

**Uncovering Conceptions of “Journalism Crisis” in  
Singapore and Hong Kong: When State Influences  
Interact with Western Liberal Ideals in a  
Globalizing Media Landscape**

by

**Shangyuan Wu**

M.A., Simon Fraser University, 2010

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# Approval

**Name:** Shangyuan Wu  
**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy  
**Title:** *Uncovering Conceptions of “Journalism Crisis” in Singapore and Hong Kong: When State Influences Interact with Western Liberal Ideals in a Globalizing Media Landscape*

**Examining Committee:** **Chair:** Shane Gunster  
Associate Professor

**Yuezhi Zhao**  
Senior Supervisor  
Professor

---

**Robert Hackett**  
Supervisor  
Professor

---

**Katherine Reilly**  
Supervisor  
Assistant Professor

---

**Adel Iskandar**  
Internal Examiner  
Assistant Professor  
School of Communication

---

**Joseph Chan**  
External Examiner  
Professor  
School of Journalism and  
Communication  
Chinese University of Hong Kong

---

**Date Defended/Approved:** September 8, 2016

## Ethics Statement



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## Abstract

The topic of journalism crisis has become increasingly pertinent as criticisms mount against news media systems that have prioritized private over public interests and/or failed to meet the challenges brought on by the Internet. Much research on journalism crisis, however, is set in the US and couched within a liberal-democratic ideological framework; little is known about how journalism crisis is articulated and experienced in other parts of the world.

This thesis, therefore, aims to expand the literature on “journalism crisis” by considering how it is conceived by journalists in societies that may be heavily influenced by Western liberal ideals but whose media systems continue to be subjected to some form of authoritarian control or influence. Establishing first that a journalism crisis must be studied at the ideological, material, and discursive levels, this study develops a journalism crisis framework that features as its dimensions the crisis narratives most commonly discussed in Western-centric literature. While noting the global nature of processes that stem from the West, like neoliberal capitalist expansion and cultural imperialism, this study highlights the selective adoption of liberal ideologies by countries outside the Western world, as imperial influences interact with local histories and cultures.

Of specific interest are two cities in Asia – Singapore, a city-state, and Hong Kong, a Special Administration Region of the People’s Republic of China. Standing at important historical junctures – with the passing away of prominent statesman Lee Kuan Yew and the rise of the “Umbrella Revolution” – these two places offer interesting points of comparison as “global cities” and former British colonies that are both subjected to some form of authoritarian control. Through a comprehensive survey with 160 journalists and in-depth interviews, this study uncovers stark differences in the journalism crisis perceptions of news-workers in Singapore and Hong Kong, and argues the existence of a “crisis of legitimacy” narrative, pertaining to the system of governance, that must be accounted for when studying journalism’s decline outside of the Western context.

**Keywords:** Journalism crisis; Singapore; Hong Kong; liberal democracy; neoliberalism

*I dedicate this work to my wonderful family back home in Singapore. I have accomplished this because of your unconditional love and support.*

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# Chapter 1.

## Introduction

The term “crisis” was first used to describe the decline in journalism at the turn of the 21st century (McChesney and Pickard, 2011; Luengo, 2014), when academics and news-workers noted numerous factors that aligned to signal the demise of journalism as we know it. The economic recession of 2008, the widespread use of the Internet, the shift in media consumption habits or audiences, the increased commercialization of the press, the consolidation of media ownership, and the loss of public trust in mainstream media have all been factors present in the narratives surrounding the collapse of journalism (McChesney, 2003; Blumler, 2010; Fenton, 2010; Freedman, 2010; McChesney and Nichols, 2010; McChesney and Pickard, 2011; Pickard, 2011; Aamidor et al., 2013; Luengo, 2014); several of these concerns have, in fact, been raised cumulatively over the years in media research since the 1960s (Blumler, 2010, p. 439). At this point, Pickard (2011, p. 73) goes as far as to say that the claim that “journalism is in crisis no longer invites controversy” – extensive literature from academics and news professionals alike have all pointed to the same trend. Notably however, he points out that “the nature of the crisis and possible solutions still elude broad agreement” (Pickard, 2011, p. 73); how existing narratives frame the crisis will directly influence how effective solutions towards addressing the crisis will be.

Interestingly, my own foray into the field of journalism crisis has revealed little to no research about how this concept is articulated and experienced beyond the Western context. Dominant literature on journalism crisis tends to be set predominantly in the US and within a liberal-democratic ideological framework, with concerns pertaining to media deregulation, commercialization, and threats of new media technology. With criticism rapidly mounting against increasingly sensationalized news content, fewer investigative stories, and the privileging of elite interests, and the widespread use of online media

threatening the very existence of the traditional advertiser-supported commercial press model, the topic of journalism crisis becomes ever more pertinent – but it is not yet known how this version of a journalism crisis will vary in other parts of the world that do not operate based on similar liberal principles.

In particular, my background as a journalist in Asia gives me impetus to investigate the ways in which the concept of “journalism crisis” is perceived and experienced in the Asian region. According to the Freedom of the Press report issued by Freedom House in 2015, most states in Asia operate within restrictive media environments, with state or party intervention in the news media, including Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Hong Kong, China, and South Korea (Freedom House, 2015). The roles of these media systems are largely determined by the political cultures within which these systems are a part; within more authoritarian or paternalistic systems, the extent to which political actors exert influence on the system and restrict freedom of expression tends to be greater (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995, p. 19-20). One would then expect the way that journalism crisis is perceived and experienced to differ, particularly given that the government plays such a huge role in determining the nature of these media systems; perhaps liberal advocates in the West might even see a worse journalism crisis than that in the West, because freedom of expression is curtailed.

There is, however, a danger of viewing the rest of the world through the Western lens – this might result in the “othering” of alternative systems, which may create, erroneously, perceptions that such alternative systems are lacking or deficient; these systems then risk becoming mere objects on which Western knowledges are imposed, rather than subjects (Shome and Hegde, 2002; Asante, 2010; Wang, 2010). As processes of globalization intensify and cultures become increasingly hybridized, societies have evolved in ways that do not align with one philosophical tradition, or one model of democracy (Christians et al., 2009); indeed, decades of being influenced by Western-centric liberal ideals have likely interacted with local historical experiences, philosophical outlooks and cultural practices in complex ways, further complicating the way media systems are viewed from one location to another and from one period of time to another.

The goal of my dissertation, therefore, is to discover the ways in which “journalism crisis” may be conceived in societies where state influence on the press places them outside of the liberal-democratic ideological framework on which Western journalism crisis literature has been premised. As a theoretical contribution, I wish to discover if there are additional crisis dimensions not featured in Western literature that must be accounted for, when examining societies that have been subjected to extensive influences from the West but still practice some form of authoritarian control on the press, to further problematize the concept of “journalism crisis”. Here, my strategy is to enable subjects within these alternative realities to articulate for themselves their understanding and perceptions of “journalism crisis” within their specific locales. Through a comprehensive literature review on crisis-related reports in news and academia in specific locales in the Asian region, and a survey and interviews conducted on news-worker perceptions, I seek to uncover the web of structural-causal factors that might be contributing to a systemic journalism crisis within the local context – these factors will take the form of broad crisis narratives that intersect with each other in a journalism crisis framework, or model, that can shed light on the nature of the systemic journalism crisis that is experienced. In addition, besides the crisis narratives typically mentioned in dominant Western-centric crisis research (i.e. crisis of civic adequacy, crisis of public confidence, crisis of financial viability, crisis due to capitalism’s inherent tendencies towards profit-seeking and exploitation, crisis due to new media, etc.), as I will explain in the chapters ahead, I believe a “crisis of legitimacy”, specifically pertaining to the system of governance, should be added as another significant contributor to journalism crisis, both perceived and systemic, in societies that practice some semblance of authoritarian control.

To demonstrate this, I will analyze two “global cities” in Asia that share many similarities – Singapore and Hong Kong. I have selected them for this study precisely for their ability to further complicate the notion of “journalism crisis” as it is understood in dominant Western literature. Both were colonies of the British Empire and are today international media hubs and key players in the neoliberal global economy (Chua, 1998; Yeoh and Chang, 2001; Prashad 2007; Boniface and Alon, 2010; Lee, 2010), making them susceptible to influences from the West. Both have a Chinese-majority population with high English literacy rates and a well-educated, tech-savvy middle class that has

become increasingly vocal about their political rights. At the same time, both cities continue to be subjected to a semblance of authoritarianism in the way that they are governed – Singapore has been labelled by scholars as “authoritarian” and ruled by the same political party for the last 50 years (Rodan, 2003, p. 519; Harvey, 2005; p. 86), and Hong Kong has been labelled as “semi-authoritarian” after its return to China in 1997 (Boniface and Alon, 2010, p. 797).

What differs between them is the extent to which their people have been ideologized to voluntarily consent to the rule of the leadership – this consent seems to be had in the case of Singapore but not necessarily in the case of Hong Kong. A crisis of legitimacy, I argue, occurs when the leadership is unable to get this broad based consent, and I believe this contributes significantly to journalism crisis perceptions in states that practice some form of authoritarianism. I will demonstrate in my thesis that where the leadership succeeds in its efforts to supplant Western liberal-democratic ideologies carried over from the colonial era with local alternatives and disseminate satisfactory material benefits to the collective – a Coxian perspective on how dominant classes maintain their supremacy in a “historic bloc” (Cox, 1987) – the leadership gains the legitimacy to exact authority over the society, including the press, thereby reducing perception of journalism crisis within that society; this is so, even when freedom of expression is curtailed, and the media does not operate within a free and competitive environment. In addition, factors that contribute to journalism crisis in the West, such as the crisis of financial viability, may also be alleviated if there is state support of the press system. This seems to run counter to the belief of Western journalism scholars that a state-controlled press system is likely to worsen fears of a journalism crisis. On the other hand, where there is a crisis of legitimacy, when government control of the press has not been legitimized ideologically nor materially, perceptions of journalism crisis are going to spike, even when more freedoms may be granted to the press. In my concluding chapter, I shall offer my perspective on the “success factors” of a neoliberal authoritarian state – in particular, its ability to benefit from its position in the global neoliberal economic order to secure material gains, while using this material success as a way to increase its legitimacy to authoritatively rule over the populace through ideological means – and how, despite lower fears of a journalism crisis, both perceived and

systemic, in a “successful” neoliberal authoritarian state, it is important to consider the broader issue of civic engagement in such societies.

Given that both Singapore and Hong Kong are global cities, and key media and communication hubs in the Asian region, this research is likely to contribute significantly to the field of global journalism. The topic of “journalism crisis”, in particular, is pertinent in both cities as events in recent years suggest that important historical shifts might be taking place. Singapore’s founding father Lee Kuan Yew, the statesman who had spearheaded the country’s authoritarian policies, had passed away in 2015, generating extensive debates on his heavy-handed management of the country’s media system since the city-state’s independence; and the “Umbrella Revolution” in Hong Kong in 2014 – when hundreds of thousands of Hong Kongers took to the streets to demand for universal suffrage from the authoritarian Chinese government – saw its coverage in mainstream media heavily criticized as being pro-establishment. Coupled with these events are online social commentaries and news reports that indicate the sliding advertising revenues and circulation numbers of media organizations in these two cities, signaling an opportune moment to investigate perceptions related to the state of news and journalism in these locales. Based on these perceptions, conclusions may be drawn about the presence of an actual systemic journalism crisis that must be addressed.

I will begin my dissertation by discussing the ways in which the term “crisis” has been conceived in existing literature, stressing here the need to account for crisis at three different levels – the ideological (i.e. expectations of how journalism should be), the material (i.e. how journalism is actually practiced in reality), and the discursive (i.e. the extent to which people are talking about existing problems as a “crisis”). I will then hone in on the notion of “journalism crisis” and how it is premised in dominant Western-centric literature on the ideological principle of liberal democracy, before turning my attention to the American news media system, seen to epitomize the liberal model of the press and play a central role in shaping global understandings of journalism. Here, I will account for the dominant crisis narratives most widely discussed within the Anglo-American context, creating an overarching “journalism crisis” framework or model that will highlight their key points of intersection – this model will guide the analysis of my

own case studies going forward – and offer a historical overview of how these discourses have come into being.

I will then seek to discover if this version of a journalism crisis is likely to be present in other parts of the world by considering processes that could suggest their possible spread globally; besides the global diffusion of new media technologies, of particular interest will be the processes of 1) neoliberal capitalism – since media deregulation and commercialization is believed to be a key contributor to the journalism crisis in the Anglo-American context; and 2) cultural imperialism – since crisis perceptions in the rest of the world are likely to be influenced by years of exposure to Western liberal-democratic ideologies. Here, I account for factors that may contribute to the material spread of the crisis, as well as ideological factors that may cause perceptions of crisis to arise. To gain insights into these two aspects as they exist outside of the Western context, particularly in the Asian region, a historical, context-specific analysis is crucial. I will then offer my perspectives on the need to further complicate the concept of “journalism crisis” in societies heavily influenced by the West but continue to be subjected to some form of authoritarian control.

Focus will then be placed specifically on the global cities of Singapore and Hong Kong – I will offer a historical examination of the development of news and journalism in these two cities, as well as the discourses that currently circulate about journalism decline in these two locales. To investigate actual perceptions of journalism crisis among news-workers in these two locales, I will detail the foundation and findings of my two-part study, involving a survey of 160 journalists from Singapore and Hong Kong, and interviews with 22 senior journalists and news editors in these two cities, to discover how they view journalism should be (at the ideological level) and how it is actually practiced on the ground (at the material level). The goal is to use these crisis perceptions to ascertain the structural-causal factors that may contribute to an actual systemic journalism crisis in each city, as well as to discover if new dimensions of a journalism crisis may be relevant to describe the state of journalism in Singapore and Hong Kong, where some form of authoritarian control on the press is exerted. This study is also likely to offer insights to news-workers in Singapore and Hong Kong on the most pertinent issues underlying their work and how they may be addressed. In addition, this study will

be useful to media educators and policymakers operating outside the Western world, aiding in the shaping of journalism curricula to address real world concerns of journalism work, as well as suggesting areas that must be looked into to safeguard high journalism standards within local contexts.

## **1.1. Theorizing “Journalism Crisis”: Understanding Conceptualizations of “Crisis” and its Ideological Underpinnings in the Anglo-American Context**

In this section, I will lay the foundation to my analysis by first detailing the ways in which the concept of “crisis” have been defined in existing journalism crisis literature. I will then hone in on “journalism crisis” in particular, bringing into view the ideological leanings of the dominant journalism crisis featured in Western-centric, particularly Anglo-American, scholarship – that is based upon liberal-democratic principles – before focusing on the journalism crisis in the US as a case in point, given that the US has had tremendous influence on global understandings of journalism. Structural-causal factors responsible for the crisis in the US are then woven into a web of interconnected crisis narratives that will serve as a framework that will guide my analysis going forward.

### **1.1.1. Defining “Crisis” and its Analysis**

Numerous narratives exist surrounding the definition of “crisis”. Zelizer (2015, p. 3) notes that crisis is often associated with “some combination of perceived suddenness, disruption, urgency, loss and the need for external assistance in order to offset helplessness and reach recovery”. Bauman and Bordoni (2014, p. 7) point out that crisis occurs when the order of things is disrupted, bringing about a surge of uncertainty that is tied to “our ignorance of the direction to which the affairs are about to turn”, and along with that, “the urge to intervene”. There is the belief that the crisis could be overcome when managed appropriately, and that the state of affairs could be restored to what it was pre-crisis, or to a previous “golden age of being”. As Koselleck (1988) explains, crisis can be defined as a moment of transition that splits time up into a “before the crisis” and “after the crisis”. Setting it up within this temporal order and making it specific



to a particular locale allows the crisis to be “grasped fully, treated, and ultimately controlled” – as Zelizer (2015) says, “what crisis offers is the possibility of closure” (p. 6).

Crisis is also often the result of a disconnect between “expectations and reality” (Zelizer, 2015, p. 6). Questions arise about why things are not working out the way that they “should be”. This crisis then becomes framed as a problem that unsettles normal, routine functioning (Zelizer, 2015, p. 6). For those who sound the crisis alarm bells, this disconnect is irreconcilable with the picture of what is ideal and desirable in their heads. There is then the urge to push the situation to a more stable and orderly place.

In turn, crisis is seen by some as opportunity – when systemic reforms may be made to an existing order in decline, to reinvigorate it with bold new alternatives (Cowan and Westphal, 2010; McChesney and Nichols, 2010; Pickard, 2011). McChesney (2007) discusses the concept of “critical juncture”, when the existing system may be 1) threatened by a revolutionary new technology, 2) suffer from a lack of public legitimacy, and 3) confronted with a major political crisis that signals a breakdown of the existing order. During a critical juncture therefore, agency to shape how the world can be remade increases dramatically, as the incentive for reform rises and a broad range of political alternatives surface (McChesney and Pickard, 2011, p. x).

Indeed, the systemic nature of a crisis is discussed by scholars like Alexander (2013), who notes that “problems become crises only when they move beyond their own spheres and endanger society at large”. In fact, Cottle (2008) speaks about the increasing globalization of crisis as the world becomes more interconnected, creating crises that are “transnational in scope and impact” and that “involve supranational levels of governance”. He notes that many global crises “are not self-contained or discrete phenomena but interpenetrate and/or mutate into related crises or exacerbate others” (p. 16). One must account for this multidimensional aspect of crisis to arrive at a comprehensive understanding.

At the same time, Cottle (2008) points out crucially that the impact of a crisis comes through not just in the material threat it poses, but also the extent to which it is articulated and elaborated in global media. The more extensive and prominent this exposure, the more legitimacy the disaster or problem gains as a “global crisis” that

warrants public attention and political mobilization (p. 17). This is the discursive nature of crisis, an aspect of crisis that is capable of increasing the recognition given to the problem multifold, which will in turn “open up productive spaces for social reflexivity, political critique and even dissent within civil and wider societies” (p. 39).

From the above discussion, it can be noted that “crisis” should be recognized, first and foremost, as a disruption to the normal functioning of things that requires closure, and that it also presents an opportune moment for systemic change to be orchestrated. At the same time, a crisis in one field is capable of endangering society as a whole and may contribute to crisis in other related fields as well. Finally, research on crisis should account for the ideological and the material, particularly pertaining to the disconnect between expectations of how a system “should be” and how it is actually practiced in reality, as well as the discursive, i.e. to what extent the problem has been articulated and legitimated as a “crisis” in the media.

Specifically, an analysis of crisis must account for the following.

At the level of ideology, or ideas that make up a culture’s common sense, focus should be placed on the normative or ideal. What is the definition of an “ideal state of being” for that group or culture? How did this definition arise? This requires a historical, context-specific approach. From whom or from where did this definition come from? For those powers-that-be that are responsible for the ideologizing, with what intent has this “ideal state of being” been set up? Whose interests does this ideologizing serve?

At the level of materiality, an empirical approach – as well as a historical one – is necessary to discover practices that exist on the ground. It is not enough to discover what concrete practices currently exist, but also to realize that they are the result of specific historical events and developments. The past influences the present in fundamental ways, and since the idea of “crisis” is temporally established as a moment of transition, historical knowledge will also offer insights into how the crisis may be managed and whether it may be overcome in the future, given a different set of circumstances.

Lastly, at the level of discourse, it is important to discover what narratives are currently circulating about the existing state of affairs and whether problems that exist have been elevated to the level of “crisis” in popular discourse. An overview of existing literature on how different actors have articulated the problem – in books, academic articles, news reports and commentaries – will offer important insights into how a crisis has been conceived and whether it has been legitimated as worthy of public attention and action. Conversely, where the issue of “crisis” has yet to be proclaimed, is it because the state of affairs has yet to rise to the level of “crisis” in material terms, or is it simply because no one has connected the dots and articulated existing problems within an overarching “crisis” framework? If it is the latter, this might reduce the amount of public attention given to the crisis at hand and limit the exposure to crisis solutions already suggested by others.

I want to point out here, however, that decrying a state of crisis is never a clear-cut affair. There might not be agreement on what constitutes a crisis, or the extent to which a systemic crisis actually exists. Is it appropriate to declare a state of crisis if problems have been accumulating gradually over time rather than abruptly? What about if these problems have been discussed as singular conditions in popular discourse rather than cohesively within a crisis framework – is it still a crisis then? In another scenario, if the crisis can be observed empirically in material terms but values and interests differ and expectations are varied about how the system should be, how would crisis perceptions then be influenced? And would perceptions of crisis necessarily lead one to conclude the existence of an actual systemic crisis? For instance, within a strict authoritarian regime, a crisis perceived by an oppressed people may be no crisis at all to the dominant elites within the same system; similarly, a system in crisis seen from the outside may be not be seen as a crisis for a well-socialized people living within that system. Indeed, definitions of crisis are rooted in specific histories and contexts, subjected to dynamic change and negotiation, and open to manipulation and control. It may be used as a term by marginalized groups to expose the flaws of a system, or, as critical scholars have long espoused, by dominant elites to generate fear and paranoia among the masses so that they may gain the legitimacy and authority to lead the population “out of crisis” in a manner that is consensual more so than coercive.

In the same vein, journalism's relationship to crisis is contextual and rooted in specific histories, dependent on context-specific normative values, material practices, institutional structures and public discourses. The structural-causal factors that create a systemic journalism crisis are likely to differ from one location to the next and from one time period to another. While I use the term journalism "crisis" in the singular, rather than "crises" – I refer here to the journalism crisis as detailed in dominant crisis research – it is important to point out that a systemic journalism crisis is likely to have as its contributing factors other crisis types as well, such as the crisis due to capitalism's inherent tendencies towards profit-seeking and exploitation, and the crisis due to new media, as I will explain in the sections to come.

To focus my research therefore, I will offer a contextual view of news and journalism in Singapore and Hong Kong specifically, and use the three levels of crisis analysis I mentioned – ideological, material, and discursive – to guide the structure of my study. I will first conduct a literature review to determine if "journalism crisis" has surfaced discursively within these two cities and the nature of its narratives. Then, I will speak to a specific group of individuals (i.e. news-workers) to discover issues of concern that exist in their work and their specific expectations of journalism's roles, to discover if their journalism realities (in material terms) match up to their expectations (in ideological terms) of how journalism in their city should be. In the process, I will uncover their perceptions on whether their press system is already in a crisis, slipping into a crisis or is far from being in a crisis, and why they feel this way, i.e. why they feel the state of journalism in their cities is capable of disrupting the routine functioning of things in some way. Important milestones in the recent histories of Singapore and Hong Kong – the death of Singapore's founding father, Lee Kuan Yew, and the pro-democracy protests that make up Hong Kong's "Umbrella Revolution" respectively – warrant the tabling of this discussion. Comparisons will be made, wherever it is meaningful, to how similarly or differently journalists in these two cities perceive the existence of a crisis, considering that they share several similarities in their historical trajectories; where there are differences in perceptions, the goal is to find out why. Conclusions will then be drawn on how their crisis perceptions relate to an actual systemic journalism crisis in each locale, and the type of journalism crisis found in each city, before offering contextual explanations on why the journalism crisis in Singapore and Hong Kong are similar or

different. Recognizing the presence of a crisis, if any, and its structural-causal factors, will allow public and political attention to be directed towards resolving it.

At this point, the idea of “journalism crisis” has been largely bound up with crisis perceptions from Western scholars and news-workers – and along with it, discourses, expectations and realities unique to journalism in the Western context. To provide more detail into existing journalism crisis literature, it is to this dominant conception of “journalism crisis” that I will now turn.

### **1.1.2. Foundations of the Dominant “Journalism Crisis”: Liberal Democracy as Ideological Principle**

There have been extensive studies on journalism crisis in the Western context; these tend to discuss the topic from a liberal-democratic ideological standpoint that is founded on the principles of “classical” liberalism (Hackett and Zhao, 1998, p 146) – this perspective stresses respect for civil liberties and political rights, the creation of spaces for popular participation in decision-making and a more open and accountable government (Robinson and White, 1998, p. 19-21). It also stresses the need for “specialized organs” independent of the political field, such as the media, to protect the citizens from abuses of political power (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995, p. 13). Where press systems fail to meet these objectives, cries of “crisis” and attempts at media reform may ensue.

I need to stress here my recognition that “the West” is not a homogeneous entity and that I do not wish to paint it out to be so in any way. Indeed, press systems vary in different parts of Europe and North America – for instance, the US features a highly deregulated and commercialized press system while countries like the UK, Germany, Belgium, Sweden and Canada have had their governments step in to fund highly respectable public broadcasters that work autonomously from the state and commercial interests. But there are some aspects of the Western world that overlap in indisputable ways. The liberal strand of democracy did have its roots in the West, specifically during the Age of Enlightenment in Europe, and later in America, during the 18th century. It was then that feudalism was dying out and with it, conceptions of privilege and rank based on one’s birth; the capitalist class took the opportunity to launch a power struggle against

the landowning feudal lords by declaring the supremacy of ideas such as science, reason, and natural rights (Hackett and Zhao, 1998, p. 18). This strand of democracy has also become aligned with economic freedom and competition; it advocates that a free market system would lead to high economic growth, improve the well-being of the population and create an enduring democratic society (Robinson and White, 1998, p. 2). The state is deemed as a potential threat to individual freedom and therefore should just be a “neutral referee” that facilitates the growth of the marketplace by enforcing its rules and maintaining social order (Hackett and Zhao, 1998, p. 146). Liberal democracy has been viewed by many as a “superior” variant of democracy because it “provides a check on authority and is a more perfect embodiment of equality and freedom than other polity” (Sim, 2001, p. 46); this point has come under greater scrutiny, as I will later elaborate.

Within the model of liberal democracy, journalism is seen to have the following normative functions, according to McNair (2009). First, journalism should provide objective, accurate reports with information that would help citizens make rational informed choices. Second, journalists should perform a “watchdog” function (i.e. the “Fourth Estate”) and closely scrutinize the powerful in society. Third, journalists should be the conduit between the people and the politicians, ensuring that the voices from the ground get heard by the powerful. Fourth, journalists should present different political positions and perspectives to the people to direct public opinion and to champion the people’s interests (p. 238-240). Indeed, the function of the media based on the liberal democratic ideal is one that stresses free expression and political engagement (Wang, 2010, p. 4). Siebert et al.’s (1956, p. 3) landmark “Four Theories of the Press”, published within the context of the Cold War, had described the liberal press as one where the media acts as a “partner in the search for truth” and is free from government control, providing information to a rational public and acting as a watchdog to check on authorities; in a more recent seminal work “Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics”, Hallin and Mancini (2004) had similarly described a functioning liberal press system as one where the press experiences limited state intervention, taking on a watchdog function to the government and giving information to citizen-consumers to aid in their decision making (p. 298-299).

The existence of different types of democracy in the West, however, has seen press systems in Europe and America prioritizing different functions. Countries like France, Italy, Spain, and Portugal have a pluralist and clientelist democracy where different interest groups compete to have their voices heard; their press systems can be said to be partisan and politically charged, amplifying agendas and encouraging negotiation (Hallin and Mancini, 2004, p. 67; Christians et al., 2009, p. 98); in social democracies like Denmark, Finland, and the Netherlands where the state steps in to ensure a more equitable wealth distribution to the underprivileged, there is strong state intervention to protect the freedom of the press and the quality of public broadcasting; Hallin and Mancini (2004, p. 67) describe this as the “democratic corporatist” model.

Traditionally however, the US has been seen by scholars to epitomize the liberal model of the press; government involvement is seen as “bad” and public funding of the press is discouraged to protect against elite rule (McChesney and Nichols, 2010, p. 59). With freedom of expression listed as a fundamental right protected by the American Constitution, the US press system has been cited in the seminal works of Siebert et al. (1956) and Hallin and Mancini (2004) as one in which the press takes on the role of “watchdog”, and is market-dominated and largely free from government control and influence. Curran (2011) has also lauded it as “the principal originator and exporter of a great media experiment” i.e. one whose goal was to allow the media to operate within a free market system with minimal regulation while still serving the interests of the people (p. 9). Zelizer (2012, p. 465) similarly proclaims it as playing a “central role” in shaping “global understandings of journalism” – it exported its models of journalistic practice and scholarly work worldwide during the Second World War and the subsequent Cold War, as part of its international project of democracy building, naturalizing the link between “good journalism” and liberal democracy. Interestingly, it is the American press system that has been bearing the brunt of the criticism in existing journalism crisis literature, despite its claims of a free press that supports liberal democracy. It has been increasingly criticized for succumbing to political and economic pressures, and failing to work in the interests of the public, prompting questions about whether the dual goals of a commercialized news media system – to increase profits and to serve the public – are essentially at odds with each other. This has prompted scholars to decry “the collapse of a viable journalism” (McChesney, 2003, p. 299) or journalism “in decline” (Hallin, 1996,

p. 244) in the US, prompting extensive research on a journalism crisis in the American context. A historical overview of America's journalistic decline and types of crisis narratives is warranted here.

### **1.1.3. “Journalism Crisis” in America: Historicizing Multiple Crisis Narratives and their Intersections**

Fears of a journalism in decline had been widely discussed on numerous occasions throughout American press history – particularly when the disconnect between expectations on how journalism should be and how things actually were, in reality, widened to uncomfortable levels – and new measures put in place to alleviate crisis conditions, ironically, would present new challenges and ignite fresh fears of a journalism under threat. The American journalism crisis is one that has taken numerous discursive forms throughout the years, tying itself to: 1) A crisis in journalism's public service role (McChesney, 2003; Pickard, 2011) or as Blumler (2010) coins it, its “civic adequacy”, and relatedly, a crisis of liberal democracy (Hackett and Zhao, 1998); 2) A crisis due to capitalism's inherent tendencies towards profit-seeking and exploitation (Dyer-Witheford, 1999; Almiron, 2010; Fuchs, 2010; Harvey, 2010); 3) A crisis of credibility or legitimacy (McChesney, 2007) and relatedly, a crisis of public confidence and trust (Henry, 2007; Aamidor and Kuypers, 2013); and 4) A crisis due to new media (Blumler, 2010; Fenton, 2010; Freedman, 2010; Pickard, 2011; Luengo, 2014), particularly, a crisis of financial viability (Blumler, 2010; Pickard, 2011).

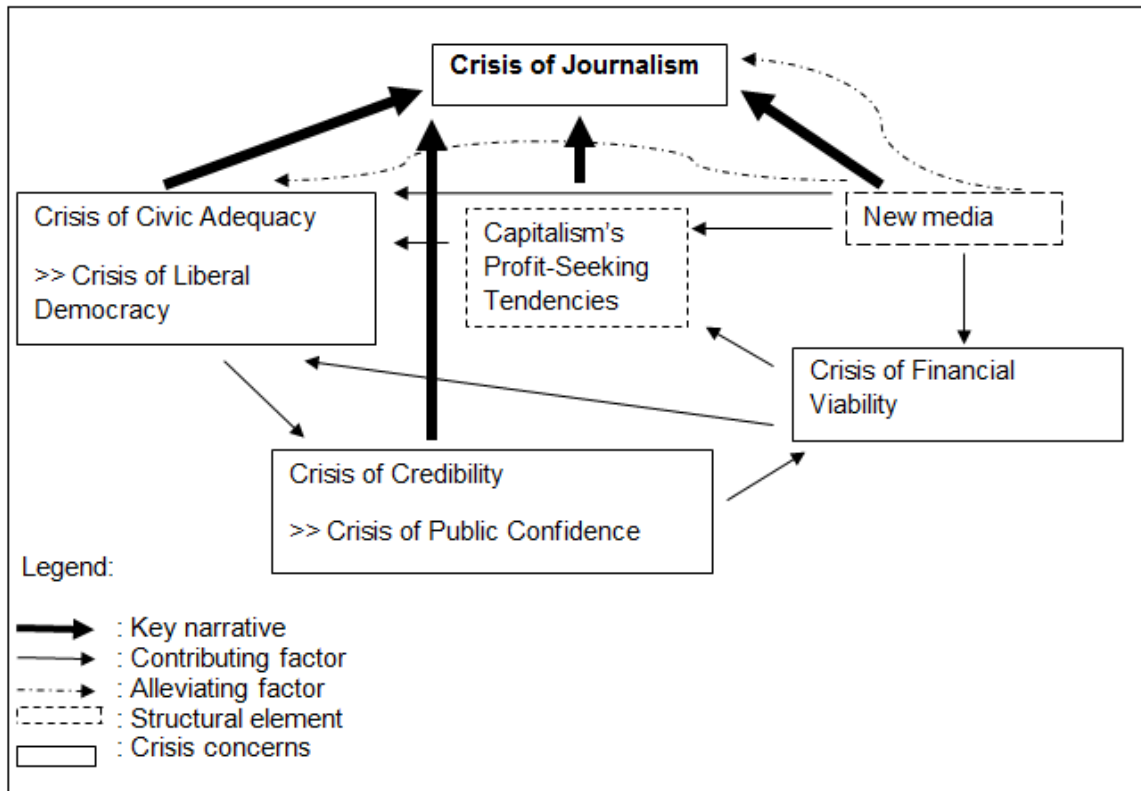
To illustrate these crisis narratives and their intersections, I have created a working model that illustrates how the idea of “journalism crisis” is conceptualized in dominant American journalism crisis research, presenting an overarching framework that can be used to critically think through the concept of journalism crisis. This working model is presented as Model 1 here.

As illustrated in the model, several of these crisis narratives are interconnected; they shed light on the web of structural-causal factors that have contributed to the systemic American “journalism crisis” in dominant crisis scholarship. The intensified commercialization of the American news media from the 1960s has created a system driven by profits – a result of capitalism's inherent profit-seeking tendencies – resulting in



the pandering of news organizations to commercial and elite interests, creating a crisis of civic adequacy of the press where the public interest is underserved and active citizenship is undermined, resulting in reduced faith in the feasibility of liberal-democratic civic institutions. The inability of the press to perform its public service role to report news fully, accurately and fairly, in turn, results in plummeting credibility and sparks a crisis of public confidence and trust in the press system. In the Internet age, a new dimension of the journalism crisis – related to new media – has emerged, involving the siphoning off of revenues from traditional news organizations to online platforms, worsened by plummeting confidence in mainstream media. This has led to the crisis of financial viability of news organizations, as news organizations struggling to survive collapse, journalism jobs are lost and resources needed for quality journalism get cut. Again, the crisis narratives tied to capitalism's inherent profit-seeking tendencies and the civic adequacy of the press are implicated. Even as new avenues for capital accumulation surface online that can boost profit margins, new forms of capitalist exploitation online have emerged, as indirect knowledge workers that exist outside of the traditional wage relationship become involved in informal work for media organizations e.g. audiences are called on to become citizen journalists to report on events as they happen. In addition, the desire of corporations to cut costs to maintain their profit margins in the digital age, thereby hurting the quality of journalistic output, becomes a concern to academics, journalists, and audiences alike. The crisis of public confidence in the media worsens as a result, as audiences realize that more topics and perspectives are tabled for discussion online than in the mainstream media. On top of that, it is unclear if the surge in online and citizen journalism is in fact benefiting or hurting the news media system. On one hand, new media is likely to see the worsening exploitation of freelancers, given capitalism's profit-seeking tendencies, and promote the circulation of unverifiable news and gossip, thereby worsening fears of a crisis of civic adequacy of the press. On the other hand, it may also table issues and perspectives that capitalist elites choose to withhold or manipulate to meet their self-interests, and present a multitude of content that can better inform the citizenry.

**Figure 1.1 Model 1: The American “Journalism Crisis”**



Using Model 1 as a visual guide, it is to these different crisis narratives and how they are interconnected within the historical context of the US that I will now turn.

Even while the use of the term “crisis” has been relatively new to describe the state of journalism in the US, becoming widespread from the economic crisis of 2008, the shortcomings of the US press system had been documented from as early as the late 19th century, according to historical accounts by journalism scholars like Hallin (1996), Hackett and Zhao (1998), and McChesney (2003; 2004). In particular, the inability of the American press system to meet its liberal-democratic ideals has been a prominent narrative, reiterated by different sets of actors in American history, as I will illustrate in this section.

Historically, America’s liberal-democratic ideals can be seen to have their roots in 18th century Europe, during the Age of Enlightenment. This was a period of revolution in social thought, when Science and Reason were thought to be crucial in helping to advance human understanding of the world and to unlock mysteries of the universe

(Hackett and Zhao, 1998, p. 16). This focus on scientific method and logical reasoning bode well for democracy as a form of social and political organization – by giving everyone a right to vote (which at that time, applied to all “free men” who were not slaves), it gave the opportunity to the people, albeit a privileged group, to participate as rational beings to influence political decision-making and exercise their individual “natural” rights (p. 17); a liberal press system was seen as crucial to help create an informed citizenry and an informed self-government. This marked the beginning of a democratic discourse that would eventually be appropriated in American journalism.

In the 19th century however, American ideology departed from this democratic discourse, as placing the supremacy of human beings’ individual rights over that of government-established law was seen to encourage rebellion, anarchy, and mob rule (Hackett and Zhao, 1998, p. 19). As ideology shifted, so did the American journalistic reality – the partisan press began to flourish in the US in the mid to late 19th century (p. 20). Often owned and funded by wealthy partisans, these newspapers served the interests of the political and business elites by representing the political viewpoints of their owners (p. 20), creating a press system that was explicitly partisan. Federal and state governments would explicitly subsidize partisan newspapers, and editors were “seen as politicians and were treated accordingly” (McChesney, 2004, p. 28).

It was also during this period, known as the Gilded Age in American history – characterized by increased industrialization and economic growth – that saw the rise of the industrial working class in America (McChesney, 2003, p. 300). A labour movement rose to challenge the capitalists and dominant partisan press, and called for extended political and economic rights for the working class majority, utilizing the Enlightenment’s democratic discourse that stressed social justice, public good, and natural rights to fight their cause (Hackett and Zhao, 1998, p. 20-22). With this movement, a labour press was created that sought to represent worker interests and aspirations (p. 21), selling its strengths as being untainted by private interests and its mission as public enlightenment for the public good (p. 23). Financial difficulties caused most labour newspapers to close down after a year or two, however (p. 25).

As industrialization and urbanization processes continued in the US in the 19th century and merchants and retailers began to look for ways to advertise their goods, independent commercial dailies emerged in the marketplace that relied on advertising (Hackett and Zhao, 1998, p. 25). This marked the beginnings of the US penny press, as newspapers could be sold on the streets at low prices; it was also during this time that newspapers first became business entities, with goals of making profits from both their readers and from advertisers interested in reaching their readers (Hackett and Zhao, 1998, p. 25). To increase their readership, these commercial dailies stressed – once again – the democratic discourse, proclaiming their mission to present “objective news” to educate the public and serve the public interest, while openly criticizing the abuse of power and privilege (Hackett and Zhao, 1998, p. 28-29). This ushered in the “golden age of the newspaper” (p. 16), characterized by a non-partisan socially responsible press that was democratically available to everyone at low prices (p. 32). In reality, however, the commercial press’ use of the democratic discourse was merely selective and self-serving – even while they cut off direct ties with political parties, they continued to be bound to private commercial interests, preoccupied with their concerns of the bottom-line (p. 28). Competition was rife for advertising dollars that would be needed to keep the cost of the publications low, the audience numbers high, and the profits higher (McChesney, 2004, p. 60).

By the early 20th century, when the US had moved from the Gilded Age to the Progressive Era, the American newspaper industry had become increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few major companies that were well supported by advertising or owned by wealthy individuals; their resilience in the marketplace made it almost impossible for small independent newspapers to compete against them (McChesney, 2003, p. 301). This meant that alternative voices from the ground could no longer be heard and that the large media corporations gained the power to decide the news agenda (Hackett and Zhao, 1998, p. 34-5). Problems associated with the commercial nature of the American press also became increasingly evident. To appeal to a large audience base to be sold to advertisers, news stories became sensationalized and dramatic, and audiences that did not appeal to advertisers, such as the poor and marginalized, were unable to speak up in the press (McChesney, 2003, p. 301; McManus, 2009, p. 221). The early 20th century saw criticism peak in the US against the

advertising supported commercial press system – the press was seen to be “destroying democracy in its rabid service to the wealthy” (McChesney, 2003, p. 301). The American press system, consequently, experienced a dip in legitimacy, as readers began to find newspapers “incredible, propagandistic and unconvincing” (McChesney, 2003, p. 301).

By the 1920s, newspaper publishers responded with a call for the “professionalization” of journalism, pushing for the setting up formal journalism schools that would produce professional editors and journalists capable of upholding journalistic standards that would be apparently untainted by corporate and commercial influence (McChesney, 2003, p. 301); this would be a claim that scholars would later profusely refute. At that point in time however, the democratic discourse seemed a reasonable one; publishers emphasized that public interest could be met when journalists covered the news “objectively”. This journalistic objectivity was manifested in a series of journalistic norms and practices such as presenting all major sides and opinions on a story, attributing quotes to sources, separating news from opinions, and presenting accurate and unbiased news stories (Hackett and Zhao, 1998, p. 41). While some journalists were frustrated that they could no longer exercise their critical judgment and political rights as citizens in their news reporting, most still embraced the objectivity principle as a means to increase their public legitimacy, and protect themselves from complaints and libel suits (Hackett and Zhao, 1998, p. 54-55). Journalistic objectivity gradually evolved to become “straight factual reporting” and later “further reduced to the reporting of factual descriptions and statements produced by accredited sources” (p. 42).

McChesney (2003) noted that this professionalization movement continued through the 1930s to 1940s, with some disruption during the Second World War when newspapers once again became strongly partisan but regained its momentum by mid-century (p. 302). The model of straight factual reporting and quoting from official accredited sources was well-received, amid strong public confidence in political authority after the triumph of the “Free World” in the Second World War and the shared ideology of liberalism that bonded the US state with its citizens and supporters (Hallin, 1996, p. 251).

Unfortunately, the credibility of the US government and media took a nosedive due to some prominent events that followed – the Vietnam War from the 1950s through to the 1970s saw the US government and media cover up their troops’ failures and wrongdoings in Vietnam, and the Watergate scandal in the 1970s saw perceptions of the US leadership take a turn for the worse (Hallin, 1996, p. 251; Hackett and Zhao, 1998, p. 47). The model of objective journalism and straight reporting began to be seen as a threat to public deliberation and democratic processes (Maras, 2013, p. 11). This was linked to concerns that journalists had become mere messengers between the news sources and the audiences (Maras, 2013, p. 63), and would be less inclined to rigorously examine complex issues (McChesney, 2003, p. 303); this had the danger of morphing into irresponsible journalism that would favour the status quo and elite interests (Maras, 2013, p. 64). Journalists became “passive recipients of news, rather than aggressive analyzers and explainers of it” (Cunningham, 2003). In addition, journalists using official sources as objective “fact bearers” allowed those with political and economic power to set the news agenda to their benefit, enabling them to shape the news to meet their own political goals or economic objectives of profit-making and capital accumulation; fear of offending these official sources would then prevent the press from performing their “watchdog” function (McChesney, 2003, p. 303).

It was during this crisis of public confidence in the US administration and the US press when critical journalism that reported events from an oppositional standpoint and provided subjective interpretations, as well as investigative journalism that exposed the wrongdoing of powerholders became more common (Hackett and Zhao, 1998, p. 49-50). These news channels too appropriated the democratic discourse that the commercial dailies had used in the late 19th century, with proclamations that they would champion the interests of the people (p. 50).

From the late 1960s however, two major developments took place that would change the American news media landscape forever.

The late 1960s witnessed a trend towards the “public” ownership of newspaper companies on the stock market (Hallin, 1996, p. 247). The Gannett chain, which owned close to 100 newspapers in the US, made the unprecedented move of selling their stock

on the New York Stock Exchange and made immense profits in the process, prompting other formerly family-owned newspapers to go public (Hallin, 1996, p. 247). Not surprisingly, in a bid to please shareholders, newspapers began to prioritize short-term profits and the bottom line over quality and the performance of public service (p. 247-8). More efforts were made to target affluent consumers that would attract higher advertising revenues, and costly investigative journalism was replaced by more cheaply produced stories on social trends and entertainment (Hallin, 1996, p. 250; Hackett and Zhao, 1998, p. 50). News holes were also squeezed to provide more stories more quickly, leaving journalists with less time to provide context and analysis to their stories and rely more on official sources with ready soundbites (Cunningham, 2003).

In another major development in the 1980s, the Ronald Reagan administration spearheaded a drive towards neoliberalism or “market liberalism”, which saw public services deregulated and/or privatized, government intervention minimized, and the private sector given freer rein in the marketplace (Hackett and Zhao, 1998, p. 151). In particular, media ownership regulations in the US became substantially relaxed, resulting in multiple mergers and acquisitions that led to the formation of large media conglomerates more concerned with generating high revenues to satisfy investors (McChesney, 2003, p. 307; Jin, 2008). This neoliberal trend continued on into the 1990s, with multi-billion dollar mergers in the US involving Walt Disney Company acquiring ABC (Hackett and Zhao, 1998, p. 4), Viacom acquiring CBS, AT&T acquiring MediaOne Group, and AOL acquiring Time Warner, just to name a few. In 1996, the Telecommunications Act passed by the US Congress formally removed almost all restrictions on the ownership of different media types in the same market, and raised the allowable size of national television networks, in the name of increased consumer choice and audience empowerment (Hackett and Zhao, 1998, p. 4, 5).

As news organizations became part of large corporate empires, focus became increasingly placed on profit-making, and scholars and observers became ever more cognizant of how the American press system was falling significantly short of its liberal-democratic ideals. News agencies were seeing a cutback on resources for news and journalism – journalists received lower salaries with lower job security and were expected to work across multiple platforms, more expensive journalism such as

international news and investigative journalism were replaced by sensationalized content and celebrity news, and journalists relied more on public relations firms or news sources to spoon-feed them the news, rather than putting in effort to investigate and uncover the truth in news stories (McChesney, 2003, p. 308). In the US's lead-up to its war on Iraq for instance, coverage was largely driven by the US administration – out of the 600 stories about Iraq in the six months prior, only 12 stories considered the potential aftermath of the invasion and what could go wrong; the establishment did not want to speak about these issues, and journalists did not want to appear unpatriotic (Cunningham, 2003). Furthermore, journalists tended to cover stories geared towards more lucrative markets and audiences, rather than the working class and poor, and corporate misdeeds and government wrongdoings were rarely reported in the media (McChesney, 2003, p. 312).

Almiron (2010) further discusses the financialization of corporate media. With the increased flow of financial capital worldwide in the 1980s and '90s, international financial actors began to seek out new spaces for investment and media conglomerates became attractive targets (p. 58-9). Alliances between news organizations and big banks and other economic power centres grew – boards of directors would have direct or indirect links with financial actors, and media companies on the stock market would be beholden to their stockholders (p. 64). Media corporations also lengthened their list of links with financial investors, creditors, and partners (p. 174). The ability of the press to play the role of watchdog further declined, as financialization drew journalists closer to those with economic power (p. 173).

Hence, while the American media claimed that they were speaking to and on behalf of the public, in reality, they were serving more the goals of capitalism than those of democracy. Seminal works from Herman and Chomsky (1988), Ben Bagdikian (1983), and Golding and Murdock (1991) from the 1980s and '90s were already recognizing that media conglomerates were generating content to forward their own profit-making interests and to disseminate ideology that favoured the capitalist elites. This essentially exposed as ideologized the libertarian model of the press that prominent scholars like Siebert et al. (1956) had used to describe the American media in the 1950s – liberal ideals that championed public interest were merely distant normative goals, rather than



empirical ones. This link between journalism and democracy was an aspirational project that was, as Zelizer (2012, p. 466) describes, “more stable, more morally unambiguous, less contingent, more socially useful, less corrupt, and most importantly, more aligned with Western notions of democracy than it ever could be on the ground”. In the real world, the US press was skewing right, privileging the voices and agendas of the political and business elites who were more concerned with raking in the profits (Hackett and Zhao, 1998, p. 153).

This has led scholars to proclaim that a truly free and independent press has never been practiced in much of the world, even in regions that are working towards some sort of democratic governance (Zelizer, 2012, p. 466). In fact, concerns have been raised about whether liberal-democratic institutions would even work in the real world, given the likelihood of intense elite resistance. Even within the US, the country that has been the biggest advocate of liberal democracy worldwide, there are concerns that the press’ claims to serve democracy have been merely a marketing ploy.

Indeed, scholars like Hackett and Zhao (1998, p. 167) have made references to a “crisis in liberal democracy”. The authors note that market liberalism or neoliberalism is threatening the sustainability of liberal democracy – its focus on self-interest and profit-making “undermines the common culture needed to sustain reciprocal respect, and the willingness to accept democratic political decisions that run counter to one’s own preferences” – profits and the creation of loyal consumers are emphasized over active citizenship and political engagement. The result is greater material benefits and political and economic power concentrated in the hands of a few, and growing inequalities that disadvantage the majority. Almiron (2010, p. 10) also suggests that the idea of a “liberal press” has provided ideological justification for the dominant elites to further strengthen their power rather than to give power back to the people; while the press may seem to have been freed from government control, it has become subordinated to the market and its corporate players instead.

This narrative of a crisis in liberal democracy has surfaced not just within the academic community but also among journalists themselves. Henry (2007), a correspondent at the Washington Post, speaks of a “corruption in the culture of the

nation's media", where journalists have been subjected to "extraordinary assaults by government and advertisers on [journalistic] professionalism" (p. 6), where "political and commercial advertising [are] often cleverly disguised as news and public affairs journalism", efforts of which are "nurtured and facilitated by powerful gatekeepers in the news industry itself" (p. 7). As publicly traded news organizations, corporate shareholders' demands are causing news organizations to cut costs and slash jobs, lowering the "standards of practice and expertise" in newsrooms and corrupting the "professional values" of journalists to properly perform their gatekeeping function and maintain high ethical standards (p. 7-8). All this has caused a dip in the trust of audiences in democratic institutions – Henry (2007) notes that public opinion polls typically demonstrate that the American citizenry is "becoming increasingly jaded and disaffected, mistrusting many... important civic institutions, including, perhaps most of all, the news media" (p. 9); Aamidor and Kuypers (2013) similarly note that only a quarter of Americans, according to Gallup polls, have confidence that their media is reporting news fully, accurately, and fairly.

Fuller (2010), a journalist and later editor of the Chicago Tribune, is in agreement, noting that as financial pressures mount, business-oriented CEOs leading the newsroom would "insert themselves more and more in editorial matters in uncomfortable ways", more concerned about advertising sales and profit figures rather than the social role of journalism (p. 10).

To address this crisis, Pickard (2011) has strongly advocated that policy changes be made in the US to establish "an autonomous yet publicly subsidized press devoted to the public interest" (p. 89). Like Curran (2010, p. 472) who is calling for a "public reformism" of the American press system, Pickard (2011) argues that the US media system should be a mixed one, with both commercial and public news outfits that can "restore the balance between profit making and democratic imperatives" (p. 90) – but even he is noting that this could be an uphill battle, given that any proposals for government intervention in the media system will likely "alarm many Americans" and reignite "commonly held fears about subsidized media" (p. 88).

