NEWS AND EDUCATION POLICY IN HONG KONG

Volume I Main Text

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Table of Content

Abstract

This thesis examines the press coverage of educational issues and the making of education policy in post-transition Hong Kong. Education is of great importance to Hong Kong. After the handover of sovereignty from Britain to China in 1997, Hong Kong's new government introduced a thorough educational reform. As educational issues had a high priority on the new government's agenda, media coverage of these issues increased dramatically. In addition, there was much speculation about how Hong Kong's media would develop after the reversion to Chinese rule. A case study of news coverage of education issues in contemporary Hong Kong holds great interest not only for studying news and education policy but also because of the insights it gives into Hong Kong's press and politics.

The present study draws on the newsmaking and agenda-building literatures to develop an analytical framework that guides the research. By employing content analysis, and supplementing it with interview data from journalists and educators, the thesis examines the press coverage of four educational issues. The four issues were the compulsory mother-tongue teaching in secondary schools, a proposed language benchmark test for teachers, sex discrimination in the Secondary School Places Allocation System, and cuts to university funding between 2001 and 2004. In total the content analysis included 1,385 items from four newspapers on these four issues.

The research found, firstly, that the press is more interested in primary and secondary education than in tertiary education issues; secondly, that the news coverage of educational issues concentrated on conflicts, and while these could occur at all stages of the policy process, they were most frequently in the later parts; thirdly, that journalists' judgement of the newsworthiness of individual events and news source activities strongly influenced the press coverage of education issues; and fourthly, that education coverage is dominated by few

powerful news sources but the domination did not necessarily secure the sources positive coverage. So press coverage tended to reflect when policy development generated conflicts and public events, and reflected the publicity strategies of the strongest and best organised groups.

Chapter 1   Introduction

This thesis examines the press coverage of educational issues in contemporary Hong Kong. This topic is of great importance to those who are interested in the contemporary performance of Hong Kong's newspapers, and especially to the interactions between press and politics in post-transition Hong Kong. More generally the thesis is a contribution to the scholarly literature on the relationship between news coverage and policy processes, and particularly on the influences on press coverage of educational issues and how that coverage interacts with policy processes.

Education is of great interest to Hong Kong residents, and one that has become a higher priority within government policy-making, and therefore also an area that has acquired a stronger media focus. Hong Kong's education system started to change in the second half of the 1980s. After the handover of sovereignty from Britain to China in 1997, the new government introduced a thorough educational reform, which involved a great deal of policy change. As educational issues had a high priority on the new government's agenda, media coverage of these issues increased dramatically. Newspapers were not only having more educational reports in their local news pages, some also launched new education pages. An editor who was interviewed for this thesis said that education reform brought an unprecedented opportunity for covering education news. So post-transition education policy in Hong Kong presents a fascinating setting to studying news and public policy formation.

The rest of this chapter provides the context for better understanding the research results and the reasons for undertaking the study. It begins by looking at the peculiar nature of Hong Kong's politics, both as a British colony and now as a Special Administrative Region within China. Despite never having been a representative democracy, policy-making in Hong Kong still pays attention to public opinion and often involves considerable public dialogue, which is

carried out in newspapers and other media. To understand the contemporary nature of press-polity relations in Hong Kong, one needs to grasp how dynamic the relationship has been between the two institutions. Therefore, the second section of the chapter reviews the four phases of press—polity relations, and the third section tries to locate the current study within the rich scholarly literature on news and politics in Hong Kong. The final substantive section considers the rising importance of educational issues in Hong Kong.

POLITICAL SYSTEM IN HONG KONG

The Executive—led Government

Hong Kong has never been a normal representative democracy with the government elected by, and responsible to, its people. In the colonial period the Governor, appointed by the Queen of England, was constitutionally the most powerful person in Hong Kong. The Executive Council, which is the executive authority of the colonial government, comprised the three top officers, that is the Chief Secretary, the Financial Secretary and the Attorney General, and other members who are mainly influential businessmen and some leading citizens appointed by the government with the approval of the United Kingdom Secretary of State. This Council remained the highest authority of public policy-making in Hong Kong after China regained its sovereignty in 1997. The Chief Executive Officer of the post-1997 Hong Kong Government is elected by an Election Committee composed of 800 members who are appointed by the Chinese Government.

