, 90

Gomez 187

Gomez and Jomo 129, 135

Goodale 47

Goto 111

Grand National Party (GNP) 202, 205–7

Guangdong 42–3

Guangdong Province Party Committee
42

H

Ha Phi Long 245

Habibie 74, 87, 89, 92

Hall 95, 99, 101, 102, 108, 110, 113

Hamnam Daily 141

Han-kyoreh 201, 202

Hanoi 1, 8, 239–41, 245, 248–9, 252–6

Harakah 136

Haruhara 94, 107

Haruhara and Amenomori 107

Herald (Singapore) 173, 177

Ho Chi Minh 243, 245–7, 249, 253, 255

Hong Kong ii, 8–10, 12, 15, 43, 45–9
51–2, 57

Hong Kong Commercial Daily 62

Hong Kong Economic Journal 62, 66

Hong Kong Economic Times 62

Hong Kong Government 59, 66

Hong Kong Journalists Association 58,
61, 64

Hong Seok-hyun 204–5, 207

Hosokawa 102

Huang The-fu 214

Hungary 144

human rights 49, 50, 57, 117–8, 123, 211,
214

Hun Sen 32, 34

I

Independent Evening Post (Taiwan) 210

Indonesia i–v, 172, 182, 185

Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI) 84

Indonesian Newspaper Publishers
Association 90

Indonesian Press and Broadcasting
Society 90

Information Act (Thailand) 234, 236

Inquirer (Philippines) 154–6, 165

Internal Security Act (ISA) (Indonesia)
120–1

Internal Security Act (Singapore) 173, 184
International Centre Against Censorship
82

International Court of Justice 122

International Economics News Journal 21

International Herald Tribune 24, 63, 95,
177

International Monetary Fund 74, 172,
228

international press 176, 177, 179

Internet 2–7, 38, 41, 51–4, 62–3, 112–3,
116, 135–6, 145, 169–70, 172, 183–4,
252–3

Iraq 9

Irian Jaya 82, 92

Is It True? (Indonesia) 11

J

Jakarta 1, 6, 74–8, 81–8, 90–2

Jamaludin and Ahmad 127

Japan 10, 12–4, 192–4, 196

Japan Broadcasting Corporation 104

Japan Newspaper Publishers and
Editors' Association 98, 113

Japan Times 95, 113

Jiang Zemin 37, 3, 41, 43–5, 47, 51, 55–6

Journalists Association of Thailand 238

Juche democracy 139

K

Karen House 177

Kasza 97, 104

Khao San Pathet Lao 26

Khao Sod 230

Khin Maung Win 21

Khin Nyunt 19, 21

Losing control

Khuumun Bicheg 30
Kiichi Miyazawa 102
Kim 100, 108
Kim Il Sung 144, 145, 146
kisha kurabu (press club) 99
Kodansha 98, 103, 105
Kolvoth Angkor 34
Kono 93–4, 111
Korean Central Intelligence Agency 196, 198
Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) 140–5
Korean Press Institute 201, 203
Korean War 193, 195, 199
Krauss 104
Kristal TV 32
Krushev 242
Kuala Lumpur 122, 126, 135
Kumnit Kaun Khmer 34
Kuomintang 210
Kwangju 199, 200
Kwon Hee-ro 193

L

Lague 178
Lai Shou-lu, Cheryl 214
Landers 110, 111
Lao Dong 247
Laos 6
Le Kha Phieu 244–5
Le Renovateur (Laos) 26
Lee 96–8, 100, 107, 109
Lee Hsien Loong 177
Lee Jae-kyoung 194, 199
Lee Kuan Yew ii, 7, 65, 68, 69, 169–71, 177–8, 186, 189
Lee Teng-hui 39, 43, 215
Lei Chen 210
Lenin 2
Lent 174
Lian He Wanboa 174
Liberal Democratic Party (Japan) 98, 101, 111
Li Honzhi 53
Lim, Catherine 171
Lim Kit Siang 127
Lim Guan Eng 119
Lee Jae-kyoung 194, 199
Lim Sang-won 198
Lindsey 82

Lin He Zaobao 174
Li Peng 39
Louyot 32
Luther and Boyd 105
Luwarso 80, 82
Lyu Eun-suk 191

M

McKinnon 248
Mahathir 115, 117–8, 123, 126, 128–9, 133–5, 175
Mainichi Shimbun 95–6, 98–9, 105–7, 113
Malaysia 2, 5, 8, 172, 175, 181–2, 185
Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) 117, 126
Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) 117
Manila vi, 147, 151, 153–6, 158, 162, 165, 167
Manila Bulletin 153–5
Mao Zedong 37, 51, 243
Marcos iii, vi, 6, 11, 147
market reform 37, 51, 55
Marr 241, 243
Maung Kya Gan 23
Maung Saw Tun 23
media ethics 64, 71
Merritt 178
Ming Pao 44, 51, 58, 60, 62, 68
Minister of Information (Indonesia) 78
Minister of Information (Malaysia) 120, 128
Ministry of Information (Burma) 20, 24
Ministry of Information and Culture (Laos) 28
Minjok Ilbo 195
Minju Choson 141
Mohamed 31
Mongolia 3, 11, 15
Montsane 29, 30, 31
Moon Sun-myong 204
Moscow TV 30
MRTV 28
MTV 32
Murdoch 43, 48, 112
Myanma Alin 19, 20, 21, 23–5