At the same time, critical communication scholars have also tied the crisis in journalism, and relatedly, the crisis of liberal democracy, to contradictions found within the capitalist system itself – they believe that the journalism crisis within the American context can be understood in the broad context of class struggle between the capitalist class and the working class. It is the profit-oriented nature of the capitalist system, of which the profit-seeking news media organizations are key components, that makes it inherently unstable and prone to crisis. This is because focus on profit is likely to cause news organizations to cut costs – including those needed to sustain expensive investigative journalism and to upkeep news bureaus overseas – and subject news-workers to exploitation in a bid to increase their profit margins. These organizations are also likely to prioritize content that increase audience ratings and please advertisers and shareholders, rather than to work in the public interest – all of these factors result in the undermining of the journalistic output and threaten journalism’s public service role. Further worsening the journalism crisis are broader economic crises that are triggered by capitalism’s inherent contradictions, that might prompt news organizations to further justify their budget cuts. As explained by Karl Marx, and other contemporary political economists like Wood (2002), Harvey (2010) and Lilley (2010), at the heart of capitalism is self-interest that is tied to the reproduction and accumulation of capital – in order to generate more profits, capitalism needs to feed “its compelling need to maintain an impoverished labour surplus for future exploitation” (Harvey, 2010, p. 72); in an attempt to maximize profits, capitalists might, for instance, push worker wages extremely low – this may result in a crisis of under-consumption, when low worker wages cause demand for goods and services produced by the capitalists to plummet and capital accumulation to stagnate (Harvey, 2010, p. 107), or the creation of bubbles when workers feel compelled to use credit to maintain their existing consumption habits.

As a prime example, the collapse of the global economy in 2008, the worst global economic recession since the Great Depression in the 1930s – caused by skyrocketing credit card and mortgage debts in the US and the subsequent growth of fictitious capital in the economy that created hugely unstable speculative bubbles (Vakulabharanam, 2009, p. 147-8) – resulted in news organizations further justifying their budget cuts and attempts at downsizing, despite the adverse effects these moves might have on journalism’s democratic function; some 13,500 jobs were lost in the American

newspaper industry from 2007 to 2009 as a result of the crisis, according to the American Society of Newspaper Editors (Aamidor and Kuypers, 2013, p. 4). In books and news commentaries, former journalists have described their dismissal after years of service to their news organization like they were “sheep” being led to “slaughter”; 53 people were laid off in a single day in April 2009 at the Chicago Tribune for example (Aamidor and Kuypers, 2013, p. 6). Amid growing unemployment, Americans, inspired by the Arab Spring uprisings in the Middle East in 2011, rallied together to begin an Occupy Wall Street movement in September 2011 to protest against corporate greed and budget cuts; this movement spiraled into a worldwide movement involving 951 cities in 82 countries in the same year (Van Gelder, 2011).

In contemporary times, with globalization and the Internet, the exploitative tendencies of capitalism have taken on new dimensions, raising further crisis concerns. The class divide is said to worsen as competition for jobs extends globally, enabling capitalist owners to relocate their operations overseas where they can produce their goods more cheaply; this causes wages to fall further, companies to downsize, and jobs to be lost (Fasenfest, 2010, p. 629-30; Lilley, 2010, p. 6). This is manifested in the news media business, for instance, by the closing down of foreign news bureaus that would traditionally have professional staff who were growing their expertise to report on those locations. Of them were Boston Globe that closed three of its foreign bureaus in Berlin, Bogota and Jerusalem, Baltimore Sun that closed its bureaus in Russia, South Africa, Great Britain and China (Aamidor and Kuypers, 2013, p. 3), CNN that shut down its operations in Manila, Belgrade, Brussels and Rio de Janeiro, and CBS that closed its offices in Paris, Johannesburg, Beijing and Bonn (Henry, 2007, p. 24). These bureau staff were replaced by “parachute journalists” with little local expertise who would fly into crisis zones for stories when needed (Aamidor and Kuypers, 2013, p. 4), or by freelancers who would be much cheaper to hire, enabling news organizations to save on wages and worker benefits. Cohen (2012) writes that freelance work has “relations of exploitation at its core” – it is an ideal arrangement for capital because firms can hire for short-term projects providing no training, benefits, overhead costs and payment for time the freelancer spends that is unproductive, while the risks and costs of production are passed on to the freelancer, who amid competition with other skilled workers, is compelled to produce his best work with little power to engage in any bargaining (p.

147). This places labour in an unfavourable position and may have a negative impact on the quality of the news content produced.

In the same vein, the term “informational capitalism” has been used by scholars to prompt a rethinking of class in the Internet age. Information has become a commodity, produced by waged labour within a market for market growth (Schiller, 2007, p. 8); information becomes “knowledge in production” – it is not just a final product but also an intermediate product that contributes to producing surpluses in other fields like biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, etc. (p. 23-25). Fuchs (2010) similarly describes knowledge as a productive force. In particular, he points out that in the Internet age, new forms of capitalist exploitation are taking place. This is because knowledge is produced both in corporations by “direct knowledge workers” such as writers, software programmers, artists, and designers, as well as in everyday life by “indirect knowledge workers” such as teachers, houseworkers, and students; both the indirect knowledge workers and direct knowledge workers are now exploited by capitalists for a profit (p. 186). In fact, indirect knowledge workers are free to be exploited by the capitalists because they fall out of the regular wage relationship, allowing capital to exploit them infinitely (p. 188). A similar point had been noted in 1999 by Dyer-Witheford. He pointed out that information technologies have moved the workers from the factory into society, deterritorializing their work and creating flexible models of employment involving more contingent workers involved in part-time, temporary and informal work (Dyer-Witheford, 1999, p. 80). As waged-time and non-waged-time becomes blurred, more people become a part of the production process and risk being exploited by the capitalists (Dyer-Witheford, 1999, p. 82).

The rise of the Internet has brought with it other woes for professional journalism practice. There had, in fact, been much optimism when Internet use became widespread at the turn of the century – there was much hope that it would solve the democratic deficit in American journalism, by allowing citizens to become active users and “joint architects” with media producers rather than just passive consumers, and allowing topics and perspectives not covered by the mainstream media to surface (Downing, 2001, p. 46; Harcup, 2011, p. 27). With journalists no longer bound to media organizations to disseminate information, their constructions of reality need no longer favour those with

political and economic power (Becker and Vlad, 2009, p. 62). At the same time, journalists could access more information, perspectives and news sources online, improving the quality of journalism, and citizen journalists could provide more content and analysis online to better inform the public (Curran, 2011, p. 113). Over time, there was hope that a pluralistic networked model would emerge where the professional journalist could work with the amateur journalist to develop a type of “network journalism” that was more collaborative, synergistic and inclusive (p. 113), ultimately resulting in the creation of a more vibrant liberal democracy.

Unfortunately, this turn to online journalism has presented new dimensions to the contemporary journalism crisis. For one, Freedman (2010) believes that the traditional business model for delivering news is in peril – increasing competition from online news providers is causing a drop in the audience numbers for newspapers and television news, and the growth of online advertising has meant a drop in the advertising revenue for traditional media outlets (p. 35). Indeed, online news outlets have been able to draw younger audiences with their features of immediacy and interactivity and have been able to offer advertisers the chance to target niche groups accurately and at low cost (p. 35). At the same time, audiences have developed expectations that they should be able to access news content for free (Aamidor and Kuypers, 2013, p. 8). Other scholars have echoed the same views – Luengo (2014, p. 567) notes “drastic falls in advertising revenues and reader migration to the Internet”, Pickard (2011, p. 75) points out the “collapse” of journalism’s advertising-supported business model due to online advertising websites like Craigslist, and Aamidor and Kuypers (2013, p. 8) reveal that the newspaper industry in America had lost more than \$26 billion in advertising revenues from 2005 to 2011, as online platforms like Craigslist decimate their traditional classified advertising pages. Blumler (2010) calls this a “crisis of viability”, as financial resources of news organizations, and even their very survival, become threatened (p. 439).

Latest “State of the News Media” reports from the Pew Research Center in the US illustrate such trends; audience figures and advertising revenues for traditional media in the US have fallen steadily. In 2013, the media primetime viewership of the three major news channels, CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC fell 11% to about 3 million; CNN and MSNBC was experiencing advertising revenue losses year on year. Newspapers

registered a 3% increase in total circulation daily but figures included paying visitors to digital platforms. Not surprisingly, obtaining news online was a popular option – in 2013, 82% of Americans said they obtained their news from their computers, while 54% said they received them on a mobile device. Digital news platforms, expectedly, benefited from this shift in reading habits – from April to June of 2013, The Huffington Post saw 45 million unique monthly visitors, putting it in second place behind Yahoo as a top news site. Advertising revenues of newspapers also reflected this shift online – advertising revenue for printed newspapers dropped 8.6%, while advertising for digital platforms rose 1.5% (Pew Research Center, 2014). Latest figures in 2015 revealed that while local television news and network news has seen slight increases in audiences between 2% to 5%, cable news from Fox, MSNBC and CNN have seen a drop of about 8%, and newspaper readership has fallen another 3% from 2014; overall, newspapers have been hardest hit, with newspaper weekday circulation dropping 19% since 2004. Advertising revenues reflect this trend – advertising revenues for television news channels have been mixed, but newspaper advertising revenues have declined another 4% from 2014, and no news organization “gets more than a small share of their total revenue from digital”; instead, it is the technology companies, like Facebook and Google, that are reaping the most benefits from advertisers online (Pew Research Center, 2015).

At this point, there has yet to be a successful coping strategy for traditional media, leading scholars to proclaim a crisis tied to new media or technological progress (Freedman, 2010; Pickard, 2011; Luengo, 2014). Concerns of lower journalistic standards and ethics surface again here as news organizations adopt a myriad of cost-saving measures, such as making their journalists work longer hours across multiple media platforms with little increase in pay, cutting back on expensive journalism like investigative reporting and foreign news reporting, and maximizing audiences numbers by focusing on human interest stories and infotainment (Freedman, 2010, p. 41-44); this reflects concerns related to crisis narratives discussed earlier – the crisis due to capitalism’s inherent tendencies towards profit-seeking and exploitation, evident from increased journalist exploitation, and the crisis of liberal democracy as a viable political system in the real world, given the inability of the press to perform its democratic functions. Coupled with the global economic recession of 2008, the news industry in the US has had significant layoffs and cutbacks. In 2009, the Wall Street Journal saw the

loss of about 30 newsroom jobs, in what has been described as a “historic industry downturn”, due to dwindling advertising revenue and a “steady migration to the Web by both readers and advertisers” (Vanacore, 2009). In 2010, ABC News lost 350 to 400 employees, a quarter of its staff count, in its bid to adopt a “leaner model in order to survive” (Los Angeles Times, Apr 28, 2010), including reducing its number of correspondents outside the US and relabeling those who remain as “digital journalists” that shoot and produce their own news reports; full-time employees at its newsmagazines like “20/20” and “Primetime” were also replaced by freelancers. In 2013, the New York Times cut about 30 staffers, many of them senior editors, as it sought “significant cost savings” (Mirkinson, 2013).

The Internet’s contributions to journalism’s decline is evident also in the monopolization of advertising revenue by search engines that do not even produce original news content (Freedman, 2010, p. 47); cutbacks within traditional news media due to a loss in advertising revenue may signal a dearth in original news content both offline and online (McChesney and Nichols, 2010, p. 17). At this point, it is questionable if the rise of online journalism would be adequate to offset the decline in traditional media to produce the same quality of journalism (Curran, 2011, p. 118). There is also the likelihood that leading news brands will continue to be dominant online, and minority journalism will continue to be marginalized and less able to set the news agenda – bloggers still have no mass audiences and citizen news sites are not common (Atton and Hamilton, 2008, p. 139; Curran, 2011, p. 115-8) – perpetuating existing power structures in cyberspace (Hackett and Zhao, 1998, p. 193). The Internet may not be the leveler of power as many have predicted; instead, Dean (2009, p. 23) says that the Internet’s “rhetorics of access, participation, and democracy” have managed to “work ideologically to secure the technological infrastructure of neoliberalism”, benefiting established power rather than the people.

At the same time, there is another danger that citizen journalists online might actually be harmful to democracy, since there may be lower accuracy in their news reports, more desk-bound news gathering, and more unverifiable opinion and gossip that replace “professional” investigative and analytical journalism. Rather than pursuing public interest, citizen journalists may also be more interested in “populist ranting” and



self-publicity; the ability to speak on issues anonymously lowers their accountability to the public (Fenton, 2010, p. 561-564). Blumler (2010, p. 440) adds that the information overload online may lead to more sensationalized, conflict-oriented and emotionally captivating content over informative, contextual and comprehensive reports. Political discourse, for instance, would likely become over-simplified and fragmented. And while popular emotions might drive positive social change, Blumler (2010, p. 440) believes they also have the ability to invoke “impassioned irrationalism”.

All these narratives have stemmed not just from academics alone. Journalists and editors themselves have lamented on the dire state of journalism in the digital age. Fuller (2010), from the Chicago Tribune, perceives the journalism profession to be in a “severe crisis”. Readers and advertisers migrating to the Internet means the corporate elites are unable to “make the business of news work” (p. xi). Newspapers have suffered “catastrophic economic damage”, largely due to a loss of classified advertisements (p. 3), and the Internet has exposed news organizations to competition for audiences not just locally but nationally and internationally (p. 9). Fuller (2010) also describes how journalists belonging to the “old order”, before the information revolution, find great “professional inertia” to learn new skills (p. 8). Attempts at pursuing a multimedia strategy by integrating different media platforms create discomfort among journalists needing to adapt to different newsroom cultures (p. 9).

Fellow journalist at the Washington Post, Henry (2007), also points out that as more people who self-publish on their computers call themselves a “journalist”, the value of “professional journalism” has also become undermined, and with it, the skills of the professionals in information gathering, researching, investigative work, presenting fair and accurate news, and recognizing meaningful news events in a complex world. The “purpose” of professional journalists becomes murkier, particularly when citizen journalists can do their work for much less pay (p. 10-11).

On the continued survival of traditional media in the digital age, particularly newspapers, the executive director of the New York Times, Bill Keller, has described the mood at places where editors and publishers gather as “funereal” and “somber” (Alterman, 2008, p. 3). New York Times journalist Pfanner (2010) writes that the

American news industry's make-up of "publicly traded chains" has seen newspapers "under pressure from shareholders clamoring for short-term results" make decisions to implement "reckless cuts in editorial and production quality, hastening the flight of readers and advertisers to the Web". Sharing these concerns is 40-year veteran journalist, Thomas Edsall, who has described the operations at his newspaper, Washington Post, as one that is "increasingly driven by fear – the fear of declining readership, the fear of losing advertisers, the fear of diminishing revenues, the fear of being swamped by the Internet, the fear of irrelevance. Fear drove the paper, from top to bottom, to corrupt the entire news operation" (Alterman, 2008, p. 14).

Despite these points of concern, some communication scholars have maintained their optimism that the state of crisis has not yet arrived, or attempt to qualify the form of journalism that is really under siege. Russial et al. (2015) note that it is the form of journalism "that promised to serve the public", in the US and other Western countries where news media is largely deregulated and commercialized, that is in crisis (p. 303). While traditional media in the West struggles to "make online journalism pay enough to make up for plummeting revenue in print", this "juxtaposes uncomfortably with the vibrant and seemingly quite viable, print media in much of Africa, South America, and parts of Asia" (p. 306). They cite Nerone (2013), noting that the existing journalism hegemony has broken down and that a new journalism hegemony will likely develop. This is the opportune moment to "repurpose" and "revitalize" the US media system that Pickard (2011, p. 87) speaks of.

Allan (2013) similarly believes that journalism is undergoing a "transformative shift" that will eventually see news organizations "decisively realigning traditional news reporting's communicative priorities and protocols". Citizen journalism, for instance, does have the capability of improving traditional journalism. Given the difficulties many newsrooms are having to stay financially viable in the digital age, contributions made by citizen journalists may lower costs for these news organizations while being more appealing to audiences; professional journalists will still have the role of gathering the information from citizen journalists, making sense of this information, fact checking, creating a worthwhile story, and distributing it widely (Allan, 2013, p. 18-19). As Arianna Huffington, the creator of the popular Huffington Post website says, "Traditional media

just needs to realize that the online world isn't the enemy. In fact, it's the thing that will save them, if they fully embrace it" (Alterman, 2008, p. 7).

McNair (2006) uses the term "cultural chaos" to describe disruptions in the field of news and journalism in the 21st century, not with negative connotations however, but simply to illustrate the current state of things, where the field is evolving in non-linear and highly contingent ways. He notes that "chaos creates as well as destroys", creating opportunities for "progressive evolution" as well as movements towards "social entropy and disorder" (p. xii). Non-linear systems may be influenced by even the slightest changes in the initial conditions of the system, as well as changes to other contingent systems to which it is interconnected. Chaotic systems are therefore unpredictable and difficult to control by those in positions of power, stripping the ability of the dominant elites to exert their authority from the top-down. This blurs the line between "the dominant and the dominated... the passive mass and the active elite" (p. xxi). Journalism, therefore, has not necessarily entered into a state of crisis, according to this perspective. Rather, it is simply at the phase of transition between order and chaos, defined by McNair (2006) as the "zone within which creative, constructive things happen" (p. xxi).

Yet other scholars have offered solutions to the dimensions of journalism crisis created by the Internet. To help make sense of the immense amount of content produced by citizen journalists and to create more value for the work of "professional" journalists, Hallin (1996, p. 259) has called on professional journalists to act as public dialogue facilitators rather than representatives for a unitary public, while McManus (2009, p. 230) is urging more cooperation between citizen journalists and professional journalists. As for the threat that online media is causing to the traditional advertiser-supported press model, Gasher (2007) and Compton (2009, p. 596) suggest that media convergence could be a method for traditional media like newspapers to gain longer term security through cost sharing and cross-platform promotions, and that the Internet should be seen as a way to help traditional media increase their audience numbers, rather than as a threat (Cao and Li, 2006).

Of course, the above solutions suggested by these scholars draw new concerns about the journalism crisis – cooperation between professional journalists and citizen journalists will likely still see the professional journalists as gatekeepers to the information, subjecting the news gathering and news selection process to the same political-economic pressures that plague journalism work to begin with, and processes of media convergence to save costs will likely cut resources for news and journalism, undermining the ability of journalists to pursue complex stories and subjecting them to poorer and less secure working conditions. All this ties back in to the crisis of liberal democracy as a viable political system in the real world, and relatedly, the crisis due to capitalism’s inherent profit-seeking tendencies, discussed earlier.

Based on the above analysis, it can be seen that the systemic crisis in American journalism is a multi-dimensional one. While ideologically, liberal-democratic ideals continue to be venerated in the US, existing discourses on the American journalism crisis draw attention to bigger questions about the viability of liberal democracy in the real world, the inherent flaws of the capitalist system, and whether journalism can continue to play its public service role and earn the trust of the people, as well as survive in the digital age amid online competition.

In sum, narratives that are interconnected to create the American conceptualization of a “journalism crisis” in contemporary times are:

- 1) A crisis of civic adequacy of the press, relating to the press system’s inability to serve the public interest by keeping the citizenry fully and accurately informed about issues of public relevance, resulting in doubt cast on the feasibility of liberal-democratic institutions in the real world;

- 2) A crisis due to capitalism’s inherent tendencies towards profit-seeking and exploitation, where capitalistic media owners working in their own self-interests cut costs, exploit the workforce, lay off experienced staff and hire freelancers outside the traditional wage relationship to improve their profit margins, even at the risk of compromising the quality of the journalistic output;

3) A crisis of credibility of the press and a resultant crisis of public confidence in the press, particularly in its ability to work for public rather than private interests;

4) A crisis due to new media, particularly a crisis of financial viability for traditional media, as online news platforms draw audiences and advertisers away.

The way these narratives have been experienced in material terms can be classified into the following categories, based on accounts from both American academics and news-workers: 1) Privileging of elite voices and news agendas over voices and agendas of the people, largely tied to advertiser, owner, stockholder, and government influence on news content and with an influence on public confidence in the news media, 2) Deteriorating standards of journalism involving more public-relations oriented journalism, more newswire stories, and more sensationalized content, as well as less investigative stories, news analysis, political criticism, and politically/ economically/ socially “sensitive” stories, 3) Cutbacks in resources for the newsroom, including more temporary contracts for journalists, longer hours, and more cross-platform multi-tasking, and 4) The threat of online media to traditional news media in terms of circulation and advertising revenue, lack of a viable business model for traditional media as well as online news, little engagement with alternative and citizen media, and citizen journalism lowering the standards of professional journalism. These crisis dimensions relating to the American journalism crisis will be noteworthy for my investigations later on, as I formulate ways to discover the types of journalism crisis dimensions that exist within the contexts of Singapore and Hong Kong.

In the next chapter of this thesis, I will go on to discuss the extent to which this version of a journalism crisis may be seen as a global one – or not – and why it is important to further problematize the way “journalism crisis” is understood outside the US.

## **Chapter 2.**

### **A Global Journalism Crisis or Not? That is the Question**

To answer the question above on the globality of the journalism crisis as it is described in dominant American literature, it is important to consider whether conditions present in the Anglo-American context that have triggered the crisis discourse are also present in other parts of the world. In particular, questions to ask would pertain to the expectations that other societies have of the roles that they believe journalism should play (i.e. the ideological aspect), and the types of concerns that news-workers face in their journalistic work on a day-to-day basis that might result in a slippage into crisis (i.e. the material aspect). Information on these two aspects will paint for us a clearer picture of the expectations-reality nexus that might result in a proclamation of crisis.

Based on the literature in this section, there is reason to believe that ideologically and materially, “the West”, especially the U.S., has had a significant influence on the expectations and practice of journalism in the rest of the world, signaling that the journalism crisis detailed in dominant crisis literature may also be reflected outside the Anglo-American context. To illustrate this, I will be focusing on two interrelated processes here – the global projects of neoliberal capitalist expansion, and cultural imperialism.

#### **2.1. An Exploration into the Global Spread of (Neo)Liberalism**

The expansionary nature of capitalism is a crucial part of the narrative here; new markets must be found and more commodities sold so that the system of capital accumulation and profit reinvestment can continue without disruption. England became

the first capitalist country to begin a large-scale expansion of its mercantilism efforts, to sell manufactured goods for profit to other countries in exchange for their raw materials (Lenin, 1966, p. 57), signaling the beginnings of a free trade system. Its capitalist system had been borne out of feudalism, as feudal landlords collected money rents from peasant producers, who, in turn, had to produce more competitively to pay good rents; those who could not afford that would be dispossessed of their lands or forced to work as wage labourers for other peasant producers to ensure their survival (Wood, 2002, p. 44). Over time, the market began to mediate between the peasant producers and feudal landlords, setting in motion market imperatives of competition, profit maximization, increased productivity and capital accumulation (Wood, 2002, p. 36). Through international trade and the subsequent expansion of its global empire, England then transmitted its competitive pressures to other states and economies, causing non-capitalist states to also become “engines of capitalist development” (Wood, 2002, p. 64). These newly capitalist countries with a surplus of capital, finding no further areas to invest, would export their capital to more backward countries where capital was scarce, raw materials cheap and wages low; England therefore began the epoch of capitalist imperialism, drawing other countries into a world capitalist system (Lenin, 1966, p. 58).

Notably however, a problem inherent to capitalist imperialism is its uneven development; capitalist imperialism tends to be marked by exploitation and unequal exchange. The result is different parts of the world economy experiencing different rates of growth (Lenin, 1966, p. 88), and some countries being at much more advanced levels of development than others (Trotsky, 2008, p. 5). Wallerstein (2007, p. 105) refers to a three-tiered capitalist world system – a core area, a semi-periphery, and a periphery – where the peripheral countries are fixed in a state of underdevelopment by exploitative structures created by the core countries that sustain a system of unequal economic exchange.

This unevenness extends beyond the economic sphere to the cultural sphere – as Europe’s colonial empires expanded, European philosophical and intellectual ideas were able to dominate worldwide, beginning with the spread of Christianity. Like the “superior” status of the colonizers, these ideas gained ascendancy over local perspectives as a more appropriate and more desirable way of seeing the world. Ideas

such as individualism over community, material conquests as progress, and white superiority were taken as the universal condition (Asante, 2010, p. 26), as well as ideas about democracy and natural rights that were tied to the Enlightenment in Europe. Europe's position as a source of knowledge and power centre became taken for granted and left unquestioned, while the rest of the world and its knowledges were seen as the inferior "Other" (Shome and Hegde, 2002, p. 263-4; Alatas, 2010, p. 239). The Europeans were able to dominate philosophy and intellectual thought for over 400 years, securing their positions at the top of the cultural hierarchy (Asante, 2010, p. 23).

The ascendancy of the US as an imperialist power came after the Second World War – when the economic potential of many advanced capitalist states were destroyed by the war, the US was able to rise from the ashes with increased economic, political, military and ideological power (Saul, 2012, p. 327), restructuring the capitalist world economy in its favour at the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944, by making the dollar the world's currency and New York as its financial hub, advocating policies that favoured financial openness (Desai, 2013, p. 21). The US president at that time, Harry S. Truman, called on developing countries to be integrated into the political and economic order led by the US so that "all countries... would greatly benefit from a constructive programme for the better use of the world's human and natural resources" (Williams, 2012, p. 3). Free trade, it was claimed, would also enable the living standards of all countries to rise and reduce likelihood of war that stemmed from economic dissatisfaction (Williams, 2012, p. 3). The institutional and academic study of "development" peaked during this post-war period (Williams, 2012, p. 1), advocating that developing countries follow the lead of their Western counterparts in order to grow. Subsequent theories of "modernization" in the 1950s and '60s argued that developing countries must follow the path taken by Western nations, to "become like the West" (Harriss, 2012, p. 10), in order to modernize and develop economically. All these efforts could be seen as a means for the US to maintain its hegemonic position in the world order and keep the developing states in a state of subordination (Williams, 2012, p. 4).

Unlike the former European empires that achieved their conquests through military power, critical scholars like Wood (2002), Harvey (2010), and Lilley (2010) have described the US as the only "empire of capital", subordinating other economies and



imposing imperial domination through economic imperatives. Harvey (2003, p. 26), defines “imperialism” as a “political project” where power of the actors is “based in command of a territory and a capacity to mobilize its human and natural resources towards political, economic and military ends”; he sees capitalist imperialism, specifically, as the use of imperialist practices based on capitalist logics such as profit-motivation, individual advantage (even through unfair and unequal exchange at the expense of other territories), and capital accumulation (Harvey, 2003, p. 32).

To intensify its power for endless capital accumulation, Harvey (2003) says the US dominates both by physical force, violence, and economic power, as well as maintains its hegemonic status by claiming to act in the universal interest and for collective benefits (p. 39-40). The work of Cox (1987) on the creation of “historic blocs” is relevant here; he defines this term as the “configuration of social forces upon which state power rests” (p. 104). In particular, like Poulantzas (1978) before him, Cox (1987) argues that the state, in setting the framework for laws and policies on production, also facilitates the creation and maintenance of dominant-subordinate relations of production within society, thereby influencing the process of accumulation from the subordinate to the dominant levels (p. 106). This structure of production then creates class differences (p. 6). On a global scale, dominant states and social classes maintain their supremacy materially and ideologically – by creating a broad base of consent for their rule in the existing world order through ideological means, while offering some satisfactory returns to the less powerful (p. 7); the quote from the then-US President Truman mentioned previously clearly illustrated this point. Weaker players then consent to leadership of powerful players with the belief that the latter are acting in the interests of the collective (p. 253). This facilitates the creation of an “international historic bloc”, which according to the neo-Gramscian perspective, involves nation-states, international institutions and civil society actively consenting to the dominance of the key hegemonic players in the world order, and voluntarily conforming to the requirements of the historic bloc, with the perception that they too stand to gain (Cox, 1987, p. 253; Saull, 2012, p. 324). This is a concept that I will return to as I discuss the relevance of a “crisis of legitimacy” narrative for journalism crisis research in Singapore and Hong Kong in the chapters ahead.

Beyond seeming to work in the collective interest, a common rhetoric adopted by the US to obtain consent ideologically was also to appeal to desires for democracy and individual freedom, as I had detailed in earlier sections of my analysis; the US had, during the Cold War, stood on the side of capitalism and democracy, against the communist regime of the Soviet Union. When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989 and the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, these American-centric ideals gathered greater steam worldwide as scholars and political observers were convinced about the triumph of democracy on a global scale; Fukuyama (1989) famously coined the “end of history” as the “end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government”. Western governments and international organizations set up in the West like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization and United Nations promoted strongly the benefits of liberal democracy worldwide, developing programmes to strengthen democratization in other parts of the world through the perpetuation of liberal institutions and norms (Carothers, 1999). The rhetoric of democracy continues to be used today by the US to justify its actions – the prominent invasion of Iraq in 2003, for instance, was termed “Operation Iraqi Freedom”.

Freedom however, as Harvey (2005, p. 5) reminds us, is just another word. In reality, the US was leading a global economic order not based on liberalism in the classical sense, i.e. in the protection of civil liberties and individual freedom, but rather on the ideals of “market liberalism” or “neoliberalism”, which advocated the freedom of the market (Hackett and Zhao, 1998, p. 151). In strategic policy changes implemented by then-US President Ronald Reagan and then-British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s, the US and the UK spearheaded a neoliberal drive to reduce state intervention in markets beyond setting up and maintaining an institutional framework to ensure the market’s proper functioning, privatize previously public sectors, and encourage the opening up of economies to the international market (Robinson, 2004, p. 79; Harvey, 2005, p. 22-24). This is a clear illustration of the Marxian theory of base and superstructure, where the economic base forms the foundation of a capitalist society, and is supported by a superstructure made up of cultural, legal, political and other forms that help to secure the position of dominant groups (Marx and Engels, 1976). In this case, to achieve endless capital accumulation, state power works together with the

capitalist class to legitimize and reproduce production relations in order to maintain the existing economic order (Poulantzas, 1978; Cox, 1987).

While stressing the importance of individual freedom and market freedom, this turn to neoliberalism could be seen as a means for the economic elites and ruling classes to restore class power, particularly after the Second World War; at that time, these economic elites had lost both power and profits as Keynesian policies were put in place to have governments intervene to rebuild the economy and afford more economic power to labour – thankfully for them, the crisis of accumulation in the 1970s that created widespread unemployment and accelerating inflation in many capitalist states became the perfect opportunity for them to proclaim the breakdown of Keynesianism (Harvey, 2005, p. 15). Consequently, neoliberal policies were quickly put in place to ensure that there was no concerted movement towards a socialist alternative (p. 15).

On an international scale, this neoliberal project had the goal of creating an open global economy and a global policy structure that allowed for the free movement and operation of transnational capital worldwide (Robinson, 2004, p. 78), coopting national economies and local elites into the global economy to “make the world available to capital” (p. 81). Here, the US was driving the worldwide liberalization of trade and capital flows through agreements like the North American Free Trade Agreement (Hackett and Zhao, 1998, p. 8). It also played a key role in the development of structural adjustment programmes of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, imposed on developing countries that experienced a major debt crisis in the 1980s – a result of the US raising its interest rates to improve its own economy, no less – that compelled them to reduce the role of the state and implement liberal policies in order to secure continued financial assistance from these financial institutions (Harvey, 2005, p. 29; Harriss, 2012, p. 14); these policy prescriptions became known as the famous “Washington Consensus”. As the international historic bloc of Pax Americana, premised on the ideology of neoliberalism, grew from strength to strength (Overbeek, 2013, p. 169), the US was able to increasingly subject the weaker states to the mechanisms and policies of set by themselves and their Western counterparts, such that they became a part of a larger political structure that accompanied international production (Cox, 1987, p. 253). Any decision by the subordinate states to withdraw from the world economy would

increase the risk of economic failure (Cox, 1987, p. 299), and make borrowing from international financial institutions difficult (p. 305).

Crucially, this project of neoliberal globalization would go towards benefiting the core capitalist economies and transnational corporations, often even at the expense of collective and labour rights, population well-being, and environmental quality (Harvey, 2005, p. 70-71). Citing Polanyi, Harvey (2005, p. 183) asserts that the idea of freedom, under neoliberalism, had degenerated to a “mere advocacy of free enterprise”, where the beneficiaries were clearly the political and economic elites. Sklair (2001) and Robinson (2004) have termed these beneficiaries as the “transnational capitalist class”, who owns and/or controls transnational capital and sets the direction of general production worldwide, with the aim of expanding the global economy to increase capital accumulation (p. 45-47). To keep their hegemonic position, both Sklair (2001) and Robinson (2004) believe that the drive towards transnational neoliberalism spearheaded by the US and UK is their class project.

The impact of neoliberalism on the media sector could not be understated. This neoliberal turn saw the media industry in the US witness dramatic deregulation and privatization of its broadcasting and telecommunication networks, resulting in an unprecedented consolidation of media power in the hands of a few large corporate empires such as Walt Disney Company, AOL, AT&T and Viacom that expanded transnationally and monopolized the international media market (Hackett and Zhao, 1998, p. 4; Thussu, 2007). This was on top of America’s already existing dominance in the global media market after the Second World War and amid the tensions of the Cold War, when it fervently promoted the idea of a “free flow of information”; this free exchange of information, according to the US, would promote world peace because news and media content, if not subjected to government censorship and control, could be capable of reducing misunderstandings and preventing wars (Preston, 1989). In reality, Schiller (1989) has argued that this US foreign policy was influencing governments of new nations to conform to the world market system, and protecting and extending flows of American media products and transnational corporations (p. 287). He described this policy as “skillfully and seamlessly blending corporate advantage, media domination, and the yearnings of people everywhere for contact and full expression, at

the same time that it confers an enormous propaganda advantage on its advocates” (p. 293).

The developing world did not always take this sitting down, however. Since the 1960s and 70s, developing nations were beginning to voice their concerns that the imbalance of cultural flows from the West to the rest of the world was extending the hegemony of Western cultures and expanding the reach of corporate capitalism, subordinating the indigenous cultures of developing countries and threatening their cultural sovereignty and identity (Schiller, 1992; Friedman, 1994; Richards and French, 2000; Banerjee, 2002); this led to the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) debates which I will be discussing in the next section. The intensification of “globalization” processes in the 1980s and ‘90s that saw a dramatic increase in flows of capital, trade, technology, people and ideas, aided in large part by the neoliberal policies of the US and the UK, further fueled heated discussions on cultural imperialism.

Indeed, the perpetuation of neoliberal capitalism and liberal democracy from the West, particularly the US, was not without resistance from the rest of the world. In the next section, I will discuss where countries in the Asian region, particularly in East and Southeast Asia – the regions of interest in this thesis – fit into this narrative of world domination by Western powers. In particular, I will note the response of specific Asian countries, especially Singapore and Hong Kong, to Western conceptions of capitalism and democracy, both on the ideological front (i.e. the extent of their subordination to these normative ideals) and the material front (i.e. the extent to which their practices on the ground reflected those advocated by the West).

## **2.2. So Where does Asia Fit in?**

Europe’s colonization of many territories in Asia before the 20th century – with the most notable exceptions being China, Japan, and Thailand that had remained independent from European and regional colonizers – had seen Spain, Great Britain, France and Portugal divide up the region into different spheres of control and influence (Abdullah, 2003, p. 61). Europe was deemed as a “higher civilization” that was progressive and modern, and it was the “white men’s burden” to lead the rest of the

world into modernity (p. 63). Over time, such ideas became engraved in the minds of colonizers and the colonized alike, creating widely shared myths and beliefs of white superiority. Edward Said's (1978) work on "Orientalism" depicted this attitude as a way for Europe to "dominate, restructure and have authority over the Orient" (p. 44). This period of colonialism altered the reality and consciousness of the colonized people in drastic ways.

With the end of the Second World War, Southeast Asia's previously colonized territories, post-independence, began "a new phase of mythologization" (Abdullah, 2003, p. 66), creating new traditions and ideologies in a sort of anti-colonial nationalist movement to recapture the cultural sphere. Interestingly, Europe became seen as both a threat to the way countries in Asia perceived themselves, as well as a model that could be emulated for their own advantage (Abdullah, 2003, p. 70). Europe's successes in governance were evident in the successes of some of its colonies like Singapore and Hong Kong that thrived as port cities. Intelligentsia from Asia's newly independent countries began to be sent to Europe to study the forms of governance there, acquiring through education their ways of thinking about progress, democracy and social justice, among other values (p. 69). Paradoxically, in times of crisis, when their attempts to emulate European forms of governance and economic development had less than desirable results, colonialism and imperialism were the first targets to be blamed, and similar arguments were used to justify the need to return to more authoritarian regimes (p. 72). Either way, it was indisputable that Europe had left its indelible mark on Asia.

After the Second World War, with the US's rise to power, Asia's role on the world stage began to shift. Two phases would be of interest here – during the Cold War when countries had to pick a side between capitalist USA and communist Soviet Union, and after the Cold War, when the world became dominated by US as its one superpower, and capitalism and liberal democracy gained ascendancy.

During the Cold War from the 1950s, Asia became the site of a fierce rivalry between capitalism and communism; while China remained a communist stronghold under the Mao regime, several Asian countries became important "bastions" for the American fight against communism (Hadiz, 2006, p. 12). The US fought two major wars

against the communists – the Korean War in 1950, and the Vietnam War in 1955 – while hundreds of thousands of communists were killed in Indonesia in 1965 (Hadiz, 2006, p. 5). South Korea and Taiwan received huge amounts of assistance in economic and military terms from the Americans, with the goal of protecting them against communist insurgence, and their subsequent economic successes were lauded by the Americans as the success of capitalism (Hadiz, 2006, p. 12). Singapore too, was a strong partner of the US in defence and security – its fight against communism lasted four decades – a battle to overcome a major communist insurgency in 1948 claimed some 8000 lives in Singapore and Malaysia (Channel NewsAsia, Nov 4, 2014). Thereafter, Singapore's defence relations with the US remained strong – in the early 1990s, it offered military facilities to the US forces when they were withdrawn from the Philippines and subsequently constructed the largest dock in the region to specifically accommodate US aircraft carriers (Rodan and Hewison, 2006, p. 108).

Cold War alliances with the US saw anti-Left and pro-Western groups take leadership in Southeast Asia from the 1950s and 1970s, namely in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines, eventually weeding out a viable Left as a significant social and political force and allowing the establishment of political regimes that operated largely to further capitalist development without pressures from an organized working class (Hadiz, 2006, p. 12). Within the context of the Cold War, the US was willing to support “a range of ‘friendly’ authoritarian regimes” in the fight against communism, opting to let “objectives of human rights and democracy take a back seat to security and economic considerations” (Hadiz, 2006, p. 7).

Hong Kong too, occupied an important position in Asia for the Americans during the Cold War. It was a colony of the British and Britain was a principal partner of the US in the Cold War. Hong Kong became a site of intelligence gathering for the Americans, strengthening the Anglo-American alliance during this period; its status as essentially a Chinese city, however, meant that relations with China had to be kept friendly; an invasion by the Chinese would make Hong Kong ungovernable and the city might run the risk of food and water shortages, supplies they obtained from the mainland. The British government in Hong Kong opted to maintain good Chinese relations through diplomatic means – it had to take steps to not accede to every American request, such

as placing limits on attempts by American officials to use Hong Kong as a base to disseminate propaganda (Mark, 2004, p. 2). Hong Kong became known as a “reluctant Cold Warrior” that took the side of the Americans and capitalism (Mark, 2004, p. 6), alongside other countries in East and Southeast Asia.

Economically, it was during the Cold War, from the 1960s and '70s, when four states in East Asia experienced spectacular economic growth. Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea increased their share in total world exports from just 1.5% in 1960 to 6.7% in 1990 and increased its share of total exports from the Third World from just 6% to a high 34% (Prashad, 2007, p. 245). These four states became known as the “Four Tigers of Asia”, and their growth became known as the “East Asian Miracle”, sparking extensive research into the triumph of the “developmental state”; besides Hong Kong that adopted a “laissez-faire” approach to its economy, their success was largely attributed to extensive government intervention in the economy, characterized by sound macroeconomic policies, strict performance standards set for industries, the strategic use of trade restrictions, encouraging export competitiveness and creating a disciplined workforce – regimes that were distinctly authoritarian in nature (Harriss, 2012, p. 15).

Ironically, it was also during the Cold War, in the 1970s, when resistance against the US's rise to power began to build among developing states. Member countries of the Non-Aligned Movement, hailing from the African, Asian, and Latin American regions of the developing world, banded together to voice their demands for greater political, economic and cultural sovereignty at UNESCO, or the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (Schiller, 1989). Beginning as a call for a New International Economic Order from these developing nations that sought a better distribution of global economic resources (Carlsson, 2003), these countries soon realized that economic independence would have to be accompanied by informational and cultural change for substantive transformations to occur, discussions evolved into a call for a New World Information and Communication Order – developing nations drafted a series of proposals to UNESCO calling for bi-directional information exchanges, a greater respect from the developed West for their national sovereignty and cultural autonomy, and greater access and participation in global communications (Schiller, 1989, p. 297). These demands centred on the concern that the West would leverage its



free market ideals to revive an era of cultural colonialism. In response, the US and UK, insisting their stance that a global “free flow of information” was to the benefit of all (and unwilling to accede to requests that might challenge the monopoly power of their transnational media corporations), pulled out of UNESCO, along with their funding, causing the debates to come to a halt (Preston, 1989; Schiller, 1989). Despite unresolved issues from the NWICO debates, this event marked the first time that nations in the Third World asserted themselves strongly against Western interests.

Interestingly, it was during this event that certain lines were drawn within the developing countries themselves – at meetings of the Non-Aligned Movement, the Asian Tiger countries that had benefitted from American benevolence during the Cold War attempted to encourage the “Third World abandonment of the political critique of the economic order” (Prashad, 2007, p. 255), asserting that economic and political reforms of the world order should be seen as separate issues, so that they would not step on the toes of the powerful states. Coincidentally, Singapore also withdrew from UNESCO at the time of the US and UK pullout – although it stated that its decision was not tied to that of the US but rather the high annual membership costs of UNESCO and the lack of relevance of the organization to Singapore’s needs (Wu, 2013, p. 25). In line with their own preachings to separate the political from the economic – while still benefitting from close economic ties with the developed West – several countries in Asia, in the 1970s, began to advocate an “Asian values” discourse that would go against the liberal ideologies of the West, to stress instead Confucian-derived values of communitarianism, social harmony and respect for authority, that would help to justify the strict governance of these countries (Sim, 2001; Lee, 2010); among them were China, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia, with Singapore being a particularly strong advocate (Natarajan and Hao, 2003).

After the Cold War, as the US spearheaded neoliberal economic globalization, several countries in Asia, in a bid to boost their economic growth, allowed the easy movement of transnational capital into the region. Hadiz (2006, p. 3) notes that “many in Asia regard US hegemony as a condition for prosperity and development in the region”; not surprisingly, many parts of Asia have been and will continue to be important centres of capitalist accumulation and development”, including Singapore and Hong Kong (p. 2).

Many countries in Asia are linked in “dense networks of global economic relationships” and are part of international economic institutions like the World Trade Organization; Singapore and Korea have also signed free trade agreements with the US (Robison, 2006, p. 64).

Like before, the relationship between the US and countries in the Asian region was a complex one, and not without friction. Many countries in East Asia seem to be adopting neoliberalism only selectively and pragmatically, with the goal of increasing their country’s competitive advantage (Hill et al., 2012, p. 2). Hong Kong, for instance, embraces the idea of a free market but continues to provide public healthcare, transportation, and education. Other developmental states like Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan, as well as by Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia, have adopted the “Asian” model of development that involve heightened state intervention in capitalist development, with strict controls on the labour force and media system (Ozawa et al., 2001). Singapore for instance, has government-linked corporations that dominate the domestic economy. While this government intervention in some countries has resulted in the negative by-product of “crony capitalism” – defined by Johnson (1998, p. 654) as “corruption, nepotism, excessive bureaucratic rigidity, and other forms of trust violation that can occur whenever a state tries to manipulate incentives or, in other ways, alter market outcomes” that resulted in the protection of corrupt firms and officials in Thailand, Indonesia, Japan and South Korea – the East Asian model of development, nonetheless, presented a very good case of state intervention in the economy (Harriss, 2012, p. 16). Not surprisingly, the selective adoption of neoliberal strategies by these states proved unsettling for the US and its efforts at neoliberal economic globalization (Rodan and Hewison, 2006, p. 105). Despite these countries being deeply integrated in the capitalist world economy, the US, backed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, attempted to pressure these Asian states to further liberalize their economies, open their markets and deregulate their financial regimes (Hadiz, 2006, p. 12-13).

When the Asian economic crisis of 1997-8 occurred, the neoliberals saw a perfect opportunity to proclaim the failings of the Asian state-driven model of development. Crony capitalism became the scapegoat – countries in Asia were blamed

for not having “adequate regulation or appropriate relations between the government and the private sector” (Williams, 2012, p. 7). This was despite the greater likelihood that the Asian economy had crashed precisely because these countries had liberalized their economies as suggested by the IMF and were subjected to the highly volatile global capital and financial markets (Clark, 2002, p. 10; Robison, 2006, p. 65). The economic crisis created opportunities for the IMF to step in and push for neoliberal market reforms in the name of good governance and democracy, opening up the economies of countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand to foreign capital – even though capitalist development has been proven to be able to thrive under a variety of political regimes, including authoritarian ones (Hadiz, 2006, p. 13). Robison (2006, p. 55) believes that the interventions of IMF and the World Bank on Asian regimes after the economic crisis could be seen as “opportunistic interventions by the US and other powerful nations to take advantage of periodic structural crises in order to bring down state-led economic systems”, and impose on them the “Anglo-Saxon market agenda”. In retaliation, anti-IMF protests against American intervention in their country’s political and economic affairs have occurred in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand; these would often translate into anti-American sentiment (Hadiz, 2006, p. 4).

Hence, as evidenced from the narrative above, America’s call for its version of neoliberal capitalism and liberal democracy to be adopted in other parts of the world has indeed met with resistance from Asia. This resistance is a complex one – the responses of countries in Asia, like Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia, tend to be extremely pragmatic, implementing measures that will help them draw substantial benefits from being a part of the neoliberal global order while denouncing others that might place them in a disadvantaged position, whether politically or economically, by offering arguments that would further legitimize their strict governance. This strategy has, so far, put the region in good stead. Cold War alliances had solidified close relations between many countries in the region and the US, post-Cold War economic successes of the authoritarian developmental states had subsequently drawn considerable respect (although begrudgingly) from the developed West, and in more recent times, alliances made between the US and Asia in the War on Terror post-9/11 have once again seen American tolerance of anti-democratic regimes, as the US sets out to establish economic alliances and trade preference deals with all

those states who are loyal to the US' anti-terrorism cause (Rodan and Hewison, 2006, p. 106).

In many ways, resistance in Asia to America's version of neoliberal capitalism and liberal democracy is not surprising. Besides having had their fingers burnt by volatile financial markets in the 1997 Asian financial crisis – the Indonesian rupiah had devalued by 70% against the US dollar (Petras, 1998, p. 153) and national currencies of Malaysia, Thailand, South Korea and the Philippines had plunged 35% to 45% (Clark, 2002, p. 3) – research conducted in the 1990s and early 2000s has shown that the desire for liberal democracy in Asia is not overwhelmingly strong. In a survey conducted by Mikami and Inoguchi (2010) from 2003 to 2008 of 24 Asian and three Pacific Rim countries (including Singapore and the special case of Hong Kong), it has been found that while most people in Asia view liberal democracy as desirable, many do not oppose the rule of powerful leaders, as long as these leaders are deemed to be trustworthy (p. 265). This can be attributed to factors related to culture and historical experiences. Culturally, Confucian-derived values that stress respect for authority and interests of the community over those of the individual suggest that liberal democracy might not be a suitable regime for Asian societies (Bell, 2006); this is a rhetoric adopted within the “Asian values” discourse. Historically, experiences of war, colonial domination and ethnic conflicts have been known to make a people more ready to delegate authority to a powerful leader or educated ruling elite that can help them overcome or prevent such events (Chu and Wong, 2010, p. 16). Economic successes and material prosperity are also known to be able to legitimize a ruling power and reduce challenges to its authority (Sim, 2001, p. 58; Lee, 2010, p. 6). In general, Asian populations have been shown to be more willing to submit to authority than populations based in the West.

The response of countries in Asia to American liberal ideologies such as neoliberalism and liberal democracy point to the need to adopt a more localized culture-specific approach to understand how these societies perceive the roles of their press. The extent to which they have embraced or rejected these ideologies have a direct influence on the expectations that they might have on how their press system should be and the practices they enact on the ground, thereby shaping their views and discourses on whether a press system is “in crisis” or not. The next section will offer a critical

perspective on the need to further problematize the concept of “journalism crisis” within complex “global” societies that have been heavily influenced by Western liberal ideals but continue to be subjected to some form of authoritarian control.

### **2.3. Complicating the Concept of “Journalism Crisis”: When State Controls Interact with Western Liberal Ideals**

As evidenced in the previous section, different countries in Asia have embraced Western-centric liberal ideologies such as neoliberal capitalism and liberal democracy to different extents, due to a differing set of local historical experiences, philosophical traditions and cultural practices. Hence, journalism realities in the region are likely to produce different types of journalism crisis dimensions and relatedly, different perceptions of what constitutes a “journalism crisis”. Notably however, decades of cultural imperialism and a “free flow of information” from the US and Western Europe have placed discussions on what “good journalism” looks like predominantly within the Western context, muting perspectives from societies that may be operating outside of the liberal-democratic ideological framework. The Asian “global cities” of Singapore and Hong Kong, for instance, are fascinating cases of investigation precisely because they have been influenced significantly by the West as part of their colonial histories and as key players in the global economy, but yet continue to be subjected to some form of authoritarian control in their systems of governance. In this section, I will examine the spread of liberal-democratic ideals in journalism studies worldwide, and the need to further complicate the concept of “journalism crisis” for societies that do not operate based on such liberal ideals.

According to Carey (2002) and Hardt (2002), the beginnings of journalism research can be traced back to mid-19th century and early-20th century Germany, when German theorists like Karl Marx, Albert Schaffle, Karl Knies, Karl Bucher, Ferdinand Tonnies and Max Weber examined the “social place of journalism”, that is, the role of journalism in “social communication and political deliberation”, laying the foundations of what would be seen as journalism’s normative functions (Wahl-Jorgenson and Hanitzsch, 2009, p. 5). In the 1950s, research by American social scientists like

Lazarsfeld, Lasswell, and Hovland took centre-stage, delving into the processes and structures of news production, audience and media effects, the professional practices and values of news-workers, and the organizational routines that governed them. In the 1970s and 80s, when journalism's conventions, routines, and professional ideologies were put under critical scrutiny by North American and European scholars like sociologists Tuchman, Gans and Golding, and cultural studies theorists Carey, Hall, Hartley and Zelizer (Wahl-Jorgenson and Hanitzsch, 2009, p. 6), focus was placed on how journalism played a role in the construction and maintenance of dominant ideologies in society (Wahl-Jorgenson and Franklin, 2008); critiques would typically assume liberal aspirations, and journalism would be criticized for undermining the democratic society and for dumbing down its citizenry.

Like the widespread influence of its scholarly work, practices and norms adopted in Western, largely Anglo-American newsrooms, were also emulated as practices of "good journalism" worldwide – the reliance on official sources as a representative voice, the presentation of opposing viewpoints to create "objective" news, and the referral to a specific set of news values to determine the newsworthiness of an event were taught in journalism schools and practiced in newsrooms in many parts of the world. In the process, this Western-centric nature of journalism practice and journalism research has privileged the Western conception of what constitutes "good journalism" worldwide (Hallin and Mancini, 2011, p. 287). Wasserman and De Beer (2008) add that the dominance of American academic publishing houses and journals have "over the last half-century become so all-encompassing that generations of journalism students... have become inculcated in the American 'way of doing things'" (p. 433). Journalism schools and training programmes have assumed "a certain universality of journalism ideology and practice" that is based on a "generic understanding of the relation between journalism, society, and democracy" (p. 433). Despite the increasing internationalization of the journalism studies field in recent years, Wahl-Jorgenson and Hanitzsch (2009, p. 7) agree that prominent English-language journals continue to be dominated by Anglo-American scholars, and journalism researchers are still paying less attention to regions such as sub-Saharan Africa, parts of the Middle East, Asia, and South America (p. 13).

