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Editorial: In this issue

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Abstract

Hong Kong is one of the world's freest places not just in its market economy, but also in the spirit of its public discourse and expressions of its popular culture. Much of the Western media are predicting the demise of this freedom when China takes over the British colony on July 1. While Western journalists anticipate eagerly the final changing of the guards, their counterparts in Hong Kong juggle shakily with the pragmatics of how they can work within the "one country two systems" interpretation of media freedom and responsibility.

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At this time of writing, Chinese soldiers have firmly staked their positions in Hong Kong to pave the way for the final handover. An outsider looking in can easily fall into assuming a worst case scenario of Chinese high-handed governance. But, on the inside, optimism still rides high in the financial markets, foreign media agencies are still firmly placed in Hong Kong.

Media educators read these conflicting signals augmenting a lasting conflict between the liberal traditions of a free press with one that is imposed, both through explicit legal avenues and ideological restraints, by China on Hong Kong journalists and academics. Former journalists, TIM HAMLETT and JUDITH CLARKE trace how changes to media practice and education in Hong Kong may come about with the promulgation of 'new' anti-subversion laws post-July 1997 which they note would drive journalism educators to teach students to consider the consequences to themselves of what they write.

TSANG TAK-SING, editor of *Tung Pao* newspaper, however, expresses greater optimism in the continuity of existing press freedom under Chinese rule. Hong Kong's economy depends on this free flow of information. What controls there will be are those restraining the press from advocating independence for Hong Kong or Taiwan, or laws banning defamation of top Chinese leaders -- just as the British law prohibits the defamation of the royal family. Tsang contends that July 1 will mark the end of colonialistic 'press freedom' defined by Chris Patten and the start of 'press freedom' under Tung Chee Hwa.

MAK YIN-TING, president of Hong Kong Journalists Association, however, are less sanguine. She echoed the journalists' apprehension on China's attitudes towards the role of a free press in a capitalist economy.

On the issue of racism in the media, P. ERIC LOUW looks at the ideological commonalities between media practices in New South Africa and Malaysia in relation to the respective countries' race-based affirmative action policies. He traces the roots of both countries' contemporary race-based policies back to a joint experience of British imperialism and examines the implications such policies seem to hold for the media and media workers. Journalists and media trainers are challenged to consider ways in which the media can respond critically to such policies.

On a more current topic, PHILIP BELL examines the role of the Australian media in legitimising "racism" as formented by the Australian Independent Member of Parliament, Pauline Hanson. He noted that the media are deeply implicated in reproducing the assumptions which maintain popular misconceptions about race as an inevitable cause of social divisions. Bell concludes his article with practical suggestions on how Hanson's politics of fear could have otherwise been reported.

Other contributions to this issue are tailored to prompt educators and practitioners to think of ways to expand the conventions of current media practice and training.

We would like to also welcome the *International Center Of Media Studies* (ICMS) in Malaysia as our new partner in fostering comparative media education and training in the region. This represents a major extension of *AsiaPacific MediaEducator's* network with our colleagues in South East Asia where journalism is being perceived to be an agent of social change.

ICMS is devoted to applied research work on media policies and public education. Its main research areas include media consumer behaviour, media textual analysis, media technology development, and coverage of Malaysia in the international press. ■