N

Nain 134, 135
Nakada 106

Nanyang Siang Pau 173, 174
 NATO 38, 39, 50
 National Assembly 202, 206, 207
 National League for Democracy 18
 National Peoples Congress (NPC) 39
 National Security Act (South Korea) 191, 195
 Nationalist Party of China 210
 Neak Tosu 34
 Netto 135
 Ne Win 17, 21
New Strait Times (Malaysia) 120–1, 125, 127, 132–4
 News and Periodicals Enterprise 19, 23
 News Corporation 43, 48, 106
 News Executives Association (Hong Kong) 64
 News Express 32
Newsweek 95, 151
 Ng 171
 Ng Ngoi-yee 67
 Ngo Vinh Long 242
 Nguyen Cong Hoan 241
 Nguyen Hoanh Linh 247
 Nhan Dan 245, 246, 250, 252, 255
 NHK 24, 95, 104–5, 110, 112–3
 Nichols 16, 21
 Nielsen 157, 159
Nihon Keizai Shimbun 95, 97–8, 113
 Nippon Television 104
 Noor 129
 North Korea 1, 2, 5, 6, 15, 191, 194, 195–6, 201
 NTV7 128, 130, 131

O

Official Secrets Acts (Singapore and Malaysia) ii, 121
 Official Secrets Act (Taiwan) 209, 217–8
 Ofreneo 150
 Omori 94, 104, 106, 107
 Ong Keng Young 175
 Ong Teng Cheong 186
 Onoodor 29, 30
Oriental Daily News 60, 61, 62
Oriental Monthly (China) 49
 Orwell 18
 Otsuka 106
Outlook Monthly (China) 49
Outlook Weekly (China) 42

P

Packer 248, 251
Panquil Bay Monitor (Philippines) 148
 Pasason 26
 Patten 48, 66
 Pauksa 23
 personality cult 38, 44
 Pharr 103
 Phibun Songgram 222
 Philippine Centre for Investigative Journalism 153, 167
Philippine Daily Inquirer v, 154, 155
 Philippine Information Agency
Philippine Star 155, 161
 Philippines i, ii, iii, v, 2, 3, 5, 8, 11–4, 148–9, 150–4, 157–68
Phnom Penh Post 35
 Phoenix TV 43
 Phjadkarn 230
 Poland 140, 144
 Polish Press Agency 140, 144
 pollution index 58, 60
 pornography 7, 9, 71, 88, 169, 183, 251–2
 poverty 5, 13, 139, 144, 193
 Pramodya Ananta Toer 5
Pravda iv, 11, 29
 Prem Tinsulanond 224
 Press Councils 4, 9
 Press Ethics Commission 196
 press freedom 58, 63, 65, 69, 71–3, 96, 107, 113, 119, 123, 212, 216
 Press Institute of Mongolia 31
 press liberalisation 39
 Press Notification Act (Thailand) 233
 Press Scrutiny Board (Burma) 21
 Printers and Publishers Registration Law (Burma) 21
 propaganda 1, 2, 8, 9, 14, 16, 20–3, 37–8, 40, 42, 44, 48, 54, 56–7, 116, 128, 129, 138, 140–3, 145, 199, 220
 Proyuth 34
Pyongnam Daily 141
 Pyongyang 8, 9, 140–5
Pyongyang Daily 141

Q

Quan Doi Nhan Dan 245, 250
 Quek Leng Chan 127

R

Radio Free Asia 23
Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK)
68–70
Railway News (North Korea) 141
Ramos 153–4, 164
Ranariddh 35
Rashid 115, 134
Ratanabon 20
Reuters 21, 41, 42, 43, 49, 136, 246, 249
Rimban 159, 161, 162
Riza Primadi 86
Roday 180
Rodong Sinmun 141
Roh Tae Woo 191, 200
Romania 5, 144
'rule of law' 45
Russia 96

S

Saigon 240, 253
Samleng Samapheap (Cambodia) 34
Samut Prakarn 229
Sanam Luang 219
Sankei 97–9, 106, 109, 113
Sarangban 191
Sarit Thanarat 22
satellite television 3, 4, 6, 25, 116, 131,
181, 220, 251
Sato 111
Schlesinger 47
Schumacher 150
Schwarz 254
Segye Times (South Korea) 204
Sein Win (Burma) 18, 19
self-censorship 12, 59, 66–8, 116, 123,
125, 135, 176, 179, 181, 191, 193
sensationalism 58–60, 64, 152, 209, 215–
6, 227, 237, 245
Seol 190, 191, 194, 198, 200, 202, 204,
205, 207
Seow 171, 173
Serbia 38
Sesser 184
Severino 160
Shenon 183
Sherman 102, 104
Shi Binhai 49