The impact of such Western cultural imperialism influences how journalism and its roles are perceived around the world. In particular, the liberal-democratic ideology may seep into journalists' normative values (i.e. the desired goals that journalism work should achieve), epistemology (i.e. their set of assumptions about the nature of knowledge), practices (i.e. the day-to-day work they do as journalists), institutional structures (i.e. the organizational structures and procedures that govern their work), and public discourse (i.e. the way journalism is discussed in the public sphere) (Hackett and Zhao, 1998, p. 83-86).

Couching journalism ideals unquestioningly within a liberal-democratic framework results in a view that alternatives to this model are seen as deficient or lacking; this perspective fails to recognize the dynamic and hybrid nature of media systems in different states (Voltmer, 2011, p. 226). An indiscriminate acceptance of Western models and theories may lead to an imbalance in knowledge production (Wang, 2010, p. 1), perpetuating the belief that there are no alternatives to those ways of thinking. The West as a power centre and source of knowledge is taken for granted and left unquestioned (Shome and Hegde, 2002, p. 263). Alternative models of the press that, for instance, view the media as an instrument to create social harmony, then become seen as lacking or deviant (Wang, 2010, p. 4).

Postcolonial studies, for one, has recognized that knowledge that is institutionalized is in fact tied to history, colonialism and geopolitics (Shome and Hegde, 2002, p. 251) – postcolonialism is a branch within the critical tradition of cultural studies that examines the types of colonial conditions that continue to exist and more importantly, why they continue to persist and how the colonized may be able to liberate themselves from such conditions (p. 250). Taking Western realities as the “universal condition” not only undermines alternative ways of thinking but also hides the divisions and inequalities that exist beneath the surface (p. 261). Using Western-centric ideas of individualism over community, material conquests as progress, and white superiority to define reality are in fact tied to a “colonizing ideology of dominance” (Asante, 2010, p. 26) and are myths that are far from universal. A way to resist such Western intellectual imperialism is therefore to understand social phenomena from more localized cultural standpoints (Wang, 2010, p. 6).

In concrete terms, one needs to question the validity of the following ideas:

1) That the globalization of media markets and the growth of transnational media conglomerates are going to create increasingly homogeneous media systems around the world towards the Western liberal model (Voltmer, 2011, p. 231). This is unlikely to happen, because i) individual states continue to have the power to craft media policies and regulations that will in turn influence the nature of their country's media system (Robinson and White, 1998, p. 32; Voltmer, 2011, p. 227), and ii) there may be a resistance to globalization from below, i.e. a call for media programming that is more culturally sensitive and suited to local audiences (Voltmer, 2011, p. 231).

2) That the meaning of democracy and related terms such as press freedom, objectivity, and the watchdog function of the press have a fixed meaning regardless of context (Voltmer, 2011, p. 233). Voltmer (2011) reminds us that "the meaning of democracy is anchored in broader cultural, historical and political discourses" and is not an absolute term (p. 234). Neither are expectations of the role of the press fixed; some societies value more the function of the press to inform the citizens and disseminate messages from the government rather than neutral and detached reporting (p. 234-235).

3) That media systems in democratizing regimes would be able to move away from their old regimes entirely to adopt new practices to guide their work. The fact is, existing structures in the old political regime will continue to influence institutional structures and norms even after the regime change (Voltmer, 2011, p. 235). As such, one can reasonably expect new emerging democracies to still have characteristics of their previous authoritarian regimes, such as a political elite that adopts practices of editorial interference to achieve certain political objectives, and a depoliticized media system that focuses on education and entertainment rather than critical programming (p. 236-237). Moreover, the existing socio-economic structure of society will also influence the form of democracy the nation adopts (Robinson and White, 1998, p. 32).

The work of Christans et al. (2009) in recognizing the myriad of press systems that exist worldwide is an important one. Despite noting that "developing countries with a basically Western orientation are bound to some intellectual dependence on Western



political philosophies and media theories” (p. 14), the authors state that simply acknowledging one type of democracy and one type of “ideal journalism” is highly problematic. Rather, media systems can take on a variety of different roles based on the philosophical traditions and models of democracy that are particular to their unique contexts. The authors note that while many scholars agree on “liberty” and “equality” as the two basic constituents of democracy, democracy, as practiced on the ground, may be founded on a “creative, even contradictory mix of ideas” and even in societies that have historically venerated democratic ideals, may have variations in the way these democratic ideals are practiced from one location to another, and from one generation to the next (p. 95). Indeed, roles of journalism must be viewed in context. While professional journalists still recognize the dominant liberal model of journalism, views vary on the extent to which they should be impartial observers and monitors of the government (p. 122). Crucially, Christians et al. (2009) point out that the types of roles given to or accepted by the media is “derived largely from the needs experienced by different participants in the political process and from the preferred working practices of the press itself” (p. 123).

Here, Christians et al. (2009) attempt to develop normative theories of the press based on a more comprehensive understanding of democracy and the philosophical traditions that these democratic political systems may be bound by. They note democracy may be classified into the following models: 1) Pluralist democracy – which emphasizes individual freedom and a role of the state restricted to facilitating a free market society; 2) Administrative democracy – where institutions and expert bodies are looked upon to look after the welfare of the people; 3) Civic democracy – where citizens are actively involved in opinion formation and governance such as through participatory media like the Internet; and 4) Direct democracy – where decision making is done by the majority and the government develops ways to listen to the people (p. 26-28). In turn, the philosophical traditions that bound these democratic political systems to their media systems could be divided into the following traditions: 1) Corporatist tradition – where the media is more cooperative and less contestatory to issues of national interest, and more respectful of authority and other social institutions like religion, education, and family; 2) Libertarian tradition – where freedom of expression is most highly valued and a free flow of information is seen as essential to uncovering truth; 3) Social responsibility tradition –

where freedom of the press has to be balanced with responsibility to the public or community such as through a code of ethics, professional norms, self-regulating bodies etc.; and 4) Citizen participation tradition – where the media is seen as belonging to the people and becoming a true voice of citizens in their struggle for collective rights, expression, or emancipation (p. 21-25).

It follows then, according to Christians et al. (2009) that the media system can take on a myriad of roles based on the normative values and model of democracy that exists. These journalism roles include: 1) The monitorial role – where the media takes on the role of informer; 2) The facilitative role – where the media supports and strengthens other institutions and civil society associations and activities; 3) The radical role – where the media acts as the platform for dissenting views; and 4) The collaborative role – where the media collaborates with sources of political and economic power such as in times of war, emergencies, and to serve national interests and development goals (p. 31).

These ideas may be extended to how one may study “journalism crisis” beyond the liberal-democratic ideological framework. Given that there are different models of democracy (institutionalized by the ruling elite), and different types of philosophical traditions that influence expectations of how journalism should be (bound up with society’s general outlook), if the media system takes on roles that suit the requirements of the political system while meeting society’s expectations, the likelihood that the system is deemed to be “in crisis” is going to reduce significantly. It is when there is a disconnect between the two – when the media is acting in accordance with the demands of the political system while falling short of the normative values of journalism expected by the public – when proclamations of a crisis become the loudest. This disconnect is likely to become even wider when the variant of democracy established by the state involves some level of authoritarianism, while the masses have been socialized to think of journalism based on the libertarian tradition (in large part due to influences from the West).

Therefore, a number of important conclusions can be made. First, one must not automatically believe that journalism is “in crisis” when it falls short of the Western liberal

model, or that it has somehow failed to properly transition to this “ideal state of being”. Journalism may exist in a desirable well-functioning state even if it abides by other normative functions besides enabling free expression and political engagement. Second, journalism crisis is contextual and rooted in specific histories. It is influenced by specific forces that exist at particular moments in time and within particular locales. While “journalism crisis” has been broadly defined by scholars as “the collapse of a viable journalism” (McChesney, 2003, p. 299) or journalism “in decline” (Hallin, 1996, p. 244), the definition of journalism crisis is not fixed – its definition is prone to negotiation, contestation, and dynamic change, and it may be defined in different ways by different social groups. A journalism crisis recognized by an oppressed people within a strict authoritarian regime is no crisis at all to the dominant elites within the same system; similarly, parties external to a press system may deem a country’s journalism to be in crisis, but a well-ideologized people living within that system may not view it to be so – this is a point that I will be returning to in my empirical research on Singapore and Hong Kong. From a transnational class perspective, dominant political and corporate elites across national borders may deny the existence of journalism crisis conditions as they continue to use the media to generate profits and forward their own interests, while the global working class may struggle to have their voices heard in what they deem as biased media systems. Third, journalism crisis is a process. The past is significant in influencing the present, and the present, in influencing the future. Old institutional structures, norms and practices are going to have an impact on journalistic regimes even when new systems and practices have been put in place. This suggests that the journalism practices of former colonies in the developing world will continue to be influenced in complex ways by both the practices of their former colonizers, as well as by the unique development of their own journalistic fields post-independence.

Scholars, for instance, have noted the practice of other types of “journalisms” around the world. Xu (2009) discusses the emergence of “development journalism”, commonly practiced in Asia that recognizes the role of journalism in nation-building (p. 359). Emerging from the urgent need of countries in the Asian region to develop quickly in the social, economic and political spheres in the post-colonial era of the 1960s (Richstad, 2000, p. 279), journalists work with the government to “build a national consensus” (Xu, 2009, p. 361), prioritizing goals like political stability, economic growth,

social harmony and regional unity (Mehra, 1989). This strand of journalism also acts as a means to counter Western cultural imperialism, to better suit journalism practices to Asian cultures (Xu, 2009, p. 360). Journalists practicing development journalism can therefore be seen as partners with the government to take on the role of nation-building and empowering the ordinary people, rather than the elite, to “involve them actively in the process of economic, cultural and political development” (Xu, 2009, p. 362); in other words, developmental press, while partnering with the government to achieve set goals for the nation, should not evolve to become propaganda tools for the ruling classes.

That said, development journalism has taken root in many countries in Asia, Latin America and Africa, and principles and practices regarding this type of journalism, as determined largely by the governments in power, remain diverse (Xu, 2009, p. 357). Romano (2005) has pointed out that developmental journalists may take on any of these four roles, that is, of “nation builder”, “government partner”, “agent of empowerment”, and “watchdog and guardian of transparency”. In addition, the press may be classified as either “pro-process” – where it prioritizes the process of development and nation-building, “pro-participation” – where it prioritizes the participation of the ordinary people in public life, and “pro-government” – where it prioritizes the constructive collaboration between the government and the press system (Chalkley, 1980). At this point, there has yet to be any study that standardizes the make-up of development journalism across different countries and cultures (Xu, 2009, p. 366). Given that the developmental press tends to act in partnership with the state, it is uncertain the extent to which it can effectively act as a watchdog to scrutinize the powerful and empower the people to participate in public life – features that have been long espoused by the liberal press model. Consequently, references made to developmental journalism have tended to focus on what make the developmental press model different from, rather than similar to, the liberal press model.

Other types of journalism discussed by scholars present interesting alternatives. Downing (2001), Atton (2002) and Harcup (2011) are strong advocates of “alternative journalism”, which is often tied to citizen journalism and public journalism. Since alternative media do not typically face censorship by the state or corporations, they can bring to the forefront topics and perspectives that are not covered in the mainstream

media, include the voices and interests of groups that are marginalized in society, and adopt a more democratic organizational structure rather than a hierarchical one. Downing (2001) believes that radical alternative media can take on a counter-hegemonic role – they challenge the hegemony of capital and create a more just society by allowing alternative visions and perspectives to be heard (p. 15). Discussions about alternative media may also be tied to the concept of “public journalism”, a reform movement in professional journalism that stresses citizen participation and deliberation, connectedness to community, and a greater diversity of voices and perspectives; its goal is to further democracy by conceiving of its readers as active citizens in the public sphere (Rosen, 1999; Haas, 2007; Ahva, 2012, p. 793). This movement has itself generated debate – notably, it has been critiqued for its lack of autonomy from the public, thereby threatening professional journalism’s claims of impartiality and objectivity (which, as we have seen in Chapter 1, are problematic claims to begin with), as well as its necessary privileging of some voices in the deliberative community over others, thereby increasing the possibility that it might contribute to, rather than alleviate, inequality in its practice (Haas, 2007, p. 38; Ahva, 2012, p. 794). Similarly moving away from the practice of impartial journalism is “advocacy journalism”, in which journalists become representatives of specific interests, speaking on behalf of certain groups to “redress power imbalances in society”, to bring to the forefront perspectives that are under-represented or misrepresented in the mainstream media, with the hopes of influencing “public opinion and key decision makers” (Waisbord, 2009, p. 371).

At the same time, even as I am attempting to problematize “journalism crisis” as it is experienced outside of the Western liberal-democratic ideological framework, I am recognizing that there is value in referencing existing Western journalism crisis literature – as cultures become increasingly hybridized, rejecting Western models and ideas wholesale would prematurely close off areas of reflection and investigation (Alatas, 2010, p. 248; Wang, 2010, p. 5). Instead, Western knowledge can and should still be valued based on its “utility, cogency, or precision” and relevance (Asante, 2010, p. 249), offering insights into the complex tensions and struggles that exist between value systems, and more importantly, the “complex entanglements between imperial strategies and national ambitions...” (Murdock, 2010, p. 138-139). Indeed, depending on the needs and objectives of the researcher, methods and theories established in dominant Western

literature may still be creatively applied to the local context if the researcher deems them to be relevant to the study (Alatas, 2010, p. 245).

In my opinion, it is undeniable that ideas that stem from the West have contributed to global understandings of “good journalism”, adding to the complex interplay between imperial influences and local sensibilities. Notably, I believe these ideas have become entrenched not because they are “Western” and therefore seen as superior, but because they have proven themselves, historically within the local context, to be normative values that are useful to the functioning of that specific society and therefore make a lot of sense to continue to adopt. Where these “Western” values no longer make sense within the local context, or where the dominant elites of that society no longer view them to make sense or beneficial to adopt (based on their own self-interests or otherwise), then these values and ideas become supplanted by local alternatives and the process of ideologizing the masses to these alternatives begins. Either way, the Western influence cannot be ignored – because 400 years of cultural imperialism by the West, coupled with processes of globalization spearheaded by hegemonic players based in the West, cannot be ignored. In epistemological terms then, it is important to recognize that the nature of knowledge about journalism is embedded in such political and economic conditions (Wasserman and De Beer, 2008, p. 430). Therefore, for the purposes of this study, I will be referring to journalism concepts such as objectivity, the watchdog function, free press and truth-telling as they are conceived in Western literature – given Singapore and Hong Kong’s history of colonization by the British and their statuses as Asia’s “global cities”, there is good reason to believe that journalists have been socialized to a great extent by Western-centric values and ideologies. My interviews with communication academics in these two cities have also indicated to me the strong Western influence on journalism education in these two locales. Lecturer Hedwig Alfred from Singapore’s Nanyang Technological University tells me that textbooks that journalism students in Singapore are using are “mostly written in the West”, and Professor Francis Lee from the Chinese University of Hong Kong says he has never taught any other type of journalism model but the liberal one. The question then is, whether these ideas, with their roots in Western literature, have been supplanted by local alternatives that have come to influence local perspectives on how journalism

should be and the practices that govern journalism work locally. That is what my study aims to find out, as it attempts to uncover perceptions of journalism crisis.

I will therefore, in my research, be taking notes from the study of journalism crisis in the West, particularly the US. The view that the American press system is seen to epitomize the liberal model of the press – despite its shortcomings – makes it a worthwhile reference point; the role of the US in the global spread of neoliberal capitalism, liberal democracy and scholarship on what constitutes “good journalism” to the rest of the world, including Asia, adds to its suitability as a point of reference. I will therefore be using the journalism crisis dimensions detailed by academics and news-workers in US to construct the skeleton – the basic framework – to understand issues of concern that may plague the work of journalists in Singapore and Hong Kong, while offering my study respondents the opportunity to bring in other issues not already listed within this framework that may be unique to their specific political, economic, and social contexts, in a bid to further complicate the dominant conception of “journalism crisis”. In other words, I opt here to adopt certain aspects of dominant Western scholarship that I find useful for my research rather than to reinvent the wheel entirely.

I want to point out here that any comparisons I make in my study, as part of my narrative, will be between how journalism crisis is perceived and experienced in Singapore and how it is perceived and experienced in Hong Kong, rather than to compare their versions of a journalism crisis with that found in the West. I am understanding that the scholarship I have gathered about journalism crisis in the West, specifically in the US, is purely from secondary literature, which makes it unsuitable for comparison with the two Asian cities I am studying, in which I have conducted extensive primary research. I will however, in my concluding chapter, reference the US and its global neoliberal drive and how it has contributed to journalism’s decline – or not – in the two Asian cities. I will also be pointing out crisis narratives not discussed in dominant Western literature that must be accounted for when studying media systems subjected to some form of authoritarian control or influence.

Next, with Singapore and Hong Kong as my case studies and with a focus on the ideological, material and discursive, I will now offer a historical overview of the

development of journalism within these two cities. In particular, I will be noting the close relations of Singapore and Hong Kong with the West, the extents to which they are situated within the US-led global projects of neoliberal capitalism and liberal democracy, and how unique local historical experiences and cultural traditions may have come to influence local mindsets, practices, and discourses. I will also offer an overview of the discourses that currently surround the decline of journalism within these two locales, and whether these discourses have been located within a “crisis” framework.



## **Chapter 3.**

### **A Tale of Two “Global Cities”: Contextualizing News and Journalism in Singapore and Hong Kong**

The “global cities” of Singapore and Hong Kong have been chosen as case studies for my research – Singapore is a city-state in Southeast Asia, while Hong Kong is currently a Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China. Both have statuses as media hubs in the Asian region (Curtin, 2010; Wu, 2013), and are key players and beneficiaries of the US-led global neoliberal capitalist economy – both have flourished as home to well-established international financial markets and currently rank as the world’s top two freest economies, according to the Index of Economic Freedom (Index of Economic Freedom, 2015). This suggests that their political and business elites have established networks of alliances with the West and that both territories are particularly susceptible to Western influences and pressures, whether politically, economically, or culturally. They are also thriving urban environments that house a strong knowledge based workforce with a high English literacy, despite having an ethnically Chinese majority; both cities have been previously colonized by the British for more than a century from the early 1800s, which means that their existing institutions, worldviews, norms and practices, may still be heavily influenced by their former British colonizers.

At the same time, Singapore and Hong Kong have never been liberal-democratic. Singapore is considered by scholars as an “authoritarian” state (Rodan, 2003, p. 519; Harvey, 2005, p. 86) – it features a ruling party which places restrictions on opposition parties, exercises strict controls on the media system and labour force, and is focused on a highly planned “state-directed brand of capitalism” (Ozawa et al., 2001). Hong Kong too, has never been granted liberal democracy by the British pre-1997, nor the Chinese after the 1997 handover; the authoritarian Chinese government, today, has

the authority to determine how much power it wishes to assign to the Hong Kong administration, as well as the city's pace of democratization (Boniface and Alon, 2010, p. 795).

A difference, however, lies in the extent to which each city's population has been ideologized to be subservient to the authority imposed by the state. As this section will illustrate, the Singapore government has boldly proclaimed its rejection of the American system of liberal democracy, choosing only to selectively and strategically adopt neoliberal reforms, while attempting to supplant liberal-democratic ideals with local alternatives in the name of the public good; this is a strategy that has yielded much success. In the case of Hong Kong however, this is a society that is a firm believer of the *laissez-faire* approach (Chu, 2004, p. 148), embracing wholeheartedly the ideals of the free market and the liberal strand of democracy, and having not been ideologized otherwise in any significant ways, has been known to react strongly to attempts by the Chinese state to curtail its freedoms. As both these societies stand at important historical junctures – Singapore's founding father Lee Kuan Yew passed away in 2015 and Hong Kong's Umbrella Revolution saw violent clashes take place in the city's streets in 2014 – this signals an opportune moment to discover the way news-workers in these two cities view the state of news and journalism within their specific locales.

In this chapter, I will present a comprehensive look at how perceptions on journalism ideals and crisis among news-workers in Singapore and Hong Kong have been influenced by the exposure of these societies to Western pressures and ideas, and how they have interacted in complex ways with local historical experiences, philosophical traditions and cultural practices to create views of journalism that vary significantly from each other. Given that the perception and experience of journalism crisis is rooted in specific histories and is a process influenced by past events, a historical examination of the development of journalism in these two cities, both at the ideological and material levels, is first necessary. I will also offer an overview of the discourses currently surrounding concerns related to journalism decline within these two locales.

### **3.1. Singapore: An Economic Ally but an Ideological Challenger to the West**

Singapore's history has been closely tied to that of Britain's from the early 1800s. It was founded as a British Trading Settlement in 1819 by British statesman, Sir Stamford Raffles. Singapore officially became British possession in 1824 and subsequently, a Crown Colony of the British Empire in 1867, for its role as a key trading port in the Malay Archipelago for the British East India Company. Singapore was ruled by the British till 1963, except for the period during the Second World War when the Japanese occupied it from 1942 to 1945 (Lee, 2010, p. 1). During this time, Singapore's growth was characterized by openness and free trade as dictated by its British colonizers – drawn in to conform with the requirements of the “Pax Britannica” international historic bloc premised on liberalism – and acted as a commercial base for the British in the Malacca Straits, between the Indian and Pacific Oceans; it subsequently prospered as a duty-free port for opium and other goods (Mahizhnan, 1999; Prashad, 2007). Indeed, the British played a key role in the prosperity of Singapore in the early years.

From the late 1940s, during the Cold War, with the UK as a key ally of the US in its fight against communism and the Soviet Union, Singapore became aligned with the NATO Allies and began a four decade-long effort to weed out communism (Channel NewsAsia, Nov 4, 2014). In turn, Singapore benefited from the geopolitical tensions of the Cold War – like several other countries in Asia like Taiwan, South Korea, Indonesia and Malaysia, its loyalty was rewarded with access to US technology, markets and capital (Gabriel, 1997). This created the perception that conforming to the demands of the dominant players in the world order would result in substantial gains for the developing states in Asia; dominant players, in seeming to care for the collective, would also gain the consent of these weaker developing states to maintain their supremacy (Cox, 1978, p. 7).

After 1963, the British relinquished political control but continued to maintain a military presence on the island for purposes of defence and foreign affairs until 1971 (Lee, 2010, p. 1). From 1963 to 1965, Singapore entered into a political union with the

Federation of Malaya and formed the Federation of Malaysia, but ideological disagreements and racial riots resulted in Singapore leaving the Federation of Malaysia on 9 August 1965 to become a sovereign republic, despite having no natural resources or an economic safety net (Seow, 1998, p. 1).

After independence, Singapore's structure of governance began to take shape under its first ruling party, the People's Action Party, helmed by Lee Kuan Yew as prime minister. Two ideological frameworks perpetuated by the party to shape Singaporean consciousness had a direct impact on the country's resistance towards of the liberal ideologies of the West – 1) the “survivalist” ideology disseminated from the country's independence in 1965, and 2) the “Asian values” ideology disseminated from the early 1980s. I will elaborate on each of these in turn.

To begin, the ideology of survivalism was entirely aligned with Singapore's drive towards economic viability, self-reliance and social stability after it became an independent nation in 1965. It had no natural resources at that time, and could not turn to the Malayan hinterland for economic safety (Seow, 1998, p. 1). The Singapore government also urgently needed to create strong bonds between the different ethnic and cultural communities that made up its populace, especially after the devastating racial riots that took place just the year before. Singapore was an immigrant society made up primarily of the Chinese, followed by the Malays, Indians and Eurasians; each community spoke its own language and adopted a wide range of religious faiths such as Christianity, Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism, making it more challenging to create social cohesion among them (Banerjee, 2002). Furthermore, Singapore was placed in a vulnerable position within its region – it was a secular state set within the largely Muslim Malay Archipelago – relations with its neighbouring state of Malaysia was shaky and plagued by racial conflicts. As such, the government had to take steps to mould a “symbolic collective identity” and ultimately, to “produce and construct a nation” (Banerjee, 2002, p. 525). Singapore's first Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, called on Singaporeans to unite in support of a “comprehensive survival strategy”, one which would give its ruling People's Action Party “a sweeping mandate for strong and decisive rule”, setting the foundations for a legitimate authoritarian rule of the newly independent

country (Means, 1996, p. 105). Democracy, at that time, became a “distant goal to be contemplated only when national survival [was] finally secured” (Sim, 2001, p. 53).

At the same time, extensive efforts were made by the Singapore government to strengthen the country economically. The Marxian perspective of base and superstructure was reflected in the way the Singapore government became part of the superstructure that worked to support the economic base of Singapore society, working with the capitalist class to forward its interests (Marx and Engels, 1976). A key strategy of the government was to align Singapore with the West, in the hopes of reaping the benefits by becoming a part of the larger political-economic structure – an international historic bloc – established by dominant Western players in the world order (Cox, 1987, p. 253). After the Second World War with the rise of the US, the Singapore government took strategic steps to position itself squarely within the US-led global capitalist economy. The government introduced English as Singapore’s lingua franca, using it as a language that could bridge the different ethnic groups and allow the country to thrive in a globalized world (Lee, 2010, p. 5). It also welcomed Western multinational companies with open arms in a bid to kick-start an industrialization programme that would help create a much-needed large-scale expansion of its job market and solve its massive unemployment problem; at the same time, it used these multinational companies as a bridge to the rest of the world while encouraging the transfer of capital, technology and management know-how into the city-state (Chua, 1998; Mahizhnan, 1999). In the 1980s, when the US and UK spearheaded a global neoliberal drive, Singapore continued to maintain an economy open to foreign investment, welcoming the flow of transnational capital into the city-state that created immense economic growth.

Within the territory however, the government was putting in place strict policies to maintain dominant-subordinate relations of production. It created an institutional framework that greatly reduced the power of labour – it called on unions and workers to work together with the government in national development, using again the “survivalist” rhetoric to consensually remove power from the trade unions that would traditionally engage in collective bargaining for improvements in the workplace; rather than taking on an adversarial role, labour-management relations would be more cooperative, with unions affiliated to a National Trades Union Congress, so that the workforce could be

mobilized for rapid industrialization (Wong, 2000, p. 3). At the same time, Singapore had continued the legacy of setting up government-linked corporations (GLCs) – that is, corporations owned by the government that undertook commercial activities – in areas such as telecommunications, airlines, utilities and ports, modelled after the commercial system of its British colonizers (Shaw, 1989, p. 18; Tipton, 1998, p. 321). GLCs began to dominate its domestic economy, producing as much as 60% of its gross domestic product (CCTV.com, Sep 5, 2012), placing Singapore’s model of development squarely within the category of “state-led capitalism” typical of Asia’s developmental states. Despite this being a direct challenge to the US’ free market ideologies, Singapore’s loyalty to the US during the Cold War saw the US continuing to back the regime, in exchange for its allegiance in the fight against communism (Hadiz, 2006, p. 12).

Over time, Singapore’s economic strategies began to pay off, allowing the country to reap substantial benefits from the US-led global capitalist order. Within the next 20 to 25 years after it gained independence, Singapore experienced tremendous economic growth with its industrialization programme. It became known as one of the Four Tigers of Asia, alongside Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan, as part of the “East Asian Miracle”. These four countries, together with Japan, achieved a “higher growth rate than most other countries or regions on the planet”; it increased its share of total exports from the Third World from just 6% to a high 34% (Prashad, 2007, p. 245). Seeing the results of its state-led developmental strategies, Singapore, in the 1980s, began to mould itself into an international business centre for high-tech industries and services (Economic Committee Report, 1986, p. 12), and then in the 1990s as a global city-state that united global economic, social and technological systems (Chua, 1998; Yeoh and Chang, 2001; Prashad, 2007). Even in the Asian Economic Crisis of 1997-8, Singapore weathered the storm well, experiencing a less than 10% devaluation of its currency compared to the worse-hit countries of Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia (Beng and Chew, 2002, p. 65); not requiring bailouts from the IMF and World Bank, its system of state-led capitalism was not directly challenged by neoliberal structural reforms imposed by these international agencies.

With Singaporeans benefiting tremendously from the development strategies and policies of the government – full employment was reached in Singapore as early as the

1970s, workers had access to affordable housing, healthcare, education, and old age security through the Central Provident Fund, and standards of living were rising as wages went up – the Singapore government was able to maintain its dominance in Singapore society, establishing a broad base of consent for its rule both ideologically and materially, by ensuring that the less powerful were offered (more than) satisfactory returns as a result of their conforming to requirements set by the state, as it supported a formidable capitalist class.

Singapore's nation-building project extended to the city-state's media system, and the same "survivalist" ideology was used as the rationale to establish tight controls on the country's media system. The Western press model, which defined the media as a watchdog of the government and the "Fourth Estate", was replaced by a development journalism model which favoured a cooperative press that would help the government achieve social stability and economic growth (Latif, 1996; Richstad, 2000; Sim, 2001; Bokhorst-Heng, 2002). The mass media became what Sinclair et al. (1996) described as the "cultural arm" of nation-building, where common references, agendas and images could be derived and disseminated across a diverse population. According to Bokhorst-Heng (2002), the Singapore government was explicit in declaring that the freedom of the news media came second to the "definition and integrity of the nation and to the purpose of the elected government", according to its first Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, and that its key role was to "contribute to nation building" according to its current Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (p. 559-560). In an interesting revelation, Birch (1993) has stated that this may be a "legitimizing strategy for keeping PAP in power", where the media complies with "staging the myths, generated by government, in order to manipulate and control social consciousness" (p. 74). What makes Singapore different is that it actually admits to what it is doing. Similarly, De Bary (1998) has also described this strategy as helping the government to "preserve and increase its centralized political authority... to guide the nation-building process through close social control" (p. 2). Its myth of a "fragile nation" prompts greater acceptance of citizens towards the government's policies (Sim, 2001, p. 52); the authoritarian regime becomes tolerable, even necessary, given that it is able to protect the well-being of Singaporeans and help them lead materially fulfilling lives (Sim, 2001, p. 53).

Local media content has therefore been made to reflect this element of nation-building. In particular, the discourse of “Asian values” was introduced into the country in 1982, when the Singapore government sought to replace the achievement-oriented work ethic that stressed “individualism” with a less politically and socially threatening “communitarianism” (Lee, 2010, p. 5), i.e. when collective interests would be prioritized over individual goals (Chua, 1993, p. 27-28). Moral education was introduced in primary and secondary schools as compulsory curriculum in 1982 to impart Confucian ethics to young Singaporeans (Lee, 2010, p. 6). In 1991, a White Paper was unveiled in Parliament highlighting Singapore’s new “national ideology” – i.e. five Confucian-derived “shared values” that stressed 1) nation before community and society above self, 2) family as the basic unit of society, 3) regard and community support for the individual, 4) consensus instead of contention, and 5) racial and religious harmony (White Paper, 1991, p. 10). The government’s attempt to shape Singapore society along such communitarian lines has had a deep impact on the way journalists work in Singapore. As part of the “Asian values” discourse, the media adopts “traditional values in the face of growing Western influence in Asia” (Natarajan and Hao, 2003, p. 302), such as a respect for authority and keeping silent for the greater good of social harmony (Hukill, 2000). This has resulted in the journalistic norm in Singapore of “reporting with sensitivity” (Massey and Chang, 2002, p. 989) and the avoidance of conflict elements in stories where words or information may provoke certain groups in society (Bayuni, 1996; Nasution, 1996; Xu, 1998). The press has taken on this collaborative role given their knowledge of Singapore’s circumstances and their desire to help Singapore succeed (Christians et al., 2009, p. 199), although the extent to which they are fully consensual of this partnership and its forms is still in question.

Critical scholars have had much to say about the Singapore’s government’s “Asian values” discourse. Sim (2001, p. 45) feels that Singapore has successfully managed to “avoid the path to liberal democracy” through its use of this discourse, a particularly impressive feat considering that this city-state’s economic successes have created an increasingly vocal and liberal middle class that would traditionally threaten the rule of strong authoritarian regimes. Sim (2001, p. 47) agrees with Castells (1988, p. 78) that the Singapore government rules not simply by coercion but also by consensus – epitomizing the Gramscian notion of “hegemony” to perfection, and creating a highly



stable political regime that is “likely to continue indefinitely” (O’Leary and Coplin, 1983, p. 21). A large part of its exercise of hegemony can be attributed to the use of “Asian values” to criticize Western liberal democracy as inferior and to call Western authorities out for wrongfully labeling other types of regimes as undemocratic. It creates “an aura of cultural legitimacy and regional solidarity against the West”, encouraging other Asian nations to emulate its model as an alternative to Western liberal democracy (Sim, 2001, p. 47). “Asian values” are thus not just a set of cultural values, but also an ideological and political response to Western domination and the creation of a consensual nation (Sim, 2001, p. 49); in the process, “authoritarian rule and non-democratic practices” become justified in the name of serving the greater good (Mahbubani, 1998; Lee, 2010, p. 6). Such ideological contestation can be seen as a manifestation of class struggle in global capitalism, where capitalist actors drawn into the vortex of global capitalism may still remain highly fragmented by nation-states and unequal development (Robinson, 2004, p. 43); working in their own self-interests, these capitalist actors may still have conflicting interests and are in competition with each other, signaling a lack of internal unity within the transnational capitalist class (p. 45-47).

In line with the communitarian aspect of “Asian values”, the Western view of the media as the Fourth Estate, offering checks and balances on the government, has been frowned upon by Singapore politicians like Lee Kuan Yew, who said in 1971, that “politics are only for professional politicians, and no person or group of persons, organizations or associations may comment on national policies without first joining or forming a political party” (Seow, 1998, p. 27). Indeed, the Singapore media has been depoliticised, according to Mauzy and Milne (2002) – while taking on a primary role of informing, educating and entertaining the populace with the intention of constructing a singular national identity, it is made to steer clear of sensitive political topics (Tan, 1990; Birch, 1993). Even as such positions adopted by the Singapore government on democracy have received criticism from the Carter administration in the US, and the government’s stance on press freedom has been critiqued by the Reagan and Bush administrations, Lee (2000) has not wavered, stating that: “We were not following [the American] pattern for development and progress, that as a country developed its free market economy and enjoyed prosperity, it should become more like America, democratic and free, with no restrictions on the press. Because we do not comply with

their norms, American liberals will not accept that our government can be good... In Eastern societies, the main objective is to have a well-ordered society so that everyone can enjoy freedom to the maximum... America should not foist its system indiscriminately on other societies where it would not work” (p. 491-492).

Indeed, any deviation from a pro-government perspective in the media may be met with severe consequences. The government has the right to restrict the circulation of any local or foreign publication found guilty of “distorted reporting” (Means, 1996, p. 108). A number of agencies have been tasked to regulate the media and culture in Singapore; led by the Ministry of Communications and Information, many of these regulatory bodies were established in the 1990s and early 2000s, including the National Arts Council, Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore, and Media Development Authority of Singapore (Lee, 2010, p. 9-10).

Several laws have also been put in place to ensure that the media does not fall out of line. The Newspaper and Printing Presses Act and the Undesirable Publications Act, for example, give the government the authority to refuse the renewal of licenses of media companies and to censor or ban publications that may cause misunderstandings between the government and the people of Singapore (Bokhorst-Heng, 2002). Foreign publications found to interfere with domestic politics may also have their circulations restricted; publications that have been subject to restrictions or bans include *The Economist*, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, *The Asian Wall Street Journal* and *Asiaweek* (Lee, 2005b). The country’s Internal Security Act is another that gives authorities the power to “block the circulation of news deemed to incite violence, arouse racial or religious tensions, interfere in domestic politics, or threaten public order, the national interest, or national security” (Freedom House, 2014). At the same time, critics of Singapore politics may face the possibility of libel suits, where the courts have often ruled in favour of plaintiffs from the ruling party while forcing the defendants into bankruptcy or destitution (Means, 1996). Limits within which the press can critique the government, however, are not clearly defined – once these invisible “out of bounds” markers are crossed though, journalists will have to face the consequences (Bokhorst-Heng, 2002). It is no surprise then that self-censorship is prevalent among news workers in Singapore – there is little to no criticism of government actions or policies and

government speeches are often simply reprinted in the press, with the media acting as the government's mouthpiece (Lent, 1989; Sim, 2001; Bokhorst-Heng, 2002).

Government regulation of the Singapore media is made easier by the structure of the media system. Singapore's mainstream media scene is a duopoly between two media organizations, the Singapore Press Holdings (SPH) and the Media Corporation of Singapore (Mediacorp), both of which have strong ties with the government and are regulated by the Singapore government's Ministry of Communications and Information; SPH is publicly listed but several of its top management shareholders are state-owned entities like NTUC Income Insurance, Singapore Telecommunications, and the Development Bank of Singapore (SPH Investor Relations, Oct 9, 2013), while Mediacorp is entirely owned by the investment arm of the Singapore government Temasek Holdings. Notable here is that while the Singapore news media system may seem "state-owned" on the outset, they operate based on a commercialized model – as corporations that undertake commercial activities, compete for audiences and advertising dollars, and contribute to the country's gross domestic product; Singapore Press Holdings additionally needs to ensure positive returns for its shareholders. This again indicates the selective and strategic adoption of neoliberal principles in Singapore – while they are backed by well-established government-linked entities, they exist as corporations competing for advertising revenue.

Currently, these two organizations dominate the free to air television and radio channels as well as the mainstream newspapers and magazines of the country (Lee, 2005b). SPH monopolizes the print media in Singapore, producing the English-language national daily *The Straits Times* and has stakes in the telecommunications and cable television sector of Singapore. Mediacorp operates the free-to-air television channels in the country including Channel 5, which plays in English, Channel 8 which plays in Mandarin, TV12 which plays programmes in Malay and Tamil, and Channel NewsAsia. Mediacorp also manages the majority of the radio stations in the country and produces a free narrow-sheet newspaper, *Today*. While a large number of foreign channels are available to Singaporeans via cable television operator Singapore Cable Vision (SCV), programming is only available in the form of "censored rebroadcasts over tightly controlled cable television networks" (Chan, 1994). At the same time, the private

ownership of satellite dishes is banned in Singapore, for the reason that these might bring in “unregulated socially and culturally detrimental programming” (Chadha and Kavoori, 2000, p. 421).

At this point, the Internet is the freest medium in Singapore that allows citizens to disseminate ideas to the masses. In 2011 in particular, the Internet became a critical medium during the country’s general election, when Singaporeans began to flood the Internet and social media with their political views and expressions of discontent towards the government (Macan-Marker, 2011). This democratization of voices online served as a game-changer in that election – Singaporean novelist Catherine Lim pointed out that “the rise of a younger, more articulate electorate, the power of the Internet and the social media... allowed free discussion on usually censored topics” (Macan-Marker, 2011). Sensing the desire of young voters for a system that would listen to them (Macan-Marker, 2011), the Singapore government took an unprecedented step to loosen its control on online political campaigning and political discussions, changing the Constitution and election laws to allow election advertising on the Internet, such as through social networking sites, blogs, podcasts and instant messaging (Mydans, 2011); this move benefitted the opposition parties immensely, having had no previous ability to campaign to the masses through mainstream mass media channels that were controlled by the ruling party. Looser controls on alternative media websites also increased the political efficacy of Singaporeans. Alternative media websites like Temasek Review and The Online Citizen allowed citizens to comment anonymously in political discussion forums, and provided readers with more objective news reports and critical commentaries that they could share with others online (Ortmann, 2011). This sudden abundance of information online created a more politically interested citizenry almost overnight.

Notably however, the government has not renounced punishment post-publication on the Internet – publishers are not immune to prosecution if they break the law in cyberspace (George, 2005). Prohibited material as defined in the Singapore’s Internet Code of Practice introduced by the government includes that which is “objectionable on the ground of public interest, public morality, public order, public security, national harmony, or is otherwise prohibited by applicable Singapore laws”

(Singapore Broadcasting Authority, 1997). These include material that feature nudity, explicit sex, advocates homosexuality, extreme violence or endorses ethnic, racial or religious intolerance. Material that may incite “hatred or contempt” for the government and “excites disaffection” is also an offence under the Sedition Act, also applicable on the Internet (Rodan, 2003, p. 511). To enforce these rulings, the government is able to monitor Internet traffic relatively easily because Singapore’s Internet Service Providers operate in a self-contained system where traffic is not routed via the United States (Rodan, 1998) – all Internet connections are routed through government proxy servers that filter out “objectionable material” (Rodan, 2003, p. 512), unless Internet users are tech-savvy enough to hook up to virtual private networking servers that give them a foreign IP address. A highly publicized incident in recent years for instance, saw for the first time a blogger, Roy Ngerng, being taken to court by Singapore’s Prime Minister Lee Hsieng Loong for defamation; he had written in a blog article about Singaporeans’ retirement money, which is locked in a Central Provident Fund managed by the government, alleging the misappropriation of these funds (Neo, 2014). In another well-publicized court case, the former editor of the sociopolitical blog The Real Singapore Ai Takagi and her husband Yang Kaiheng were charged under the Sedition Act for promoting “feelings of ill will and hostility between different classes of the population of Singapore” (Chelvan, 2016); Yang was subsequently jailed for eight months for sedition. In the same year, 17-year old Amos Yee was issued a second jail term for his social media postings that were deemed “critical of Christianity and Islam”; his first jail term of five weeks the previous year was the result of likening the late Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore’s first prime minister, to Jesus Christ, violating the country’s “zero tolerance approach towards insults of race and religion” (BBC News, Sep 29, 2016).

In June 2013, in what was seen by many as a major step backwards, the Singapore government imposed new restrictions on domestic news websites, requiring them to be individually licensed on a yearly basis if they met two criteria, i.e. if they report on average an article per week on Singapore’s domestic affairs over a period of two months, and have at least 50,000 unique visitors from Singapore each month over a period of two months (Wong, 2013). Under these new licensing rules, online news sites must remove content that is “against the public interest, public security, or national harmony” and therefore in breach of Singapore’s Media Development Authority (MDA)

guidelines within 24 hours, once they are notified to do so (Wong, 2013). As well, these sites must put up a performance bond of S\$50,000 (Wong, 2013) – a sum that citizen journalists can ill afford. Although the Singapore government has assured citizens that these regulations only apply to sites that report on domestic news, in a bid to make news media in Singapore more accountable, many Singaporeans worry that these rules would stifle personal blogs and news commentary websites (Magpile, 2013). The Media Development Authority had mentioned that if blogs begin to act like news sites, they too would need to be evaluated accordingly. Frustrated Singaporeans organized a 2,500 person protest on 8 June 2014 against online media censorship, but the rulings remained unchanged (Magpile, 2013).

Interestingly, even as the Singapore government exercises considerable control over its media system, the city-state has positioned itself as the bastion of neoliberal capitalist media, promoting the country as a “vibrant global media city” and “Asian media marketplace”, with the Media Development Authority set up to attract the world’s most prominent media companies in broadcasting, publishing, cinema, music and digital media to establish bases there (Media Development Authority Singapore, 2003). In what has been described as a “vigorous promotion of Singapore as an infocommunication hub for the Asian region” (Rodan, 2003, p. 504), the government has worked to attract international broadcasters and producers to set up their regional programming and production facilities in the country. Interestingly, this move has been met with considerable success. Leading media and information technology companies from the developed West, like BBC, CNBC, and Discovery Networks, have been undeterred by the country’s strict media controls and have chosen Singapore as the base for their regional headquarters, drawn by the country’s strategic location, outstanding infrastructure and cost advantages of the move (Rodan, 2003). Singapore is also the base for several Western publications such as Financial Times, International New York Times, The Economist, and the Wall Street Journal (SG Press Centre, 2015); interactions between foreign news-workers and Singaporean news-workers would likely influence how journalism is perceived in this country.

Going forward, it seems unlikely that the Singapore government or its media system will be adopting the liberal-democratic model anytime soon, if at all. While the

younger population in Singapore views liberal democracy as an attractive alternative, and has shown a preference for the government to “follow rather than lead popular opinion”, Sim (2001, p. 59) feels that the Singapore population’s desire for democracy remains subordinated to their desire for economic prosperity.

This sentiment was amplified as the city-state mourned the death of its founding father Lee Kuan Yew; he passed away in March 2015 at the age of 91. As Western media described Lee’s leadership of the country as controversial due to his tight controls on the media, and his views on political opposition, and corporal punishment, Singaporeans reacted with angry fervor on social media, defending Lee’s actions as necessary for Singapore to attain the success that it had today (Singh, 2015; Wu, 2015). Subsequently, the general election in Singapore in September 2015 saw the late Lee’s People’s Action Party achieve a landslide victory (Channel NewsAsia, Sep 12, 2015). It seems then that the returns that the Singapore government have been able to deliver, coupled with the deeply entrenched ideologies of survivalism and “Asian values”, have sufficiently enabled the Singapore government to continue its authoritative rule over the country with broad based consent from the people. When it comes to governance, the case study of Singapore clearly illustrates how state power can successfully create a historic bloc capable of keeping dominant players in positions of power.

At the level of public discourse, there has yet to be any discussion relating journalism in Singapore to the framework of a “journalism crisis”. While many studies on Singapore revolve around the government’s strict control of the media, there is little to no academic research that examines the idea of “journalism crisis” in a more holistic sense in Singapore, that extend to areas such as the commercialization of the press, the availability of funding for news and journalism, and the challenges posed by new media on the traditional advertiser-supported press model in the country. This leads one to wonder if this simply indicates that problems have yet to arise in these areas, or that no research study has actually attempted to meaningfully connect the dots.

Some scattered online social commentaries and news reports seem to indicate signs of trouble. Both Singapore Press Holdings and Mediacorp, despite still being highly profitable and experiencing no major job cuts, have experienced a drop in their

advertising revenue and circulation numbers. Singapore Press Holdings' advertising revenue has in fact been dropping year on year since 2012. In 2014, advertising revenue from its newspapers and magazines fell by 6% (S\$59.5 million) from the previous year, and its circulation revenues witnessed a drop of 6.8% for its newspapers (S\$51.3 million) and 4.9% for its magazines (S\$9.7 million) (SPH Media Releases, 2014); Yeo (2014) states that a likely reason could be "the general population's increasing preference for online media compared to traditional print media". In 2015, Singapore Press Holdings' advertising revenue for its media business dropped by a further 7.4% from 2014 (SPH Media Releases, 2015). Singapore Press Holdings is largely able to cushion their drop in profits due to their diversification into the real-estate business. As for Mediacorp, the organization's figures in 2013 saw a big 42.1% decrease in operating profit from S\$44.4 million to S\$25.7 million, partly due to a "weak advertising market and investments in new product lines" (Today Online, Aug 30, 2013). Its Chief Executive Officer Shaun Seow says the softening global economy in 2012 resulted in markets scaling back on advertising expenses. To keep revenues up, Mediacorp has invested in "content production and digital assets", as well as offered "more innovative marketing solutions that cut across multiple media platforms", according to Seow. In 2014, figures continued to slide, with operating profits at just S\$11.6 million; this was again attributed to the company's investment in "new product lines, content and production capabilities" amid a changing media landscape (Mediacorp, 2014). For instance, according to Seow, money was invested to build up Mediacorp's Toggle website, which would allow audiences to view content across multiple devices at a fee.

Online social commentaries have given their views on the matter. Blogs such as The News World Disorder have attributed these profit losses to the pull of the Internet, noting that younger Singaporeans are turning to the internet to get their entertainment and news (The News World Disorder, Oct 25, 2007). On another alternative news website The Independent Singapore, an article published online on 8 November 2013 noted that the drop in circulation and advertising revenue for Singapore Press Holdings has prompted changes to the way news is covered by that organization, in a bid to cut costs and money spent on manpower. New cost-cutting measures announced by its Chief Executive Officer Alan Chan and Editor in Chief Patrick Daniel include sending just one reporter out to cover an event and then writing it up and depositing it in a centralized



pool for other newspapers under the company umbrella to pick up and reshape according to their newspaper's needs. The newsrooms will also be revamped to "make print-and-digital reporting seamless" (The Independent Singapore, Nov 8, 2013).

In sum, it is worthy to investigate, given changes to the media landscape, if there are indeed perceptions of "journalism crisis" in the city-state and where these crisis concerns lie. The Singapore government may have succeeded in re-ideologizing the public away from Western liberal-democratic ideals to embrace its survivalist ideology and "Asian values" rhetoric, but has the widespread use of new media created greater expectations of liberal democracy in the city-state and hurt the trust of the public in the mainstream media? Have the decreasing profits of news organizations increased fears of a crisis of financial viability and triggered concerns of a crisis due to capitalism's inherent profit-seeking tendencies, in which news-workers are being exploited to maintain profit margins and the quality of journalism is compromised? Ultimately, how is a journalism crisis, if any, perceived and experienced in a society where the state has traditionally taken on the role of regulating the press in the name of the public good?

### **3.2. Hong Kong: An Authoritarian "Big Brother" and a Liberal Outlook under Threat**

To understand the workings of Hong Kong's media system, one must first understand the political-economic context within which this system has been a part. From the 1800s, Hong Kong became a bridge between China and the West – it was occupied by the British in 1841 and was ceded to them when the Treaty of Nanking was signed in 1842. In 1898, the New Territories were leased to the British for 99 years, ending in 1997. Capitalism thrived under British colonial rule – the Chinese chose to leave the territory in British hands even after the triumph of communism in China in 1949 due to strategic and economic reasons – and the colony became the world's "economic gateway" to China (Boniface and Alon, 2010, p. 792). Like Singapore, Hong Kong's prosperity under the British ensured widespread consent for the continued dominance of the "Pax Britannica" international historic bloc, premised on liberalism. During its occupation, the British gave ultimate political authority to the British governors and their

legislators to rule over Hong Kong, creating a system that was politically undemocratic (Boniface and Alon, 2010, p. 793).

British governance of Hong Kong, before the 1997 handover to China, shaped the society in fundamental ways, instilling in it the value of liberalism, despite never allowing it to be fully democratic. This is evident from the laissez-faire approach it implemented to drive Hong Kong's development, and the freedom it gave to the Hong Kong press system. I will elaborate on each of these in turn.

Unlike other countries in East Asia like Singapore, Taiwan, Japan and South Korea, Hong Kong became a part of the Asian economic miracle not from state-led policies typical of developmental states – where the state would spearhead the development policies, protect domestic markets, financially aid capitalists, establish state enterprises, and/or render less power to the workers (Chu, 2004, p. 147) – but rather as a “capitalist paradise where laissez faire is observed” (Friedman and Friedman, 1980; Chu, 2004, p. 148), characterized by low taxation, almost free port trade, and reducing the role of the government in leading the economy (Index of Economic Freedom, 2015). More specifically, between 1945 and before the handover to the Chinese in 1997, Hong Kong's economy went through three stages. When industrialization began in Hong Kong in the 1950s and '60s, the British colonial government adopted a small-government, free-market approach to industrial development. The government's role was mainly to create the regulatory framework and physical infrastructure to facilitate the growth of the free market, becoming a part of the superstructure that worked to secure the economic base and maintain the power of the capitalist class. Only in the 1970s, after civil unrest in 1966 triggered by a rise in Star Ferry prices and in 1967, due to labour disputes within the territory and the Chinese Cultural Revolution, did the colonial government attempt a period of “positive non-interventionism” (Chu, 2004, p. 149). During this time, the government introduced social reforms such as a ten-year housing programme, nine-year free and compulsory education, and a reform of the Employment Ordinance that governed employment conditions in Hong Kong (p. 149). Subsequent attempts at developmental support were lackluster though – government efforts to give direction to the economy often lacked clear policy goals and/or funding and research support, a far cry from the state-led industrialization policies of other developmental states in the

region (p. 149). When the US and UK spearheaded the global neoliberal drive in the 1980s, Hong Kong's economy kept to its free market principles, allowing the city to prosper from the flow of transnational capital into the territory.

Hong Kong's adoption of the *laissez-faire*, small-government approach could be attributed to the colonial nature of the territory – while its leaders, who saw themselves as “stewards of the British Empire”, were intent on maintaining the economic prosperity of Hong Kong so that the goal of endless capital accumulation could be had for the dominant players of the Pax Britannica historic bloc, there was a general lack of a national “will to develop” (Chu, 2004, p. 150). At the same time, the lack of developmental intervention by the state was not criticized because the population experienced neither economic distress nor widespread unemployment – the masses were able to obtain returns satisfactory enough to remain consensual to the authority of the British. Over time, the dominant-subordinate relations of production became relatively fixed in Hong Kong society. Even when unemployment and underemployment peaked among middle-aged workers in the 1990s, the workers had such weak organization and bargaining power that they were incapable of affecting government policies significantly (Chu, 2004, p. 151).

As for Hong Kong's press system, its evolution could be traced back to the 1840s, when it became a refuge for political dissidents fleeing persecution from the imperial Chinese government, and revolutionaries who used Hong Kong as a base to rally support for overthrowing the imperial Chinese regime (Lai, 2007, p. 8). An anti-authority Chinese press began to thrive in Hong Kong, and this early Chinese press was predominantly concerned with Chinese politics. After the Second World War, in 1948, the Chinese Communist Party launched two newspapers *Ta Kung Pao* and *Wen Wei Po* in Hong Kong, and the Nationalist Taiwan Kuomintang launched the *Hong Kong Times* a year later, beginning an ideological tug of war for Chinese nationalism that coincided with the Communist takeover of mainland China. These partisan newspapers actively disseminated propaganda for their political parties (Lai, 2007, p. 9). However, because there was no direct challenge to colonial authority, the British colonial government accorded substantial freedom to the press in Hong Kong to be critical of Chinese politics. Laws were put in place but exercised only if needed; these included the Seditious

Publication Ordinance, the Printers and Publication Ordinance, the Emergency Regulations (Amendment) Ordinance, and the Control of Publication (Consolidation) Ordinance, established largely to prevent the publication of material that would damage or harm the British establishment (Lai, 2007, p. 9).

While the partisan press was heavily subsidized by political parties, their circulation saw a steady decline in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as a commercial press system began to take over, creating a free and competitive media system supported by advertising and based in neoliberal principles. This could be attributed to a growing demography of locally born Hong Kongers who were less concerned with Chinese politics and nationalism, and the rise in business and advertising opportunities within the territory as more rich business people left mainland China for Hong Kong (Lai, 2007, p. 10). The commercial press, mostly owned by wealthy businessmen, differed from the partisan press in that its views on Chinese politics were “more or less independent”, avoiding oppositional or alternative viewpoints to official lines and moving away from dabbling in local politics, focusing instead on providing the public with information on local affairs and entertainment news, so as to avoid run-ins with the authorities (Lai, 2007, p. 10).

As the 1997 handover drew closer, there was a widespread perception that Hong Kong society would be significantly altered by the transition. Fears of China’s powerful political influence, capable of coopting Hong Kong’s social and economic institutions, curtailing the people’s civil liberties, and constraining the media were expressed as the handover became imminent (Chan and Lee, 2007, p. 127).

Leading up to the handover, there was a marked change in the nature of Hong Kong’s press system. The late 1980s and ‘90s saw the emergence of new political journals and newspapers, resulting in the creation of a critical press. Lai (2007, p. 180) attributed this to the process of de-colonization, when the British colonial government held less political sway and was, at the same time, consciously releasing their legal hold on the Hong Kong media system. During this “political power vacuum”, British control over Hong Kong was diminishing while the Chinese had not yet fully established its legitimate authority over the territory; Lai (2007, p. 180) noted that “in anticipation of the

political changeover, the public tended to support a resilient and free press”, founded upon their skepticism towards a new Chinese administration and increasing anxiety over the future of Hong Kong’s civil liberties and press freedom. At the same time, a maturing civil society in Hong Kong became more vocal about their demands, and a new generation of journalists educated on Western journalistic norms and ideals became more professionally aware of the importance of press freedom. A fervent and concerted effort by the Hong Kong public to campaign for an open trial and early release of Hong Kong journalist Xi Yang, arrested and sentenced to 12 years imprisonment by the Chinese courts for “stealing state secrets” in 1994, became a prominent case in point (Lai, 2007, p. 180-181; Sciotto, 1996, p. 132).

When the sovereignty transfer finally took place in 1997, a Joint Declaration was signed by the Chinese central government that promised a “one country, two systems” to Hong Kong, ensuring that the territory would be substantially autonomous to make decisions in governance and economic policy for 50 years after the handover (Boniface and Alon, 2010, p. 793); it also promised residents of Hong Kong freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and rule of law by an independent judiciary (The Globe and Mail, Jun 15, 2014). Hong Kong would also continue to abide by its mini-Constitution, also known as the Basic Law, drafted by Beijing over five years from 1985, a “politically conservative” document that retained several key features of the colonial system such as concentrating power in Hong Kong’s Chief Executive and the system of appointing officials for its legislature, as well as restricting emerging institutions within the territory to abide by the “corporatist democratic” model, with officials appointed through indirect elections heavily influenced by the state and big businesses (Boniface and Alon, 2010, p. 793). Notably, the Basic Law also guaranteed that the press system, while subjected to statutory laws and licensing requirements enforced by the Communications Authority in Hong Kong to protect individual rights and public order (Communications Authority, 2015), would continue to remain free, as it had been under the British (Vanderklippe, 2014).

Chan and Lee (2007, p. 3) pointed out that it was important that China took its own “one country, two systems” policy seriously, since Hong Kong’s experience would allow China to show the rest of the world, especially Taiwan, that this unique system was

feasible. As part of this policy, Hong Kongers were afforded many freedoms denied to the mainland Chinese, guaranteed by a strong rule of law (Boniface and Alon, 2010, p. 795). Their freedom to assemble and speak meant that alternative and oppositional voices could be expressed without fear of legal or political repercussions (Yung and Leung, 2014, p. 99). Hong Kong's civil society would also be allowed to grow and powerfully express its opinion and interests (Chan and Lee, 2007, p. 130). Alternative media in Hong Kong would be free to operate within the city, serving as watchdogs against government and corporate wrongdoing and providing inputs for authorities on Hong Kong's future development (Yung and Leung, 2014, p. 99). Online media too, would be able to serve as important avenues through which critical viewpoints about the government could be expressed and discussed, and news agendas that addressed social injustices brought forward (Tang, 2014, p. 156).

The Chinese central government experienced a shaky start to their governance of Hong Kong post-1997. The new Hong Kong administration backed by China, under the leadership of Tung Chee-Hwa, did attempt to move Hong Kong away from free market policies to become more interventionist and actively mould Hong Kong into an "innovation-led, technology-driven economy" (CE Commission, 1998, p. v), but results were "transient and nondescript" (p. 154). The political institutions of the Hong Kong administration did not have the capacity to adequately plan and implement development policy, having been modeled after the colonial system where only the general grades administrative officers had the power to enact transformative policies – everyone else were "generalists and seasoned bureaucrats" with little policy-making capabilities, neither was the governor used to "provide major political leadership" (Lee, 1999, p. 943-944). This resulted in extensive red tape and poor coordination between different departments. At the same time, strains were developing between the senior civil servants and the new leadership after 1997, who were expecting to work with Tung as "partners in governance" rather than as his subordinates (Lau, 1999; Lee, 1999; Cheung, 2002; Sung, 2002). This was coupled with the problem of legitimacy of the new government to lead in economic affairs – businesses had, through the years of operating under free-market ideals, adopted as commonsensical that the laissez-faire approach worked best. The private sector, having acquired economic leadership within Hong Kong society for more than forty years, were unwilling to comply with the new government's

economic policies that privileged certain sectors over others. This resulted in the Tung-led government returning to the option of market-led policies (Chu, 2004, p. 156).

However, it is undeniable that China's central government plays a key role in determining the nature of Hong Kong society. With China now being the sole power centre sans the British colonial government, the attitude of the central government towards Hong Kong has become more hard-line (Lai, 2007, p. 14); rather than using ideological means to gain broad-based consent by asserting that they are acting in the interests of the collective, the Chinese government seems to be maintaining dominant-subordinate relations by imposing its will, whether directly or indirectly, on Hong Kong society. Hong Kong may have liberal roots, but it has not yet been granted full democracy by the Chinese (Yung and Leung, 2014, p. 99). In fact, Boniface and Alon (2010, p. 797) have labelled its political system as "semi-authoritarian".

This is due to a number of reasons. Firstly, the Chinese central government continues to determine the amount of power it wishes to assign to the Hong Kong administration, as well as its pace of democratization (Chan and Lee, 2007, p. 128; Boniface and Alon, 2010, p. 795), using these strategies to maintain its dominant status within the national historic bloc. The possibility of effecting universal suffrage (or "one person, one vote" elections) for Hong Kong is decided by the Chinese government – while there are plans to implement such changes by 2017, Hong Kong's Chief Executive continues to be selected by an 1200-member election committee made up of occupational groups that are predominantly pro-China (Boniface and Alon, 2010, p. 795; The Globe and Mail, Jun 15, 2014). Half of the Legislative Council is also selected by the occupational groups, rather than Hong Kong's mass electorate (Boniface and Alon, 2010, p. 797). The ability to interpret and alter Hong Kong's Basic Law ultimately lies in the hands of Beijing; the Chief Executive can override checks by the judiciary by appealing to the National People's Congress in Beijing (Chan and Lee, 2007, p. 128; Boniface and Alon, 2010, p. 799). In fact, China's State Council reiterated China's control over Hong Kong in June 2014 by stating in a newly-released White Paper – its first policy documents detailing how Hong Kong should be governed – that while Hong Kong enjoys "a high degree of autonomy", it is still "subject to the central leadership's authorization" (The Globe and Mail, Jun 15, 2014), noting that the rights Hong Kongers

enjoy are privileges given to them by the Chinese government and should not be taken for granted. Despite being open to allowing universal suffrage by the next elections in 2017, China's central government has stated in its White Paper that it will not allow an "unpatriotic" leader to govern Hong Kong (The Globe and Mail, Jun 15, 2014).

Secondly, pressures from China relating to freedom of speech, assembly, movement, and academic freedom, have created a strong sense of fear among Hong Kongers about offending Chinese authorities; Boniface and Alon (2010, p. 800) describe Hong Kong as "a separate and semi-democratic system embedded within a larger autocratic whole". This has caused them to self-censor extensively and curtail their personal liberties, especially with regards to expressing their opinions on politically sensitive topics (p. 798). In particular, even though China's central government has not imposed its stringent system of press control and formal censorship to directly suppress media freedom in Hong Kong (Chan and Lee, 2007, p. 113; Lee, 2007, p. 436) – they have only explicitly stated the "three nos" policy to the Hong Kong media with regards to covering national issues, i.e. no advocacy for Taiwan or Tibet independence, no engagement in subversive activities, and no personal attack on national leaders (Lee and Chu, 1998) – Chinese authorities have imposed their will on Hong Kong media in other indirect ways.

A widely discussed method of Chinese control relates to the ownership of Hong Kong media organizations. After the handover, Hong Kong media have been concentrated in the hands of pro-China business tycoons who have strong business interests with/in the mainland or have Chinese backgrounds (Chan and Lee, 2007, p. 128; Fung, 2007, p. 160-163; Lee, 2007, p. 436). As previously discussed as an inherent flaw of capitalism is the self-interests that drive this capitalist class; they work towards aligning themselves with the Chinese state and business elites to achieve their goal of endless capital accumulation. Profits that may be had from their business relationships in China outweigh their concern for the social role of journalism in Hong Kong society. It is not surprising then that oftentimes, a new owner might revamp a newspaper by replacing old journalists (particularly those with critical voices) with new ones, remove the political news desk, shuffle the staff around, and/or change the paper's editorial direction, as part of a "restructuring process" (Lai, 2007, p. 182). These owners might



also influence newsroom norms and practices, including the freedom of journalists to cover certain issues, as well as make major decisions on how the newsroom is set up and which top level employees to hire and fire (Lee, 2007, p. 436). At the same time, criticisms occasionally come from the Chinese central government to rein in the media in Hong Kong and their coverage of “sensitive” issues such as the independence of Taiwan; these result in the creation of “informal guidelines” for the coverage of certain issues (Lee, 2007, p. 437), establishing the norms for “political correctness” (Lee and Chan, 2009, p. 113). Warnings issued by the Chinese government are also often ambiguous – no clear definitions or political boundaries are drawn in their warnings, e.g. terms such as “spying”, “advocacy” or “state secrets” remain vague, making it difficult for Hong Kong media to ascertain where that limit for reporting lies (Sciutto, 1996, p. 134; Lee, 2007, p. 438). Journalist Xi Yang’s arrest in 1994 demonstrated this point – his report on the sale of gold and the movement of interest rates by the People’s Bank of China was an act of “stealing state secrets” punishable by imprisonment, according to the Chinese central government.

It is not surprising then that Sciutto (1996, p. 132) has described self-censorship in Hong Kong as having reached “nearly epidemic” levels. Francis Lee (2007, p. 438) adopts Chin-Chuan Lee’s (1998, p. 57) definition of self-censorship as “a set of editorial actions ranging from omission, dilution, distortion, and change of emphasis to a choice of rhetorical devices by journalists, their organizations, and even the entire media community in anticipation of currying reward and avoiding punishments from the power structure”. While there may be no direct commands given by superiors, journalists still partake in the process of censoring their own work based on unwritten rules and norms that they learn in the newsroom, through observing how others work, how news decisions are made, and by talking to colleagues (Lee and Chan, 2009, p. 115).

This self-censorship becomes problematic when it is justified for the journalist to take a critical stance in a news story. In fact, researchers have discovered that in Hong Kong media, the professional ethic of “objectivity” in news reporting begins to act as a disguise for self-censorship – journalists adopt a neutral stance as a means to counter political pressures. However, this also implies a disregard for local interests and the inability to play a watchdog function to monitor abuses of power (Lee, 2007, p. 452);

journalists, in a bid to be “objective”, no longer feel the responsibility to make judgments on issues, allowing their news sources to define the news instead (Lee, 2007, p. 440). In fact, Lee (2007, p. 441) describes objectivity as an “excuse for the media to refrain from providing needed political criticism toward power holders”. Sciutto (1996, p. 141) says this causes journalists to “dilute their news coverage, adopting a “safety first” attitude when covering news tied to China (p. 141). This then results in a smaller spectrum of opinions on topics; Fung (2007, p. 160) argues that when the media begin to act collectively in presenting “neutral” coverage, “their new political positioning becomes the norm and forms the majority opinion”. The “centrist” approach acts here as a pragmatic solution – these media can please their audiences by being “professional”, as well as the power-holders by taking no stance on issues (p. 164). Interestingly, the neutral stance can be seen as the pro-China stance; critical views on China are avoided and the new political centre is normalized (p. 165). Any opinion that lies outside of the centre is subsequently viewed as deviant or radical (p. 165).

Other means of indirect control exerted by the Chinese central government stem from the increasing social interactions between the people, media and political institutions of Hong Kong and China. Feelings about China inadvertently become shaped by these interactions; Ma and Fung (2007) point out that more positive thoughts and feelings towards China may result, while the media continues to shape Chinese national identity among Hong Kongers. More China-related media projects also influence the types of media content that Hong Kongers are exposed to (Fung, 2007, p. 161); to participate in China’s rapidly growing media economy, Hong Kong media firms must work within the parameters set by the Chinese central government (Curtin, 2010, p. 269). Culturally as well, conservative values such as obedience towards law and order, and cooperation for stability and prosperity will contribute to the Chinese government maintaining its hegemonic control in Hong Kong without major challenges to the political system (Chan and Lee, 2007, p. 129).

Indeed, recent events in 2014, such as the dismissal (and subsequent attack by cleaver-wielding assailants) of the chief editor of independent newspaper Ming Pao, famed for reporting on China’s human rights violations, the firing of critical radio talkshow host Le Wei-Ling, the banning of some liberal scholars from the news, the sudden

suspension of Chinese state-owned companies from advertising in two Hong Kong tabloids, and the rejection of a broadcasting license to a Hong Kong television station (Vanderklippe, 2014), all suggest the worrying consequences that might result from presenting opinions that may challenge the political system. And news about the problems that plague pro-democracy journalists and editors continue to add fuel to the fire – columnist for the Hong Kong Economic Journal Edward Chin, who had been a prominent supporter of the city’s pro-democracy movement was dismissed in September 2014 after eight years at the newspaper, as part of a “redesign of the business section” (incidentally, the newspaper is owned by a Hong Kong businessman with extensive investments in China) (Buckley, 2014); the home of Jimmy Lai, publisher of the pro-democracy Apple Daily newspaper and Next magazines was raided in August 2014 as part of investigations into bribery (Callick, 2014) – this followed an attack on Lai’s home by a vehicle ramming into his front gate a year before, with a knife, an axe and a threatening note left behind at his door (Forsythe and Gough, 2014); and two major British Banks HSBC and Standard Chartered abruptly halted their long-time advertising relationship with Apple Daily at the end of 2013 after being “told to do so by the Chinese government”, claiming it was a “marketing decision” and not a politically motivated one – this occurred at about the same time as two local advertisers Bank of East Asia and Hang Seng Bank, a subsidiary of HSBC, also pulled out (Forsythe and Gough, 2014). All these events further promote self-censorship among journalists and editors and inadvertently creates and perpetuates a pro-China “hegemonic voice” (Fung, 2007, p. 165), not just among the media but also among the audiences (p. 169).

In this way, it is doubtful that “press freedom” in Hong Kong, as it is constitutionally guaranteed by the Chinese central government, is really freedom that is based off classical liberalism at all. In fact, it can be seen as an ideological smokescreen to keep the Hong Kong people appeased, offering them a peace of mind that their press system is still free from government control and can therefore play its role as government and corporate watchdog and act in the interests of the people. In reality, it is a system that has been hijacked by the corporate and political elites to act in their own self-interest, disseminating values and ideologies that would help them amass more political and economic power. Unlike in Singapore where a critical historical moment created reason for the state to call on the people to consent towards giving the

government decisive rule of the city-state, creating the opportune moment for the ideologizing of the people to begin, there was no such critical juncture in the history of Hong Kong post-handover. The economy was doing well, and most people led comfortable lives. The socialist rhetoric that China was using on its own people (Zhao, 2011, p. 563), which focused on championing the interests of the lower social classes, was not going to work in Hong Kong. Indeed, ideals of liberal democracy carried over from the colonial era have become deeply embedded in Hong Kong society as a normative value. This means a greater disconnect between the city's political system and its deeply entrenched philosophical traditions that increase the likelihood of revolt. As it is, journalists are already finding themselves unable to reconcile the demands of the job, that is, needing to self-censor "sensitive" stories to avoid receiving flak from the authorities while ensuring that they continue to protect the interests of the public by monitoring and keeping the power holders in check (Lee and Chan, 2009, p. 113).

One therefore needs to look beneath the surface when it comes to Hong Kong's media system to realize that fewer and fewer critical perspectives and issues are being tabled in the mainstream media. This is what Hong Kong's media industry looks like on the surface – it is extremely vibrant; it stays true to its free market principles as a bastion of neoliberal capitalist media. For one, its film industry is one of the largest in the world. In terms of print media, it is home to 54 daily newspapers as of August 2015, of which 27 are in Chinese, 12 in English, 10 are bilingual and five are in Japanese (Hong Kong Fact Sheets, 2015). Apple Daily and Oriental Daily News are the most popular Chinese newspapers in Hong Kong – while both are known for their relatively sensationalized news reporting, Apple Daily is seen to be more pro-democracy, and is known for being politically critical (Chan and Lee, 2007, p. 127). A more "serious" Chinese-language newspaper is Ming Pao. As for English-language dailies, The South China Morning Post, Hong Kong's first English newspaper and a highly trusted news source, has the most number of subscribers while The Standard, the other English-language daily, is distributed for free. Both contain local and international news (InterNations, 2015). In terms of broadcasters, there are three active free-to-air terrestrial television networks – the commercial television companies Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB) and Hong Kong Television Entertainment (HKTVE) and the government-funded public broadcaster Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) – and three domestic pay-television companies;

together they offer over 700 local and foreign television channels in multiple languages. RTHK, known for its independent stance against the government, also exists alongside two commercial radio broadcasters to offer some 13 radio channels in Hong Kong (Hong Kong Fact Sheets, 2015), of which a number of radio talkshows engage in political criticisms (Chan and Lee, 2007, p. 130). Like Singapore, Hong Kong's global city status is evident from the number of international and regional media players that have set up their offices there. Wall Street Journal's Asian edition, The Financial Times, USA Today International, International New York Times, and The NIKKEI are all printed in Hong Kong (Hong Kong Fact Sheets, 2015). International and regional broadcasters also have bases in Hong Kong, such as News Corporation's Star TV and BBC World Service Television.

Looking beneath the surface however, one will realize that few media outlets really offer opinions that challenge the powers-that-be, and the Hong Kong people have not been oblivious to this. Indeed, the power play between the Chinese and Hong Kong political and corporate elites and the Hong Kong masses is heating up. Post-1997 events have shown just how deeply entrenched liberal ideologies are in Hong Kong – when the Chinese central government tried to enact anti-subversion laws in 2003 that would limit civil liberties, for instance, massive protests with some 500,000 demonstrators ensued in Hong Kong, forcing the government to withdraw the legislation (Boniface and Alon, 2010, p. 795). This was seen as a key factor for the resignation of Chief Executive Tung Chee-Hwa two years later (Channel NewsAsia, Jul 1, 2014).

Notably, the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong holds large-scale rallies every July 1, the anniversary date of the handover from British to Chinese rule, calling for a move towards universal suffrage and to keep the autonomy of the public broadcaster Radio and Television Hong Kong (Boniface and Alon, p. 801). In July 2014, the largest pro-democracy rally since the 1997 handover took place in Hong Kong, drawing more than half a million protestors; a subsequent sit-in in Hong Kong's central financial district saw 2,000 protestors take part (BBC News, Jul 2, 2014). This took place after pro-democracy group Occupy Central conducted an unofficial referendum in June 2014 on democratic reform that drew nearly 800,000 votes – a move expectedly condemned by Beijing as “illegal and invalid” (Van Sant, 2014). Occupy Central

subsequently rallied tens of thousands of pro-democracy protesters for large-scale demonstrations in Hong Kong at the end of September 2014, termed the “Umbrella Revolution”, constructing barricades on important roads and around government buildings, demanding for universal suffrage and calling for the resignation of Hong Kong’s Chief Executive Leung Chun-Ying (Channel NewsAsia, Sep 29, 2014). In September 2016, six young pro-democracy advocates were voted into the city’s legislative council responsible for passing laws and budgets in the territory (BBC News, Sep 5, 2016). Evidently, tensions between Hong Kong and China are rising as the 2017 elections draw near. Similarly, media researchers have noted that journalists in Hong Kong continue to venerate the liberal conception of the press, emphasizing the role of journalists as independent actors in the process of political communication who serve the interests of the public, and as watchdogs capable of checking the wrongdoings of the powerful (Chan and Lee, 2007, p. 130; Lee, 2007, p. 439). However, despite widespread sentiment among Hong Kongers that the city keeps its democratic freedoms, the political elite in China may still hold the deciding vote, and the corporate elites helming Hong Kong’s media outlets are keeping the population in check.

At the level of public discourse, while there have been many studies about the Chinese central government’s influence on Hong Kong media, there has been little to no academic research done about a potential “journalism crisis” in Hong Kong in a more holistic sense, taking into account other potential areas of concern such as the commercialization of the Hong Kong press, the lack of funding for news and journalism, and the challenges posed by new media on traditional news media. Like Singapore, there has yet to be any overarching research study that links these narratives together in a meaningful way.

At this point, scattered news and academic reports do exist that suggest other problem areas in Hong Kong’s news media, beyond government influence on the press. Existing literature on the commercialized nature of Hong Kong’s media, for instance, tend to focus on how tabloids blur the line between information and entertainment, in a bid to increase their advertising revenue through mass circulation (Lee, 2005a). As for the lack of funding dedicated to news and journalism, Jack Qiu, an associate professor in the CUHK School of Journalism and Communication says the pay of reporters and

editors in Hong Kong is currently “really low”, and some managers expect low-paid journalists to “copy news from other sources rather than to pay to generate original stories”, particularly for free newspapers (Chong, 2013). Chairperson of the Hong Kong Journalists Association Mak Yin-Ting agrees that frontline journalists are “overdue for salary increases” and the low pay has resulted in senior editorial staff quitting and inexperienced journalists taking their places, harming the quality of journalism (Chong, 2013).

A search of the newspaper archives reveals discussions on another potential journalism crisis dimension – the threat of new media on traditional media in Hong Kong. Ming Pao’s general manager Alex Ko points out that print circulation and advertising have been “weakened by the growth of the Internet” (Forsythe and Gough, 2014). Statistics have revealed a drop in newspaper readership (for paid and free newspapers) among those aged 15 to 64 in Hong Kong from 76% in 2006 to 69% in 2012. Within this age group, the readership drop for paid newspapers alone was especially pronounced, particularly among those aged between 15 to 34, falling 20% from 68% in 2006 to 48% in 2012 (Chong, 2013). Advertising revenues have suffered as a consequence, with figures falling from HK\$7.53 billion in 2011 to HK\$7.47 billion in 2012. Free newspapers however, registered a higher advertising revenue from HK\$3.53 billion to HK\$4.69 billion within the same time period (Chong, 2013); this trend of free newspapers generating higher incomes than their paid counterparts has persisted into 2015, although fiercer competition among free newspapers may spell trouble for revenues going forward (Yeung, 2015). Furthermore, in 2015, several developments in Hong Kong’s news industry have been worrying – Hong Kong Daily News closed down due to declining advertising revenue and circulation numbers; a cash-strapped Sing Pao Daily News had to suspend its print edition; and the popular Apple Daily saw its revenue drop by 9.5% and its net profit by 31.6% (Chen, 2015).

Newspapers have responded in various ways. As mentioned, many have entered the free newspaper market, such as Metropolis Daily, Headline Daily, AM730, The Standard, Sky Post and Sharp Daily – their steady increase in readership numbers have attracted strong advertiser support (HKTDC Research, 2012). The Hong Kong Economic Journal and Hong Kong Economic Times, two big Chinese-language business

newspapers in the city, have also launched paid websites in 2008, beefing up their online and mobile offerings, such as real time market news and analysis, to draw readers. The South China Morning Post also uses a paid-access model for its website (World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers, 2008). The paid website model is believed to be able to generate new income streams and help to market the printed newspaper (World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers, 2008); the reach of the online versions seem to be limited to younger readers though, while the printed paper is read by older audiences between 30 to 50 years old (HKTDC Research, 2012). Chairman of the Coalition of Hong Kong Newspaper and Magazine Merchants, Liu Sair-Ching, aptly calls the printed newspaper business a “sunset industry” and an “outdated product” for youngsters, who have more choices for news and do not need to turn to print media; in fact, those in the younger generation are often not willing to pay for news at all (Chong, 2013). While online advertising revenues have been on the rise in recent years – online advertising has the benefit of never running out of advertising space and online news is cheaper to distribute compared to the printing and distribution costs of print editions – it still remains to be seen if digital advertising revenues can offset the continued drop in print advertising revenues (HKTDC Research, 2012).

As for Hong Kong’s major broadcasters, the city’s oldest television network Asia Television was cash strapped for months and closed down in April 2016 after years of falling viewership (Zheng and Steger, 2015; Fortune, Apr 2, 2016), and Hong Kong’s most popular free-to-air network Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB) has seen slight declines in its net profit, attributing these to increasing costs of operations, a sluggish recovery of the economy in mainland China and the US which might have limited the growth in advertising spending, and a “growing challenge” from Internet companies as audiences, especially those in the younger age bracket, shift their television viewing habits to the computer and other mobile devices (Yu, 2013).

From the points listed above, given important changes in the media landscape, it becomes worthwhile to investigate how “journalism crisis” is perceived and experienced in the city, if at all, and within which areas these concerns lie. To what extent has new media influenced the level of public trust in Hong Kong’s mainstream news sources and worsened fears of a capitalist takeover of the press, at the expense of journalism’s social



roles? Has the siphoning of profits away from mainstream news outlets raised concerns about financial viability, amid a very competitive news media system, and increased fears of news-worker exploitation and dipping journalistic quality in the Hong Kong press? And finally, how is a journalism crisis, if any, perceived and experienced in a society that has traditionally venerated liberal-democratic ideals and is now faced with an authoritarian overseer that seems unable to get broad-based consent from the people? Indeed, Hong Kong's press and politics sets it apart from Singapore's, presenting an interesting case for comparison.

## **Chapter 4.**

### **Uncovering the Material and Ideological Aspects of Journalism Crisis: Laying the Methodological Groundwork**

From the above analysis, Singapore and Hong Kong present themselves as appropriate case studies that may be compared and contrasted, with results likely to contribute to a deeper theoretical understanding of how journalism crisis may be further complicated in societies that do not operate based on liberal-democratic principles. For one, both these two cities share a number of similarities. They both seem to be open economies that are a part of the neoliberal global order, indicating that they are highly susceptible to Western influences and are a part of a dense network of relationships with the West, whether in their historical trajectories or in their current statuses as “global cities”; this suggests that concerns about the decline in journalism in the US – involving for instance the profit motivation of the capitalist class and the widespread use of new media – may be reflected, to some extent, in the press systems of both these cities as well, and that journalists may have been socialized to view the liberal conception of the press as attractive. At the same time, these two cities stand apart from their Western counterparts since neither exists as a liberal democracy – Singapore has been labelled as “authoritarian” by some scholars (Rodan 2003, p. 519; Harvey, 2005, p. 86), and Hong Kong “semi-authoritarian” after its 1997 handover to China (Boniface and Alon, 2010, p. 797).

That said, a historical analysis of the evolution of press and politics within these two cities has suggested that there exists significant differences in the way they view the state of news and journalism in their cities. The Singapore government seems to have been more successful in engineering broad-based consent for its rule over the country and its press system through ideological and material means, while the authoritarian system of governance in China seems to have caused immense tensions

within Hong Kong whose citizens are used to their democratic freedoms. By discovering perceptions of journalism crisis in Singapore and Hong Kong, and comparing journalism crisis fears, if any, in each locale, I believe a “crisis of legitimacy” narrative, as it relates to their systems of governance, may be a relevant inclusion in the overarching framework of “journalism crisis” occurring within societies where authoritarianism may be a part of the political culture.

For the purposes of this study, comparisons between the Singapore and Hong Kong case studies on possible similarities and differences can provide insights into the presence and type of journalism crisis experienced in each locale, opening up lines of inquiry that can lead to a more formal comparative study going forward, where crisis narratives may be broken down into their component parts for further examination. For now, this study aims to offer a foundational understanding. Indeed, patterns discovered when examining a phenomenon by looking at small units can lead the researcher to deeper theoretical insights when studying the same phenomenon in larger units (Ragin, 1987, p. 15). In this study, I have set up a common framework with dimensions on which the case studies may be compared for similarities and differences (Livingstone, 2003, p. 489), establishing a “context of comparisons” (Smelser, 2003) to guide my research at this initial stage – this was the “journalism crisis” framework (Model 1) that I established in Chapter 1. Within this framework, structural-causal factors that may generate fears of a systemic journalism crisis are framed within broad and interconnected crisis narratives, all of which have been derived from dominant journalism crisis literature set within the Anglo-American context. These narratives form the dimensions on which the Singapore and Hong Kong case studies will be compared. Of particular note, as presented in the literature review, is a specific point of difference between the two locales – their systems of governance – suggesting the likelihood of a new narrative not presented in Model 1, a crisis of legitimacy. This will be a particular point of investigation, with attention paid on how this difference has influenced the other crisis narratives within the journalism crisis framework in complex ways.

As for the units that are sampled, I have chosen to conduct my research specifically on news-workers in Singapore and Hong Kong. This is a group that can tell me, firsthand, the type of issues they perceive to be of concern in their day-to-day

journalistic work (i.e. the material aspect of a crisis), and the type of journalism ideals they have been taught and currently value as news professionals (i.e. the ideological aspect of a crisis). Crucially, I will ask if they feel that journalism in their city is “in crisis” and how they come to define this term. This way, I can discover whether there is a sense of crisis, and if so, how journalism crisis is perceived and experienced among news-workers in these two locales, and offer my take on the relevance of the crisis narratives so commonly discussed in Anglo-American literature, on societies outside the Western world that practice some semblance of authoritarianism.

## **4.1. Research Questions**

I will use a series of broad research questions to guide my study, offering quantitative data in the form of percentages to illustrate how widespread certain perceptions are, and qualitative explanations and anecdotes that can illuminate why these perceptions have surfaced. From my research on journalist perceptions of crisis, I will then, in my concluding chapter, offer my view on the presence of an actual systemic journalism crisis in Singapore and Hong Kong, the nature of the crisis in each locale, and the context-specific structural-causal factors that may have contributed to each of them.

My research questions (RQs) are as follows:

RQ1: What issues of concern do journalists in Singapore and Hong Kong perceive to be present in their day-to-day journalistic work?

RQ1a: How are these perceived issues of concern similar and/or different between Singaporean and Hong Kong journalists, and why do these similarities and/or differences exist?

These are two related questions. RQ1 seeks to uncover the issues that might plague the work of the journalists surveyed; it targets the material practices that Singaporean and Hong Kong journalists perceive as most concerning within their newsrooms. Issues will be categorized into four groups, as uncovered earlier from scholarship on the Western, predominantly American, journalism crisis. As noted

previously, the role of the US in the global spread of neoliberal capitalism, liberal democracy and scholarship on what constitutes “good journalism” to the rest of the world, including Asia, adds to its suitability as a point of reference. The four groups of concerns are: 1) Deteriorating standards of journalism involving more public-relations oriented journalism, more newswire stories, and more sensationalized content, as well as less investigative stories, news analysis, political criticism, and politically, economically, or socially “sensitive” stories, 2) Cutbacks in resources for the newsroom, including more temporary contracts for journalists, longer hours, and more cross-platform multi-tasking, 3) The threat of online media to traditional news media in terms of circulation and advertising revenue, lack of a viable business model for traditional media as well as online news, little engagement with alternative and citizen media, and citizen journalism lowering the standards of professional journalism, and 4) Privileging of elite voices and news agendas over voices and agendas of the people, largely tied to advertiser, owner, stockholder, and government influence of news content and with an influence on public confidence in the news media. This part of the study will also offer respondents the opportunity to bring up other issues of concern not covered by the four categories above. RQ1a will involve a comparison of the perceived issues of concern for journalists within these two locales. In the process, I will be noting how these perceptions may contribute to an actual systemic journalism crisis by referring back to the crisis narratives commonly referred to in Western literature (i.e. the crisis due to capitalism’s inherent profit-seeking tendencies, crisis due to new media, crisis of financial viability, crisis of public confidence, etc.); I will, at the same time, consider how local political, economic, and social contexts may have come into play to influence journalist perceptions. In the concluding chapter, I will offer my own view on the presence of an actual systemic journalism crisis in each of the two locales, noting specifically if dimensions of crisis perceived by journalists are severe enough to cause a disruption in the normal functioning of things and endanger society as a whole, thereby qualifying as a “crisis”, or whether they are less severe and should be described as “concerns” at this point.

RQ2: What roles do journalists in Singapore and Hong Kong think their “ideal” news media system should play?

RQ2a: How are the roles of their “ideal” news media system similar and/or different for Singaporean and Hong Kong journalists, and why do these similarities and/or differences exist?

Again, these two questions are related; they seek to examine if journalists within these two cities are more inclined towards liberal press characteristics typically venerated in the West, or characteristics commonly found in developmental press systems that have been widely advocated in Asia, where the media cooperates with the government in nation-building. They also offer respondents the chance to bring up other roles they feel their ideal news media systems should be playing that have not been listed in the survey.

Indeed, these questions are designed to discover the extent to which local journalists look up to the liberal model of the press – having been influenced by their interactions with the West as “global cities” and by the British during their period of colonization – or whether journalists have been successfully ideologized to venerate local alternatives to this model. After all, both Singapore and Hong Kong have Chinese-majority populations that traditionally advocate Confucian values such as respect for authority and social harmony. Hence, the answers from these two research questions will identify the ideological aspect of the journalism crisis, if any, within these two locales (keeping in mind that in RQ1, we have already addressed the material aspect), and offer a comparison on the similarities and/or differences and why these similarities and/or differences exist. The ideological aspect is important because it uncovers the expectations that news-workers have about the news media system they would like to have; any disconnect with how journalism is practiced in material terms will likely increase perceptions of a journalism crisis.

RQ3: How do journalists in Singapore and Hong Kong define “journalism crisis”?

RQ3a: How are these crisis definitions similar and/or different between Singaporean and Hong Kong journalists, and why do these similarities and/or differences exist?

In the next research question, RQ3, I ask journalists how they would define “journalism crisis”, prompting respondents to identify a journalism crisis in discursive terms. This is important, because despite concerns raised in Singapore and Hong Kong about the state of news and journalism in these two cities, there have never been any attempts by scholars to connect the dots within a larger “crisis” framework to draw attention to these intersecting issues. I leave this as an open-ended question in the survey to draw out individual responses, and then analyze the data to discover if similar responses could be grouped together into broader narratives typically mentioned in dominant journalism crisis literature (e.g. crisis of financial viability, crisis due to capitalism’s inherent profit-seeking tendencies, crisis of public confidence, etc.). This question will tease out the ways in which “journalism crisis” is imagined in these two locales. Relatedly, in RQ3a, I will compare the crisis definitions of news-workers in Singapore and Hong Kong, and examine if local circumstances and contexts may have created similarities and/or differences that may be noteworthy.

RQ4: Do journalists in Singapore and Hong Kong view journalism in their cities as being “in crisis”?

RQ4a: How are these crisis perceptions, if any, similar and/or different between journalists in Singapore and Hong Kong, and why do these similarities and/or differences exist?

Here, the goal of RQ4 is to find out whether respondents are of the view that journalism in their cities is “in crisis” – determining here if the discourse of “crisis” is indeed warranted as a means to draw attention to the issues in journalism work in Singapore and Hong Kong – and the reasons why they feel this way; I will then attempt to uncover how crisis narratives typically mentioned in dominant journalism crisis literature may be relevant to describe the state of news and journalism in these two cities. I will also offer respondents opportunities to discuss solutions that they think may help to alleviate this crisis, if any. In a related question, RQ4a, I will compare the extent to which journalism crisis perceptions of news-workers in Singapore and Hong Kong are similar and/or different, and given an understanding of local history and contexts, as well as a knowledge of the material practices that govern journalism work in these two cities

and the ideological outlook of news-workers, will uncover why these similarities and/or differences in crisis perceptions, if any, exist. Here, I will bring in the need to discuss a “crisis of legitimacy”, as it relates to the system of governance, as a narrative that must be included in any discussion on journalism crisis in societies that practice some form of authoritarianism.

RQ5: Do journalists in Singapore and Hong Kong view journalism in the US as being “in crisis”?

RQ5a: How are these crisis perceptions on US journalism similar and/or different between journalists in Singapore and Hong Kong, and why do these similarities and/or differences exist?

For the next research question, RQ5, I wanted to find out if journalists in Singapore and Hong Kong were aware that the liberal press model, practiced and promoted by the US was, in their opinion, in crisis, and that they should re-evaluate their veneration of such liberal ideals and their feasibility in the real world. In other words, I wanted to know if journalists were uncritically looking up to the liberal press model with no awareness that the American press system was also flawed, in the view of many critics. RQ5a would then look into how perceptions of a US journalism crisis are similar and/or different between journalists in Singapore and Hong Kong. This is particularly interesting to examine, because based on the literature review about the Singapore and Hong Kong press systems, it seems likely that Hong Kong’s long tradition of venerating the free market and liberal-democratic ideals may have resulted in Hong Kong journalists being less likely to perceive the US press system to be in crisis, especially since the US has been a proud promoter of the very liberal ideals that they uphold.

RQ6: For Singaporean and Hong Kong journalists, how does the state of journalism in their cities compare with the state of journalism in the US?

Finally, my last research question, RQ6, will investigate if journalists perceive similarities and/or differences between the state of journalism in their cities and the state of journalism in the US – suggesting, therefore, the need for scholars to account for alternative conceptions of “journalism crisis” that exist within different political, economic,



and social contexts. Here, I will collate responses and juxtapose them against the crisis narratives commonly discussed in dominant journalism crisis research, to uncover potential similarities and/or differences in the types of journalism crisis, if any, found in these two cities and the US. Answers to this research question will also suggest the need for more tailored solutions to be proposed to address the journalism crisis within different locales, rather than any one-size-fits-all solution advocated by Western scholars and practitioners.

## **4.2. Methodology**

To determine my methodology, I refer to two similar studies conducted on journalist perceptions – Hanitzsch and Mellado’s (2011) work on how journalists in 18 countries perceive influences on their work, and Lee and Chan’s (2009) study of journalist perceptions of self-censorship in Hong Kong. Hanitzsch and Mellado (2011) had conducted a survey using six dimensions of influences that consisted of 21 items, asking respondents to rate “on a scale of 1 to 5, how influential each of the following items is in your day-to-day job”, with 1 indicating extremely influential and 5 indicating not influential at all; Lee and Chan (2009) conducted a comprehensive survey of all major news departments in Hong Kong, followed by in-depth interviews with twenty journalists from newsrooms with different political stances, recruited through personal networks and the snowball technique. From the methodologies of these two studies, I derived a two-part methodology to suit my own research needs – beginning first with a comprehensive survey of journalists working across a range of newsrooms in Singapore and Hong Kong, which would give me a general understanding of the perceived issues of concern and ideological outlooks of news-workers in these two cities, followed by in-depth face-to-face interviews with senior journalists and news editors in these two cities to gain useful anecdotes and insights into the more interesting survey findings.

To begin, I conducted a comprehensive survey of 160 journalists (see appendix for survey form) – 80 from Singapore and 80 from Hong Kong, to determine what each city’s journalists perceived as issues of concern in their journalistic work, their views of an “ideal” news media system for their city, how they defined a “journalism crisis”, whether they felt their own press systems were “in crisis”, and their views on the

American journalism system. These journalists were contacts from personal networks who would then recommend other journalists for the survey, as well as contacts obtained from the professional networking website LinkedIn, where journalists had listed their job designations and resumes in their profiles. Overall, about 30% of all the journalists contacted responded. Response rates began to slow significantly close to the 80-respondent mark in each city and due to time and budgetary constraints, a decision was made to stop the collection of data once the 80-person mark was reached.

For this study, I defined “journalists” as all those who have at least some “editorial responsibility” in the production of news content (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1986, p. 168) – my survey respondents included general news reporters covering beats spanning politics, defense, courts, education, healthcare, lifestyle and business, with a wide variety of job scopes including newswriting, photojournalism and documentary production within local news outfits. I used the snowball technique to locate journalists working across different newsrooms; because of the vast number of journalists working in a wide variety of news outfits in these two cities, it would be difficult to obtain a representative sample of all the news-workers in these two locales; neither were official statistics available about the total number of journalists working across different platforms and languages within these two locales that were obtainable from the journalist associations or government regulatory bodies of these two cities.

Rather, like Hanitzsch and Mellado’s (2011) had done in their journalist survey, my emphasis was placed on obtaining a mix of journalists working across a broad spectrum of media platforms (i.e. newspapers, television, radio, and online) and languages (i.e. English, Chinese and other languages spoken). Care was taken to allow journalists to point out if they worked across multiple platforms and multiple languages. Notably, only local news outfits were included in the survey; research has shown that journalists working in foreign media sometimes have more leeway in their coverage than the local press because they are targeted more at foreign audiences (Sciutto, 1996, p. 141). I also made sure that respondents had worked at least six months in the field, so they were more settled into and aware of their work environments.

For the second part of my study, I travelled to Singapore and Hong Kong and conducted in-depth interviews face-to-face with 10 senior journalists and news editors in Singapore and 12 in Hong Kong, in order to gain insights into the more interesting or controversial survey results; I obtained these contacts either from my existing survey sample, or with the snowball sampling technique, by asking journalists that I had already surveyed on the contacts that they had. Based on the survey findings, I asked them questions such as whether they were surprised to see journalists characterize their ideal news media system the way that they did; what roles of journalism were taught to young journalists on the job or in local journalism school; why certain constraints existed in the newsroom, how they see these constraints play out in their day-to-day journalistic work, and whether they could be alleviated; if they were surprised to find out the proportion of journalists in their city who felt their press system was in crisis; and whether they felt other models of the press might be more suitable to aspire towards given their existing political, economic, and social contexts. In addition, I also conducted face-to-face interviews with six academics from Singapore and Hong Kong, to obtain their views on the questions above and insights they may have about the journalism landscape within these two cities.

In the chapters that follow, I will detail the survey and interview results I obtained from each locale, based on the research questions I set up – I begin first with my findings on Singapore in Chapter 5 and then my findings on Hong Kong in Chapter 6, before offering a comparative analysis of the journalism crisis perceptions in these two locales in Chapter 7.

## **Chapter 5.**

### **Journalist Perceptions of Crisis in Singapore: Findings and Analysis**

The findings below are derived from the responses to my survey questionnaire on journalist perceptions, consisting of 27 questions in total, and my hour-long face-to-face interviews, all of which were conducted between December 2014 and May 2015.

In Singapore, the 80 respondents surveyed and the 10 interviewed were all journalists working in the two news media organizations there – Mediacorp and Singapore Press Holdings – with a majority of survey respondents working across the English and Chinese media platforms. This is reflective of the Singapore context, where English is the country’s first language and the population has a Chinese majority.

In the segments that follow, the study findings will be laid out according to the following categories: 1) Journalist workloads in a global/digital world, 2) Perceived issues of concern in journalistic work\*, 3) Journalist views of their “ideal” news media system\*, 4) Local definitions of a “journalism crisis”\*, 5) Perceptions of US journalism and the liberal press model\*, 6) Perceptions of a local “journalism crisis”\*, 7) Journalist views on public confidence in the local news media and the level of journalistic professionalism among news-workers in the city, and 8) Journalists’ hopes for the future. Areas marked with an asterisk (\*) correspond directly to research questions posed in Chapter 4; those areas without an asterisk have been included in the analysis for the important context and/or anecdotes they provide.

## 5.1. Journalist Workloads: As Journalism Goes Global/Digital

To get a sense of the workloads of journalists as media globalizes and goes digital, I began the survey by asking journalists if they worked across different media platforms and languages. This segment would lay the contextual foundation to the next segment that asks journalists what issues of concern exist in their journalistic work. In particular, it will provide insights on the extent to which journalists are exploited in the age of informational capitalism, and how this may influence the quality of journalistic content, as newsrooms devise strategies to cope with a changing media landscape. Newsrooms that demonstrate an inability to stay on top of these new media trends may also influence journalists' perceptions of crisis.

In Singapore, of the 80 journalists surveyed, 32.5% of journalists worked only in newspapers, 23.8% only in television, 13.8% only in radio, 2.5% only online, and 27.5% worked across multiple platforms, that is, they were responsible for producing content to suit different media formats.

Interviews with respondents indicate that the turn to a “digital first” newsroom is increasingly felt in Singapore. One broadcast journalist says,

Even when traditional media journalists like me go out, what I do first at a news event is to do a fast write, give it to the digital team; take pictures, give it to digital; if it's a video, give it to digital. Digital has first cut. Then, I think about my other platforms.

Another print journalist says,

We have to get the news out as soon as possible via text or pictures on Facebook and tweet the news to followers, then we will share the breaking news on a few paragraphs, which will go on our website – these will be shared again on Facebook and Twitter, both on our professional and personal accounts. Now we are not just competing with other traditional media, we're also competing with blogs and other news sites.

As more resources are being pumped into the digital aspect of Singaporean newsrooms, more people have also been hired specifically as digital content producers. One broadcast journalist says,

If it's a big news story or breaking news, our newsroom would send digital journalists to the ground; this is in addition to reporters from TV and radio. The role of these digital journalists is just to feed social media – tweet, Facebook, take pictures – they produce digital specific stories that are filled with pictures and videos, which are uploaded onto a specific link on our news website.

Currently, content posted on the websites of Mediacorp's news platforms, Channel NewsAsia on television, 938LIVE on radio and the newspaper Today, are available for free online. Content posted by the newspapers operating under Singapore Press Holdings, however, can be accessed in their entirety only by paying a monthly subscription fee; users who do not pay only have access to a select number of stories a month.

In terms of languages used in reporting, in Singapore, a high 93.7% worked only in one language – the majority worked only in English media at 55% followed by Chinese media at 37.5% – while 6.3% reported that they worked across multiple languages. While Singapore has four official languages, English and Chinese continue to feature most prominently in the Singapore media landscape since English is the language of instruction in schools and at the workplace, and the Chinese population forms a majority at 70%. That said, the trend of journalists working across multiple languages in Singapore may be on the rise – because the Singapore media landscape is made up of a duopoly where one company, Mediacorp, houses all the television and radio channels of the four different languages, and the other company, Singapore Press Holdings, houses the newspapers of all four languages, senior journalists and editors I spoke to say it is becoming common that journalists sent out for stories would be asked to file for other languages if they are effectively bilingual, or to collect soundbites for other language stations within their company.

## **5.2. Perceived Issues of Concern in Journalistic Work**

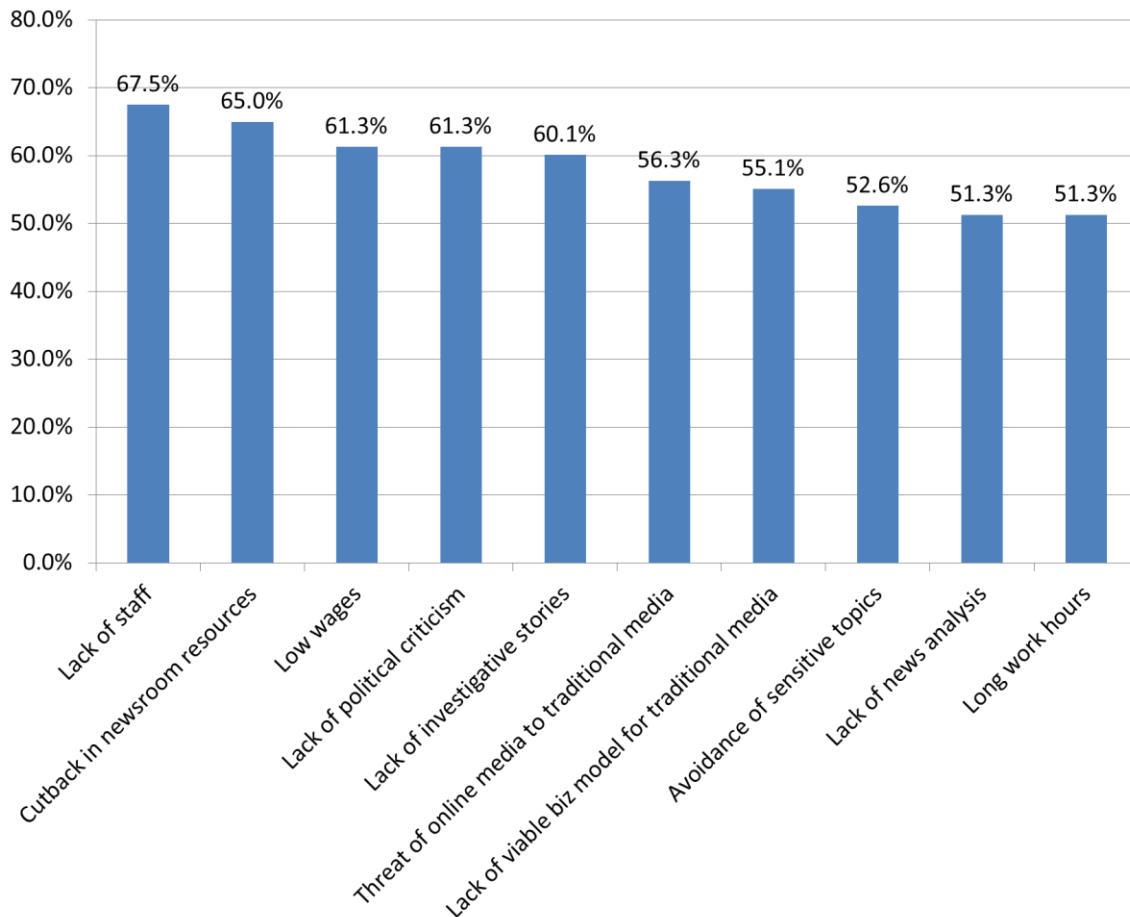
Issues that might be concerning to journalists were grouped into four categories, based on dominant journalism crisis literature, namely: 1) Journalism practices, 2) Newsroom resources and working conditions, 3) Challenges of online media, and 4) News agendas and interests. Within each category, concrete issues that might be

experienced by a journalist in his or her work were listed, such as the broad category of “journalism practices” encompassing issues such as “too much public relations journalism”, “too many newswire stories”, “lack of investigative stories”, “lack of political criticism” etc (see appendix for survey form). Like the study by Hanitzsch and Mellado (2011) on journalist perceptions, respondents in my study were asked to rate the extent to which they felt each issue was of concern on a five-point scale, from “no, not of concern at all” to “yes, very much of concern”.