Shiu Lo-sin 69
Sing Chew Jit Poh 118, 127, 132, 173
Sing Tao Jih Pao 62
Singapore ii, iii, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 251, 252
Singapore One 7
Singapore Cable Vision 181
Singapore Department of Statistics 180–1
Singapore One Cable Network 169
Singapore Press Holdings 174, 181
Singer 48
Singh and Lopez 155
Sithu Nyein Aye 23
Sivarasa 117
SkyCable 159
SLORC (State Law and Order
Resoration Council) (Burma) 18
Smith 54
Soeharto ii, iii, iv, v, 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 11, 74,
77–84, 86–92
Soviet Union 2
South China Morning Post 42, 55, 62, 66,
67, 69, 70, 71
South Korea i, 3, 4, 12–3, 15, 95
Southeast Asian Press Alliance (SEAPA)
iii, 92
Soviet Union 40, 49, 139, 140, 144
Special Administrative Region (SAR) 58,
60, 61, 64–71
Stalin 2, 138, 140, 144, 243
Standard (Philippines) 154, 164
Star TV 30, 32, 62
State Secrets Law (China) 46
State Peace and Development Council
(SPDC) 18
Straits Times 41
Suaram 118, 128
Suchinda 219, 220, 226
Sukarnoputri 84
Sun Star (Philippines) 156
Surya Citra Televisi (SCTV) 86
Sydney Morning Herald 2
Syngman Rhee 194

T

Ta Kung Pao 62
Taiwan 39, 43, 51–3, 62, 68, 70
Taiwan Political Review 211
Taiwan Television 210
Tam Lang 241, 242
Tanaka 100, 101

Teachers News 141
 television 3, 4, 6, 9, 10, 24, 25, 27, 28, 30,
 31, 32, 35, 41–3, 48, 50, 55–6, 94,
 102, 104, 106, 108, 110–3, 115–6,
 120, 125, 128–9, 131, 135, 181–3,
 208, 210, 212, 215, 220–1, 225, 234,
 240, 249, 251, 255
 Television Corporation of Singapore
 (TCS) 180–2
 Templar 246–7
Tempo 79, 82–3, 90, 92
 Tenaganita 119
 Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah 134
 Thadindaok Thetsay 23
Thai Post 229
 Thailand i, iii, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8–13,
Thailand Times 230
 Than Eint Hmu 23
 Thanom Kittikarcharon 22
 Thayer 109
The Asian 211
 The Association for Taiwan Journalists
 (ATJ) 216–7
The Bangkok Post 230, 238
The Business Times (Singapore) 175
The China Youth Daily 42
The Eighties (Taiwan) 211
The Global View (Taiwan) 214
The Great News (Taiwan) 216
The Guardian (Burma) 19
The Hong Kong Standard 63
The Independent Morning Post (Taiwan)
 216
The Journalist (Taiwan) 214
The Mongol Messenger 29, 30
The Nation 219, 220, 230, 238
The Star 118, 126, 131–4
The Straits Times (Singapore) 173, 187
The Sun (Hong Kong) 60–2
The Times 43
The Way of Beijing 49
 Tiananmen Square 37, 48, 54, 64, 72
 Tibet 40, 50, 61
 TIME 95, 151
 Tirol 160
 Tokyo 93, 96, 97, 99, 101, 109, 114
Trial by the Press (Indonesia) 11
Truth (Mongolia) 11, 13
 Tung Chee-hwa 60, 62, 63, 66, 67, 70, 71–2
 Tuoi Tre 247, 250
 TV Asahi 102, 111–2, 114

U

U Mingala 23
Ulaanbaatar (Mongolia) 29, 31
Unen (Mongolia) 29
Unen Ulu ('Is It True?') (Mongolia) 29
 United Kingdom 37, 45
 United Nations 17, 35, 74
 United Malays National Organisation
 (UNMO) 117, 125–7, 129
 United Nations Transition Authority in
 Cambodia 17
 United States 37, 39, 43, 45, 51–2, 94–5,
 150–2, 158, 161, 170, 181, 194–5, 199
 Universal Declaration of Human Rights
 14, 117

V

Van Cao 243
 Van Nghe 243
 Veritas 148
 Viengchan Mai 26, 27
 Viengchan Toolakith-Sangkom 27
Vientiane Times (Laos) 6, 26, 27, 28
 Vietnam 1, 5, 7, 10, 15
 Voice of America 23

W

Wahid 3, 78, 84
 Wang Xiaolong 46
 Washington 38, 53, 200
 Wathajak 230
Weekly Vietnam Investment Review 248
 Wen Wei Po 62
 Westney 95
 Win Myint 21
 Wolfensohn 10
 Wong Chun Wai 133
Workers Daily (China) 42
 World Bank 172
 World Trade Organization (WTO), 45
 World War II 193, 194

X

Xi Yang 68
 Xin 44
 Xinjiang 40, 50

Y

Yamamoto 99
Yomiuri 95, 96, 98, 106–7, 113
Yongchaiyudh 226
Youm Kyo-ho 194–6
Young 96

Z

Zasgyn Gazryn Medee 29
Zhao Ziyang 49
Zhengquin 45
zhongyang (central authorities) (China)
42, 44–5
Zhu Rongji 39, 48