Responses in this segment would shed light on the possible types of crisis narratives – crisis of civic adequacy, financial viability, public confidence etc. – that might be relevant to describe the state of journalism in each city. While I will be noting the types of crisis narratives that journalist responses seem to be aligned with as I go along, I will only offer in the concluding chapter my view on whether each narrative does add up to a “crisis” capable of disrupting the normal functioning of things and endangering society as a whole, or whether it is still just a “concern” at this point that is less severe, and how these descriptions of crisis and concerns may be meaningfully connected in an overarching “crisis” framework. Again, efforts will be made to compare the responses of Singaporean and Hong Kong journalists to discover if crisis narratives not found in existing Western-centric research and unique to these societies may emerge in the final analysis.

The top 10 most concerning issues which Singaporean journalists perceived as “of considerable concern” or “very much of concern” have been drawn up in the graph here.

**Figure 5.1 Top 10 Perceived Issues of Concern for Singaporean Journalists**



Interestingly, the top three concerns – 1) lack of staff (67.5%), 2) cutback on newsroom resources (65%), and 3) low wages (61.3%) – all stemmed from the “newsroom resources and working conditions” category, suggesting that journalists felt stretched on their jobs with fewer staff in the newsroom, and did not feel like they were receiving adequate remuneration for their increased workloads. From interviews with journalists in Singapore, respondents said that newsroom cutbacks were most evident in the manpower count. One respondent interviewed said that the digital focus of the newsroom has had some influence on this:

If there is a headcount that is open, let’s say two job openings, which preferably should have gone to hiring another beat reporter, it typically tends now to go to the digital side, that’s where we need the resources because of the 24-hour nature of online news; large resources have been committed to cater to this need. This means something has to be



sacrificed; in this case, it is the resources to hire other journalists to do the print stories.

Within the framework of a journalism crisis, these findings are reminiscent of a crisis due to capitalism's inherent tendencies towards profit-seeking and exploitation, where labour becomes exploited to ensure endless capital accumulation for the capitalist class. The desire for profits creates a workforce that is overworked and subjected to resource constraints; the quality of the output, in this case being the news reports produced, become compromised as a result.

The willingness to invest in the newsroom was also brought up during the interviews – one journalist says that “news is not a segment that brings in profit, so they are going to focus on the segments that make money, like entertainment programmes”, another notes that “the goals of my organization have become so diverse – are we focusing on news or entertainment? What is the company's vision? It isn't clear to us”.

Again, the inherent flaws of capitalism offers an insight into this – resources are diverted into areas that are likely to generate the highest profits. Revenue earned by a media organization that houses within it a variety of media businesses might not be siphoned into the news department, but rather into departments that would draw higher audiences and hence, more advertisers and greater advertising revenue. Again, the inability to invest in the newsroom means fewer resources for journalists which might undermine the ability of news organizations to perform their public service function.

Other journalists interviewed felt that the demanding nature of journalism – individuals must have “the right mix of news experience, digital savviness and linguistic ability” – has meant greater difficulty in replacing journalists who leave. One editor says, “We don't have a freeze on hiring. There is a lack of people because we never found the right people to fill the vacancies, so existing ones are overworked”; another senior journalist concurs, noting that “we never downsized the newsroom; I think it's a matter of finding it difficult to field positions that were left vacant after people leave”.

This seems to indicate that new media technologies might be generating a wider series of concerns for news organizations that should be considered within the

“journalism crisis” framework. Beyond the popular narrative of a crisis of financial viability, there seems to be another concern that relates to a difficulties in finding qualified personnel, that is, people who have both the journalism training and the digital expertise needed for the job. This suggests that while the nature of journalism and the demands of the newsroom are changing, journalism education is not catching up. Attention must therefore be drawn to this area.

Within the next highest rated concerns among Singaporean journalists were those that pertained to “journalism practices”, namely the lack of political criticism (61.3%) in fourth position, the lack of investigative stories (60.1%) in the fifth position, and the avoidance of politically, economically, or socially sensitive topics (52.6%) in the eighth position. These concerns demonstrate the influence of liberal ideologies on journalists; respondents believe that the ability for news organizations to offer political commentary, conduct investigative reports and discuss a broad range of topics and perspectives are important functions of the press and constitute practices of “good journalism”. The inability to perform these tasks, therefore, signals a disconnect between their expectations of how journalism should be and their journalism realities. The result is perceptions of a crisis of civic adequacy, where the public service role of journalism is seen to be undermined. Notably, it would not be appropriate to label this as being aligned with a crisis of liberal democracy, given that liberal democracy has never been granted to Singapore’s civic institutions; it would be more appropriate to frame this as an inadequacy of the news media system in Singapore to address civic needs and interests.

Interviews with respondents revealed that the above three concerns on journalism practices could be attributed to a number of factors.

First, the lack of investigative stories could be attributed to two key factors – a lack of time, and a fear of overstepping the boundaries. One journalist points out that “we would like to do it more often but unless the journalist is freed from certain duties for a decent period of time, it is not possible to do high quality investigative journalism in Singapore”. Another journalist elaborates on the fear factor, “we are afraid of stepping

onto many landmines, government or legal; those people who dare to say things will do so only to an extent, not too in-depth”.

Second, given the historical trajectory of Singapore’s development, the lack of political criticism and the avoidance of sensitive topics were not surprising findings for the respondents interviewed – although it was time for much needed change. One journalist says,

It goes back to the historical context of how Singapore was formed, the kind of society we live in, [they influence] why it is important for the media here to play a role in nation-building, for example, to disseminate information for the government. That’s the context you’re in, that’s the way it is.

This journalist adds that scrutiny of the newsroom can be intense, particularly around general election periods:

It comes to the point where a [politician’s] speech comes in and the editor will say, “I want you to focus on this, this, and this, lead with this, write it this way, and I want you to pick these soundbites”. And when the prime minister speaks, just let him speak, don’t paraphrase him, don’t edit him out, let the whole message out. From a trained journalist’s perspective, I would say that’s not how journalism is done. But that’s how we’re putting out government related stories because there’s a top-down brief.

The need to work alongside the government and toe the official line has been so well ingrained in the minds of Singaporean editors and journalists – the result of successful ideologization efforts from the government and decades of socialization – that one journalist says,

We have been conditioned so well to be mindful that it is subconscious already; we don’t want to come up with information that will rouse people to do things they would not normally do. It becomes more voluntary and internal.

This self-censorship however, has resulted in the streamlining of views in the mainstream media that is preventing Singapore society from moving with the times, according to some journalists interviewed. One senior journalist tells me,

The conclusions that one tends to get out of reading all the news analysis is that Singapore is vulnerable, we are a vulnerable society, Singapore society is largely conservative and hard trade-offs need to be made. I mean let's trigger debate and discussion, let's have a discussion on why trade-offs are important, and let's get people to think for themselves.

This reporter acknowledges that this will be a difficult shift but a necessary one.

The thing is, it's going to be a pickle, who wants all that trouble if you go and write all these articles and then people start to talk and ruffle feathers. Of course it will ruffle feathers, but that is part of moving forward, that's a vibrant society.

Another journalist makes a similar point,

I think the management seems to think that if you allow discussion, something bad will come out of it. But if you turn it the other way and if they are able to see it from another perspective, or if they have people who are skillful enough on the frontline, people who manage the debates who can get something good out of it, it is actually worthwhile to do it.

Journalists tell me that this is particularly important since we have entered an Internet age where people are already exposed to many different viewpoints online. To Singaporean journalists, when confronted with the survey category of "challenges of online media", the threat of online media to traditional media – this was ranked sixth in their list of top concerns at 56.3% – comes not just from the dropping revenue and circulation of traditional media due to competition from online media but from the damage the Internet is doing to the credibility of Singapore's mainstream media. This is again aligned with a familiar journalism crisis narrative – the crisis of public confidence that mainstream media is facing because alternative perspectives and issues that surface online are challenging the version of reality that these media organizations create and threatening their credibility.

One journalist recounts the general election in 2011 that featured an unprecedented level of political engagement online:

As traditional media, we needed to have the information about election results come from the official source, in that case, the government elections department. So the whole time, we were not reporting the results until there was official word from the elections department – but

everyone on Twitter was already talking about it! So the thing was, people said that we came across as being rather stupid and very slow because it was like everyone already knew and nothing was said by the national broadcaster! That was when the higher-ups realized we had a lot of catching up to do.

Another journalist echoes the urgent need to keep up with online media platforms,

We have a lot more avenues and channels that are open to us, compared to many years ago. Because of the Internet, we should be and hopefully are dealing with a society that is increasingly educated and interested and more engaged; there will be increasing voices who will want that kind of alternative smart angles, smart commentary.

The ailing business model of traditional media in the Internet age was the seventh concern among Singaporean journalists at 55.1%, although reactions from interviewees were mixed. One journalist says the threat is “very real” and has been tied to “declining advertising revenue and circulation”, while others are more optimistic. The reasons from respondents: Singaporean newsrooms are very “well protected”, and that “in Singapore, there are only two media companies and the government will not let them go bankrupt”.

This presents an interesting twist to the traditional journalism crisis narrative that is related to the rise of new media technologies – the crisis of financial viability. In the case of Singapore’s mainstream media, as profits continue to be in the millions, the potential of collapse is felt a lot less by journalists there; although some journalists have been retrenched as part of cost-cutting measures (refer to the crisis due to capitalism’s profit-seeking tendencies discussed earlier), there has been no drastic hiring freeze or large-scale layoffs to indicate that these two state-supported media organizations are in any sort of financial trouble. This indicates that within a state that practices authoritarian control over its media and the media functions as an instrument for the government in nation-building and development, the fear of a crisis of financial viability amid strong online competition is much less significant.

Another journalist feels that mainstream media in Singapore is doing well to keep themselves relevant, “We are keeping up – learning to tweet fast and accurately, it is something that is like second nature to us, so we can keep it as quickly as they do”. In

fact, this journalist is confident traditional media will not be made obsolete in Singapore anytime soon,

What online media lacks is the credibility. They may give you more sensational content but may not necessarily be accurate and responsible. When there is an information overload, people tend to take a step back and say, “Ok, who do I start to believe?” So in a way, we are covering the same content as other online media but we’ve got more concrete substance that we can offer viewers in the later part of the day if they want more in-depth stories. To me, online media is not a threat. It’s an opportunity.

The issue however, as noted by another journalist, is to continue to give extra value to readers – since they would have already heard about the breaking news from their social media sources,

We have to write our news for the print version in such a way that we already assume that a sizeable portion of people already know what is happening – so we jump into the consequences, the reactions, the human stories, while still putting the news value up there. The headline cannot just be “An earthquake strikes this place” anymore. It has to be something different.

Interestingly, in the category of “news agendas and interests”, contrary to existing journalism literature about Singapore that focuses extensively on government control and influence of the press, this issue did not make the top 10 perceived concerns of the Singaporean journalists interviewed. Only 47.5% of Singaporean journalists rated this as concerning. Hence, even while respondents were able to pinpoint strategies used by the government to influence content – such as through “subtle suggestions” made via phone calls, emails or meetings with editors to carry certain content, establishing rapport through “lunches and tea sessions”, through supervision by “appointing former civil servants into key editorial and board positions”, laws and policies, and controlling access to information, often with the goals of presenting the ruling party in a more favourable light or preserving its reputation, protecting the interests and stability of the state, and presenting a positive image of the country – less than half the respondents noted these influences as troubling.

On the outset, this seems like it could be the result of journalist respondents censoring their responses, intentionally or subconsciously, to avoid overstepping the line

or it could be journalists not perceiving these government controls on the press because these controls have become so normalized in their day-to-day work. Alternatively, such government control could be seen as not concerning because journalists have been ideologized to believe that working with the government is necessary to ensure national stability and growth (i.e. the survivalist ideology). When asked the explanation for their response, journalists offered a few reasons.

This could be due to the nature of the individual journalist's work – “government influence and control only applies to political stories” so journalists who did not cover the political beat would be less subjected to these controls in their own work. In addition, much of this government influence, while more evidently felt by editors who inform me they may get “emails coming in that say I want this, this, and this in the news report”, these controls come to journalists through more subtle or indirect means. One journalist says,

Maybe the batting away of suggestions to do a story or work from a particular angle is done by the editor himself. This particular question, to me, is like do you get a call in the night? Do you have meetings with government officials who say, “You can do this, you can't do this”? In this case, it is not. It comes through more subtle means we journalists don't always witness.

Another journalist agrees, saying, “People who tell us what to use and what not to use is not the government on a daily basis; it is the management who self-censor. So the connection to direct government influence is not there”.

Indeed, this issue of self-censorship also came up when I asked survey respondents to bring in other concerns that they experienced in their journalistic work that was not included in the survey. Journalists feel that there is “no entrepreneurship in investigating pressing citizen issues and breaking stories that matter” and there exists a “gregarious mindset that falls back on pleasing politicians and advertisers in the short term”. This is aligned with the narrative of a crisis of civic adequacy, where journalists perceive that journalism should involve serving the interests of the public rather than those of the dominant elites, creating a subsequent crisis of public confidence in the mainstream media and their journalists. One survey respondent notes that the “open knowledge that journalists are not independent of government influence” may have

caused the profession to “not be a highly respected vocation” in the eyes of the public. Another issue of concern that Singaporean journalists flagged that was not included in the survey related to newsroom culture. Respondents felt that there was a “lack of proper guidance in the newsroom”, with very little discussions about “journalism ethics and professional standards”. Journalists hope to see “bosses intellectually and editorially engage journalists – new and senior – to discuss matters”.

### **5.3. Picturing an “Ideal” News Media System**

Survey findings revealed an interesting mix of opinions from Singaporean journalists on how they perceived their “ideal” news media system – evident was the influences of journalists from both the Western liberal-democratic ideology and the Singapore-specific survivalist ideology.

The draw of the liberal-democratic perspective was evident. When asked to pick which features would make up their “ideal” news media system, 36.3% of the journalists selected only characteristics pertaining to the liberal press model, such as the press acting as a watchdog to monitor the powerful in society, providing unbiased reports to keep citizens informed, and presenting different political positions to encourage political debate and participation. In fact, of all the press features listed, the ones that pertained to the liberal press model were the highest ranked. Singapore academic and communication professor Cherian George, based in Hong Kong Baptist University, says this is not surprising – in local newsrooms and journalism school, these liberal press features are taught to young journalists and students as the only ideals of journalism. He tells me,

Not once in my ten years in the newsroom or as a journalism educator have I heard Asian [developmental] values being used as a mission of journalism; not once have I heard either editors or journalism teachers say, “You have to do the story because it’s good for consensus building”. If you analyze journalism awards in Singapore, Singaporean editors will say this story deserves an award because it sparked a debate, was on a controversial topic, or it was highly read, not because it built consensus.



Indeed, of those who picked only the characteristics of the liberal press model, only 10.3% were educated in the West (UK, US, Australia), as opposed to learning on the job in Singapore or receiving their journalism education locally or within Asia. This clearly showed that liberal-democratic ideals were seen as desirable and the foundation of “good journalism” whether or not journalists were educated in the West or not. A journalist interviewed says, “We all know that American media is very vibrant and can talk about anything, so everyone will aspire towards that because here in Singapore, it is impossible for us to do that”.

Notably however, more survey respondents did pick features from both the liberal press model as well as the developmental press model, at 63.8%. These developmental press features included cooperating with the government in nation-building efforts, promoting consensus and harmony over contention and debate, and acting as a mouthpiece to disseminate messages from the government to the people. This finding demonstrates the belief among Singaporean journalists that while the Western liberal press model has its positives, it might not be the best fit for Singapore’s unique political, economic, and social contexts, and that the media should take on roles supportive of the government as well. One journalist sums this up,

Although we journalists may not avow the idea of nation-building as much as the management may want, where we differ is just the extent, or degree to which we should support this nation-building at the expense of journalism. But I think we do agree that it’s important to be supportive.

The contradictions experienced by the Singaporean journalist is further evident from the survey responses – at times, respondents would select seemingly conflictual press features such as desiring that their ideal news system “present unbiased reports” while also “avoiding the coverage of stories that might create social conflict and instability”; the latter option clearly indicates that a biased perspective must be taken. This suggests the complex entanglements created by both Western journalism standards and local historical experiences and work cultures that leave Singaporean journalists torn about what type of news system works best in their society. One journalist interviewed summarized this well,

On one hand, we look towards American's liberal reporting, but on the other hand, we agree that freedom has its prices. Also, from a young age, our education has already reminded us that we are a multiracial and multi-religious environment, so conflict between different societal members is something that must be avoided. So I think a lot of Singaporean journalists wander between these two points.

Several journalists interviewed pointed to this unique context of Singapore. One senior reporter notes this,

A lot of the people who experienced the initial phases in nation building are still around now, so they understand that during that phase, it wasn't a very stable situation; I grew up seeing stability as a priority. If freedom of speech leads to polarization of the society to the extent that it creates instability, then it is not worthwhile. So whatever we do, we will always think about whether it will affect social stability.

Another news editor echoes this view,

Singapore is four different races; you need your social harmony. Look at the US now, look at Ferguson and Baltimore, the blacks and whites fighting. We cannot afford that in Singapore; their town is like one Singapore. If that one town disintegrates, the whole country dies. So even though we want this liberal model, there comes a time where when it comes to social harmony, we will work with the government, we will do whatever it takes for Singapore to remain socially harmonized. That is why you have this discord [between the liberal and developmental models among journalists]. And it's a voluntary thing.

Journalists also point to the trust that Singaporeans have that their government would do the right thing,

It is a system that works so far because to a large extent, we've had people with integrity in the government, or we perceive them as such. If the time comes when the leadership does not perform in a way that is acceptable, this whole system will not work.

Communication professor Ang Peng Hwa, from the Nanyang Technological University, agrees on this issue of trust:

There is a lot of trust in the Singapore government – we assume that the government is rational, good and benevolent. There is no “venal emperor” that we need to criticize and remove. In the case of Singapore right now, [the developmental model works] based on this high level of trust.

All these responses indicate the extent to which the Singapore government has ideologized the population, including the journalistic community, that the government is working for the betterment of Singapore society and leading the people towards the continued the prosperity of the city-state; the media simply partners with the government in this cause. While it is undeniable that the interplay between Western liberal influences and locally promoted ideologies of survivalism and Asian values is a complex one – Singaporean journalists become aware of the benefits of a liberal press in their journalism education at school and in their observations of Western news media – there seems to be a consensus that the media needs to have a cooperative relationship with the government, rather than an antagonistic one. Succeeding on the ideological front is only one part of the story; the Singapore government has, at the same time, succeeded in delivering, in material terms, benefits to the Singapore population if they consent to the decisive rule of the leadership. Rapid economic growth has meant that most Singaporeans lead a comfortable life, with ample opportunities for a good education and good jobs. This builds the trust that Singaporeans have in their government and their belief in the effectiveness of the developmental press model.

Next, to enable the survey respondents to offer their own opinions, I asked about other roles that their “ideal” news media system should play that were not listed in the survey. Here, Singaporean journalists noted characteristics like a sense of social responsibility, facilitating communication between the government and the people, and shaping a more rational-thinking population by being the “voice of reason” that weighs the agenda of all stakeholders. Again, these responses indicated the gravitation of Singaporean journalists towards the developmental press model, where the media would work with the government for the public good.

On how the Internet might contribute to the creation of their “ideal” news media system, Singaporean journalists pointed out a list of positives, including mainstream media having access to more voices, messages reaching a wider crowd and at a much faster speed, and more interactivity in coverage and with readers. A couple of interesting responses included how online media is likely to keep traditional media on their toes. One journalist surveyed says that “the state media will feel the pressure to report with a more balanced view”; another voices a similar opinion, saying that “it pushes newsrooms

to ensure our work is credible and that we can not only provide accuracy but also as diverse a view as what citizen journalists can offer". Another positive with the Internet is its ability to present the topics that traditional media are unable or unwilling to table, and to spark discussions among the citizenry in unprecedented ways – "more debate on issues of concern will give the public an opportunity to see them from different perspectives" – these discussions, if widespread enough, will feed back to the mainstream media which will then be compelled to report on them. One survey respondent aptly points this out, "Because the mainstream media cannot turn a blind eye to public discourse happening online, the emergence of social media has opened up more space for the traditional mainstream media to report on previously politically sensitive topics".

Bringing this discussion back to the "journalism crisis" framework, it seems then that Singaporean journalists place much hope that the Internet will help to alleviate a number of their journalism crisis concerns. In particular, fears of a crisis of civic adequacy of the press – where the mainstream media might be encountering political barriers to keep the public informed – might be addressed with Internet users bringing up issues and perspectives for discussion, and while any crisis of public confidence in the mainstream media might worsen as audiences become aware of their bias, this will likely motivate mainstream media organizations to up their game and gain back the public trust, particularly since these news organizations in Singapore need to maintain their credibility in order to help the government shape local values and ideas.

However, some survey respondents also warned of the detriments that the Internet might have on the creation of their ideal news media system, such as increasing the burden on the resources and manpower of mainstream media to produce news 24/7, while siphoning away advertising revenues and drawing audiences towards free news content online – these become obstacles that will hinder the media's ability to do its job, particularly because journalists will likely be overworked and underpaid as media organizations struggle to cope with these challenges; this is reminiscent of the crisis narrative on capitalism's profit-seeking tendencies. Over time, an inability to cope with this changing media landscape will likely result in a crisis of financial viability of traditional media outlets, furthering hurting the media's ability to perform its social roles.

The Internet is also changing the nature of journalism itself; one journalist tells me, “We are now focusing more on stories that are garnering page-views and high ‘engagement’ values which bring in the money for online media outfits” – this means that traditional news media might be drawn to cover more sensationalized content that has generated hype online, leaving the public ill-informed about more “serious” news, creating a potential crisis of civic adequacy. This particular crisis may also be worsened when the growth of public discourse online compels the powers-that-be to exercise even stricter control on traditional media. One journalist says, “The Internet can make politicians and traditional media more defensive and insular”, causing them to place “more compliant staff within the upper echelons [of news organizations]” to ensure that their agendas continue to be advanced.

The result may then be a crisis of public confidence in the media, which will mean that the mainstream media will no longer be seen as credible sources that can act as conduits between the government and the people, and continue being the government’s reliable partner in nation-building. In addition, news that circulates online may not be trustworthy. One journalist surveyed says that “sensational news tends to spread faster and wider compared to balanced news reports”; another notes that “the information may be false and even get distorted along the way, creating social conflict and instability”; and yet another points out that “news agenda setting is no longer in the hands of competent (we hope) professionals in the newsroom; many so-called citizen journalism sites push their own agendas”. The need to weed out stories that are false, misleading or inaccurate will further burden traditional news media outlets, leaving journalists with less time to pursue stories of greater significance and hurting the ability of the news media to keep the public informed.

#### **5.4. Definitions of “Journalism Crisis”**

The respondents surveyed were asked to offer their own definition of a “journalism crisis” – the goal was to ascertain if their perceptions of crisis were similar to those listed in Western-centric journalism scholarship and whether they had perspectives that were unique to their local context.

A number of factors stood out in the crisis definitions of Singaporean journalists. Falling journalism standards was one such factor, defined by respondents as “when journalism fails to perform its duty” or “when the core values of journalism is compromised” – these core values are defined as accurate, fair and unbiased reporting, serving the public interest, acting as a check on the powers that be, and editorial objectivity and integrity. Censorship came up as a key factor that influenced journalism crisis perception as well. This could be in political terms, such as “when the media becomes the mouthpiece of political parties” or “when a nanny state controls all media outlets”, or in economic terms, such as “when media companies pursue news that attract eyeballs rather than inform the public” or “when news organizations are too focused on ratings and sensationalism and profits”. One journalist writes that journalism is in crisis when “journalists get used to self-censorship” as well.

As a result of this censorship, survey respondents express the fear that the quality of reporting might drop, creating “an inability to do investigative and analytical journalism”, a focus on “infotainment” and becoming “ beholden to popular opinion”, generating “sensationalized, skewed, unverified news”, and producing “churnalists” instead of “journalists”, where emphasis is placed on “churning out stories to fill the pages and chase the numbers”; these generate concerns of a crisis of civic adequacy of the press to keep the public duly informed. The threat of online media is also seen as an integral component of a journalism crisis for Singaporean journalists – when “people are no longer willing to pay for good reporting and newsrooms no longer have resources to conduct business”, and when “declining audience numbers lead to layoffs and closures [of news organizations]” because “people believe citizen journalism is ‘real journalism’ and no longer read or watch traditional media”, sparking fears of a crisis of public confidence in the press and a crisis of financial viability as audiences and advertisers migrate online.

Indeed, this drop in public confidence and trust in the news media was brought up by several Singaporean journalists in their definitions of journalism crisis. Here, they refer to people no longer knowing if they can believe or trust the news media, and when “journalism has lost most of its credibility” and people would rather “turn to unaccredited news sources” – a likely scenario if a news system is seen as “not being objective and

carrying an agenda of its own”, when “journalists present stories in a manner that is ‘popular’ rather than ‘right’”, and when the media is seen to be “ beholden to the government or advertiser interests”.

## **5.5. Perceptions of US Journalism and the Liberal Press Model: In Crisis or Not in Crisis?**

Considering that the US is commonly looked up to as epitomizing the liberal press model, with its news and cultural products disseminated widely around the world, journalists surveyed were asked to rate if they felt the US press system was in crisis or not.

A quick breakdown of percentages indicated that for Singaporean journalists, 33.8% of respondents felt that the US press system was “in crisis” or “close to being in crisis”, and 16.3% of respondents felt it was “not in crisis” or “far from being in crisis”. A high 50% of the respondents were undecided. Based on these figures, there did not seem to be a large number of respondents in Singapore who were venerating the American liberal press model uncritically.

## **5.6. Perceptions of a Local “Journalism Crisis”: Explanations and Solutions**

In Singapore, the percentage of journalists who felt the news media system was in crisis compared to those who felt that it was not was separated by a mere 8.8%. Specifically, 43.8% of the survey respondents felt the Singaporean press system was “in crisis” or “close to being in crisis”, while 35% of the respondents felt the system was “not in crisis” or was “far from being in crisis”. The rest of the respondents were undecided.

For the 43.8% of respondents who said yes, they perceived that the system was in crisis or close to being in one, they cited issues that primarily pertained to: 1) The threat of online media to traditional media and its business model, 2) Political influences on the press that have created a culture of self-censorship and complacency and have

resulted in a dip in public trust, and 3) Cuts in newsroom resources and the inability of newsrooms to retain good journalists and keep up with changing times.

When it came to the threat of online media, survey respondents said that while “traditional media still arguably retains the support of older Singaporeans, younger Singaporeans – those born in the 1990s and later – no longer consume news the same way” and that “citizen journalism is slowly taking over mainstream journalism”, causing “news outlets to lose their market share and advertising dollars”; these reflect concerns of a potential crisis of financial viability. One journalist points out that the “widespread perception of pro-government bias in mainstream media has also resulted in more people turning away from it as a source and believing everything they see online, even though it has a startling lack of accuracy and objectivity”, creating a likely crisis of public confidence in the mainstream media.

Indeed, the political influence on the news is described by several journalists as a key reason why they felt their press system was in crisis. One journalist says, “It has become a government mouthpiece and is skewed towards only highlighting the good of one political party”; another journalist notes that the “state controlled media has top editors toeing the government line – sad state of affairs”; in another survey response, one journalist describes the newspaper he works for as a “biased and one-sided ‘government newsletter’”. These views highlight fears of a crisis of civic adequacy of the press. This “lack of differing views and debates about political ideologies and government policies” is of concern to journalists who believe that “political influence over the news should not override its journalistic prerogative”. Relatedly, respondents indicate that they are seeing diminishing public trust and confidence in Singapore’s mainstream media. One journalist surveyed says, “Mainstream journalism is losing its credibility – alternative perspectives are not being presented and genuine debates not generated”.

As for newsroom resources and cultures, sentiments vary, from long work hours, resource cutting and the lack of staff – “with the same number of pages to fill, reporters turn to press releases as a quick turnover story” and “media innovation simply makes the reporter do more, instead of do better”, relating to the crisis narrative on capitalism’s profit-seeking tendencies that sees an exploitation of workers – and issues with the



management. One survey respondent says, “Crucially, there is very little journalism training or guidance on the job; news editors are often too jaded”; another points out the lack of “accomplished journalists and editors” to helm the news desk and that “management does not have a clear vision”. These issues again point to the difficulties of newsrooms in Singapore to attract and retain qualified personnel for the job.

While Singapore’s press system, seen through a liberal-democratic lens, is surely deemed to be problematic, an insightful finding here is the relatively high percentage of journalists surveyed (35%) who felt that Singapore’s journalism was not in crisis, or was far from being in one.

Of their responses, reasons for their “not in crisis” response related to stable audience numbers, fair and responsible coverage, the increasing ability to negotiate boundaries, and a vibrant online media landscape that is keeping traditional media on its toes.

In terms of audiences, survey responses indicate that there is “still considerable confidence in news disseminated via the mainstream media” and that “because not all people in Singapore are internet-savvy, there is still a huge role for traditional media to play in providing credible and relatively objective reporting”. This means that Singaporean journalists believe it is unlikely that there will be a drastic migration of audiences to online sources in the near future. When it comes to fair and responsible coverage, one reporter surveyed says that “much of the news in Singapore still rather objective and factual”; another points out that “news outlets are still responsible and responsive”.

Notably, survey respondents pointed to improving conditions over the years, with “the chance to push and negotiate boundaries”. Even while certain lines cannot be crossed – “there is a line that cannot be crossed when it concerns race and religion”, journalists surveyed say, “the line moves when issues like politics are concerned”, and that “there has been greater freedom for ideas to be voiced”. Journalists interviewed echoes the same sentiments. One senior journalist recalls this,

In the past, it was more like [the government says] “this should be written in this way”, or “this should not be written at all” and that was the final word. Now, because there is a habit of engaging people and seeking views, I think it is becoming more ingrained in our culture to discuss something before you come to a final decision.

Another journalist adds this,

We are not a total government mouthpiece. If we have a story that is critical of a government policy, we can still put that out, so long as it is balanced. It's not like you cannot do a story totally.

Another says, “You can do a lot of things now that you cannot do before and tell the truth but cloak it – for example a sensitive story on race – and let the audience put two and two together”.

Meanwhile, the widespread use of online media is working to challenge traditional boundaries. Survey responses note that “in terms of dialogue and debate, the Internet has opened up new possibilities”, presenting issues of concern and alternative points of view to Singaporeans, and “emboldening citizens to question government policies and decisions”. In other words, as one respondent points out, “journalism in Singapore seems to have taken a step forward to become more open and more daring with the threat of citizen journalism”. These points suggest that the Internet plays an integral role in addressing any crisis of civic adequacy of the press. In fact, mainstream media has taken on the role of becoming the verifier of information when Singaporeans have seen perspectives from many different sources. One respondent says that “Singaporeans turn to mainstream media to confirm supposed facts [that they read online] – they generally do not feel that the stories that they read on mainstream media are not credible”. This indicates that the public confidence in the press may not have dipped to worrying levels as yet.

As part of the survey, I also asked if journalists felt the crisis in Singapore was inevitable or whether they felt there was possibility for change. Responses were mixed here as well. The inevitability of the crisis comes from the changing media landscape that has created “new habits of media consumption”, and the political history of the country in which “the traditional news media has been censored and taught to self-

“censor”. Those who believe in their agency to create change believe that this change can come from within the newsroom – one journalist says, “I think you can still negotiate and operate within the parameters of the political and social system while still telling truth to power”, and another points out that “responsible editors would help”. One respondent interviewed says change could be on the horizon, given the passing away of Singapore’s founding father Lee Kuan Yew:

I think under Lee Kuan Yew’s time, there were no grey areas, only black and white. But after him, there’s a lot of grey, and now that he is gone, I think the area of grey will be even greater. At the time when Lee Kuan Yew set up Singapore, he was fighting for everything, fighting for the little red dot. Now, people know who we are and where we stand. We don’t need to justify [ourselves anymore] but we need to move with the times. So I think that’s what the government will do.

On possible solutions to this journalism crisis, reporters surveyed offered solutions in four broad areas: 1) Adapting to new media, 2) Newsroom restructuring, 3) Loosening media controls, and 4) Journalist training. Top-of-mind solutions seem to pertain primarily to addressing the crisis in civic adequacy of the press to better serve the public interest; this suggests that Singaporean journalists perceive this as the most relevant and pressing crisis concern to address. I would elaborate on each of their suggested solutions.

First, to adapt to new media, newsrooms could “work with independent online media to attract more readers”, and “engage the younger generations using platforms they are familiar with”. Second, to restructure the newsroom, a number of journalists called for a “review of the editorial polity [i.e. people who lead the newsroom]”, where “civil servants are cut out of editorial boards”. One journalist says,

Newsrooms should not, in the first place, have staff who are obviously affiliated to a certain party. But if this has to be the case, include staff who are affiliated to opposition parties as well, so that there can be fair representation.

Other suggestions included better training of young journalists and more efforts to retain experienced journalists. One survey respondents also suggests “breaking the duopoly so that healthier, more vibrant organizations will grow to take their place”. Third, there is a call for “less state control” of the media. A journalist surveyed says, “Let people decide

for themselves by being impartial in news stories”, and another says, “More freedom of speech, less political hyper-sensitivity over ‘opinions other than the official ones’”. Finally, journalists should be trained to “understand the pillars of journalism, who are critical, analytical and who can provide insights into complex issues”.

On these suggestions, journalists interviewed agree that adapting to new media is already a work in progress for local newsrooms, as part of their “digital first” policy. On other crisis solutions however, journalists interviewed have their doubts, particularly with regards to media controls. One interviewee says, “It is not going to change much; it depends on who is in charge of the newsroom. It is up to this person how they want to convey directives to the journalists”. Echoing this view is another journalist who points to the appointment of civil servants as heads of newsrooms, “Some people with no editorial background are now heads of department, so it is difficult, unless you sack all of them and get independent editors, to change any editorial policy”. Training journalists to be more critical has its limitations as well. One journalist says,

If your editors have a certain direction and say you can't say this or you have to say this in a certain way, then as a reporter, it's really making the decision of whether or not I want to fight this or whether I can let this go. And if I fight this, what are the consequences, is it really worth it? Seriously, you'll be out of a job if you push too much.

At the end of the day, some journalists say it comes back to one question, “If you say some loosening [of media controls] will be good, then to what extent do you want to loosen it? We have to think about whether it will affect social stability”. This point suggests that responsibilities of a developmental press that partners with the government in nation-building have been deeply ingrained in the minds of Singaporean journalists. Again, this reiterates the success of the Singapore government's efforts at embedding ideologies of survivalism and Asian values in Singapore society.

Journalists in Singapore generally agree that there are limitations to using journalism crisis research that is American-centric to find solutions to their journalistic concerns. This is because the journalism crisis experienced in Singapore and the US are, at their cores, different, due to the vast differences in their political and media landscapes. While acknowledging that some aspects of the crisis may be similar –

particularly issues related to the emergence of new media, the resultant loss of audiences, and journalism ethics – most of the Singaporean journalists surveyed noted important differences between the press system in Singapore and the US. Some journalists point out the unique nature of America’s problems with the press, noting that “in the US, there are alternative power centres which control different sections of the media”, and that “TV stations there can be pro-republican or pro-democrat and bash the other party; different from Singapore’s tiny media landscape”. At the same time, it is also noted that “free speech is not allowed in Singapore” and that “Singapore does not share America’s belief in the ‘Fourth Estate’”. One survey respondent also notes the economic state in the US, pointing out that “the US is suffering from the impact of a poor economy” which could lead to more cost-cutting of news media firms, while Singapore’s economy has been performing well consistently. These points suggest the need to understand local conditions before adequate solutions to crisis concerns may be crafted.

## **5.7. On Public Confidence and Journalistic Professionalism**

When asked to rate their perceived level of public confidence in Singapore’s mainstream media, the mean obtained from the journalist survey was 5.48 out of 10, and the median was 5 out of 10. Survey respondents pointed to a number of reasons for their ratings.

Those who noted public confidence say that people still regard mainstream media as “top of mind” for certain types of news. One journalist says the public turns to Singapore’s mainstream media for “analysis and detailed home news and go online for breaking news”, while another says,

The public is still confident in news coverage 80 to 90% of the time, in areas such as the stock market, disasters, environment, and world issues but seek out more diverse views on about 10% of issues, usually related to political coverage.

Indeed, public confidence in Singapore news media tends to be high during certain periods – one survey respondent notes that “most people still turn to the traditional news providers here, although people use alternative media mostly during elections or when

there are controversial issues”; another respondent says, “In times of crisis, such as the AirAsia incident, mainstream news media sales go up. But come election time, the mistrust is amplified and readers turn to alternative media”.

Generally though, there is the belief that people still trust the news media in Singapore – because it has a “reputation for providing information with evidence”, and is seen to “provide accurate and factual news coverage”. One journalist surveyed says, “Older people probably trust traditional media more and younger people less, but by and large, people still do read and believe what is in traditional media is true”.

Low ratings for the level of public confidence came from looking at the situation from the opposite perspective, that “a sizeable segment of the population prefer to go online to get their news fix and updates” and that people are “questioning more and demanding to hear alternative voices and opinions that are different from the ruling party”. Biased coverage is also seen to be a key factor that is causing a dip in public confidence in Singapore’s news media, particularly in terms of political coverage. Survey respondents say that “political news is almost always one-sided”, and that “people are increasingly disenchanted with the pro-government stories being published”. Because “most people who read the papers do check other sources”, journalists say that audiences “do not find news reporting in Singapore objective but rather a tool for disseminating government information” and that “the views that news outlets present cannot be taken at face value”. While credit is given to stories that are non-sensitive – one journalist says, “To be fair, reporting is ‘objective’ enough when it comes to ‘non-sensitive topics’” – but this journalist also adds that “come election time, and when discussing ‘sensitive’ issues, the bias is too obvious and this inevitably leads to cynicism from the public”.

Responses seem to suggest then that confidence of the Singapore public in the city’s mainstream media is dependent on the type of news covered. Political stories, particularly those that are sensitive or controversial, seem to be less credible in the eyes of the public compared to non-political stories. This suggests that any crisis of civic adequacy of the press needs to then be qualified to account for this difference – where

non-political stories are concerned, the press may be better able to keep the public accurately and fully informed and allow different voices and perspectives to be heard.

Singaporean journalists surveyed were also asked for their perceptions on journalistic professionalism in the city. Ratings were higher than that for their perceived public confidence in the press – the mean rating for journalistic professionalism was 6.16 while the median stood at 6 out of 10.

When asked how they defined “journalistic professionalism”, respondents pointed to several key criteria, most notably objective and balanced reporting, and working in the public interest, as well as factual, accurate, truthful and ethical reporting that is socially responsible and “tells truth to power”.

Some notable comments that related to objective reporting included “to present news in a fair, objective manner, while balancing the interests of the public and the society, without being carried away by public opinion or be dictated by those in power”, and “to daringly explore issues and angles deemed controversial or may be perceived to be frowned upon by authorities, yet at the same time, to be responsible”. A number of responses related to journalists “not being swayed by fear or favour”.

Here, Singaporean journalists seemed aware that objective reporting may result in journalists turning into messengers to simply convey messages from news sources to audiences – thereby privileging elite voices and interests – and have qualified their responses that alternatives issues and angles should be pursued and that the interest of the public must be served as well. Particularly noteworthy is how Singaporean journalists continue to stress the need to “act responsibly” in their reporting – this again highlights the embeddedness of the ideology that the press should partner with the government in nation-building.

Notable comments relating to working in the public interest included “being able to listen to the masses”, “bringing about stories that matter”, and having a “service orientation” rather than a “profit or ratings orientation”. One survey respondent says, “To inform and educate the public, as well as to provoke thinking in those who were not in the know of certain issues”; another says, “To have the interests of the public at heart

and not give in to pressure from the newsmakers, be it the government, advertisers, or other individuals". These tied in with journalist comments on social responsibility, a point that survey respondents linked to "being aware of one's social and national responsibility", and "being honest and responsible to newsmakers and the audience".

Survey respondents were asked to give a rationale for why they rated journalistic professionalism in Singapore the way that they did, creating a resulting mean of 6.16 out of 10.

Respondents most commonly acknowledged that Singaporean journalists are of high integrity, and "try their best within the rules of the game". One journalist says "Most of the journalists I have worked with in this city take their work seriously and try their best to adhere to strict standards of professionalism"; another agrees saying, "By and large, we journalists do take our profession seriously, despite the considerable flak we take from the public for being the 'lapdogs' of the government". In fact, one survey respondent says, "Most journalists I know try their best to work around constraints and some push the boundaries", and that there remains "many idealists still working in the system". Singapore journalists are also generally "ethical", "unbiased" and "responsible" and that most "will not choose to write a biased report, at least not knowingly".

Responses here indicated that Singaporean journalists tend to associate professionalism with ethical and responsible reporting; no one questioned here that efforts at professionalizing journalism may in fact work against the public interest, rather than for it, that is, abiding by "professional" journalistic norms such as objective reporting, separating news from opinion, and citing from official sources may in fact create more bias in the news media that favour the elites, rather than less bias. Singaporean journalists seemed to take the idea of "professionalism" at face value here. A large part of their comments also centred on journalists doing the best they can "within the rules of the game" and the pushing of boundaries seems to be a rarity; this indicates that Singaporean journalists are aware of their position of subordination to the state.

On the flipside, those who did give lower scores for journalistic professionalism attributed it to the Singapore media's role as "government mouthpieces", and the limitations they face on the job that might threaten their professionalism. One survey



respondent says, “On the whole, most are extremely professional. However, the same cannot be said for many of the leaders in media, who are beholden to outside influences, and who are mostly selected as leaders not on the basis of professional brilliance, but on political acceptance”; another respondent says, “We’re puppets most of the time – whether we like it or not. Many journalists here are good and passionate journalists but have to toe the line”. Limitations of journalists to do investigative journalism are also raised – “reporters are not able to do unfettered investigative journalism in the areas of government policies, politicians’ lives and others”, and that “there is little time for investigative journalism in my newsroom – much of the stories that go on air are handed down to us by ministry press releases”.

Another negative tied to low journalistic professionalism is the lack of critical thinking among Singaporean journalists and self-censorship. Respondents say that there is “much room for improvement in terms of being a thought provoker and leader” and that “most journalists in the traditional media self-censor, when it comes to government policies and their impact on the public”. One survey respondent points out, interestingly, that “for the most part, many journalists here seem to regard themselves as pseudo public relations workers, and aren’t pushing themselves to truly understand the society they’re reporting”.

Senior journalists and editors I interviewed echoed these views. One interviewee says,

It is not surprising. I think there are a lot of people with good ideas but sometimes it just takes one of their good ideas being shot down for them to feel like they need to stay within the rules of the game.

Another interviewee says the newsroom culture itself does not promote critical thinking –

Like if I did a certain story and they [the management] want it changed, I think it comes very naturally for a journalist to then question why. But a lot of the times now, there is no reason given to us, it’s “just do it”. Don’t think, just do. That’s what I take issue with. It’s very top down.

It seems then that critical thinking on the job and critical perspectives in journalism studies do not figure significantly in the education and training of journalists in

Singapore. Again, this falls in line with the government's efforts to ideologize news-workers in favour of a cooperative press; journalists that think critically and question the system may be viewed as a destabilizing force that must be nipped in the bud.

## **5.8. Finding Meaning in Local Journalism Work: Hopes for the Future**

I asked my journalist interviewees a final question on how they come to terms with the constraints placed on their work and the challenges of their profession, as well as what they see for the future of journalism in their cities. Some offered insightful perspectives.

In Singapore, a few of the journalists interviewed reiterated the idea that a distinction must be made between political stories and non-political ones. They tended to define political stories as stories involving the ruling party – these may involve controversies surrounding the party, party announcements and decisions, or stories that “bring up the ruling party's past” – as well as stories that favour the opposition parties and their achievements. One journalist says he finds motivation specifically through the non-political stories that he does,

For political stories, I find that I have no say. I cannot contribute meaningfully to society. My only contribution is to convey what the government wants us to tell the public, so that affects quality and that affects motivation. But I try and balance things out by coming up with my own stories I know will not be a problem because even if I dig, let's say I'm doing a social piece, at the end of the day, if you dig further and it is for the good of society, even the ministries are willing to help. So for political stories, I really cannot say that I have done a lot for society, but I offset that with coming up with my own ideas [on social pieces].

Another senior journalist agrees,

If I'm just talking about political stories, we are literally just a government mouthpiece. But other aspects of journalism, I think we're doing solid work, in terms of long form, even investigative journalism, and delving into social issues. In terms of engagement with readers on non-traditional platforms, I think we're doing great work there as well.

Discussions on online platforms are helping more issues get tabled in the mainstream media, even potentially sensitive ones, which give journalists hope for the future:

If the independent media and bloggers are quiet, it gives us less clout to say, "Let's discuss that". But if people are already talking about it, you can't ignore it right? If there is enough noise from viewers, then we may be able to step in and discuss with the editors whether we can address that voice and publish that or run that politically sensitive piece. If we can, then let's do a more wholesome and holistic story.

Responses such as these indicate the desire of Singaporean journalists for the press to address its crisis of civic adequacy, so that the public may be informed of different perspectives and become better informed.

At the end of the day, there is a recognition that within any system, the media will always be subjected to some kind of control. One journalist says,

We can never operate in a model that is entirely of our own choosing – we will always be dictated or guided by a mixture of liberal and developmental press features. It is impossible to not be bounded by restrictions, due to the fact that we have certain responsibilities to the state, which pays for our operations, and to the people.

The key is to create a system that works for that society; there seems to be an agreement that Singaporeans look towards a press model that can be simply described as "pro-Singapore" – a point reiterated by a Communication Lecturer at Nanyang Technological University and former news editor Hedwig Alfred. She says,

The media's mission is to be pro-Singapore, it's not always just about making the government happy. So yes, they would be mindful to keep the place safe, to make sure there is harmony, but at the same time, they know they have a responsibility to report on what Singaporeans are concerned about.

One journalist echoes these views,

We don't want to be liberal for the sake of it, but we want to be liberal enough so that people's voices that are not heard get heard and it's for the public good. The idea of benefitting people works for me.

Indeed, the idea of working for the benefit of Singapore society as a whole is important for Singapore journalists; among all the different crisis narratives, the crisis of civic adequacy of the press appears clearly as a top-of-mind concern. Singaporean journalists are clear that their goal is to work for the betterment of Singapore and Singaporeans – in line with the developmental press model – and given that the government has proven itself to be trustworthy, competent, and working towards the same goal, local journalists have accepted as part of the job that they also need to “keep the government happy” and not rock the boat. If the government actively censors information and puts the Singapore people in harm’s way, then local journalists are more likely going to experience a drastic disconnect between their expectations of how journalism should be and how journalism is actually practiced in reality, thereby prompting a more widespread perception of journalism crisis. So far, there seems to be no such drastic disconnect that is felt by a majority of Singaporean news-workers.

At this point, Singapore is clearly at the stage of experimentation. One senior journalist says,

We’re trying to keep up with the social media world and always trying to find new ways of telling the stories, the important things that matter. Journalists themselves also start new blogs or new websites to get people to talk [about issues], so I think we are at the stage where we are transitioning, and we are finding ways of doing it better.

Generally, there seems to be a sense that the Internet, being the freest medium of communication in Singapore, can help to organically address their top-of-mind crisis concern of civic adequacy and help expand spaces for dialogue and debate. This journalist says,

There is a lot of experimentation going on and to me, this is pushing the boundaries as to what people can accept and what they can’t, and basically how do you tell the same story but in a different way, as well as the topics, the type of things that can be said. I think there is much to be optimistic about.

## **Chapter 6.**

### **Journalist Perceptions of Crisis in Hong Kong: Findings and Analysis**

Findings in this chapter are derived from the responses to my survey questionnaire on journalist perceptions and my hour-long face-to-face interviews, all of which were conducted between December 2014 and May 2015, at the same time as my study on Singapore.

In Hong Kong, the 80 respondents surveyed and 12 interviewed hailed from a wide variety of news outfits in the city, including South China Morning Post, Apple Daily, The Standard, Ming Pao, Sing Pao Daily, Sing Tao Daily, Cable News, TVB Jade, TVB Pearl Asia Television, RTHK, China Oriental Daily, Phoenix TV, Now TV, iCable News, Hong Kong Headline Daily, and Metro Daily Hong Kong. The spread of survey respondents was roughly split in half between the English-language journalists and the Chinese-language journalists.

Like the previous chapter on Singapore, the study findings will be laid out according to the following categories: 1) Journalist workloads in a global/digital world, 2) Perceived issues of concern in journalistic work\*, 3) Journalist views of their “ideal” news media system\*, 4) Local definitions of a “journalism crisis”\*, 5) Perceptions of US journalism and the liberal press model\*, 6) Perceptions of a local “journalism crisis”\*, 7) Journalist views on public confidence in the local news media and the level of journalistic professionalism among news-workers in the city, and 8) Journalists’ hopes for the future. Areas marked with an asterisk (\*) correspond directly to research questions posed in Chapter 4; those areas without an asterisk have been included in the analysis for the important context and/or anecdotes they provide.

## 6.1. Journalist Workloads: As Journalism Goes Global/Digital

In Hong Kong, of the 80 journalists surveyed, 25% of the journalists said they worked across multiple platforms while the rest worked on just one media platform – 31.3% worked on just the newspaper platform, 37.5% worked on just television, and 7.5% worked on just online media; those who worked on multiple platforms tended to most commonly be newspaper and radio journalists, who would also produce content for the Internet. Television journalists seemed to venture least towards the online platforms.

On these findings, interviews with Hong Kong journalists and academics offered some insights. There seemed to be agreement that two newspapers in particular have been able to most effectively leverage on the online platform – Apple Daily and the South China Morning Post. Both these news agencies have designated teams that produce video and content for their online platform – this is typically lacking in other news organizations that may be short on staff to produce digital-specific content. A journalist interviewed laments the situation in his newsroom,

We have a colleague who does the updates of the news on the website, and we get stories from the newswires like AFP, AP, RTHK etc., which we just feed onto the webpage. There is another journalist who spends half his time manning the webpage and the rest of his time doing his own stories. So we have precisely 1.5 people working on the website! This is not enough – we need to have someone to do the tech stuff, the web design, the pictures, the videos. We don't have resources to do that.

Apple Daily and SCMP's online presence have stood out for a number of reasons. Speaking with journalists working in both these agencies, it becomes evident how they have been able to succeed online.

For Apple Daily, journalists who arrive at a press conference are told to “take a photo of the press release, send it to the office, and the online news team will put the message out online immediately, on the website and on the news app”. They also “use Whatsapp [a cellphone chat application] to transfer photos or the main points about the press conference while the conference is still going on”. Besides the online news team, there is a separate Facebook team that will share “the kind of news that maybe the

readers will like” on Facebook. The mission of Apple Daily is to provide “instant news”, where they put real-time news online as quickly as possible. On top of that, photos and/or videos of the event and soundbites are obtained for the “video news” segment; their photographer also doubles up as a cameraman here. To ensure that they are still able to generate value-add for their print content, journalists usually stay till the end of the press conference, or “even after the press conference to get more news behind the scenes”, unlike the electronic media journalists who “usually just leave in the middle of the press conference because they have to report their news quickly”. Apple Daily’s website is currently accessible for free – there is some advertising on their online platforms and the company is still working to find a suitable business model that can generate revenue.

For the South China Morning Post, their strategy involves the journalists and editors working to get content out online as quickly as possible throughout the day – the key is to keep up with story developments over the course of the day and “print just gets the latest version at night”. This means that “reporters have to file their stories a lot earlier, the story must get subbed earlier in the day, so that stories can be published in digital form”. Access to SCMP’s website is not free and strictly limited to subscribers – non-subscribers can only access five stories a month. This idea of filing news as it develops extends to social media for SCMP journalists – interviewees informed me that breaking news on social media is a part of their key performance indicators (KPI):

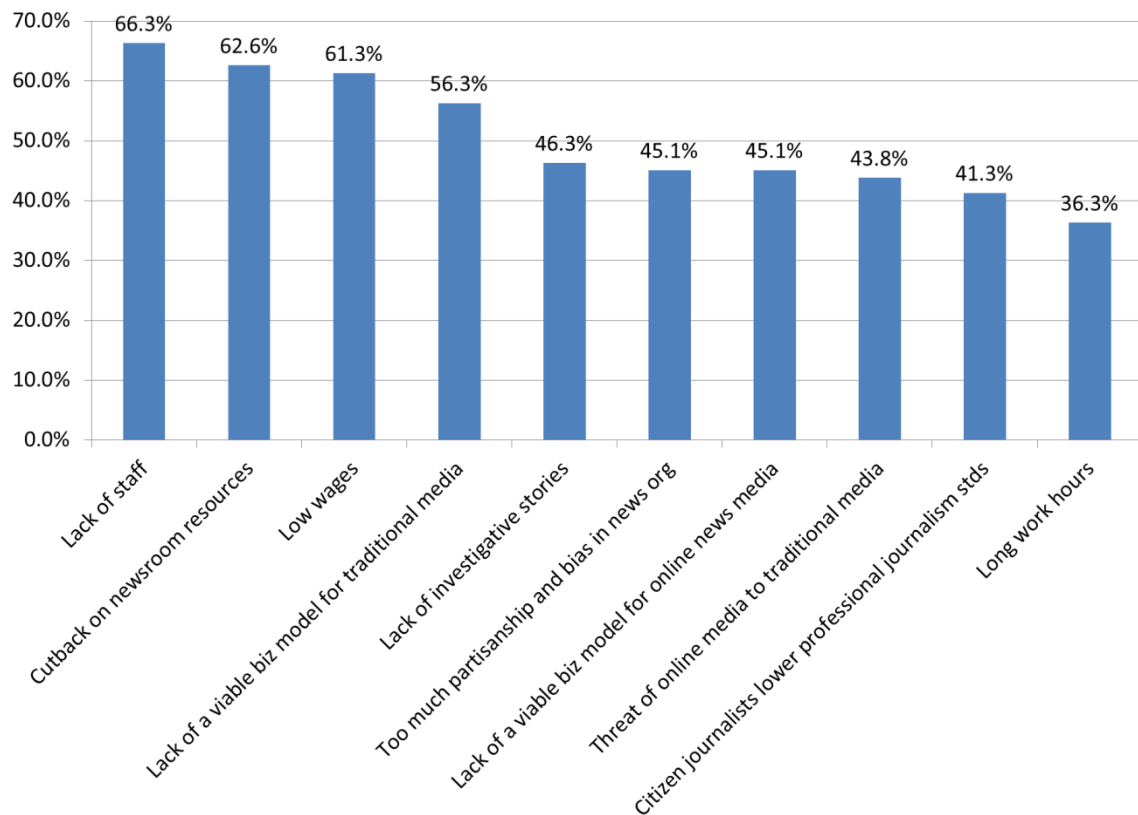
Occupy Central was an excellent case in point; our traffic went through the roof! The whole time it was just developing content. SCMP knows that social media is critical for content distribution – you get new readers by spreading the news. That’s why that’s a KPI, that’s why we’re measured on it.

In terms of languages used in reporting, in Hong Kong, a high 95.1% worked only in one language – 58.8% of the respondents worked solely in English media, 36.3% worked in Chinese media, and 5% worked across both English and Chinese. This was not surprising to many of the Hong Kong journalists subsequently interviewed; they said that in Hong Kong, it is common that news agencies specifically report only in English or Chinese; these two remain the most prominent languages used in Hong Kong society.

## 6.2. Perceived Issues of Concern in Journalistic Work

The top 10 most concerning issues which Hong Kong journalists perceived as “of considerable concern” or “very much of concern” are presented in the graph below.

**Figure 6.1 Top 10 Perceived Issues of Concern for Hong Kong Journalists**



Within the top five concerns, the highest ranked three issues all relate to newsroom resources and working conditions, namely 1) lack of staff (66.3%), 2) cutback on newsroom resources (62.6%), and 3) low wages (61.3%). The top two concerns are closely related; as one journalist interviewed says,

It isn't a cutback on resources like you have five computers, I'm taking away two. It's more like you have five computers, you're running one news programme, but now I need you to do three programmes, so there's a thinning out of resources in manpower and machines as well.

This directly influences another concern, listed as the fifth most worrying – the lack of investigative stories at 46.3%. Hong Kong journalists say this issue is not due to the fear



of digging too deep or being too critical – it is attributable simply to the lack of staff. One interviewee says,

I don't think reporters are allowed the time to do investigative stories; they are trying to fill their paper. And the media here in Hong Kong is moving too fast – reporters have to do the online version, the video, the newspaper itself, sometimes they may have columns to write; they just don't have the time to do investigative stories.

Another journalist echoes these views, “We don't have too many reporters and we have to work on daily stories, so we don't have much time to work on investigative stories. It's not because of any control from above; it's because of manpower”.

A point to note is the third highest ranked concern among Hong Kong journalists – that of low wages. This issue came up as the issue that is “very much of concern” to the most number of journalists surveyed – some 42.5% rated it as being extremely concerning. Interviews with Hong Kong journalists reflected this; responses showed a significant amount of frustration. One senior journalist reveals this,

I am infuriated; I am trying to hire staff now with the same wages that I turned down 10 years ago! Ten years on, inflation has gone up like crazy, and we are offering the same wage. How the hell am I supposed to hire people? I have a very high turnover rate. The English department has a more special scenario because if you're bilingual in Hong Kong, you can get a job anywhere you want. And without wages, it is impossible to hire.

Placed within the “journalism crisis” framework, this situation seems to clearly align with the crisis narrative on capitalism's inherent tendencies towards profit-seeking and exploitation, where waged labour is overworked and underpaid, exploited to enable the capitalist class to improve profit margins. In the case of Hong Kong's news industry, the journalistic news product becomes compromised, as newsrooms face constraints in manpower and resources, and are unable to attract competent individuals.

Hong Kong academic and communication professor Francis Lee, from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, sheds some important light on the issue of low wages,

You have so many news organizations in Hong Kong – if we talk about the print newspaper market alone, it is not just saturated, it is super saturated. It means that any kind of potential profits become so spread

out. The basic fact is also that a lot of Hong Kong media organizations are indeed not earning a lot of money and even losing money. If you're not earning money, then how can you pay your staff a huge amount?

Interestingly, despite not being very profitable, these news media organizations continue to be supported by their capitalist owners. Professor Lee brings up an important point to explain this,

There is a good reason for that – because a lot of media owners in Hong Kong, with one or two exceptions like Jimmy Lai [owner of Apple Daily], they are purchasing or running media organizations not for profits but more like it's symbolic capital for them when they have to deal with China. These media owners have ample businesses in China and when they run media organizations in Hong Kong, a lot of them may be politically driven. In other words, they don't exactly care too much about how much they are earning or whether they are earning at all. That's my view of it.

Again, this explanation is in line with the inherent flaws of capitalism – it is a system driven by the self-interests of the capitalist class. In a bid to amass more political and economic power in the long run, these capitalist owners depress the wages of their waged workers so that their media organizations can stay afloat and continue to be used as pawns in their money-making ventures.

Journalists tell me that the problem of low wages in Hong Kong has created a whole slew of factors that is causing the decline of journalism in the city, bringing into view connections with other narratives like a crisis of civic adequacy and a crisis of public confidence in the mainstream media. One journalist describes it as a “really really bad snowball effect”.

For one, a number of interviewees talked about the inability to retain good and experienced reporters. One senior journalist laments this,

My entire team consists of junior staff who are unable, really, to write a proper critical piece without a sub-editor looking through it. I mean if we were in a rush and someone wrote me something, I couldn't just rush to air that. 85% of the time I'd have to rewrite parts of it before it could be aired. And that's a huge problem because there are a lot of critical issues happening in Hong Kong and I can't actually rely on anyone to cover it properly on their own, independently.

A second consequence of low wages is that when senior journalists leave, no one has the expertise to work on investigative stories. One journalist says,

You can only do investigative stories when you're very familiar with issues. If you are unfamiliar with the topic, you don't even know where to start. The young editors don't have the expertise and knowledge to find out what stories they can do.

Another journalist adds that the quality of investigative journalism suffers as a result, "Investigative stories are not particularly in-depth – what comes out as investigative may be something that is simply not pack journalism – it's not a topic that is particularly investigative, it's just a topic that no one else has discussed".

A third consequence of low wages and hence fewer senior journalists in the newsroom is that no one is able to properly train the young journalists. One journalist says that "mentorship in Hong Kong is a luxury":

People work for two or three years and then they don't work in journalism anymore because they find that their progress is limited, and their salary is low, and their bosses don't take effort to groom them properly, so staying behind to be a journalist is meaningless.

It does not help that other higher-paying jobs are easily available in Hong Kong. One interviewee says,

Especially fresh graduates, [if you're] paying them not much money, you're not going to get very good, high quality people. We lose potential talents to other industries, like investment banking, which is unfortunate. You know, it's not dishwashing. You're reporting in a high pressure environment on very complicated things that are very important to what's going on in the world and in our city. You can't have just a bunch of clueless people in charge of that; it will just water down the whole profession.

A fourth consequence is that when the journalism profession is teeming with very young individuals, this makes them "easier to control" by the powers-that-be. One journalist voices these fears,

The young ones can be controlled – they don't know any better, they don't know the historical context, and they don't know the bigger picture of what's been going on. And so, when they're given a directive to cover

an event and ask for soundbites, they will write out the story without understanding the implications because they're simply too young and inexperienced. This is great for a company that wants to control the news output but I see it as a horrifying situation.

Another journalist echoes these views,

When they are very young and naïve, they are not going to think “Ok, how do we creatively get a newscast that makes people think?” They are just like, “Ok, let's just get it out” – it doesn't engage the viewer, or make people think about what is going on. That's probably the biggest threat in my opinion.

Evidently then, the squeeze on worker wages created by a profit-motivated capitalist class in Hong Kong has created greater concerns of a crisis of civic adequacy of the press, generating fears that the news media system is no longer able to act in the interest of the people and hold the powers-that-be accountable. While it might be more appropriate to discuss a crisis in liberal democracy in Hong Kong compared to Singapore – Hong Kong's civic institutions have been granted considerable democratic freedoms under the “one country, two systems” policy – Hong Kong society continues to be subjected to the will of the authoritarian Chinese government and has not been granted liberal democracy. Hence, framing the discussion as one where the media is unable to attain the expectations of society to meet civic needs and interests seems to be more apt.

Another area of concern, the fourth in the list of highest rated concerns, belonged to the category of “challenges of online media” – it related specifically to the lack of a viable business model for traditional media amid the changing media landscape at 56.3%. Other issues relating to online media use also made it to the top 10 highest rated concerns, such as the lack of a viable business model for online media at 45.1%, and the threat of online media to the advertising and circulation of traditional media at 43.8%. The highly competitive – and saturated – news media market in Hong Kong has amplified these fears that declining audiences and revenues for traditional media, associated with a crisis of financial viability in the face of online competition, would force further cost-cutting and newsrooms closures.

In particular, it seems to be their news organizations' inability to adequately leverage the online platform to better their operations, audience reach and revenues – I shall describe this as difficulties in new media adoption – that seem to bother Hong Kong journalists the most; only a few news outlets like Apple Daily and South China Morning Post seem to have successful digital strategies. One journalist says,

The owners think that if you have a website, that means you have an online presence, or if you have an app, then you're existing online. They don't really care about how they push the information to readers. They don't tweet, they don't use Facebook, they don't even have a LinkedIn account to get themselves exposed.

Another journalist echoes these views,

We have an app, we have a website, we have a presence on social media, but in terms of journalists being encouraged to use social media as a way to expand on the stories they've been working on, I don't see any encouragement. I do that myself but nobody's asking me to do that, and nobody will say well done if I did that.

Here, communication professor Francis Lee offers a plausible explanation, relating to a "wait and see" attitude of media owners. He points this out,

A lot of these media organizations don't exactly care about profits anyway; they run their organization for the symbolic capital. And some of the media organizations that care about media profits have ways to earn money by free newspapers – any financial trouble is postponed by the huge success of these free newspapers. In other words, they don't have very strong incentive to invest in the very uncertain arena, which is online. If I run a newspaper in Hong Kong, I already have my financial problems solved by free newspapers or because I have businesses in China, I really run this newspaper for the symbolic capital anyway, then why do I need to invest so much in new media development? Why don't I wait for someone in Europe or North America to work it out?

This suggests that the quality of the journalistic output online may be compromised as the media's capitalist owners prefer to dedicate resources to areas that will draw in the greatest profits.

In addition, under the category of “journalism practices”, partisanship and bias in Hong Kong’s news media came up as a troubling issue as well at 45.1%, occupying sixth position in the list of concerns. One journalist notes this,

It’s very easy to define which print media belongs to which side. Sometimes I believe it’s quite polarizing, in a bad way. [For example] Apple Daily, it gives us an impression that it’s the most liberal newspaper in Hong Kong, but in these two years, it seems that because their anti-government perspective or stance is very clear, so no matter what the government says, this newspaper will bend it or find a lot of opposition voices to comment about this. And sometimes I would have doubts about whether you can use watchdog [function] to justify all these news reports. On the other hand, the Tai Kung Pao and the Wen Wei Pao are very, very pro-government, so no matter what happens in Hong Kong, all the angles are supporting the government. So I don’t think being polarized is a good feature actually.

When asked if diversity of opinion does in fact better inform audiences and help them arrive at a more comprehensive picture, this reporter says media consumption trends in Hong Kong do not support this perspective,

I would have doubts because people who’ve read Apple Daily would not have read Tai Kung Pao. On the other hand, people who believe in Tai Kung Pao would not read Apple Daily! I think for the younger generation, yes, they might have the opportunity to look at things from a different perspective, but not for the people who only rely on traditional media.

These responses align with the narrative of a crisis of civic adequacy experienced by Hong Kong’s news media, where highly partisan content may create a less informed citizenry rather than a more informed one, and the press ends up prioritizing the interests of their owners (whether they are government, pro-China businessmen, or pro-democracy advocates) rather than that of the people.

Another journalist echoes these views,

Now they are not just liberal, they are extreme. To them, unbiased news is not important, promoting democracy then is important, being anti-government and opposing Chinese government then is important. Apple Daily has this trend, I’m seeing; in Occupy Central, they reported in more and more extreme ways, so at that time their readership dropped. Even Hong Kong audiences think that it is too extreme; they want unbiased papers.

This leads into the narrative of a crisis of public confidence in Hong Kong's news media, where audiences become jaded and distrusting of what they read in mainstream news sources.

I also asked Hong Kong journalists if there were other issues of concern not listed in the survey. A number of notable points stood out. One key point was the business and political interests of Hong Kong media owners in mainland China, reminiscent of what communication professor Francis Lee was referring to about media owners in Hong Kong treating their news organizations like "symbolic capital" to aid them in their business dealings with China; Chinese University of Hong Kong communication professor Joseph Chan also describes these media outlets as "political assets". A number of journalists referred to these media owners influencing news coverage. One survey respondent says,

The unique thing about journalism in Hong Kong is many owners of media outlets also own other forms of businesses in China. They would somehow exert their influence over their outlets' editorial independence, to censor sensitive coverage on China affairs.

Another journalist interviewed echoes these views,

It depends on who the boss is. Some of them may have businesses in mainland China and their interests are there, so some of the organization's reports may be angled a different way to be not so liberal. To please the boss, the way they cover the news is inclined towards what the boss wants.

Evidently then, the desire of the capitalist owners of Hong Kong's news media to improve their business relations with China – thereby maximizing their profits in the long run – is hurting journalism in Hong Kong, resulting in further fears of a crisis of civic adequacy of the press and a crisis of public confidence.

Also fitting within the narrative of the crisis of civic adequacy and public confidence is the discussion on self-censorship, highlighted by respondents as another key issue of concern in Hong Kong's news media. When I asked interviewees to elaborate on this point, one journalist says,

Self-censorship is a big problem; let's just say nobody has really gone out of their way to ask why some stories are not being done, especially when it comes to sensitive politics or anything to do with Occupy or anything to do with China. Obviously this is worrying because at the end of the day it's an imposition on the freedom of thought and your ability to think for yourself, and have a freedom of ideas and expression. People just don't want to get in trouble; their jobs are on the line and it's just not knowing where the boundaries are, and so people play it safe.

Another journalist says that high-profile threats and attacks on pro-democracy editors and journalists from Ming Pao and Apple Daily are not helping the situation – “it gives us an impression that journalists in Hong Kong seem to be under threat if you're not reporting something that supports the central government or the Hong Kong government”. In comparisons with the past, one senior journalist notes this,

Hong Kong reporters in the past were more feisty and more aggressive about getting stories about China but now they are much more cautious and tip toe, simply because of the overall crackdown on journalism and news reports in China, which is very real.

### **6.3. Picturing an “Ideal” News Media System**

In Hong Kong, journalist support for the Western liberal-democratic ideology was overwhelming, when asked about the features they would like to see in their “ideal” news media system. 81.3% of the respondents picked only characteristics pertaining to the liberal press model, such as the press acting as a watchdog to monitor the powerful, providing unbiased news reports to inform citizens, and presenting different political positions to encourage debate.

Communication professor Francis Lee from the Chinese University of Hong Kong says this is not a surprising finding at all – this is the one and only journalism model that Hong Kong journalism students are taught. He tells me this,

I did my undergraduate journalism degree in Hong Kong and I'm teaching journalism theory and I've never learnt about developmental journalism when I was an undergrad, and of course I never teach that. I don't think a lot of Hong Kong journalists or people would have an idea about what developmental journalism is. When you don't have the concept of it and you talk to me about it, that there's this idea of journalism that promotes



social harmony, national development, even helps the government as a mouthpiece, it is so communist! Especially in the Hong Kong context.

To Hong Kongers, Professor Lee says the liberal model of journalism constitutes what they view as “universal values of journalism”:

I don't think Hong Kong journalists think that it is only one of many models and that it is very Western. I think they have a sense it is Western, but they don't care about why. The liberal model has been the kind of model that they've been practicing for at least three to four decades, and that is the model we teach at school. For the Hong Kong people and journalists, that is the so-called “universal values of journalism”.

Indeed, of those reporters who selected only the liberal press features, only 18.5% of them were educated in the West (UK, US, Australia), as opposed to learning on the job in Hong Kong or receiving their journalism education locally or within Asia. This clearly showed that it did not take a Western journalism education for journalists in Hong Kong to incline them towards liberal press features; they acquired these leanings locally as foundations of “good journalism” as well. One journalist interviewed says,

Journalists in Hong Kong are rather young, they have that kind of mission to tell the truth especially under the education system here, derived from the British; they want to be the “Fourth Estate” because that's what they were taught to do.

Another journalist echoes these views, “Reporters in Hong Kong receive a journalism education that is the Western kind of education and they tend to believe that the media should be the watchdog and not the propaganda of the government”.

Hong Kong's British link is brought up by another senior journalist interviewed:

Hong Kongers [tend to] feel that what is left behind by the British is the foundation to Hong Kong's success. If this disappears, Hong Kong's success will be no more. If we adopt mainland China's way of doing things, including political reform, then Hong Kong will be no more. That's why I think we have such liberal stances.

Evidently then, Western liberal ideologies continue to be deeply embedded within Hong Kong society and have not been supplanted by local alternatives through ideologization efforts of the Chinese state.

The necessity for Hong Kong's news media to play the watchdog role is also contextually relevant and crucial for this city. Communication professor Joseph Chan from the Chinese University of Hong Kong says,

In a place like Hong Kong where there is no democracy at all and where there is no representative government, and this is a big global city, a very complicated sophisticated society, how do you manage all these differences and also the gap between the government and the people? People have to rely on the media as a way to reflect their voices and to express their opinions – this happened during the colonial period and also during the run-up to the handover and in post-handover Hong Kong. You have nobody to argue for you, you only have the media to rely on. And that's why I call it "Hong Kong's media serves a surrogate democracy function" because of the structural requirement. So both the government and the people treat the media as a platform for the expression of their opinions; even though this opinion is not unified, it is very diversified, and it is a way you can hear the people's voices. Hong Kong's media can choose not to play this role, but the structure is for them to do it, otherwise the pressure can be so great that the people will revolt.

In fact, he strongly points out that the liberal stance of Hong Kong's news journalists is borne out of local-specific factors rather than because they are "from the West":

It is not necessarily the case that people just learn from the West, as you might think; there is something more to it. It grew out of our own needs, and it has something to do with the ideals of journalism that prevails in the world. So while in general, I would say most people abide by journalism ideals that are closer to the West, there are structural reasons why that is the case, not just because they learnt it through socialization or because it is from the West.

This indicates how deeply ingrained liberal ideologies are in the consciousness of Hong Kongers; these ideals have themselves played a crucial role in the historical experiences of the city.

Hence, despite both societies having a Chinese majority that would, on the outset, seem to have been educated in the ways of traditional Confucian values – such as being respectful to authority and stressing consensus and harmony in society – as part of their cultural upbringing, Hong Kong journalists did not seem to have been swayed by these developmental leanings. Professor Francis Lee attributed this to the

lack of an authoritative body that actively perpetuated these ideologies, “No Lee Kuan Yew!”. Another journalist insightfully points out that “social harmony” in Hong Kong has even acquired a negative connotation:

In China, they keep saying there is a need for a harmonious society, but to the mainland Chinese, harmony is to silence everything that is negative. Given this context, “social harmony” is not a phrase that Hong Kongers will use very much. [Even though] harmony is something they also strive for, because of the current conditions, this term has become mutated. Things are no longer so simple.

Views like these indicate a deep rejection of ideologies perpetuated by the Chinese state – given that Hong Kong was a refuge for political dissidents of China in the 1840s and that the city experienced more than a century of colonization under the British, these are events that have set this city apart from the rest of mainland China, shaping the worldviews of Hong Kongers and creating an “us” versus “them” divide that have prevented the successful bridging of values and ideologies from the Chinese state.

Offering the lesser-held perspective are journalists who had picked developmental press features alongside liberal press features in this segment. One journalist interviewed says,

I believe that journalists are actually acting like a middleman between the government and the people, so while we should be a watchdog to make sure the government does the right thing and to represent the people, at the same time, I believe sometimes we do have a responsibility to tell the people the ideas of the government as well. That doesn't mean whatever the government says, I have to copy all the things without digesting all the materials, but I believe sometimes it is a two-way conversation. If we find that in a particular issue, actually the government does have its point and I do have the evidence that the government has made a correct decision, then I have to work on what I believe is correct.

Notably as well, there are newspapers in Hong Kong that are distinctively pro-government. As one journalist interviewed points out, newspapers like the Tai Kung Pao and Wen Wei Pao will not look up to the liberal press model.

Next, I asked survey respondents the open-ended question of whether there were other roles that they felt their “ideal” news media system should play that were not

listed in the survey. Respondents cited the promotion of critical thinking in citizens – “make citizens think and make their own decisions”, as well as enhancing the diversity of stories in the media to cover “news analyses, investigations, offbeat and alternative stories”. All these align with characteristics of the liberal press.

As for their views on the Internet, Hong Kong journalists felt that the Internet has both benefited and challenged the creation of their “ideal” news media system. Positives of the Internet include allowing up-to-date news to reach the public more quickly, and exposing the people to multiple and alternative viewpoints online. Several references were made about the good work of citizen journalists; one respondent describes citizen journalists as “not tied to big corporations and can report and say things freely,” while another says they are “passionate and well-equipped to report the news”. During the Occupy Central movement for example, “it was those online media managed by citizen journalists that updated the information the fastest” and they were “hard for the central government to have total control”. Such activity online can “help people consume and understand the news more profoundly”, enabling the media to better perform its role of informing the public, and with more public engagement, can “prompt reactions from opinion-makers and ensure that voices of the people get heard by those in power”, thereby championing the interests of the people. At the same time, the Internet also helps traditional media “increase circulation through social media” and “spread their content to a wider readership”. Additionally, some survey respondents say it is a good source of information for journalists “for research, fact-checking and sharing of stories”. These capabilities of the Internet can help the news media system address concerns related to a crisis of civic adequacy and a crisis of public confidence.

On the flipside, several survey respondents pointed to the concern that information online may be unverified and inaccurate. One journalist says, “Too many bloggers pretend to be journalists and put things on the Internet without verifying them first”; another respondents echoes this, “Facts and truths can be easily distorted – once it goes viral, it is almost impossible to make things straight again”. This version of journalism online is worrying to many. One journalist surveyed says,

Sensational stories that get clicks and shares only reinforce the existing bias or create a new bias; this bias may go viral in an instant, yet it is far

more difficult to spread a moderate voice or balanced view or an in-depth analysis.

These raise concerns of a worsening, rather than an alleviation of, a crisis of civic adequacy of the press. Online stories are also described as “shorter and simpler”, “emotional” and “superficial”, with journalists even alluding to “too much debate” – “no sooner do you think you have a fact then you’ll find 10 others that disagree!” Political debate online sometimes also becomes “two sides throwing words at the personal affairs of each other and misses the point entirely”. This can cause a crisis of public confidence in the news media system. Furthermore, managing what is happening online is increasing the burden of traditional newsrooms, “particularly if the staffing levels do not grow to match the increased workload”. This raises concerns that existing news-workers will be further exploited to meet these demands, drawing attention to a potential crisis due to capitalism’s inherent profit-seeking tendencies and a drop in the quality of the news content produced.

#### **6.4. Definitions of “Journalism Crisis”**

Journalists in Hong Kong had largely similar journalism crisis definitions compared to Singaporean journalists. A key concern was the erosion of journalism standards, described as “drifting away from the journalistic ideals of impartiality, telling the truth, being accurate, being a watchdog of those in power and giving a voice to the people”, and there is a general “lack of unbiased, trustworthy news outlets”. Censorship and the restriction of press freedom was a top criterion for a journalism crisis as well – “when there is strong government, politician or advertiser intervention”, when journalists lack the “freedom to report what they want” and editors are “not allowing them to write or cover the ‘truth’”, and when public interest is not placed as “top priority”. A drop in the quality of reporting, from “serious topics” to “trivial matters like celebrity news” is also a criterion of a crisis, when “ratings dominate rather than the accuracy of information”, creating a likely crisis of civic adequacy of the press to perform its public service role to meet civic needs and interests. The increasing polarization of Hong Kong’s media amid recent political tensions has also resulted in a unique crisis criterion reflected in some survey responses, that is, “when agencies produce news, seen by the public as a source

of truth and information, that are blatantly biased to the point of being lies". Again, this sparks fears of a crisis of civic adequacy of the press. In addition, the threat of online media can also plunge a press system into crisis, when "advertisers are attracted away from traditional media" and "newspapers die, journalists lose their jobs, and people get their information through social media"; this is tied to the narrative of a crisis of financial viability.

Like Singaporean journalists, Hong Kong journalists also feel that the factor of public trust is an important one in determining if a news system is in crisis or not; this might result in a crisis of public confidence in the press. Survey respondents say, "A journalism crisis is when significant number of organizations are losing readership because the public has lost trust in the media", and when "journalism becomes irrelevant – when people ignore it, and it has no voice or agency in its society".

Rather unique to the context of Hong Kong – considering the attacks on news-workers in recent years – is the journalism crisis criterion relating to "challenges to a journalist's life and safety", as noted by the survey respondents. This suggests that a concern on journalist safety may be a valid addition to the "journalism crisis" framework of Hong Kong.

## **6.5. Perceptions of US Journalism and the Liberal Press Model: In Crisis or Not in Crisis?**

For Hong Kong journalists, a high 51.3% of respondents were undecided about whether the US press system was in crisis or not. Of the remaining journalists, 27.5% of respondents surveyed felt the system was "in crisis" or "close to being in crisis", while 21.3% felt the system was "not in crisis" or was "far from being in crisis". Based on these figures, there did not seem to be a large number of respondents in Hong Kong who were venerating the American liberal press model uncritically.

## 6.6. Perceptions of a Local “Journalism Crisis”: Explanations and Solutions

In Hong Kong, the percentage of journalists who felt the news media system was “in crisis” or “close to being in crisis” was 71.3%, way ahead of those who felt it was “not in crisis” or “far from being in crisis”, at 21.3%. The rest of the survey respondents were undecided.

For those who said yes, they perceived the system was in crisis or close to being in one, issues cited pertained to: 1) Political and economic influences, demonstrating “attacks on press freedom through violence or business pressures” and “needing to be ‘politically correct’ [i.e. self-censor] to gain financial resources from mainland China”, 2) Stagnant low wages for journalists, and 3) The threat of online media to traditional media and its business model.

Political and economic influences – that led to self-censorship and biased reporting – were most commonly discussed by respondents. Of particular mention were the censoring of a particular news story about police brutality on Occupy Central protestors by television news broadcaster TVB and the pulling out of advertisers from the pro-democracy news outlet Apple Daily. On political controls, one journalist surveyed writes that “China seems to have quite a bit of influence on the news – TVB already had an issue with management changing an ‘Occupy’ story”. This story, broadcast during the Occupy Central movement, had seen TVB broadcasting one version detailing the removal of a protestor by a group of police officers to a “dark corner” where they began “kicking and punching” him – later versions of this story did not carry these vivid details. One journalist says some of the management was “furious” that the story used “terms such as ‘kicking and punching’ and ‘dark corner’”:

I mean it was five o'clock in the morning or something, there were many dark corners, but they said by describing it as a dark corner, you are putting your leanings that this is bad thing. There was a huge commotion after that and a lot of [journalists] quitting came from it.

This journalist is uncertain if censorship like that comes from directives from the government or self-censorship among the editors:

We do get calls from the [government] liaison officer from time to time and there's definitely a certain level of self-censorship within even middle management, because they know if it passes them, it gets to senior management and they will get censured for it.

This TVB incident was similarly brought up by a number of senior journalists interviewed. One reporter described the story as “watered down and actively censored” – the news-workers responded with a protest petition where “some people who signed it felt the anger and the boss didn't take it very well – there was no sort of meeting of minds”. This censorship incident at TVB had indeed resulted in almost 60 news professionals at the station issuing a joint statement against the management's decision to edit the video and a number of journalists quit their jobs (Heung, 2015). This incident clearly aligns with a crisis of civic adequacy of the press, where the media faces restrictions to adequately and truthfully inform the public. To communication professor Francis Lee, this event could signal a worrying turn for Hong Kong journalism as such censorship controls become more blatant.

Indeed, Hong Kong journalists are keenly aware of these influences; survey respondents noted that “the Hong Kong and Beijing governments attempt to intervene via high-ranking editorial staff”, “many media outlets have already bowed to Beijing and become a mouthpiece of the government – misinformation and biased reporting have become very common”, and that “there is interference from Beijing – the PRC government awards friendly media with political appointments for their owners and management as well as [offer them] advertising, while the independent voice has seen advertisements withdrawn”.

On this economic front, the possibility of advertising pull-outs is causing journalists to perceive the beginnings of a journalism crisis. The fact that media owners in Hong Kong often have business interests in China is well-known. One journalist surveyed says, “owners' business interests (and with that, ties to government) often interfere with how Hong Kong media serve their purpose”, and another points out that “it's hard to be impartial in your reporting if the owner of your media organization has vested interests in the mainland and doesn't want to report on anything too touchy”. This is a pressure that has been described by journalists as “subtle”, yet very worrying – “too many media is now controlled by pro-Beijing owners and will take sides on local and



national news”, lest “the government tells businesses not to advertise with them”. One respondent writes that the control of these “‘pro-China’ executives” is causing “public anxiety on press freedom”. One journalist interviewed relates to this as an “unspoken kind of influence” – “it is known in the community that commercial pressure can be exerted on media organizations”. These points align with the crisis narrative on capitalism’s profit-seeking tendencies, when capitalist owners of the press work in their self-interests to maximize their profits.

Indeed, currently, news outlets that are pro-liberal democracy have to beat the odds to survive – Apple Daily journalists are at the forefront of this struggle, especially with the advertising pullout of Standard Chartered Bank and HSBC. They feel the profound mission to keep pressing on – one journalist says, “If one of these days Apple Daily shuts down, the other newspapers that are still fighting for some kind of press freedom might also turn to become milder and less critical”.

This perception of crisis is worsened by the well-publicized “recurring incidents of assaults on media executives”, including what has been described by respondents as “intimidation”, “fire bombings”, “attempted murders” and “violent attacks”; these point to the need to include in Hong Kong’s journalism crisis framework the concern on journalist safety. This has resulted in self-censorship where “ignoring important stories that could possibly be troublesome to Beijing are really quite rife”, and that “more newspaper agencies are reporting pro-government stories in recent years, leaving more public voices underreported”, again contributing to fears of a crisis of civic adequacy of the press.

This bias towards pro-government perspectives – and conversely the pro-democracy perspectives in opposition to that – has resulted in a wider polarization of Hong Kong’s news media, which some journalists see as very problematic. One comment notes that, “It’s obvious that some newspapers are being the mouthpiece of the government, arousing negative feelings towards the opposers, while some media are having too much sensationalized content to go against the government. The two sides are polarized”; another response says, “The reporting style become too political – pro- or against-government media use every chance to attack each other”. One journalist

surveyed says “Many media distribute biased stories, and some might even claim that they are representing certain groups in society.” As previously mentioned by respondents, given that Hong Kongers supporting one media outlet are usually unlikely to check out others with different political standpoints, the increasingly polarized nature of Hong Kong’s news media might mean the public becomes less well-informed. This has directly impacted public trust and confidence in the health of the Hong Kong press system to accurately, fully and fairly present the news. One respondent says, “The readers, especially the young, hold deep distrust towards the news [media] because of their undisguised political orientation”. Many of these readers are migrating online to access the diverse opinions and news stories that might be censored on traditional news media, particularly in politically trying times like during the Occupy Central movement. Even while acknowledging that news online may be unreliable and biased, respondents note that the Internet space “allows more room for unimpeded discourse and reporting”. This movement of audiences, and hence advertisers, to online platforms creates fears that the business model of traditional media is under threat.

The newsroom’s inability to retain experienced journalists due to the “long work hours” and “dismal pay” is adding to perceptions of a journalism crisis, according to the survey respondents. This is again in line with the inherent flaws of capitalism that see capitalist media owners exploit their workers to ensure their media businesses stay afloat and aid them in their profit-making ventures in China. The stagnant pay scale for “almost two decades” and the trend of news agencies “only willing to pay for entry-level reporters when senior reporters leave” is, as a journalist surveyed says, “preventing professional journalists from staying in the industry”. This lack of experience in the newsroom is sparking fears of a workforce that is “easier to control” as Chinese state influence on the press increases.

On the flipside, journalists who felt the Hong Kong press system was not in crisis or was far from being in one pointed to a few reasons. These included the good diversity of news media outlets in the city that enhance the civic adequacy of the press system – responses include “there is a good balance of voices in the media and there are plenty of outlets I feel are trustworthy and unbiased”, and “Hong Kong still has range of differing viewpoints (range of papers of different stances) to give people a more complete picture

of what's going on, as long as they're open to reading them all"; the determination of frontline journalists – “the lower-level, frontline reporters and subeditors smart enough to get around unreasonable instructions”; and the constitutional protection of press freedom in the city from state control – “Hong Kong still enjoys press freedom, which is safeguarded by the law; media organizations can still act on their own, despite some pressure, which has been there even in the past, and will be there in the future”. These responses indicate that those respondents who do not perceive a crisis tend to base their views on the ability of the Hong Kong press system to play its public service role, i.e. the civic adequacy of the press seems to be a top-of-mind priority.

On the point of press freedom last point, senior journalists interviewed who have had experiences working in news organizations elsewhere, including in the West, say the Hong Kong press system is “far freer than it might think”. One interviewee says political and economic influences are part of the workings of every news organization worldwide:

They are the same litany of problems that any journalist across the world faces – [elsewhere] we've had editors shut down serious stories about chief executives of companies that had advertising ties etc.; [in journalism] you have a boss, a proprietor, an owner, advertising, every media company has to make a profit. So I think the more you spend in media, the more you trade off your idealistic values and become more realistic about what journalism is.

Another senior journalist says, “I've been working in Hong Kong media for more than seven years. Direct government influence? I'm not aware of any”. There also seems to be a difference between constraints placed on the English news media compared to the Chinese news media in Hong Kong. As one journalist tells me, “I will say the English news team, we're second language, we're not the main priority, so generally speaking, we are under the radar and so people pay less attention to us and we can afford to be more critical”.

Indeed, a number of senior journalists and news editors I interviewed acknowledged that the constitutional protection of press freedom is a saving grace in these times of political tension in Hong Kong – direct government intervention in

journalistic work is absolutely not condoned in the eyes of the law – but note that it is still important to see the red flags that currently exist. One senior journalist interviewed says,

When the liberal newspaper gets advertising boycotts and a journalist from Ming Pao is injured by we-don't-know-who, by someone, it gives us the impression that journalists in Hong Kong are under threat if we're not supportive of the central government or the Hong Kong government. I can't say it's a very concrete crisis at the moment, but when all these things add up, it gives us [the journalists] an impression like this.

At this point, pressures on journalism in Hong Kong are subtle, but present, hurting the ability of the press to perform its social role of informing the public. Journalists interviewed discussed typical strategies used by the powers-that-be to influence content. One journalist says,

They can't really give you direct demands or directions, but they will try to speak to your boss, then your boss will speak to the people in charge of the newsroom. Once the people in charge of the newsroom have this conversation with their boss, they say "Ah, don't try to report something bad about the police again, I guess it's too much", then if they have a chance to report on something related to the police again, they will have the impression that maybe the government doesn't like this kind of information, and maybe there is something wrong with this, so they will just change it or not report it, because it's not that big a news after all.

Another journalist says that even though "editorial decisions are still made by individual section heads and journalists themselves", top management with close links to the government still have some influence:

They don't directly influence the actual content, but would challenge editors and editorial decisions; they are still bound by the charter which says we have editorial independence and that they do not have a direct say in individual reports, but there is subtle influence.

An editor interviewed speaks of the strategies that are typically adopted by government agencies to influence the news agenda, such as scheduling their news conferences very close to the evening off stone [i.e. daily deadline for submitting stories], or packing several big announcements and events on the same day. This editor says,

When everybody knows there's going to be a big announcement, they would always hold their press conferences close to news time. So most

news organizations, especially electronic media, have their main newscast at six or seven o'clock; the government would often make their announcements at about five, so we would then have an hour to digest everything and broadcast [the news]. So everybody works their hearts out to try to churn things out, and there isn't time to get reactions. This way, the government's point of view gets out in the news [as it is].

The editor also discusses strategies government agencies use to bury negative or controversial news,

They also use a trick whereby they would make use of one particular day to pack several big events together. So for example, on the other day when the government announced the political reform package, they also organized a news conference, had the auditor's report coming out, and an announcement about light pollution. So on a normal quiet day, light pollution would be a big story but those who are working within the government as information officers would say, "Ok let's cramp everything in on that day", so that's the second or third story. That's how the government tries to influence the news agenda.

In other strategies, the pro-democracy news outlets may run into problems when they ask government officials for responses. One senior journalist says,

We don't really have the chance to get interviews with the high-ranking government officials because they usually won't accept our invitation. They regard us as one of the media who do not support the government. Of course we will keep trying to send out invitations to those government officials to ask for interviews and even if they're not willing, we will try to ask for a written response.

I asked if journalists would be deterred to write the story if they are unable to get a reply; responses among journalists varied. One said that they would run the story anyway with a note that the government had declined to respond, another interviewee said that "for some stories they will shut you down – the editor will say this story is one-sided and you can't publish that".

At this point, Hong Kong journalists can take comfort in the fact that journalism practice in Hong Kong and China are still "significantly different". Communication professor Joseph Chan says,

People are much more apprehensive towards the Beijing government rather than the Hong Kong government, because Beijing is very different

ideologically. And organizationally, it can seek to punish and penalize you. It can also take harsh measures in order to stop you from reporting. That happened to a Hong Kong journalist – it is something real. But with the Hong Kong government, it so far still stops from interfering directly with reporting. They can make calls behind the scenes, they can befriend you, they can stay away from giving you interviews, or stop advertising in your media outlet, but then whether you submit to this kind of pressures is up to you.

But communication professor Francis Lee says that indications point towards a slippery slope downhill:

You need to start to sound alarm bells. We do still have Apple Daily, but you know the trend is going downwards. It is a crisis not because Hong Kong is already like mainland China, but it is a crisis because Hong Kong is becoming like mainland China; and it is moving quick, at least in the past two years.

As part of the survey, I also asked if journalists felt the crisis in Hong Kong was inevitable given the current political, economic, and social climate in the city. An overwhelming majority said that they felt it was inevitable given the “closer link” that Hong Kong now has with China. One journalist describes it as “unbreakable connections to a country that actively discourages freedom of speech”. Survey respondents were keenly aware of the “political and cultural difference between Hong Kong and China”; they described China as “a country which doesn’t tolerate freedom of expression and pluralism which is the bedrock of journalism”, and that “the more rebellious Hong Kongers get, the tighter the control from Beijing”. One journalist surveyed says, “Beijing doesn’t want to be questioned. It wants to bring in the same controls it has over mainland media to Hong Kong to silence dissent”, and another respondent worries that “the central government has the resources and power to control news agencies [in Hong Kong]”. Of the few journalists who responded that the crisis in Hong Kong need not be seen as inevitable going forward, responses pointed to the active role of journalists and newsroom managers in “choosing to not let it happen”, and “safeguarding press freedom”.

On possible solutions to this journalism crisis, almost all the responses pointed to the urgent need for journalists, news organizations, and the public to play a more active role to ensure that the media’s social role is not compromised. Journalists in Hong Kong,

like in Singapore, seem to base their solutions on ways to address the crisis of civic adequacy of the press specifically, suggesting that this crisis concern is to them most crucial and pressing. I will elaborate on each of these solutions in turn.

First, in calling for journalists to take action, respondents note the importance for journalists to “stand united against influences” and “insist on doing what they think is right”. There are also calls for “organizing the news workforce so they can voice concerns better and have more lobbying power” – a way to do that is “closer collaboration among news associations and unions”. This solution however, is viewed with much skepticism from the senior journalists and news editors I interviewed. One of them says,

I have to be honest – it gives me a feeling that it might not be that effective in really dealing with crisis. I guess one of the functions of the journalist association is to have a statement whenever there're things happening. But apart from statements, what else can we do to really deal with the problem?

Another journalist echoes the same view,

I guess the reporters are already working with the union now but their voice is always being ignored. I mean they have all the statements but they're not formally addressed by the government or people who are affected. So I don't know, it doesn't seem to work.

Bringing up a valid point however is a journalist who believes the work of the journalist association in Hong Kong is a step in the right direction: “If we don't voice our [our concerns], the general public simply won't know why it is important, that is why it is important to do that”. Communication professor Francis Lee agrees, noting that journalists in Hong Kong must become “more outspoken” and “defend themselves” when their rights and freedoms are threatened.

Second, news organizations must also play a part to alleviate this journalism crisis, most significantly, to raise the salary of news-workers. This would enable newsrooms to “attract talent”, and retain experienced journalists who can “do more training”. There is also a call to diversify the funding for news organizations in Hong

Kong, so that they are not merely controlled by businessmen who may “be at the mercy of short-term commercial worries and may be controlled by Beijing”.

Third, the public also plays a crucial role. Survey respondents cite the importance of “pressure from the public”, especially on the Internet, against possible constraints on press freedom. One survey respondent says, “Grow the web presence and give dissenting voices a space”; another says that “citizen journalists could deliver stories that the traditional outlets will not touch”.

In general, journalists in Hong Kong agree that it would not be appropriate to juxtapose journalism crisis research and solutions based in the US on the Hong Kong context. While acknowledging that the threat of online media to traditional media is a similarity between the US press system and Hong Kong’s, most respondents believe that the “different political and social contexts” between Hong Kong and the US have presented very different journalism crisis scenarios. One points to the US “at least having democracy” rather than a semi-democracy like Hong Kong; another believes that the “journalism crisis in Hong Kong is more political, while the one in the US is more commercial”. One respondent attempts to sum it up, “In both cases, it comes down to money, but in Hong Kong there is more blatant influence by government [i.e. Beijing]”.

## **6.7. On Public Confidence and Journalistic Professionalism**

When asked to rate their perceived level of public confidence in Hong Kong’s mainstream news media, the mean obtained from the survey respondents was 5.53 out of 10, and the median was 5.5 out of 10. When asked the reasons for their ratings, respondents mentioned a number of reasons.

Those who believed that there was still relatively high public confidence in Hong Kong media pointed to the trust that the public still placed on the local press system. One journalist surveyed says, “While more people rely on citizen journalism nowadays, traditional media is still the most common platform where people obtain the news”. Another survey respondent says, “People generally choose the news outlets they like the most and believe and support it wholeheartedly”. The diversity of Hong Kong’s news



media landscape also means that “intense competition from rival agencies and newspapers keep them honest”; and the fact that Hong Kong’s freedom of speech remains constitutionally protected allows people to “continue to rely on the media for information and analysis”. Where there are concerns about the media, the Hong Kong public readily voices these concerns online, which seems to some as an indication of good faith in the press system:

They criticize us when necessary and they praise us for good stories. The fact that there’s a dialogue, to me, means there is some trust that we can change, do better, or keep up whatever good work we are doing.

For journalists who gave low ratings for the level of public confidence, reasons cited pertained primarily to censorship fears and biased reporting. The independence of Hong Kong media is a big concern; journalists point to a “reddening of the media” and a “deteriorating political climate in the city”. One journalist says, “Many people assume all decisions taken by publications are due to Beijing interference”, and another says there is a “growing sense that mainstream media just toes the government line” and “dare not speak out on sensitive issues due to economic and political affiliation with China”. The concern of self-censorship is amplified with recent attacks on journalists in Hong Kong and advertising pull-outs from pro-democracy media. One journalist surveyed pointed to “the attacks on a Ming Pao editor and the firebomb attack on Apple Daily owner Jimmy Lai’s house” that has “caused confidence in the media to wane as such people are cowed into submission”. One journalist candidly says, “If the media do not toe the line, their editors are stabbed in broad daylight or their issues stopped from being distributed. And good luck with getting advertising”. These incidents, made known to the public, cause a drop in public confidence. One survey respondents says, “There are too many scandals and bad publicity. And the content of many newspapers do not tally with what they see with their own eyes”; another adds that “I often hear Hong Kongers say they don’t trust the local press as much because they exaggerate their content or they are biased”. As a result, Hong Kongers turn to online media for their news, which some journalists see as evidence of lower public confidence in mainstream media; as one journalist notes, “People have more ways to get information now, and the mainstream media has lost its authority”.

From the above responses, there seems to be two camps of journalists in Hong Kong – one camp believes that the constitutional protection of press freedom still enables news outlets to stay honest and unbiased, and another camp that sees this guarantee of press freedom as a ploy to pull the wool over the eyes of journalists and observers to what is really happening – increasing interference in the press by government and media owners to bias the news, in a bid to boost their own political and economic power.

Notably however, a large number of Hong Kong journalists feel that it is not possible to lump sentiments relating to Hong Kong media together, since the city's media scene is extremely diverse. A common response from survey respondents was that confidence levels depended on which news organizations were in question. One respondent says, "Everyone has a side and generally supports whichever newspaper appears to be closer aligned to their political stance"; others point out that "people have different levels of confidence in different news outlets" largely because "people know that different news organizations have a different political stance". Generalizations will be difficult to make because "there is such a range of media outlets that it's hard to generalize in this way – people seem to trust the agencies they choose to trust".

Hong Kong journalists surveyed were also asked to rate their level of perceived journalistic professionalism in the city. Results showed slightly higher ratings here than that for their perceived public confidence in the news media – the mean rating for journalistic professionalism was 6.03 while the median stood at 6 out of 10.

When asked how they defined "journalistic professionalism", respondents pointed to several key criteria, such as objective and balanced reporting, and working in the public interest, as well as factual, accurate, truthful and ethical reporting. Notably, the journalist's role of acting as a watchdog, conducting investigative journalism and promoting critical thinking stood out particularly strongly within the Hong Kong context.

To begin, comments related to objective reporting would make reference to "reporting without fear or favour", "reporting without an agenda", and "independence from political, economic, and social influence". Respondents viewed professional journalists as those that are "willing to report the news in a fair and impartial manner"

and present “an unbiased perspective” by presenting readers with “various viewpoints” or “arguments of both sides”. The key, according to survey respondents, is to be “fair, honest and transparent” and to “objectively present the truth otherwise hidden by governments and businesses”. From these responses, journalists in Hong Kong seem to be mindful that the objectivity ideal in journalism may result in irresponsible reporting where the media simply relays messages from the news-makers to the audiences, thereby privileging elite voices and interests; comments here stress the importance of presenting a variety of viewpoints and arguments that might not be in line with official viewpoints.

Serving the public interest is also seen as a top priority. One journalist defines professionalism as “being responsible to your interviewees and the public”; another respondent points to “helping to initiate discussions and debates, to shape a better society for the people” and that journalists should “seek truth and speak for the underprivileged and powerless”.

In the same vein, survey respondents see great value in investigative and watchdog journalism that “investigates issues that matter to the people” and “holds the government to account when necessary”. Journalists should be able to “think critically on social affairs, know how to find out the truth and present in-depth analysis to the audience”, and “write stories that ‘ask questions’ and seek another side”. This emphasis on investigative and watchdog journalism is in line with previous observations of Hong Kong journalists viewing the Chinese state as a threatening external power that must be scrutinized.

When survey respondents were asked why they rated journalistic professionalism in Hong Kong the way that they did, creating a resulting mean of 6.03 out of 10, responses were varied.

Journalists that gave higher ratings said that truth telling still ranks high among Hong Kong news media. One survey respondent says, “There are very few cases of grossly misleading or wrongful reporting, and stories are frequently broken even when they are inconvenient to the government or to major business interests”; another echoes this view, “Hong Kong journalists generally perform their tasks with objectivity,

sometimes though not absolutely neutral, there's seldom false or misleading reporting". The role of journalists as watchdogs has also been duly performed, in the eyes of a few respondents. One journalist surveyed says, "Some investigative news reports conducted by some news agencies or organizations were indeed fact-based and critical enough to arouse public awareness and help improve the society"; another points to the city's reporters as "a smart and sober pack, except for the ones in tabloid or government-run news services". Interestingly, most of the respondents who gave professionalism a higher rating lamented on the context within which Hong Kong journalists have to work within – comments included "most journalists in Hong Kong are pretty good but they're working under a difficult system", "journalists are concerned about doing their jobs well despite the pressures they face", and "we continue to do what we can with the limitations that we have".

Here, journalistic professionalism is seen by Hong Kong journalists as ethical and responsible reporting; there were no doubts cast on the negatives of professionalizing journalism, i.e. that adhering to "professional" journalistic norms such as objective reporting, separating news from opinion, and citing from official sources may in fact privilege elite voices and interests rather than the voices and interests of the people. Hong Kong journalists seemed to take "professionalism" at face value. Responses also indicate that Hong Kong journalists seem aware and frustrated by the constraints they face on their job, referring to the pressures and limitations that they face. This highlights the stark disconnect that Hong Kong journalists experience between how they view journalism should be, and how journalism is practiced in their newsrooms, again signaling a clash of ideologies between the city's news-workers and the powers-that-be.

On the other hand, respondents were a lot more vocal about why they did not think that journalistic professionalism in the city was high. Not surprisingly, biased reporting and self-censorship came up again as the key reasons for this. One reporter surveyed says, "Bosses of media who pay the salary to news producers have their own political standpoint, and staffs must almost always obey the direct orders from the top about what and how they should do the reporting". The consequence of this, according to another survey respondent, is that "too many journalists have a pre-set agenda before

they start doing interviews. They already have a plan on how they want to portray the story even before they have an in-depth understanding about the issue”.

The influence of political, economic and social pressures is also hurting Hong Kong’s journalism standards. One journalist surveyed points out that there is “too much news from the government information office – to be professional, we shouldn’t do that”; another says “political pressure from Beijing” has resulted in increasing self-censorship among journalists, noting that “journalists in Hong Kong work very hard and are diligent but there is this sense that one shouldn’t push the boundaries too much, unless you are [the pro-democracy outlets] Apple Daily and to some extent iCable”. Once again, there is reference made to TVB’s report during the Occupy Central movement about the police treatment of a protestor, seen as evidence of biased reporting in place. One survey respondent wrote that “higher-ranked people in the office have bowed to Beijing – look at TVB”.

Coupled with these factors relating to biased reporting and self-censorship is the problem of inexperienced journalists in Hong Kong newsrooms that are lowering perceptions of journalistic professionalism in the city. Survey respondents linked young, inexperienced journalists with the inability to “write detailed analysis”, the “reluctance to speak out because they fear for their careers”, and the tendency towards “subjective reporting among young rebellious reporters”. One survey respondent says, “Hong Kong’s journalists tend to quite young, which means there’s plenty of drive and passion, but also the lack of wisdom, and sometimes they can’t really detach emotions from their stories”. Another notes that, “Most front line reporters are not experienced enough and therefore don’t know how to ask follow-up questions and are not critical of the flood of info they receive”.

The lack of proper training of young journalists and low wages is not helping the situation. One respondent makes reference to the quitting of experienced journalists who would traditionally be training the rookies, “The quality of journalists is deteriorating without proper training, and turnover rate is pretty high”; another journalist laments this, “We are seriously underpaid – how to talk about professionalism when you can’t even pay your rent?” One respondent aptly summarizes this, “The relatively low wage of the

industry cannot groom a sophisticated journalist". It seems then that the concept of journalistic professionalism seems to be tied up with a whole slew of other problems faced by Hong Kong newsrooms that is preventing them from doing their jobs.

Of noteworthy mention here is the common response from Hong Kong journalists that it would not be accurate to classify journalistic professionalism of all Hong Kong journalists under the same index, again due to the diversity of the city's news media landscape. One respondent says, "There are some excellent journalists, but also government stooges and many commercial writers"; another two journalists share a similar view, that "most journalists here have the speed and accuracy, though the neutrality lies upon the outlet they work for", and "most journalists have a high level of professionalism and report the facts. It's only the news companies that hold back on [reporting] certain issues at times". For the aforementioned reasons, one journalist surveyed concludes this,

There are great journalists in Hong Kong, but there is also a whole litter of reporters who, either due to editorial influence or a personal lack of experience or professionalism, can be biased in telling stories, or are just bad at it.

In particular, some journalists made reference to the different level of "journalistic professionalism" between frontline reporters and news editors – there is the perception of the latter being more subservient to pressures from the top. One survey respondent recalls incidents during the city's Umbrella Revolution:

During the Umbrella movement, journalists tried so hard to cover all stories that happened. However, the final reports were somehow biased as management decided to present a biased report in order to show their support to the government. So generally, reporters in the frontline are really professional but management of the newsroom always have their political concerns and are very powerful in influencing reporters' stories.

Another journalist surveyed says this, "There are alleged cases of reports by frontline journalists being removed or modified by seniors, so I believe the levels of professionalism vary across ranks".

I asked the interviewees to comment on this – this difference between how frontline reporters and news editors perceive their work tends to depend on whether the news outlet is more pro-government or pro-democracy to begin with. One senior journalist working at a pro-government news agency says,

I think there's a disconnection between the two levels within the organization. The frontline reporters are trying to stick with the liberal model, at least many of them are doing that, but the management, the editors, they will stick with what they're told to do, stick with the government. The outcome will be leaning towards the government.

For news outlets that are more pro-democracy, however, the news editors are entirely aligned with the frontline journalists in their desires to expose government wrongdoing and corporate abuses; as one senior journalist says,

I know that some editors may play down the news [that is critical] but it has never happened in our company. Because the government knows that if they make a phone call to our company, to our editor, and tells us to play down the news, we will write about this and they will just create another big news!

## **6.8. Finding Meaning in Local Journalism Work: Hopes for the Future**

Hong Kong journalists I spoke to agreed that this is a critical moment for their city. The increased political engagement of Hong Kongers in general, and a political landscape in flux, has placed greater scrutiny on the role of the media in Hong Kong society – and with that, a stronger sense of mission among Hong Kong journalists to stick to the “basic principles of journalism”, despite the odds. One senior journalist says,

I think because right after the handover, it was very stable, especially compared to what people were expecting. There were visions of doom and chaos – none of that – business as usual, in fact, business was fabulous. Hong Kong flourished and prospered and was stable. But as people became more politically aware and engaged, that's when they became more aware of different social injustices, and that's also when the government and certain media agencies realized the need to calm the situation and maintain the “social harmony” we've been speaking of.

Numerous factors have fuelled this increased political awareness; one reporter refers to the “talks about patriotism as mainland China tightens its grip” and the use of “social media that has made young Hong Kongers smarter about the state of their city and concerned about the future – it’s not just about commerce anymore, young Hong Kongers want more”.

When such tensions rise and controls on news content increase, that’s when Hong Kong’s news-workers become more sensitive about challenges to their environments. One interviewee tells me this,

When Hong Kong is going through a critical moment, you will see a difference in media reports – if there’s a critical issue, different kinds of controls will appear. Like during the Occupy movement, most of the newspapers were pro-government, and they did not report news about the police attacking the protestors or played it down. If Hong Kong is peaceful and nothing is happening, all the media will report about the same news, and it’s okay. But if it’s a critical issue, as a journalist, you need to find out the reality!

Ultimately, there is a fear in Hong Kong society that China will “take over” Hong Kong. One journalist says, “I think there’s definitely an element of imagination there where we compare with China and go, ‘Oh my god, what if we become like them’”. Another interviewee says,

Because the mainland wants to impose their way of doing things onto Hong Kong, a lot of journalists feel that they are coerced to comply. If we don’t resist now, in the future, we might be “reddened” and become just like them. To many journalists, this is not acceptable.

Responses such as these indicate the strong presence of an “us” versus “them” divide that is widening in Hong Kong and the desire for Hong Kong not to become “like China” is a recurring discourse that surfaces among the local journalistic community. The use of strong words like “coerce” and “resist” also indicate that Hong Kong journalists are viewing the Chinese state in highly antagonistic terms.

Amid rising political tensions, all of the journalists I spoke to exhibited a strong sense of mission to defend what they view as the basic tenets of good journalism. One journalist says,



I think it's really important that we act as a monitor of the government and of all the business interests and the rich and famous, and to be an outlet for the people, to tell the stories of the people, because who else would do it? Who else can provide that?"

Another journalist asserts this,

If the liberal model is replaced, it's not journalism, and I wouldn't want to work in the profession anymore. If it's just China Daily type of journalism, or Xinhua, forget it. I think at this point, it's treading water; I think it's managing, it's doing its best.

Indeed, this struggle for editorial independence and to tell truth to power is where Hong Kong journalists are drawing the meaning of their work from. One news editor says, "Hong Kong journalists guard their freedom fearlessly. Many people join the ranks of journalism because they want to defend press freedom and freedom of expression, even though they could be earning a lot more money in other fields". Another journalist echoes these battle cries,

We're still trying very hard to maintain this kind of liberal journalism, even though I notice that nowadays, we face some threats, or we feel that we face some threats. We're not trying to look for a new style of journalism, because to us, there's only one kind of journalism and we should not just easily sacrifice this kind of journalism to suit our present condition. At this time, our government does not have support from the public; it's difficult for journalists to think we should cooperate with the government. Controls on the media is not correct and should not be encouraged.

Again, such responses make clear that Hong Kong journalists see themselves playing a vital role in Hong Kong society, and that is, to check on a government that they believe must be carefully scrutinized and to reflect voices of the people to those in power, so that Hong Kong society can continue to thrive. Clearly, news-workers in Hong Kong do not believe it will be for the good of Hong Kong to cooperate and partner with the government.

One interviewee sums up these sentiments with a dash of optimism,

We are aware that press freedom is very limited in mainland China but we are still under "one country, two systems". And so we do our best to defend these two systems; being journalists, we're trying to defend our

values the best we can and live up to what is pledged on the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law and defend that [press].

A lot of hope, therefore, is weighing on the constitutional protection of press freedom in Hong Kong, which will enable journalists to legitimately raise their voices if any censorship is imposed upon them. This interviewee says,

I think the positive aspect is that we have young journalists coming out from universities and they are taught based on the liberal model; they know that we have press freedom and want to maintain things that way. And so I do have high hopes and I am optimistic that we will maintain a liberal system, so long as the “one country, two systems” policy continues [to exist].

## **Chapter 7.**

### **A Comparative Exercise: Exploring Significant Variations in Journalism Crisis Perceptions in Singapore and Hong Kong**

The goal of this comparative exercise, based off the study findings revealed in Chapters 5 and 6, is to give a comprehensive view of the similarities and/or differences that exist between the way Singaporean journalists conceive of “journalism crisis” and the way Hong Kong journalists conceive of the same concept, based on their expectations of how journalism should be, and the material practices they perceive as issues of concern in their daily journalistic work.

#### **7.1. Areas of Comparison**

In my analysis, I will pay particular attention to whether these journalists believe the state of journalism in their cities warrants the use of an overarching “crisis” framework that can elevate discussions on and call more attention to this issue, how the journalists’ perceptions of “good journalism” may have been influenced by the West and how these ideas have interacted in complex ways with local values and ideologies, as well as the presence of unique journalism crisis dimensions that may be present in media systems outside the Western world that practice some form of authoritarianism. Comparisons will be made between journalist responses in these two cities wherever relevant, and tying them to crisis narratives typically articulated in dominant journalism crisis research. But because this is an empirical study on journalist perceptions, I will offer, in the concluding chapter, my view on how these perceptions shed light on the existence of an actual systemic crisis in Singapore and Hong Kong, and what structural-causal factors may have contributed to the types of journalism crisis that have emerged.

### **7.1.1. Journalist Workloads: As Journalism Goes Global/Digital**

An examination of how journalist workloads have changed in the digital age in Singapore and Hong Kong indicates that journalists in both cities are now given more responsibilities as newsrooms devise strategies to cope – it is no longer enough for traditional media journalists to focus solely on producing content for the media platforms they have been hired for. Rather, each journalist is expected to also produce snippets of content for the digital platform in real-time and relay these back to the newsroom. The question to further inquire then, is whether there is a pay raise that corresponds to this increase in responsibility, or whether, adopting a Marxian critique of capitalism, journalist exploitation is indeed on the rise, with the risk that the quality of journalistic output is also compromised; this will be found out in the next segment.

When examining business models, it seems news organizations in Singapore and Hong Kong have, at this point, either adopted an advertising supported business model that allows users to access free content online, or a model involving a paywall that requires users to pay a subscription fee in order to access more than a few of their stories online; questions are asked in the next segment if journalists see problems in the business models their organizations have adopted online. A particular difference between the Singapore and Hong Kong case studies worth noting here is that resources seem to be readily pumped into newsrooms in Singapore to hire journalists that solely produce for the digital platform, while in Hong Kong, besides select newspapers like Apple Daily and SCMP, newsrooms seem to lack the resources to invest in such digital teams, generating greater frustrations of overworked journalists and the inability to leverage on digital technologies. On the outset, Hong Kong may seem to be experiencing greater challenges dealing with the digital turn than Singapore; whether this is true will be discovered in the next segment when journalists are asked to rate their greatest issues of concern on the job.

Next, when comparing the responsibilities given to journalists in Singapore and Hong Kong to report beyond the language they are hired for, workloads seem to be greater for Singaporean journalists. Given the fact that different language news outlets operate under the same roof, these news organizations seem to have legitimized their actions to use journalists for reporting in more than one language by stating that it is the

best and most efficient use of manpower that allows operations to be streamlined. However, if workers receive no corresponding increase in wages – a detail which will be found out in the next segment – such efforts, from a Marxian perspective, could be seen as cost-cutting measures put in place to increase the profit margin of the media business, even at the expense of exploiting the workforce, in a bid to ensure that the capitalist class that helms the business maximizes their capital gain.

With a broad understanding of how journalism work in Singapore and Hong Kong is changing in a globalizing digital media environment – adding to existing journalism literature that seems to focus largely on government influence on the press in these two cities – we can now compare the perceptions of journalists on the issues of concern that plague them in their day-to-day work within these two locales.

### **7.1.2. Perceived Issues of Concern in Journalistic Work**

In comparisons between the Singapore and Hong Kong case studies, a few notable points stand out. There are a number of similar crisis narratives that journalist responses align with, such as the crisis due to capitalism inherent profit-seeking tendencies that relates to cost-cutting measures established by media owners to improve their profit margins at the expense of worker welfare. As well, biases of news outlets caused by close relations between media owners and the political and business elites – Singapore media has been tasked to partner with the government in nation-building while Hong Kong's media owners use their organizations as symbolic capital to better business relations with China – suggest the possibility of a crisis of civic adequacy of the press, where the public service role of the press becomes undermined in favour of elite voices and interests, and a subsequent crisis of public confidence in the news media, where audiences begin to question the credibility of mainstream news sources. In both cities, it would not be adequate to speak of a crisis of liberal democracy, since neither Singapore nor Hong Kong's civic institutions have been granted liberal democracy in the first place.

Where they differ is in the area of new media technologies. Singaporean journalists seem less concerned with drastic layoffs and newsroom closures amid

competition from online news sources, since their media companies are state supported and continue to make millions in yearly profits; Hong Kong journalists, however, are mindful of the stiff competition they face with the many news outlets in the city and that their news organizations are hardly making any profits to begin with – this amplifies their concerns on the financial viability of their organizations as competition from online news sources increase. In addition, another key difference lies in the type of challenges faced by newsrooms in Singapore and Hong Kong when it comes to new media – newsrooms in Singapore are more concerned about the ability to find qualified personnel with the right mix of digital savvy and journalistic skills for the job, while journalists in Hong Kong are more concerned with the inability of their news organizations to come up with effective digital strategies that utilize the capabilities of the Internet to improve their reach, revenues and operations.

A close examination of the responses of journalists in the survey and interview also indicates to me a difference in the way journalists in Singapore and Hong Kong perceive the need to closely monitor the powers-that-be in their locales. Singaporean journalists indicate their understanding of the government’s stance that the media should work with the government to ensure national stability and unity – suggesting the successful ideologization of Singaporeans towards the notion of “survivalism” – but point out that the media needs to move with the times and better address public debates that are already taking place online; Hong Kong journalists view the increasing bias in their media sources towards the Chinese central government with much more apprehension, seeing it as the beginnings of more authoritarian control of the Chinese government on Hong Kong society, suggesting a clear “us” versus “them” divide that is widening in the city. This suggests the relevance of a “crisis of legitimacy” narrative that is related to the system of governance – an additional crisis dimension that needs to be addressed in societies that practice some form of authoritarianism. This narrative will be further developed as part of this comparative analysis.

### **7.1.3. Picturing an “Ideal” News Media System**

Responses in this section indicate that Singaporean journalists have strong inclination towards the developmental press model – 63.8% of the respondents included

developmental press characteristics when asked about their “ideal” news media system – and that there is a general consensus (albeit one that is sometimes contrived) that the news media has a duty to support the government in nation-building, given the nation’s historical trajectory. There is a belief that this is a system that has worked so far to the benefit of Singapore and Singaporeans – in material terms, Singaporeans now lead comfortable lives under the current leadership – which further embed such developmental leanings among news-workers in the city-state, despite them being aware of the benefits of the liberal press model. This is a mark of successful ideologization efforts by the Singapore government.

The case of Hong Kong is quite the opposite however. There remain strong inclinations towards the liberal press model despite the city’s handover to China two decades ago; 81.3% of respondents picked only liberal press characteristics when asked about their “ideal” news media system. The general consensus among news-workers is that the press needs to monitor the actions of the powers-that-be and hold them accountable, as well as champion the voices and interests of the people so that they may be heard by those in power – these ideals have been carried over from the city’s long period of colonization under the British and further ingrained through the local historical experiences of Hong Kong. The city’s journalists appear not easily swayed by the ideologies of the Chinese state that advocate respect for authority and creating social harmony and consensus over contention and debate – in fact, there is a certain amount of repulsion towards these ideas, with local journalists believing that these are ploys to limit freedoms and assert control; these measures are then deemed to threaten a system that has worked well for Hong Kong and one that has helped the city and its people draw substantial material benefits from. Indeed, there seems to exist a widening “us” versus “them” divide in the city, as the Chinese state seeks to exercise greater control on Hong Kong society.

These ideas extend to the perceptions of Singaporean and Hong Kong journalists on the Internet and how it may contribute to the creation of their “ideal” news media system. While both sides see several similar positives to the widespread use of new media, such as the tabling of more issues and perspectives and the quicker transmission of these ideas to audiences, and several similar negatives, such as the

circulation of false and misleading information online and the growth of more sensationalized news coverage to garner page-views, there remains a stark difference in the way Singaporean and Hong Kong journalists refer to the role of the Internet here. Singaporean journalists are mindful that their news organizations, in the digital age, must partner with the government to sieve through and make sense of the content online in order to ensure that social stability, public order, and economic development are not threatened, while leveraging on the Internet and discussions online to make their content more diverse and credible; in this way, the trustworthiness of the mainstream media remains high and the press can continue to perform its role in nation-building. In the case of Hong Kong however, the Internet exists alongside the mainstream media to prompt greater political participation, so that more voices and perspectives from the people get heard by those in power, and that alternative viewpoints, particularly those that might be censored in mainstream media, might be able to surface to help the people understand the news in more profound ways.

From this analysis, I maintain that there is a stark difference between the way the way Singapore and Hong Kong's news-workers perceive the press system's relations to power. The Singapore government appears to have succeeded ideologically to create a broad-based consensus for their decisive rule of the city-state, demonstrating in material terms the benefits of their rule, while the Hong Kong government, backed by the Chinese leadership, is facing an uphill battle of creating consensus with a population that has long been ideologized in a vastly different way, and who has benefited materially from the system it is familiar with. This speaks to a crisis of legitimacy pertaining to the system of governance that, I argue, must be considered for locales subjected to some form of authoritarian rule – this is a narrative that I believe plays into the crisis perceptions of local news-workers, which I aim to further illustrate in the sections to follow.

#### **7.1.4. Definitions of “Journalism Crisis”**

From my study findings, journalism crisis criteria – factors that will influence news-worker perceptions of the existence of a journalism crisis – are very similar between Singapore and Hong Kong. This could be attributed to the Western journalism



scholarship that journalism students in these two locales are exposed to in school. They relate primarily to the news media's inability to perform its social roles caused by political and economic pressures and competition with online sources, thereby causing a dip in public confidence in the press and the migration away of audiences and advertisers to online platforms, resulting in an inability of traditional media to remain financially viable. Both Singaporean and Hong Kong journalists were fearful that their press system would not be able to serve the interest of the people and hold the powers-that-be accountable. This does not necessarily contradict the idea that Singaporean journalists are more socialized towards developmental journalism, since this form of journalism seeks to empower citizens to become actively involved in the process of political, economic, and cultural development.

Notably as well, the exploitation of journalists was not a top-of-mind criterion of a journalism crisis for news-workers in either city. Even for Hong Kong journalists who have been subjected to decades of low wages, elite control on content rather than on labour seemed to be a more definitive criterion of a journalism crisis. Unique to Hong Kong is an additional factor in the definition of a journalism crisis, that is, the concern of journalist safety, the result of highly publicized attacks on news-workers in the city in recent years.

#### **7.1.5. Perceptions of US Journalism and the Liberal Press Model: In Crisis or Not in Crisis?**

Based on my study findings, there did not seem to be a large number of respondents in Singapore and Hong Kong who were venerating the American liberal press model uncritically. Interestingly, there also did not seem to be considerable difference between the crisis perceptions of Singaporean and Hong Kong journalists towards the US press system – Hong Kong journalists, despite looking up more to liberal press ideals, do not feel that the US press system is functioning better than Singaporean journalists. This is notable, suggesting an awareness among journalists in both cities that problems do exist in the American press system as well, or at least an uncertainty about whether the American press system is truly upholding the standards of “good journalism” that it purports.

### **7.1.6. Perceptions of a Local “Journalism Crisis”: Explanations and Solutions**

Top concerns between Singaporean and Hong Kong journalists that have created perceptions of a journalism crisis share some similarities, particularly relating to: 1) Political influences on the press that have created a culture of self-censorship, 2) The threat of online media to traditional media and its business model, and 3) Deficiencies in newsroom resources and manpower that are influencing the quality of journalistic output.

There are several key areas where they differ, however. For one, Hong Kong journalists seem to be a lot more concerned about the economic pressures on their newsrooms, citing how recent pull-outs of prominent advertisers from pro-democracy news outlets have created added pressures to toe the line; Singapore newsrooms do not have this concern, given that they are state-supported institutions already mandated to work with the government. Given the heavy saturation of the news industry in Hong Kong, with dozens of competing news outlets, any potential drops in revenue become a greater cause for concern; there are only two major news organizations in Singapore. Hong Kong journalists are also mindful of and troubled by the close alliances that their media owners have with the business and political elites in China – these media owners have inserted themselves into the editorial process to shape content that might be controversial or sensitive to the powers-that-be (the Occupy Central coverage on TVB as a case in point), reducing the ability of the media to perform its social role of informing the public accurately, fully, and fairly. In Singapore, there is similarly a close alliance between media owners and the political elites of the city-state – there is a hope that Singaporean newsrooms be helmed by experienced journalists rather than civil servants – although Singaporean journalists are broadly consensual of the role that the Singapore news media plays to help the government in nation-building. Hong Kong journalists also speak of journalist safety, or the lack thereof, as a key influencing factor on their crisis perceptions, given the highly-publicized recent assaults on news-workers in Hong Kong; there have been no such occurrences in Singapore.

Additionally, another difference seems to lie with concerns pertaining to newsrooms resources – Hong Kong journalists are a lot more troubled by their low wages than Singaporean journalists are, suggesting that the situation in the latter case is

not as severe. Responses from Singaporean respondents indicate that their concerns are primarily related to new responsibilities to produce for online platforms without a corresponding increase in wages, while Hong Kong respondents indicate that there seems to be no clear reason why wages have not risen for the last two decades to even match inflation rates. Both are factors that influence the quality of journalistic output and present difficulties in hiring and retaining experienced journalists, but the premise of these concerns are evidently different. Both cities also have different resource concerns when it comes to challenges in the digital age – Singaporean editors are noting difficulties in hiring journalists with the right mix of journalism training and digital expertise, while Hong Kong journalists are concerned that their media owners are the ones who have not placed priority on hiring enough personnel to manage the online platform. Here, priorities on the digital front seem to be laid out top-down in Singapore and difficulties are experienced at the bottom, while such priorities seem to be articulated from the bottom-up in Hong Kong, with difficulties to match expectations at the top.

Lastly, the desire to keep up with changing times is expressed in both the responses of Singapore and Hong Kong, although they are of a completely different nature. In Singapore, this means expanding spaces of debate in the mainstream media to account for alternative voices, opinions and issues to surface, especially since such debates are already taking place online and ignoring them may mean hurting public confidence in mainstream news media; in Hong Kong, keeping up with changing times means remaining steadfast in their upholding of “good journalism” values of the liberal-democratic persuasion, ensuring that the press continues to monitor government and corporate wrongdoing and championing the voices and interests of the people, despite added pressures from the authoritarian Chinese state.

Indeed, journalism crisis perceptions are felt more widely and more intensely in Hong Kong compared to Singapore – 71.3% of journalists in Hong Kong perceive their press system to be in crisis or close to being in one, compared to just 43.8% in Singapore. This statistic clearly aligns with expectations that these journalists have of how the press system in their cities should be – recall that a majority of Hong Kong journalists (81.3%) had chosen only liberal press features as part of their “ideal” news

media system, while a majority of Singapore journalists (63.8%) had chosen a mix of both liberal and developmental press features.

Top-of-mind solutions to the crisis seem to focus on addressing the crisis of civic adequacy of the press in both Singapore and Hong Kong – where there is concern that the press is unable to perform its public service role to accurately and fully inform the public and meet civic needs and interests – thereby indicating that this crisis concern is the most pressing issue that must be resolved. Notably however, the tone adopted by journalists in discussing this crisis narrative is vastly different between respondents from Singapore and Hong Kong. Hong Kong journalists distinctly display an “us” versus “them” mentality, viewing the Chinese leadership in antagonistic ways; they seem to almost be issuing a battle cry for Hong Kong journalists to unite and defend themselves against a threatening external power. Singaporean journalists however, while expressing the need for change in the system, are mindful of the limitations of their recommendations, indicating that replacing the civil servants that head their newsrooms and/ or breaking the media duopoly would require a structural overhaul with permission from the state, and loosening constraints on the press might backfire and threaten the social stability that the nation has tried so hard to build. Again, the successful ideologization efforts of the Singapore government are visible here, that the media system still holds a position that is subordinate to the state.

### **7.1.7. On Public Confidence and Journalistic Professionalism**

A number of similarities and differences stood out in this section, when examining how Singaporean and Hong Kong journalists perceived levels of public confidence in the press and journalistic professionalism.

Both Singaporean and Hong Kong journalists rated their perceived levels of public confidence in the press at about 5 out of 10; journalists in both cities cited audience awareness of the biased nature of news coverage in favour of the dominant elites as a cause for the low rating.

A notable difference in their responses was this: Singaporean journalists tended to make a clear distinction between political and non-political stories when discussing

how much the public trusted the mainstream media – audiences tended to view political stories with skepticism that it would be biased towards the government, more so than non-political stories. Hong Kong journalists however, stressed another type of distinction that must be made, that of news organizations. Recalling that Hong Kong’s news industry is brimming with competing news outlets, respondents say it would not be accurate to lump together sentiments on their press system since confidence levels would depend on the news outlet in question. Given that Hong Kong’s news outlets have rather distinct political stances, Hong Kong audiences would tend to trust news outlets that they politically aligned with more than others.

When asked to rate their perceived level of journalistic professionalism in their city, both Singaporean and Hong Kong journalists gave a rating of about 6 out of 10. Both Singaporean and Hong Kong journalists seemed to associate journalistic professionalism with objective and balanced reporting, and working in the public interest, as well as factual, accurate, truthful and ethical reporting. Neither group questioned the negatives that could be associated with professionalizing journalism, i.e. that “professional” practices such as objective reporting, separating news from commentary and citing official sources could bias the press more towards elite voices and interests rather than the voices and interests of the public, although there seemed to be an awareness that there is a need to bring in a variety of viewpoints and arguments not put forward by elite sources.

Interestingly, when discussing journalistic professionalism, Singapore journalists pointed out the need to still act responsibly, in particular, that journalists must be aware of their “social and national responsibility”. This highlighted the extent to which the Singapore government has succeeded ideologically to embed in journalists the need to partner with them in nation-building. Relatedly, critical thinking among Singaporean journalists also seems to be lacking, where frontline journalists simply take instructions from the top. On the flipside, respondents in Hong Kong were a lot more focused on asserting the role of their press system as a watchdog to monitor those in power, to conduct investigative journalism to unearth wrongdoings and to promote critical thinking among the populace. Again, this demonstrates a stark contrast between how Singaporean and Hong Kong journalists have been ideologized – the Singapore

government has successfully ingrained in the minds of journalists the need for the press system to work with the government, using ideologies of survivalism and Asian values, while the Hong Kong and Chinese governments are wrestling with a journalistic community that seems to view them in more antagonistic terms, laying the foundation for a crisis of governance that would increase perceptions of a press system in crisis.

In addition, the competitive nature of Hong Kong's press system also has respondents noting that levels of journalistic professionalism are different across different news organizations, and across the ranks of individuals within the newsroom (i.e. frontline journalists versus news editors), creating more grounds for conflict to occur; this is less of an issue in Singapore which features a media duopoly and where journalists and news editors have a consensus on how the press should best serve the people.

#### **7.1.8. Finding Meaning in Local Journalism Work: Hopes for the Future**

When comparing responses from Singaporean and Hong Kong journalists in this section, one conclusion is clear. Journalists from both cities care most about serving the people and bettering their society; addressing the crisis of civic adequacy of the press remains as their top-of-mind concern, a lot more so than the other crisis narratives. Singaporean journalists can be seen to be “pro-Singapore”, and Hong Kong journalists, even though it has not been articulated by them in these words, can be seen to be “pro-Hong Kong”. Notably however, due to significant contextual differences, the conditions under which these ideas are articulated must be clarified. In the case of Singapore, despite controls on the press system, local journalists continue to see these as a part of the job or justified, because they are a part of a system that works. In the case of Hong Kong, controls on the press system are viewed as the beginnings of a slippery slope downhill, because local journalists feel a huge responsibility of acting on behalf of the people to monitor the government, believing that there will be negative consequences for Hong Kong society if they do not perform this role.

Essentially, it all boils down to a question of trust. Singaporean news-workers see their government as trustworthy and ideologically aligned towards the goal of

bettering Singapore society, as they are; this is a trust that has been fostered for many decades, and Singaporeans have benefitted materially from the leadership of the ruling party. Hong Kong news-workers do not believe they can trust the Chinese leadership and have sensed a drastic misalignment of ideologies with the authoritarian Chinese state; Hong Kong's material success has also been largely attributed to the good work of the British, not the Chinese. There is a strong sense among Hong Kong journalists that the city must not be "like China" and efforts of resistance must be amped up to accomplish that.

At this point, the optimism from Singaporean and Hong Kong journalists stem from different sources – Singaporean journalists believe that the Internet is creating spaces for dialogue and debate that would significantly address their top-of-mind crisis concern of the civic adequacy of the press, while Hong Kong journalists are counting on the constitutional protection of press freedom in Hong Kong to continue doing good work to monitor the powers-that-be and to champion the voices and interests of the people. That said, given the authoritarian form of governance in both these locales, a more careful scrutiny of this optimism is warranted in the concluding chapter.

## **7.2. Study Limitations**

I have attempted to make my study above as comprehensive, insightful, and epistemologically sound as possible. I do, however, want to recognize the limitations of my study. I shall begin first by acknowledging the shortcomings of conducting comparative work in the social sciences, before moving on to the potential issues associated with my sampling technique and research instruments.

When it comes to the social sciences, comparative research tends to be less cut and dry compared to research in the hard sciences, since it is not always possible to generate neat typologies and a comprehensive range of factors may influence the study. According to Lijphart (1971), comparisons only become theoretically meaningful when a large number of crucial characteristics or variables are similar and can be held as constants, while variables under investigation are dissimilar and can allow the researcher to investigate how they relate to one another (p. 687). Similarly, Toynbee

(2008) points out that because social reality does not allow for the isolation of variables to create “closed experimental conditions”; this means that the correlation between variables can never be accurately tested. In “open systems”, experiences are shaped by a myriad of different factors and it would be hard to pinpoint causal factors (p. 267). This issue becomes amplified with globalization, where transnational non-state actors intervene in the workings of local systems, domestic media compete alongside transnational media players, and the authority of the state may be undermined by more powerful players in the world order. Orenstein and Schmitz (2006) argue that comparative scholars must take into account transnational influences, actors, and spheres of governance that have the ability to impact the domestic realm (p. 479). As part of my research, therefore, understanding that no “closed experimental conditions” may be created, I have sought to account for all the factors that may have influenced journalism crisis perceptions, beginning with acknowledging the influence of Western knowledges on societies operating outside of the West, and how local historical experiences, philosophical traditions, cultural practices, and political, economic and social contexts may have come to influence the uptake of these Western liberal ideologies within specific locales. Here, I acknowledge the hybridity of systems and that journalism crisis perceptions are shaped by the complex interaction between imperial and local forces.

Smelser (2003) identifies another shortcoming of the comparative method, noting that in the social sciences, contexts within which comparisons are made may be too varied for indices to be comparable, for instance, using years of schooling to describe one’s educational level when systems of education may be completely different across countries. This is a relevant limitation in this study – for example, the idea of “low wages” may differ from respondent to respondent. I have attempted to clarify these more subjective ideas through the in-depth interviews. As is typical of research that involves questionnaires and interviews, respondents, in answering questions posed to them, may also provide answers based on widely accepted social norms or reach for tropes or handy ways of talking about their work – I have attempted to address this through instructions on the consent forms and verbal reminders that call for “truthful participation” in the survey and interview. In the same vein, where self-censorship is already internalized, it may be difficult to draw out responses that accurately reflect reality. This I



have tried to address by reaching out to as many news-workers as possible for my survey to widen the range of possible answers, and to speak to senior journalists and editors across a number of different media platforms for my interviews; I will be speaking more about the internalization of self-censorship later on in the concluding chapter.

Furthermore, Smelser (2003) points out that comparative research runs the risk of ethnocentrism, where Western researchers may tend to use the Western experience as a point of reference, and oversimplify the “Other” (p. 655). Conceptually therefore, I understand that my work may bring up some points of contention from critical theorists who see that my understanding of “crisis” continues to be Western-centric – the crisis I reference in Chapter 1 has its roots in the Anglo-American context and the issues of concern I have listed in the survey are reflective of concerns that have surfaced within the American journalism crisis. Like I mentioned in Chapter 2, it is undeniable that the ideological understandings of journalism and its material practice in societies outside of the West have been significantly influenced by the West in the past, from the colonial era, to the present, through processes of globalization. This is especially true in the case of “global cities” like Singapore and Hong Kong that are also former British colonies. I therefore do not believe that I should be rejecting the Anglo-American understanding of “journalism crisis” entirely, since journalism ideals and newsroom practices may be similar. Notably however, I have given respondents ample opportunities in my survey and interview to tell me where they are not similar; respondents can indicate to me if issues I have listed are not relevant in their local context, and if other issues and perspectives that are unique to their specific locales exist. I am also enabling my respondents to offer up their own perspectives and understandings of contentious terms such as “crisis”, and “ideal media system” in my survey and interview. This is how I enable alternative conceptions of “journalism crisis” to be articulated, in contexts that do not operate based on liberal-democratic ideologies.

Another issue that may be contentious is my use of the term “Western”. Indeed, I reiterate here that I am fully aware that the West is not a unitary entity – how “journalism crisis” is understood may be varied across and within different countries in North America and Europe; I have tried to limit this spread of ideas by focusing on the American journalism crisis as my reference point. In the same vein, it may be argued

that “journalism crisis” to academics may be different from how the term is understood by journalists; it would therefore be erroneous for me to make any sort of comparison between how the journalism crisis has been articulated in the Anglo-American context, largely through academic sources, and how the journalism crisis is articulated in Singapore and Hong Kong, through surveys and interviews on journalists. I emphasize here that my goal is not to compare journalism crisis perceptions between these two cities and the US. Rather, any comparison that is made is between Singapore and Hong Kong, first by bringing to light the ways journalists perceive and experience journalism crisis, and then discovering the types of crisis narratives that may be relevant to frame how the concept of “journalism crisis” should be understood in these locales.

I also want to reiterate that my research is not attempting to assert theoretical universalism, that is, to speak on behalf of all societies susceptible to Western influences that have some form of authoritarian control on their press systems. My work focuses specifically on the case studies of Singapore and Hong Kong, and at best, can only offer points of consideration for future studies about journalism crisis dimensions that may exist within societies that operate outside of the Anglo-American context. To discover patterns of crisis narratives that may be more broadly applicable will require a more formal comparative study involving a more comprehensive range of variables.

Next, I want to address the limitations tied to my process of sampling. Because I utilized the snowball sampling technique and surveyed respondents across a wide variety of news beats, my research may be faulted for its potential biases. I acknowledge the existence of “within differences” among news-workers and news organizations in Singapore and Hong Kong that are capable of shifting the results I obtained in my empirical study. For instance, I understand that journalists in the political beat in Singapore might be more likely to view the system to be in crisis than those in the lifestyle sections; similarly, if I had reached more journalists working within the pro-Beijing newspapers in Hong Kong like *Tai Kung Pao* and *Wen Wei Pao*, I would have likely seen more journalists in Hong Kong choose developmental press characteristics for their “ideal” news media systems. I want to point out here, however, that sampling bias is a common shortcoming of non-probability sampling, where results may vary from sample to sample, and this is regardless of the size of the sample; only random

sampling may protect against this bias (Agresti and Finlay, 2009, p. 19). Unfortunately, as Agresti and Finlay (2009) acknowledge, non-probability sampling is sometimes necessary if the researcher does not have access to all the units within the sampling frame so that a simple random sample may be obtained (p. 19).

Such has been the case with this research study. Due to structural and logistical constraints – there was no official record of the journalist population in Singapore and Hong Kong (inquiries were made to the journalist associations and government regulatory bodies of these two cities) and it was not logistically possible to go to every newsroom in these two cities to count the numbers and distribute the surveys – the snowball sampling technique that attempted to reach as wide a mix of journalists as possible was chosen as the next best alternative. I also chose to not conduct any statistical tests given that my limited sample size of 80 respondents per city might skew findings. That said, to get a wider and potentially more representative range of responses, I included in this study both a quantitative aspect that can give an indication of broad journalist sentiments, and a qualitative aspect that can offer up more substantial explanations and insights into this topic.

I shall, in my final chapter, connect my findings on journalist perceptions with my take on the existence of an actual systemic journalism crisis in Singapore and Hong Kong. In the process, I will identify the structural-causal factors that have contributed to each crisis type and the need to consider an additional crisis narrative – the crisis of legitimacy, as it relates to the system of governance – for societies whose media systems are subjected to some form of authoritarian control or influence. I will also offer my perspective on the characteristics of a “successful” neoliberal authoritarian state.

## **Chapter 8.**

### **“Journalism Crisis” in Singapore and Hong Kong: A Contextual Understanding of Crisis and the Neoliberal Authoritarian State**

I began this dissertation with a simple objective in mind – to discover how the concept of “journalism crisis” may be further problematized in societies significantly influenced by the West but continue to adopt some form of authoritarian control on their press systems, choosing as my case studies Singapore and Hong Kong, having been inspired by my own work as a journalist in the region. To answer this question, I sought to enable journalists working within such environments to define for themselves what a “journalism crisis” is and whether they felt the journalism in their specific locales was in crisis – after all, for too long, press models from the West have been used as yardsticks against which the rest of the world’s press systems are measured; a problem, if you consider that other press systems may not operate based on the same liberal-democratic ideals, or within the same political, economic, and social contexts. I chose however, not to denounce Western journalism research entirely. The influence of the West on journalism expectations and realities around the world is undeniable – news-workers in many parts of the world have looked up to Western scholarship on “good journalism” for decades – and journalism crisis research already established there would provide valuable insights into the phenomenon. Rather than re-inventing the wheel, I chose to refer to the Western, primarily American, journalism crisis as a reference point. Here, I accounted for the crisis at the ideological level, through my analysis of liberal democracy as an ideological principle in the West, as well as at the material level, through anecdotes and accounts from news-workers and academics, and the discursive level, through an overview of the types of discourses that have surfaced on the decline of journalism in academic research, news reports and social commentaries.

These three levels of analysis would be crucial to dissect, epistemologically, how crisis perceptions come to be formed – when there is a stark disconnect between expectations of how reality should be (in ideological terms) and how reality actually is (in material terms), as well as the types of narratives that circulate to elevate the current state of affairs to the level of “crisis” and in need of public attention and action (in discursive terms). In Western journalism crisis literature, the ideological-material disconnect is tied to the inability of the press to work in the interests of the public and uphold the ideals of liberal democracy so deeply entrenched within the European philosophical tradition; news organizations have succumbed instead to political and economic pressures to work in the interests of the dominant elites. The changing media landscape has also presented new challenges to traditional media and their advertising-supported business model, causing news organizations to cope by slashing newsroom resources and focusing on cheaper journalism, further undermining the democratic functions of the press. Even the US, seen around the world as the leading promoter of liberal democracy and a proud advocate of the liberal press model, has itself fallen short of these liberal-democratic ideals. This has sparked a multitude of “crisis” narratives to enter into the public discourse, particularly at the turn of the 21st century, that have drawn increasingly public attention and action to address these issues of concern. These narratives include a crisis of civic adequacy of the press and relatedly, a crisis of liberal democracy; a crisis due to capitalism’s inherent tendencies towards profit-seeking and exploitation; a crisis of credibility and public confidence in the press; and a crisis due to new media, particularly a crisis of financial viability. These narratives intersect, forming a web of structural-causal factors that contribute to concerns on journalism’s decline, as I illustrated in Model 1 in Chapter 1.

The question then is, whether this journalism crisis articulated in the Western, and predominantly Anglo-American context, is also present in other parts of the world, or whether there are interesting variations in the way journalism crisis is conceived in more complex, hybrid societies where Western liberal influences interact with authoritarian controls on the press. To a certain extent, there is reason to believe the former assertion to be true – beyond the worldwide diffusion of new media technologies, I pointed out neoliberal capitalism and cultural imperialism as notable processes that have extended from the West to the rest of the world. Neoliberal capitalism, described by scholars like

Hallin (1996), McChesney (2003) and Harvey (2005) as contributing to the increased commercialization of press systems in the West, is a global drive spearheaded by the US and UK administrations in the 1980s, while ideologies pertaining to liberalism and democracy have been spread over centuries from the West to the rest of the world, first by a colonizing Europe, and then by the US as an “empire of capital”.

In my analysis on the Asian region, in particular, and its receptiveness to the Western-centric ideals of neoliberalism and liberal democracy, I demonstrated that the adoption of these liberal values among Asian countries tends to be selective and strategic – while strong economic ties may be established between many countries in Asia and the West, ideological alignments are less cut and dry, often influenced by local historical experiences, philosophical traditions and cultural practices, and set within specific local contexts. This was also the case for journalism education and training – “professional” ideals like unbiased objective reporting would be taught to young journalists from books and journals written by Western scholars and news-workers, but varying circumstances in local newsrooms would sometimes mean a selective use of these strategies.

I chose Singapore and Hong Kong as my case studies largely because while both cities are intensely connected to the West as part of their colonial past and their current statuses as “global cities”, each has a government that imposes some form of authoritarian control or influence on their society and press system, which means that neither operates politically as a liberal democracy. This makes them fascinating case studies, to explore how influences from the West would interact with their local histories, cultures, and contexts in complex ways to influence perceptions on journalism. Both Singapore and Hong Kong are also key media and communication hubs in Asia, which means that understanding the workings of their media systems would be invaluable to the global journalism community. In addition, both cities have been in the spotlight in recent years – Singapore’s founding father Lee Kuan Yew, the statesman who had spearheaded the country’s authoritarian policies, had passed away in 2015, and Hong Kong was thrown into a state of turmoil in 2014 when hundreds of thousands of Hong Kongers took to the streets to demand universal suffrage from an unwavering authoritarian Chinese government; these events, tied to the political shifts in these two

cities, have sparked greater discussions on the state of news and journalism in these locales, suggesting that this might be an important historical juncture for both Singapore and Hong Kong.

In Chapter 3, I laid out Singapore and Hong Kong's positions in the international political economy, and how journalism is viewed at the ideological level and practiced at the material level in these two societies. I also pointed out the types of discourses that have surfaced about the state of news and journalism within these two cities. In Singapore, most notable was the close alliance Singapore has had with powerhouses in the West particularly the UK and the US, and the attempts by the Singapore government to shape Singaporean consciousness after the country's independence using the "survivalist" and "Asian values" ideologies; these efforts at ideologization enabled the ruling party to gain broad-based consent to decisively rule the nation, placing democracy and freedom of the press on the back-burner in the name of the greater good. In Hong Kong, most notable was the close relationship this city has had with the UK, which has inclined the local population towards the liberal-democratic ideal; despite the handover to China and its authoritarian leadership in 1997, such liberal leanings have been strengthened rather than diminished, prompting journalists to assert the importance of press freedom more fervently as stories of control and censorship by pro-China media owners, withdrawal of advertisers, and attacks on pro-democracy journalists circulate.

This presents grounds for an interesting comparison of the two cities, particularly where ideologization of the people by the powers-that-be is concerned. Such comparisons can lead to a deeper theoretical understanding of how the concept of "journalism crisis" may be further complicated in societies influenced by the West that continue to subject their media systems to some form of authoritarian control or influence. Using Model 1 as a framework that details how different crisis narratives may be interlinked, I juxtaposed perceived issues of concern of Singaporean and Hong Kong journalists against this framework of crisis narratives to gain insight into the web of structural-causal factors that might be contributing to an actual systemic journalism crisis within the two cities. In this chapter, I intend to then offer my view on the contributing factors to this actual systemic crisis by generating new models of journalism crisis that would relate to Singapore and Hong Kong – these models would highlight the types of

crisis narratives and concerns (labelled as the more severe “crisis” or the less severe “concern” depending on their ability to disrupt the normal functioning of things and endanger society as a whole) capable of describing the state of news and journalism in Singapore and Hong Kong. Also, I was particularly interested in the key point of dissimilarity between these two cities – the extent to which their people have been ideologized to voluntarily consent to the rule of the leadership – which may contribute to a new crisis narrative not present in Model 1, that is, a crisis of legitimacy, pertaining to the cities’ systems of governance. Through my survey and interview, I sought to build up my argument to substantiate the existence of this crisis narrative.

At the level of public discourse, while there have been many reports on government control and influence of the news media, neither Singapore nor Hong Kong has seen any major discussion surface about their states of news and journalism being “in crisis”; this is the case despite scattered online social commentaries and news reports indicating issues of concern. This begs the question of whether problems related to their news industry are simply not as severe, whether certain factors are present to offset fears of a journalism in crisis, or whether there has simply not been any research study that has meaningfully connected the dots to realize that these concerns intersect.

To find this out, I conducted a comprehensive survey with 160 journalists and interviews with 22 senior journalists and news editors in these two cities to uncover the perceptions of these news-workers on journalism crisis, by discovering how they viewed their “ideal” journalism at the ideological level and where their journalism realities fell short in material terms. To form the skeleton of my survey, I referred to the most pressing concerns commonly discussed in American journalism crisis literature, offering my respondents the opportunities to point out concerns that I had missed that were unique to their local contexts; in my subsequent analysis of the study’s findings, I brought the discussion back to the model I created in Chapter 1, as a way to think through the broad narratives that might be relevant to describe the state of affairs in these two Asian cities. I shall detail my findings here.

In the case of Singapore, while Singaporean journalists may continue to look up to liberal-democratic ideals, as influenced by exposure to Western journalism



scholarship in school and everyday interactions with Western media, local historical experiences and the existing political culture have created new sensibilities. There seems to be widespread agreement that theirs is a “press system that works”. The collaborative role that the press has taken on in Singapore has worked so far for the betterment of the nation, particularly in terms of economic growth and comfortable material lives for Singaporeans, and has become a way for local journalists to contend with their own conflictual feelings about wanting a more liberal press. This trust in the system has been built over decades on the trust that the Singapore government would “do the right thing”, and build a press system that is first and foremost “pro-Singapore” – this is entirely aligned with the “survivalist” ideology and the “Asian values” discourse that is so deeply entrenched within Singaporean society; where such views are internalized, crisis perceptions are also influenced as expectations are able to be reconciled with actual journalism realities. Journalists simply contend with finding other ways to make their work meaningful, such as focusing on bringing social issues to the forefront, rather than political ones.

Key issues that plague Singaporean journalists in their daily work suggest the relevance of a number of crisis narratives that might be aligned with journalism crisis concerns in Singapore.

Firstly, respondents note that there are cutbacks in newsroom resources and manpower, often tied to the increasing workload of a “digital first” newsroom, the difficulties in finding suitable people for the job, and the unwillingness to invest in quality journalism. These would relate to narratives such as the crisis due to new media, particularly related to finding digitally skilled personnel for the job, as well as the crisis due to capitalism’s inherent profit-seeking tendencies, where resources are directed to areas that generate the highest profit (e.g. entertainment) rather than the news department, and workers are exploited to maintain profit margins for the capitalist media owners.

Second, respondents point out the lack of political criticism and investigative stories in the press, due in part to a strong culture of self-censorship in the newsrooms, signaling the likely presence of a crisis of civic adequacy of the press, where the

respondents feel the news media is unable to fully and fairly inform the public and meet civic needs and interests. This concern is present even though Singaporean journalists seem to consensually agree that the Singapore press should partner with the government in nation-building; this suggests the influence that decades of exposure to liberal ideologies in Western journalism literature and Western media has had on Singaporean journalists and their desire to see more pushing of boundaries, that is, without harming the established system.

Third, respondents are concerned with the threat of online media to traditional media – in terms of the drop in advertising and circulation numbers experienced by traditional media as audiences migrate online, but more significantly, from the damage that the Internet is causing to the credibility of the mainstream media. In is in line with the crisis due to new media, generating concerns on the financial viability of traditional media, as well as fears of a crisis of credibility and subsequent crisis in public confidence experienced by traditional media platforms as alternative issues and viewpoints not tabled by the mainstream media are able to be broadcast on the Internet.

When asked if they felt journalism in Singapore was in crisis, these were the same three issues that surfaced among the respondents who said that they felt the press system was in crisis or close to being in one. Here, they defined “journalism crisis” as a state where “core values of journalism” – such as accurate, fair and unbiased reporting, serving the public interest, acting as a check on the powers-that-be, and editorial objectivity and integrity – become undermined. Censorship of the press can create fears of a crisis, as can the threat from online media to the circulation and revenues of traditional media, and plummeting public confidence in the press, where audiences no longer believe what they read and would rather turn to unaccredited news sources for information. The way Singaporean journalists define a “journalism crisis” clearly suggests the impact of Western liberal scholarship on the way they conceive of their journalism ideals; notably, no respondents mentioned that a crisis would result if the media is no longer able to partner with the government to fulfil its nation-building function – this was not a top-of-mind crisis criterion, indicating the contradictions experienced by Singaporean journalists.

To clearly place the perceived journalism crisis concerns of Singaporean news-workers in perspective, I attempt here to craft a model that suggests the structural-causal factors that could contribute to an actual systemic journalism crisis in the city-state. I want to point out here that perceptions acquired from empirical research, while insightful, may have the tendency to present situations as more or less severe than they actually are (perception surveys may sometimes morph into platforms for individual complaints!); only by placing these perceptions within a larger context can a more accurate representation of reality be drawn. As such, I am offering a distinction here between “crisis of” and “concerns on” in my model – where a broader understanding of the context suggests the unlikelihood of a crisis concern to disrupt the normal functioning of the system and endanger society, it will remain as a “concern” rather than be given the more severe label of a “crisis”. Turning now to Model 2, one may observe the following:

The civic adequacy of the Singapore press – and its subsequent impact on the credibility of Singapore’s mainstream media – seems to be a top-of-mind issue. This is not surprising, given the political influence and control of the government on the media system, and the tabling of more issues and perspectives online that have led to increased audience skepticism of the mainstream media system. New media content may also skew the coverage of traditional media sources towards unverifiable news and gossip and sensationalized, click-worthy material. However, fears of a “crisis” on that front seem to be alleviated by a number of factors. First, there seems to be a consensus that the news organizations, under the purview of the Singapore government, are continuing to work for the betterment of Singapore society, presenting news coverage that is seen to be socially responsible; the Singapore public therefore continues to have trust in the mainstream media for most stories. Secondly, the widespread use of new media in Singapore has created a vibrant online landscape that is seen to be capable of keeping the traditional media organizations on their toes. When issues and perspectives become widely discussed online, traditional media journalists cannot ignore them without damaging their news outlet’s credibility; this gives journalists more leeway to push boundaries further and request that stories that may be previously deemed sensitive or controversial be covered in some way in the mainstream media. The public is then able to become better informed in the process. All these reasons suggest that the issue of

civic adequacy of the press is not likely to cause a major disruption capable of endangering society, and has been labeled as a “concern” rather than a “crisis” in Model 2.

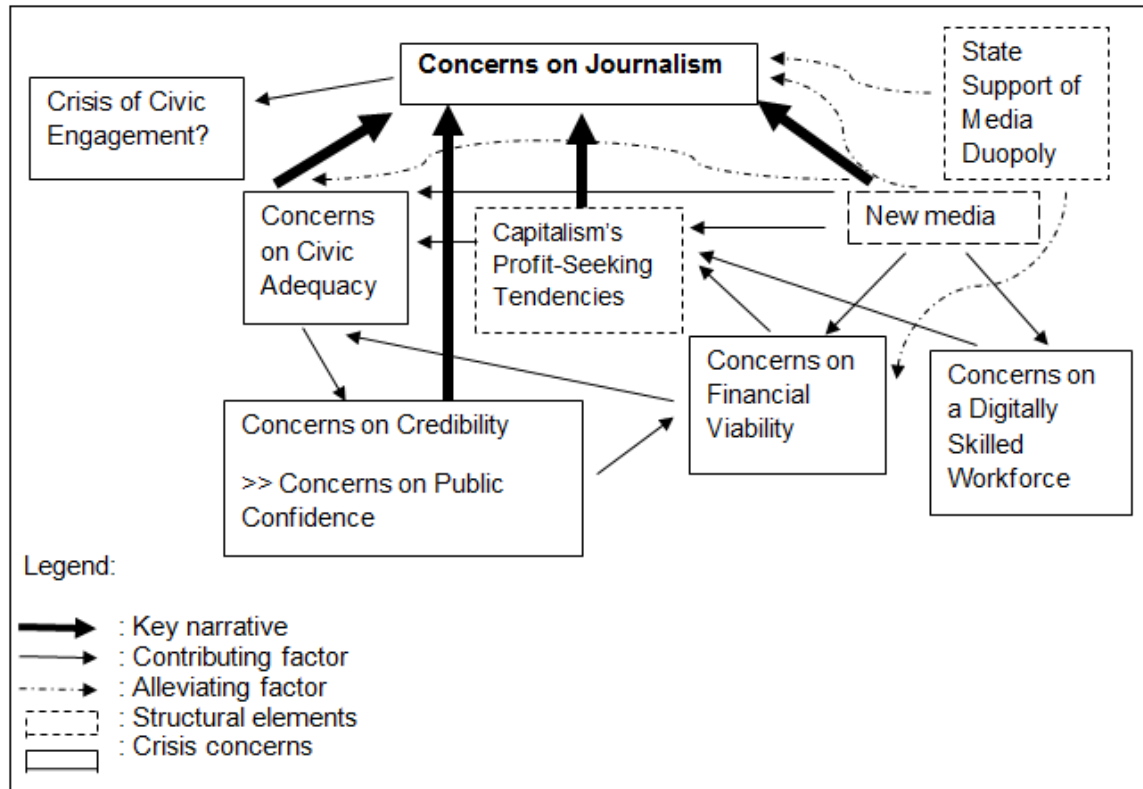
The narrative of a crisis due to capitalism’s profit-seeking tendencies, described in dominant journalism crisis literature, is also noteworthy in the Singapore context. I stress here that this concern is still relevant in the case of Singapore – even while the press system may appear to be “state-owned” on the outset, it operates based on the commercialized model as corporations that compete for audiences and advertising dollars, as I had mentioned in Chapter 3. This means that it is still possible that the media owners are prioritizing profit-making and acceding to advertiser and shareholder demands, thereby overworking journalists and compromising the journalistic output. Also contributing to a potential crisis tied to capitalism’s profit-seeking tendencies is a crisis due to new media. Competition with news media sources online may mean a siphoning away of audiences and revenues to online platforms, prompting greater cost-cutting measures to be implemented and worsening worker exploitation in traditional media outlets as they struggle to remain financially viable. New media itself is also creating opportunities for news organizations to use citizen journalists informally; they fall outside the traditional wage relationship and may be infinitely exploited. Furthermore, newsrooms may place more responsibilities on journalists to work across different media platforms as news organizations digitize, increasing the likelihood of exploitation. When news organizations are unable to find the right personnel with both the journalistic ability and digital savvy to work across media platforms, existing journalists in the newsroom are also more likely to be overworked. These factors may, in turn, harm the civic adequacy of the press as journalists have less time and resources to conduct comprehensive reporting.

That said, the crisis due to capitalism’s profit-seeking tendencies appears to be less severe in Singapore because the mainstream media in Singapore does not operate within a free and competitive media landscape in the traditional sense; recall in Chapter 3 that it is a duopoly of two media organizations with strong ties to the Singapore government and well-established government-linked corporations. This greatly reduces the possibility of drastic cost-cutting measures related to fierce competition in the news

industry that might potentially disrupt the system. Relatedly, any potential crisis due to new media that is tied to financial viability is also less likely, given the state support of Singapore's media duopoly; this is evidenced in my empirical study, as Singaporean journalists reveal that they are not particularly worried about losing their jobs or experiencing drastic salary cuts. These responses suggest that financial viability of the press remains a "concern" rather than a "crisis". With regards to worker exploitation, Singaporean newsrooms have not registered any particularly worrying exodus of employees or high turnover rates like in Hong Kong; neither is there a significant problem of informal unpaid work in Singaporean newsrooms by workers who fall outside of the traditional wage relationship. These suggest that the factor of capitalist exploitation is not as severe. Reports by citizens on new media may also offer a check and balance on the power of the capitalist elites. As such, any crisis tied to capitalism's profit-seeking tendencies is likely to be more of a "concern" at this point and not likely to disrupt the functioning of the system and endanger society. As for newsrooms finding difficulty in hiring journalists with the right mix of journalistic ability and digital savvy and are, therefore, at risk of overworking existing journalists, the lack of a high turnover rate suggests that, while this concern must be addressed in the new future, it is not urgent enough to endanger the press system at this point.

The model that lays out the structural-causal factors that contribute to an actual systemic "journalism crisis" in Singapore is crafted here. Note that instead of "crisis of journalism", it is "concerns on journalism" in the Singapore context; the press system, on the outset, is not dysfunctional and in need of an urgent reform, at least based on my empirical findings (a few qualifiers are warranted here though, which I will detail later on, when I bring in the question of a "crisis of civic engagement"). This is supported by the survey finding that only 43.8% of the respondents surveyed felt that the Singapore press system was in crisis or was close to being in one, statistically very close to the considerable 35% of respondents who felt the system was not in crisis or was far from being in one.

**Figure 8.1 Model 2: The Singapore “Journalism Crisis”**



Based on my study findings, one of the key reasons that can be used to explain the nature of Singapore’s “journalism crisis” – or rather, the lack thereof – is the successful ideologization efforts of the Singapore government to incline the populace towards the “survivalist” and “Asian values” ideologies post-independence. The Singapore government had urged the Singapore people, convincingly, to consent to the decisive rule of the government so that the nation may successfully navigate the many challenges it faced after its independence from the British, including mandating that the press work with the government as a partner in nation-building, as well as to adhere to the Confucian values that advocate social harmony and respect for authority; in this way, the country would be able to remain socially and politically stable and become economically prosperous. These ideologies have successfully shaped the Singaporean consciousness towards a respect for the leadership, and a subordination of the press to the will of the government. The government has in turn strengthened this public trust in them by rewarding the people in material terms with good jobs, comfortable lives, and a high standard of living.

This indicates the ability of the government to maintain its legitimacy to rule, and this has translated into the people's willingness to forgo a number of their freedoms, including freedom of the press, for the social stability and economic growth that the government has promised. This governance strategy has successfully alleviated fears of a journalism crisis in a society where the media is subordinate to the government's strict control. In other words, a trustworthy government controlling the press means a trustworthy press; this, in turn, means less fear of a journalism crisis. State support of the media by a trustworthy state also reduces the severity of other traditional crisis dimensions, like those tied to the financial viability of the press, and to capitalism's inherent tendencies towards profit-seeking and exploitation that may result from unbridled media competition.

Not surprisingly, Singaporean journalists do not feel that their press system needs a major overhaul. When asked about strategies that may be implemented to alleviate journalism crisis concerns in Singapore, suggestions from study respondents tended to focus on ways to better leverage on new media (given its current status as the freest media platform in Singapore); while suggestions on the loosening of media controls were brought up, these tended to be qualified with additional concerns that loosening up too much might harm Singapore's social stability, evidence again of the government's successful ideologization efforts at creating a collaborative press. On how journalism in Singapore could be improved with new media, suggestions from respondents included: 1) The allocation of more resources to the "digital first" priority set by Singaporean newsrooms, rather than depleting the resources allocated to the traditional news media; 2) That professional journalists need to establish close monitors on online and citizen media discussions and be more proactive in tabling issues discussed on social media, while the government needs to offer more leeway for journalists to analyze, investigate, and prompt discussion of these issues that "matter to the people" – this ensures that public trust in Singaporean media remains high, mainstream media is still seen as credible, and journalists continue to find value in their work, even while the media remains within its "pro-Singapore" context; and finally, 3) Journalism schools in Singapore needs to ensure that they produce graduates that are both digitally savvy and able to critically synthesize information they receive from online media platforms with the work they produce for the traditional newsroom, so that the

news industry does not experience a dearth of talent as the newsroom moves further into its digital phase.

It seems then that Singapore has presented itself as a successful case study that directly opposes what Western journalism scholars like McChesney (2003), Golding and Murdock (1991), and Herman and Chomsky (1988) are purporting as a concern even within liberal press systems – that a concentration of media ownership (in the case of Singapore, in the hands of government-linked corporations that undertake commercial activities and are profit-motivated) leads to greater fears of a systemic journalism crisis as the media succumbs to political and economic pressures, at the expense of serving the public interest. Direct state intervention in the press is also a contributor to such fears, as the media is seen to likely bias the news in favour of the dominant elites while forsaking its public service role. This does not seem to be the case in the Singapore context, at least not outwardly so. Singaporean journalists do not believe that the interests of the people have been severely undermined. A few qualifiers are warranted here, however.

First, due to successful ideologization efforts, the need to self-censor may have already been internalized by respondents, thereby making it difficult to pick up dissenting voices in this study. There might, therefore, be a wider crisis of civic engagement that remains unspoken and unaddressed; the populace may feel uneasy voicing a diversity of opinions, especially dissenting ones, and engaging in political action and debate. The platform that Singaporeans are looking at to alleviate journalism crisis concerns, that is, the Internet, has at the same time not been ruled out as a medium that may be subjected to government control; content publishers may still be subjected to punishment for “objectionable” content, and new licensing restrictions have been placed on domestic news websites in recent years. The extent to which new media can alleviate journalism crisis fears, therefore, is reliant, ironically, on how much freedom the Singapore government is willing to afford it; should rules on Internet use continue to tighten online, it is likely to create a spike in fears of journalism crisis. This leads us to another qualifier, the trustworthiness of the Singapore government. At this point, the Singapore government has proven itself as trustworthy and acting in the best interests of Singapore society, according to the perceptions of respondents in this study. Economic



growth and material comforts seem to be key determinants of this trust, signalling the entrenchment of the survivalist ideology in Singapore society as a means for the government to gain consent to rule – liberal advocates may view this focus on the economic as reductionist and inadequate to measure a country's success. In addition, it is uncertain if the level of trustworthiness of the Singapore government will change in the future. Should the government become untrustworthy at some point, the citizens would be less likely to organize themselves to viably challenge authority; certainly, the media would experience great difficulty stepping up as the voice of the people, given their prolonged subordination to the will of the state. When that happens, the inability of the press to play its public service role would be amplified.

As for the case of Hong Kong, journalists there seem to be particularly frustrated with how their media owners view the role of the press – not necessarily as instruments that can champion the interests and voices of the people but as tools to aid them in their business dealings with China. This means that these media owners are likely to urge their news editors to tread more cautiously when politically sensitive or controversial news stories surface – over time, the culture of self-censorship develops where, as one journalist says, “[journalists] will incline towards what their boss wants”. This is what Hong Kong academics have termed as the use of the media as “symbolic capital” or “political assets” for these media owners. Another consequence of the use of media outlets as political assets is that profit-making becomes less of a priority; most of the news organizations in Hong Kong merely break even amid the very saturated news media landscape – this means thinning out staff wherever possible, less money and desire to invest in investigative journalism and digital media strategies, and extremely low journalist wages. Coupled with an influx of journalist graduates seeking jobs from mainland China, this means little incentive to grow wages, which has resulted in a slew of factors that is causing journalistic standards to decline in the city – from the inability to retain good, experienced journalists who can train the younger ones, to the lack of qualified staff to fill positions that empty out, and the inability to perform investigative and analytical journalism. Journalists say that inexperienced news-workers “don't even know where to start” when it comes to investigative work, and tend to be “easier to control” by the powers-that-be.

It is not surprising then that the top issues of concern among Hong Kong journalists are related to: 1) Cutbacks in newsroom resources and manpower, with “low wages” having the most number of journalists rating it “very much of concern”, 2) Threats of online media to traditional media, particularly relating to the inability of many news outlets to properly leverage on the online platform to increase their audience reach and revenue, and 3) A lack of investigative stories and excessive partisanship and bias in the news organization. A number of crisis narratives would therefore be relevant to describe journalism crisis concerns in Hong Kong

First, cutbacks in newsroom resources and manpower and the presence of stagnant low wages suggest the relevance of the crisis narrative about capitalism’s inherent profit-seeking tendencies, where capitalist media owners, in attempting to maintain or improve the profit levels of their media organizations within a highly competitive environment, choose to cut the resources to their newsrooms and keep the wages of journalists depressed. This then leads to a potential crisis of civic adequacy of the press, where the quality of the journalistic product is compromised; low wages means experienced news-workers capable of producing investigative and analytical stories leave their jobs for better paying positions elsewhere, and cutbacks in resources and manpower mean existing journalists become overworked and concerned with just producing enough stories for the day to fill the bulletin, rather than to offer critical assessments on important issues and events. Given that the goals of these media owners are to amass greater political and economic power with China in the long run, the ability of the news product to adequately meet civic needs and interests becomes a lesser priority.

Second, the threat of online media to the advertising and circulation numbers of traditional media, and the struggle of many news outlets to properly leverage on the online platform to boost audience reach and revenue seem to be aligned with a crisis due to new media, particularly relating to a crisis of financial viability, since Hong Kong’s news outlets are already competing in a very saturated market. Stiffer competition with online news sources would mean cutbacks to already low resources for the newsroom and a drop in the quality of the journalistic product to adequately meet civic needs and interests; this will subsequently cause a dip in public confidence in the news media to

meet its public service role. In addition, when politically sensitive events like the Occupy Central protests occur and a whole host of opinions and issues not tabled in mainstream media surface online, the civic adequacy of Hong Kong's mainstream media becomes further questioned and public confidence in the press worsens.

Third, a lack of investigative stories in the Hong Kong news media and excessive partisanship and bias in news organizations contribute to fears of a crisis of civic adequacy of the press, where highly partisan content may mean a less informed citizenry rather than a more informed one, since respondents note that audiences, particularly the older generation, tend to be loyal to the news outlets that align with their political views – those who read the pro-government *Tai Kung Pao* will not read the pro-democracy *Apple Daily*. When content becomes too “extreme” therefore, it polarizes Hong Kong society. In turn, this leads to a likely crisis of credibility and a drop in public confidence in Hong Kong's news outlets, when audiences become distrusting of what they read in mainstream news media, sensing that news outlets are prioritizing political and corporate interests rather than public interest.

When asked if they felt journalism in Hong Kong was in crisis, the same three issues listed above were brought up by the respondents who felt the press system was in crisis or close to being in one. Here, “journalism crisis” was defined by respondents as a “drifting away from the journalistic ideals of impartiality, telling the truth, being accurate, being a watchdog of those in power and giving a voice to the people”. Censorship of the press can create fears of this crisis, whether prompted by political alliances or the desire for economic returns, as can the increasing polarization of the media that make them “blatantly biased”, and the subsequent dip in public confidence in the press where journalism becomes untrustworthy and ignored by the people. Like in Singapore, the way Hong Kong journalists define a journalism crisis suggests how impactful Western liberal scholarship is in influencing how they understand the roles of journalism. Unlike the case of Singapore however, such liberal ideologies have been further entrenched in Hong Kong society from the period of British colonialism in Hong Kong to its current status as a Special Administrative Region of China – the lack of a democracy and representative government has meant that the people have come to rely on the press to express their voices and opinions, and to act as a check on the

authorities. Such local historical experiences have cemented these liberal ideologies as the foundation of “good journalism” in Hong Kong and are taught religiously in Hong Kong’s journalism schools.

To place the journalism crisis perceptions of Hong Kong news-workers in perspective, I am crafting here a model that suggests the structural-causal factors that could contribute to an actual systemic journalism crisis in the city. Again, these are conclusions gathered from my empirical research on perceptions and I will be making a distinction between the use of the words “crisis” and “concern”, depending on the severity of the factors to disrupt the system and endanger society; to do that, I am going to analyze the journalist perceptions within a larger context and what they reveal about a systemic decline in journalism. Referring now to Model 3, my analysis is as follows:

A key contributor to a systemic journalism crisis in Hong Kong seems to centre on the influence of capitalist media owners, with business dealings in China, using their news outlets as political assets to better relations with the Chinese, thereby working in their own self-interests to amass greater political and economic power. The goal that these news outlets should meet civic needs and interests therefore becomes secondary. In a media landscape saturated with competing news organizations, these capitalist media owners have kept worker salaries depressed even as workloads of journalists increase, contributing to a crisis due to capitalism’s inherent profit-seeking tendencies, where workers are exploited by the capitalist class for profit – this is evidenced in the immense frustrations experienced by Hong Kong journalists on their stagnant pay, according to my survey and interview findings. This has contributed to the crisis of civic adequacy of the press, where cutbacks in resources and stagnant low wages mean fewer experienced staff are retained who are capable of producing critical, investigative stories to keep the public fully and accurately informed. Hong Kong audiences then become more skeptical of their news media system, contributing to a crisis of credibility of the mainstream media and a drop in public confidence in the press.

New media has entered the mix as well, creating fears of a crisis of financial viability of traditional media as they siphon away audiences and advertising revenues – news outlets struggling within an already highly saturated media environment have had

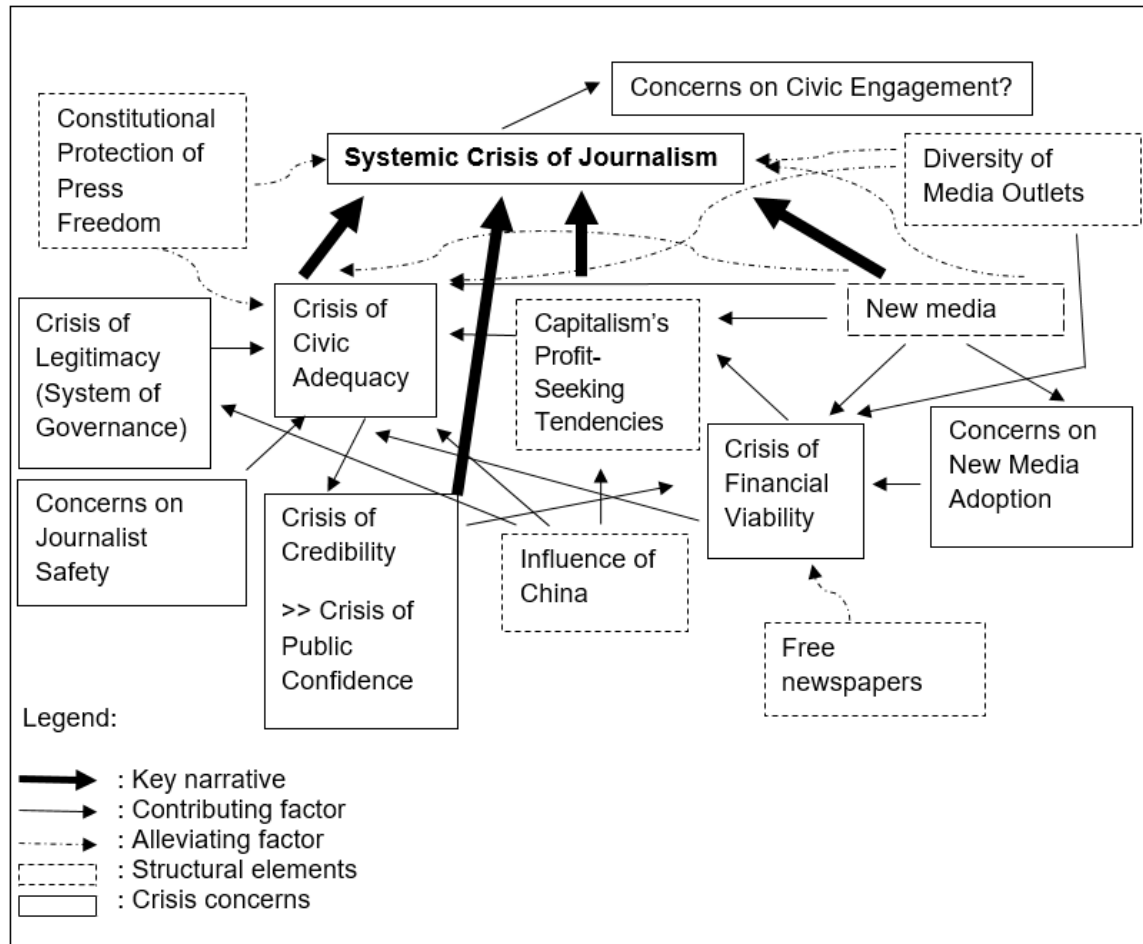
their budgets cut further to survive, contributing to worker exploitation that aligns with the crisis narrative on capitalism's profit-seeking tendencies, as well as to the crisis of civic adequacy of the press, as fewer resources mean less time and manpower to conduct in-depth journalistic reporting. These claims have been supported by respondents in my empirical study. At the same time, indirect knowledge workers are roped in to produce content for these news organizations (e.g. protestors acted as citizen journalists during the Occupy Central movement); such informal work places them outside the traditional wage relationship and opens them up to more capitalist exploitation. Another disruption of new media comes from the tabling of issues and opinions not mentioned in mainstream media, adding to fears that mainstream media is unable to adequately meet civic needs and interests, thereby causing a dip in the credibility of the press and the confidence that the public has in it, and driving audiences further to online platforms. This was evident, for instance, during the Occupy Central movement.

Additionally, in the case of Hong Kong, concerns have been raised that news organizations have been unable to leverage on new media platforms to boost their audience reach and revenues; I term this as concerns pertaining to new media adoption. Note here that I believe this is a "concern" rather than a "crisis" at this point, since some news organizations like Apple Daily and South China Morning Post have, in fact, been able to leverage on these new media platforms well. Generally though, the lack of proper new media strategies in Hong Kong newsrooms is contributing to the crisis of financial viability of traditional media. While news organizations have stayed afloat by entering into the free newspapers market, declining revenues amid online competition signal a likely desire to keep the advertisers happy, contributing to the crisis of civic adequacy of the press, when content is biased in favour of the advertisers.

Journalists in Hong Kong are also particularly concerned about recent reports on assaults on pro-democracy journalists and news editors – while these have not been widespread, hence being labeled as a "concern" rather than a "crisis", they are nonetheless prompting fears of a worsening crisis of civic adequacy of the press, as journalists feel the need to self-censor politically sensitive or controversial content to ensure their own well-being. The Hong Kong public too, while at this point still actively seeking change, may be less inclined to partake in political debate and action over time,

for fear of negative repercussions; as such, concerns on civic engagement remain a looming possibility, as I have noted in Model 3.

**Figure 8.2 Model 3: The Hong Kong “Journalism Crisis”**



Notable in Model 3 is an additional crisis narrative not typically discussed in Western-centric crisis literature – the crisis of legitimacy – which adds to fears of a systemic journalism crisis in Hong Kong, particularly in its contributions to the crisis of civic adequacy of the press; any attempt to shape media content is seen as unacceptable and viewed with suspicion. This is in contrast with the Singapore case study, where government influence and control on the media has not created an overwhelming sentiment that the press system is in crisis. Instead, in the case of Hong Kong, the percentage of respondents surveyed who felt the Hong Kong press system was in crisis or was close to being in one was significantly higher at 71.3%. Coupled with a slew of other structural-causal factors previously mentioned, a common response from

Hong Kong journalists seem to be that they do not find the authorities trustworthy and acting in their best interest. There is a desire of Hong Kong journalists to “resist” and “defend themselves” against this malevolent political force. Despite having a Chinese majority population, Confucian values that advocate social harmony, consensus, and respect for authority seem to have taken on a negative connotation within the Hong Kong context, seen as smokescreens for the Chinese central government to enact stricter controls on Hong Kong society; as evidenced in Model 3, the “influence of China” is described as contributing directly to three different crisis narratives – the crisis of legitimacy of Hong Kong’s governance system, the crisis of civic adequacy of the press as journalists feel the need to self-censor, and the crisis tied to capitalism’s inherent profit-seeking tendencies as capitalist media owners work to better their business relations with China.

Indeed, China’s authoritarianism runs counter to the strong inclination of Hong Kongers towards liberal-democratic ideologies – these ideologies have become entrenched in Hong Kong society not just as carryovers from the West, but also from being cemented by Hong Kong’s own local historical experiences, first under the rule of the British and then the Chinese. Efforts at ideologizing the population otherwise have been futile, largely because, as I argue, there was no significant historical milestone that prompted the supplanting of such liberal ideals with more communitarian alternatives, like in the case of Singapore and its period of struggle post-independence. Given that Hong Kong was already prospering under the British, the socialist rhetoric adopted by the Chinese central government to champion the interests of the lower classes did not stick, and neither was the authoritarian Chinese government given the opportunity to cement its legitimacy to rule over Hong Kong by contributing significantly to its material prosperity. This has resulted in greater fears of a journalism crisis in Hong Kong, both real and imagined, whenever the Chinese or Hong Kong governments make a move to influence news content or stories circulate about assaults on journalists, advertising pull-outs and blatant acts of self-censorship. The knife attack on a Ming Pao editor, the attack on Apple Daily owner Jimmy Lai’s house, the advertising pull-outs of British banks HSBC and Standard Chartered from Apple Daily, and the act of self-censorship at TVB during the Occupy Central protests are cases in point. Indeed, Hong Kong’s media platforms have been seen to edge towards more pro-government stances in recent

years, often to the frustration of the journalists themselves, raising the concern of a “reddening” of the press.

Such political influences are deemed to be highly detrimental to the ability of the press to play its public service role, contributing to the crisis of civic adequacy of the press and plummeting public confidence in the news media. It is also such influences that have prompted Hong Kong journalists to remain steadfast in defending the liberal nature of their press system, to tell the truth fairly and accurately, act as a watchdog to monitor those in power and give voice to the people. To most Hong Kong journalists, the liberal press model is the only model they know and accept; in fact, journalism based on any other model is enough to turn many Hong Kong journalists off from the profession entirely. To them, this press model is not worth emulating simply because it has been advocated by the developed West; rather, this model forms the core foundation of “good journalism” that is reinforced by the structure and historical circumstances within which Hong Kong finds itself.

For journalists who are hopeful that the Hong Kong press system is not yet in crisis, the constitutional protection of press freedom in the city from direct government intervention, as noted in Model 3, is a saving grace that enables them to continue to adhere to such liberal ideologies; with this protection, news organizations may choose to refuse or retaliate against any attempts from government agencies to intervene in their news content, thereby ensuring that the news media is able to play its public service role. The diversity of media outlets in the city is another alleviating factor of journalism crisis – respondents believe a bigger range of news outlets means a better balance of voices that are represented. For Hong Kong, the “within differences” that exist between news outlets and their political stances are particularly pronounced. Recall the existence of newspapers like Tai Kung Pao and Wen Wei Pao, for instance, that are pro-government and consistently toe the official line; offering counter-perspectives are news outlets like Apple Daily and Ming Pao. Both these alleviating factors complement the positives that new media play for journalism in Hong Kong, prompting the discussion of more issues and perspectives in mainstream media, addressing the crisis of civic adequacy of the press, and acting as a possible check and balance on the power of the



capitalist elites, thereby alleviating any crisis that may be tied to capitalism's inherent tendencies towards profit-seeking and exploitation.

Like the case of Singapore, a few qualifiers are warranted here – these alleviating factors do seem to generate further concerns of their own. First, the constitutional protection of press freedom may merely be acting to appease Hong Kong society and prevent it from revolt, while government agencies continue to exert political and economic influences on the press through more indirect means. Second, the diversity of media outlets has no direct implications on the diversity of voices represented – several news organizations have been increasingly inclined towards the pro-government perspective over the years – and the sheer number of competing news outlets are instead creating more financial troubles for those news organizations struggling to survive. And third, new media might be contributing to the spread of more unverifiable news and gossip that creates a less informed citizenry rather than a more informed one. All these are noteworthy considerations.

When asked specifically about the ways in which journalism crisis concerns in Hong Kong may be alleviated, suggestions centred on ways to address, first and foremost, the crisis of civic adequacy of the press “against [political and economic] influences”. A multi-pronged approach can be taken: 1) To organize the news workforce to “stand united” and collectively “voice their concerns” through closer collaboration with news associations and unions – the widely publicized journalist petition against TVB's Occupy Central controversy was a case in point, 2) To raise the salary of news-workers to retain talented and experienced journalists capable of producing comprehensive analytical stories, 3) To diversify the funding for news organizations in Hong Kong so they are not predominantly controlled by rich businessmen subservient to the Chinese central government, and 4) To reach out to the public who can work alongside the news workforce to protest against restrictions on press freedoms; Hong Kong's civil society has been described as discerning and very active.

When comparing the case studies of Singapore and Hong Kong therefore, a few key similarities and differences should be noted. While several crisis narratives, on the outset, might seem similar, the severity and nature of these narratives are different –

notice the greater use of “concerns” within Model 2 for Singapore, i.e. factors that do not seem capable of endangering the system and society, and the greater use of “crisis” within Model 3 for Hong Kong. I shall offer a breakdown of these similarities and differences here:

First, both Singapore and Hong Kong newsrooms are subjected to cost-cutting measures and increased worker exploitation amid a more competitive digital media environment, contributing to crisis fears due to capitalism as media owners prioritize the bottom-line, but it may be argued that this is less severe in Singapore compared to Hong Kong. This is because Singapore’s news media system exists as a duopoly, and while they operate as corporations competing for advertising dollars, the media landscape is not a competitive one. Furthermore, these organizations are supported either by the investment arm of the Singapore government or have government-linked corporations as their major shareholders; this strengthens their financial backing. Indeed, at this point, Singapore’s two media organizations continue to make millions of dollars in profits yearly, and are at no risk of having major job cuts or newsroom closures. This is unlike Hong Kong’s media environment, which is highly saturated and extremely competitive. This means that news organizations are merely breaking even and journalists have to contend with lower wages.

Second, when examining the impact of new media on the press system, different types of concerns have emerged in Singapore and Hong Kong. Traditional media in Hong Kong seem to be experiencing a greater crisis in financial viability compared to those in Singapore, due to Hong Kong’s highly competitive media landscape. This has in turn translated to less money invested into new media development; Hong Kong journalists have reflected concerns on greater difficulties experienced by their newsrooms to leverage on the online platform to boost audience reach and revenues compared to Singapore, whose journalists appear to be keeping up with new media trends. That said, Singapore newsrooms are experiencing challenges as they transition into the digital age, related to hiring news-workers with the right mix of digital savvy and journalistic ability; this has resulted in more responsibilities being doled out to existing journalists.

Third, where civic adequacy of the press is concerned – a significant contributor to falling credibility and public confidence in mainstream media – the situation seems to be worse in Hong Kong compared to Singapore. It is important to acknowledge first that there are concerns on civic adequacy for both cities, as media owners establish close relations with government, resulting in content that may be skewed towards elite interests and agendas rather than those of the people – in Singapore, the press partners with the government in nation-building, in Hong Kong, the press acts as symbolic capital for their capitalist media owners to get in the good books of the Chinese central government and better their business relations with China. This link with government, however, is where the difference lies, and I want to bring in the other crisis narrative I mentioned earlier – the crisis of legitimacy – as a contributing factor.

In Chapter 2, I drew from the work of Cox (1987), noting that dominant classes maintain their supremacy through ideological means while offering satisfactory returns to the collective to gain their broad-based consent (p. 7). This element of consent is crucial because as Christians et al. (2009) remind us, media systems tend to take on roles based on the normative values upheld in their societies and the model of democracy that exists; as I have argued in Chapter 2, if a disconnect exists between these normative values venerated by the public – that have not been successfully ideologized by the ruling classes – and the model of political governance, this is when fears of crisis become amplified, including that of journalism crisis, tied to a press system that works according to the demands of the political elites rather than the expectations of the people. This becomes both a perceived crisis and an actual systemic one.

Based on my study findings, Singaporean journalists seem to have been ideologized to consensually work with the government to ensure national stability and unity, despite this indicating that press freedoms be curtailed, particularly when it came to political stories or “sensitive” topics that might be harmful to the public order. Evidently then, efforts at embedding the “survivalism” and “Asian values” ideologies in Singapore have proven to be very successful, with the legitimacy of the Singapore government to decisively rule the nation further strengthened as Singaporeans benefit materially from their leadership as well. As evidenced in how Singaporean journalists view characteristics of their “ideal” news media system – 63.8% chose a mix of

developmental press characteristics and liberal press characteristics in their responses – there is a widespread belief in the benefits of the press collaborating with the government. Singaporean journalists, however, continue to experience internal conflict when it comes to the extent to which their news media system should be freed up or controlled – this can be attributed to their exposure to Western liberal-democratic ideologies as members of a “global city” with strong connections to the West and what they have been taught in their Western-centric textbooks in journalism school. Despite this, there is generally an agreement among Singaporean journalists that the press model they would like to have is one that is “pro-Singapore”, i.e. one that operates to the betterment of Singapore society and its people. As long as the Singapore government adopts a similar stance as it manages the press system, as it seems to have done, it is seen to be trustworthy – this trust in the government, in turn, goes to alleviate fears of a journalism crisis, even when the government establishes strict controls on the press.

To back up this assertion, this study has found that a relatively low 43.8% of the Singaporean news-workers surveyed felt that the Singapore press system was in crisis or close to being in one, despite political influences on the press, the threat of online media to traditional media, and cutbacks in newsroom resources and manpower; these structural-causal factors that might traditionally generate fears of a crisis are mediated by the successful digital strategies implemented by Singaporean newsrooms, state support of the news organizations in Singapore from financial troubles, news organizations being kept on their toes by a very vibrant online media environment, and an overarching belief that efforts by the state to manage the press are for the good of Singapore society and Singaporeans.

In the case of Hong Kong, on the other hand, there seems to be an ideological disconnect between the government – specifically the Chinese central government and the Chinese-backed Hong Kong government – and the Hong Kong people, who have long looked up to ideals of liberal democracy from the 1800s, when the city was ceded to the British. These liberal ideologies have been reinforced over time by the structures and historical experiences of Hong Kong society itself, causing Hong Kongers, including the journalistic community there, to view the Chinese authoritarian system of governance with much hostility. Unlike in the case of Singapore, substantial ideologization efforts had

never been undertaken by the Chinese and Hong Kong governments to align Hong Kong society with alternatives to these liberal ideals; neither did moments in Hong Kong history prompt a call from the authorities to justify its decisive rule of this city. In fact, the “one country, two systems” policy has created the foundation of an “us” versus “them” divide that serves as a reminder that Hong Kong society is distinctly different from its Chinese counterpart. Not surprisingly, 81.3% of the survey respondents in Hong Kong chose only liberal press features as characteristics of their “ideal” press system, a vastly different statistic from Singapore’s 36.3%. Such liberal leanings are strengthened with Hong Kong’s position as a global city with close connections with the West, and with how journalists are taught in journalism school. A majority of Hong Kong journalists experience no conflict in how they want the press system to be – to them, the liberal press model of telling truth to power, acting as a watchdog to monitor the authorities, and championing the interests and voices of the people is the only model they know and accept. Any attempt at foisting a more controlled press model on them is met with great resistance.

To back this up, this study found that 71.3% of Hong Kong’s journalists surveyed felt that their press system was in crisis or close to being in one, citing reasons such as political and economic pressures to censor news content (including threats to journalist safety), stagnant low wages and threats of online media to the business model of traditional media. This slew of structural-causal factors, compounded with the belief that the government is not on their side and must be scrutinized, adds to fears that any government control of the press is to the detriment of Hong Kong society and must be resisted.

Based on my analysis, I therefore believe that a crisis of legitimacy narrative as it pertains to the system of governance, while not discussed in Western dominant literature on journalism crisis, is a relevant key contributor to discussions on journalism crisis set in societies where the government has significant control or influence on the press, within Asia or beyond. If ideological stances taken by the government and the people are aligned and public trust is built over time, a government’s control of the press may still be given widespread consent and lower fears of a journalism crisis, even when certain press freedoms are curtailed; such restrictions on the press are seen as actions that can

benefit the greater good. However, this does not apply to governments not deemed to be trustworthy. Even when more freedoms are doled out to the press, if there is an ideological disconnect between the government and the people and trust has not been successfully built over time, then any government action to control or influence the press is met with apprehension and hostility, increasing fears of a journalism crisis. This crisis of legitimacy narrative must therefore be taken into account, alongside other crisis narratives more commonly discussed in Western-centric journalism crisis literature; unlike societies in the West where political pressures on the press system is placed within the “crisis of liberal democracy” narrative, it would not be appropriate to impose the use of this term on societies that have not been granted liberal democracy by their political leadership in the first place.

That said, this does not mean that a highly state-regulated media system that is ideologically aligned with the normative outlook of the people is without issue. On the outset, it may seem that Singapore’s success story runs counter to the works of Western journalism scholars like McChesney (2003), Golding and Murdock (1991), and Herman and Chomsky (1988) on the problems associated with a concentration of media ownership. In Singapore, while both media organizations operate as commercial corporations competing for advertising dollars, there is no great concern that public interest is being undermined by a monopolistic media system that is profit hungry, as evidenced from the journalist survey and interview. The Singapore press system, operating within a less competitive environment, seems less affected by the ills of a hyper-commercialized system like that of the US, where news content has the likelihood of pandering to advertiser and shareholder interests. However, it is still important to step back and question the implications of an uncompetitive media environment, regulated by the state, on the broader issue of civic engagement. Where wrongdoings must be exposed and social injustices be addressed, would the news media system be able to take on these roles, especially when such stories might be deemed controversial or “sensitive” to the dominant elites? As development journalism scholars have themselves become aware, there is a fine line between partnering with the government in nation-building, and becoming a propaganda tool for the ruling class. Even as the Internet is presenting itself as a viable platform for a greater diversity of voices, including dissenting ones, to be raised, media environments that are state-regulated are also at risk of having

the Internet regulated as well; and if the people are successfully ideologized on that front to believe that it is for the public good, the issue of civic engagement becomes ever more pronounced. At whichever point the state becomes no longer trustworthy, it is uncertain how the people can organize themselves to challenge the system, and how the media can adequately champion the interests of the people.

Herein lies a fascinating thread that links Singapore and Hong Kong back to the US and its global neoliberal drive. Neoliberalism has been seen as a contributor to the journalism crisis in the American context, where media deregulation and commercialization have created media conglomerates that prioritize profit-making, disseminating the values and ideologies that favour the political and economic elites rather than to act in the interests of the public. News has become more sensationalized to increase audience appeal, news stories cater to the demands of advertisers, marginalized groups seldom have a voice in mainstream media, and stories that offend the dominant elites are swept under the rug. Nonetheless, neoliberalism in the US has spread worldwide in a concerted effort by the transnational capitalist class to create an open borderless economy, expanding markets to facilitate the flow of transnational capital. Global cities like Singapore and Hong Kong are themselves beneficiaries of this neoliberal global order, growing their prosperity as open economies that allow transnational capital to flow freely into their territories. Where Singapore succeeds is its ability to leverage on the US-led neoliberal drive to strengthen the authoritarian rule of the leadership on its citizenry that further solidifies the position of the government in the power hierarchy. Recall that the Singapore government maintains its legitimacy to rule by gaining broad-based consent from the people through ideological and material means – its ideology that it is working for the betterment of Singapore society is premised on the foundation that it is able to bring material wealth to the city-state. This is precisely tied to the benefits it is reaping from its strategic position in the neoliberal global order. On the flipside, it has adopted strategies to denounce these very neoliberal measures that it is itself benefiting from, advocating the problems associated with a deregulated liberal press system as one that can lead to social instability and chaos, thereby strengthening its decisive rule over the nation. This is the mark of a “successful” neoliberal authoritarian state.

Hong Kong, while also benefiting from the neoliberal global order, has had a lot less success on the ideologization front by the Chinese central government and Chinese-backed Hong Kong government post-handover that might justify greater government intervention; this is partly attributable to the material benefits that had already been reaped when Hong Kong was under British rule, solidifying broad-based consent to the system of “laissez-faire” governance under the British rather than the Chinese. Coupled with a long history of adopting free market ideals in its press system and civil society, any efforts by the government that might suggest a curtailing of existing freedoms is met with much hostility. Hong Kong’s adherence to neoliberal principles in its news media industry – keeping it free and competitive like the US – has generated other concerns for journalism. Amid intense competition in a highly saturated media landscape, news outlets find themselves struggling to remain financially viable, to retain experienced journalists with reasonable wages, and to keep playing their watchdog roles to monitor abuses of power, without experiencing political and economic backlash for their coverage of stories that may be “sensitive” to China.

In conclusion, an examination of the concept of “journalism crisis” can become highly complex in societies influenced by Western liberal ideologies but continue to be subjected to some form of authoritarian control on their press systems. While factors that may have caused journalism crisis concerns to rise in the West may be spread worldwide through global processes such as neoliberal capitalist expansion and cultural imperialism, the development of news and journalism within specific locales is just as likely to be influenced by local historical experiences, philosophical traditions and cultural practices. It is within a complex interaction of all these factors that expectations of how journalism should be (at the ideological level) and how journalism is actually practiced on the ground (at the material level) become produced and set into motion; the models developed in this thesis can help to shed light on the web of structural-causal factors that contribute to an actual systemic journalism crisis within the “global cities” of Singapore and Hong Kong.

Where discussions on journalism have not centred on talks of a “crisis” (at the discursive level), as in the case of Singapore and Hong Kong, an analysis such as this can uncover whether the lack of such public discourse is because an actual systemic



crisis is not widely perceived (as in the case of Singapore), or whether it is because existing research has yet to connect the dots (as in the case of Hong Kong). In the latter scenario, with the help of study findings like these, public discourse can begin to elevate the problems that exist to the level of “crisis”, such that public attention can be drawn towards effective systemic reform. At the same time, where journalism crisis is not perceived by the majority, like in the case of Singapore, it becomes insightful to further break down why a state-regulated media system that is uncompetitive – the type of press system that Western liberal scholars vehemently argue against – is seen as properly-functioning and contributing to, rather than endangering, society as a whole; and then furthering this analysis to decipher if this signals a crisis on other fronts beyond that in the journalism field. As a line of inquiry for future study, one may consider how societies with different ties to neoliberal capital and differing political cultures and societal outlooks may face different sets of challenges to civic engagement; a more formal comparative framework can be established for this purpose, with the development of more precise categories for comparison.

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## Appendix.

### Survey Questionnaire

#### Journalist Perceptions Survey

##### Instructions

Please answer all the questions on this survey. It is expected to take about 15 minutes. Your answers will go towards a media research study on journalist perceptions and will be kept strictly confidential. By filling out this questionnaire, you are consenting to participate in this study, and we thank you for setting your time aside for this.

**Q1 . City you are working in:**

- Singapore
- Hong Kong

**Q2 . News platform you are working at [you may select more than one option if applicable]:**

- Newspaper
- Television
- Radio
- Online

**Q3 . Language of reporting:**

- English
- Chinese
- Malay
- Tamil
- Japanese
- Others

**Q4 . Number of years of employment as a journalist:**

- 0.5 - 3 years
- 3 - 5 years
- 5 - 10 years
- More than 10 years

**Q5 . Briefly describe your journalism education (number of years, place of study):**

**Q6 . Briefly describe your role(s) in the newsroom:**

**Q7 . With regards to journalism practices, which issues of concern are present in your own journalistic work? Please rank the severity of every issue listed below from “No, not of concern at all” to “Yes, very much of concern”.**

	No, not of concern at all	Yes, but of little concern	Yes, somewhat of concern	Yes, of considerable concern	Yes, very much of concern
Too much public relations journalism i.e. obtain stories from press releases :	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Too much pack journalism i.e. pursue the same stories as other news agencies :	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Too many newswire stories :	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Too much sensationalized content :	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Too many trivial “infotainment” stories :	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Too much partisanship or bias in the news organization :	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of investigative stories :	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of news analysis :	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of political criticism :	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Avoidance of politically, economically, or socially “sensitive” topics :	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Q8 . With regards to newsroom resources and working conditions, which issues of concern are present in your own journalistic work? Please rank the severity of every issue listed below from “No, not of concern at all” to “Yes, very much of concern”.**

	No, not of concern at all	Yes, but of little concern	Yes, somewhat of concern	Yes, of considerable concern	Yes, very much of concern
Long work hours :	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Low wages :	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Temporary short-term contracts that create job insecurity :	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Extensive cross-platform work :	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cutback on newsroom resources :	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of staff :	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Q9 . With regards to the challenges of online media, which issues of concern are present in your own journalistic work? Please rank the severity of every issue listed below from “No, not of concern at all” to “Yes, very much of concern”.**

	No, not of concern at all	Yes, but of little concern	Yes, somewhat of concern	Yes, of considerable concern	Yes, very much of concern
Threat of online media to traditional media (i.e. advertising, circulation) :	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of a viable business model for traditional news media :	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of a viable business model for online news media :	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of engagement with alternative media/ citizen media :	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Citizen journalists lower standards of professional journalism :	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Q10 . With regards to news agendas and interests, which issues of concern are present in your own journalistic work? Please rank the severity of every issue listed below from “No, not of concern at all” to “Yes, very much of concern”.**

	No, not of concern at all	Yes, but of little concern	Yes, somewhat of concern	Yes, of considerable concern	Yes, very much of concern
Privileging of elite voices and interests over the public’s voices and interests :	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gearing news content towards more lucrative markets and audiences :	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Significant government influence/ control on news content :	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Significant advertiser influence/ control on news content :	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Q11 . If you feel “government influence” is of concern, please state:**

Which governments? :

Goals of influence? [please specify government] :

Methods of influence? [please specify government] :

**Q12 . If you feel “advertiser influence” is of concern, please state:**

Goals of influence? :

Methods of influence? :

**Q13 . Are there other issues of concern in your work as a journalist NOT listed above? Please elaborate.**

**Q14 . What roles do you think the ideal news media system in your city should play? You may choose more than one option here.**

- Provide unbiased, accurate reports to keep citizens informed
- Act as a “watchdog” to closely monitor the powerful in society (i.e. government, corporations)
- Ensure that voices from the people get heard by those in power
- Champion the interests of the people

- Present different political positions to encourage political debate and participation
- Avoid covering stories that may create social conflict and instability
- Act as a mouthpiece to disseminate messages from the government to the people
- Cooperate with the government in nation-building efforts
- Promote consensus and harmony over contention and debate

**Q15 . Are there other roles that you feel your ideal news media system should play that are NOT listed above? Please elaborate.**

**Q16 . Do you think the Internet presents more benefits or challenges to the creation of your ideal news media system? Why is that so?**

**Q17 . How familiar are you with the way journalism is practiced in the US?**

- Very familiar
- Familiar
- Somewhat familiar
- Not familiar at all

**Q18 . Do you think the state of journalism in the US is “in crisis”?**

- It is in crisis
- It is close to being in crisis
- It is considerably far from being in crisis
- It is not in crisis at all
- I am undecided if it is in crisis or not

**Q19 . In answering the question above, how did you define a “journalism crisis”?**



**Q20 . What about journalism in your city? Do you think it is “in crisis”?**

- It is in crisis
- It is close to being in crisis
- It is considerably far from being in crisis
- It is not in crisis at all
- I am undecided if it is in crisis or not

**Q21 . Please state the reasons for your choice above.**

**Q22 . If you feel journalism in your city is in crisis or is close to being in crisis, please answer the five questions below. Otherwise, please go to Question 23.**

What do you think are the main causes of this journalism crisis in your city? :

Do you think the Internet has helped to alleviate or worsen this journalism crisis in your city? Why is that? :

Do you think this journalism crisis is inevitable, given the unique political, economic, and social contexts of your city? Please elaborate. :

What solutions do you propose to this journalism crisis? :

Do you think that journalism in your city is experiencing a crisis similar to that in the US? Why or why not? :

**Q23 . On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you gauge public confidence in the news media in your city? [with 1 as “least confident” and 10 as “most confident”]**

**Q24 . Please state the reasons for your rating above.**

**Q25 . How do you define “journalistic professionalism”?**

**Q26 . On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate the level of professionalism among journalists in your city? [with 1 as “not professional” and 10 as “extremely professional”]**

**Q27 . Please state the reasons for your rating above.**

Submit