The legislative authority is the Legislative Council. The Council started having indirectly elected legislators based on functional constituencies (representatives for different industries and profession categories including education) in 1985. In the early 1990s, the colonial government

brought democratic reform to Hong Kong.[1] Since then, party politics started in Hong Kong.[2]

The Legislative Council became a fully elected legislature in 1995. However, the

democratisation process halted but did not stop fully after the sovereignty transition. The first

term of the Legislative Council formed in 1998 retrograde to a less representative composition

with only 20 out of the 60 legislators being directly elected, but this number increased to 24 in

the second term in 2000 and was further increased to half of the membership in 2004. Under the

Basic Law, in 2007, Hong Kong could determine its own method for the election of the Chief

Executive Officer of the government.[3] However, even though over five hundred thousand Hong

Kong people rallied for a full democracy in 2004, their demand was turned down by the Chinese

Government. The developments of democracy in Hong Kong is largely dependent on the

political developments on the mainland.

Within the Hong Kong Government, the Education and Manpower Bureau (previously

called 'Branch' rather than 'Bureau') inside the Government Secretariat is responsible for

developing and reviewing educational policies. Agencies and departments under the Education

and Manpower Bureau, such as the Education Department, are its executive arms. The Bureau is

staffed by professionals, who make their career inside the education field, and generalist

administrative officers.

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[1] The Hong Kong Government issued two Green Papers (consultative document) in 1984 and 1987 to propose
democratisation of the government by introducing indirectly elected and directly elected members of the Legislative
Council. In February 1988, the government published the White Paper, 'The Development of Representative
Government: The Way Forward', which decided in 1991 that ten directly elected Legislative Council seats would be
introduced. Further reform projects were announced by the last Governor, Chris Patten, in 1992 and the Legislative
Council became a fully elected legislature in 1995.
[2] The three main political parties are: The Pro-Hong Kong Democratic Party, The Pro-China Democratic Alliance
for the Betterment of Hong Kong, and The Liberal Party which, represents the local business interest.
[3] Depending on the interpretation of the Basic Law, Hong Kong could have a direct Chief Executive Officer election
in 2007. However, the writing of the initiatives related to constitutional development in the Basic Law was
deliberately ambiguous. In 2003, the interpretation of the Basic Law triggered a political debate in Hong Kong and
between Hong Kong and China's academics.

The Legitimacy Problem

As Lee (1994:59, cited by Ahmed et al., 1997:13) indicated, in Hong Kong's executive-dominated political system in the colonial period, the senior civil servants of the colonial government were ultimate policy-makers. This remains the same after the 1997 handover. In his first annual policy address in 1997, the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Government stated clearly, "[T]he Hong Kong SAR (Special Administrative Region) has an executive-led government" (Policy Address 1997, section 148). The system ensures the state has enough power to implement policies the government prefers but it does not guarantee a smooth operation of policy process. Instead, the influence of other political forces cannot be disregarded nor underestimated.

As mentioned in the previous part, the number of directly elected members of the Legislative Council was increased. In addition, established public institutions, professional organisations, and grassroot groups are active political actors bearing pressure on the government to make policy decisions in their interest. With regard to education, important organisations include the tertiary institutions, the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union, the Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers, the Education Convergence (a teachers' group) and the associations of school headmasters and parents. More interestingly, case studies done by Sweeting and Morris (cited by Sweeting, 1995:242) found that there was "strong prevailing influence of exogenous influences such as international organisations (e.g. the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) on educational policy in Hong Kong." Therefore Hong Kong educational policies have been shaped by endogenous and exogenous forces.

This inclusion of political forces in Hong Kong's policy process is always interpreted as a result of an apprehension of the manifest legitimacy problem confronting the government. The government has a clear idea of how important an inclusive policy-making process is to the

success of public policies. As the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong government stated in his maiden policy address:

> To lead, we must listen carefully and explain clearly what we intend to do…we want to assure the community that your Government remains committed to listening to community views and responding by setting out clearly how we plan to meet our long term objectives. We remain committed to debating publicly issues of importance to the community, so that all have the opportunity to take part in the process (Policy Address 1997, section 148).

A consequence of the legitimacy problem is that the political system in Hong Kong is "sensitive to crises which are considered capable of escalating into threats to the status quo" (Sweeting, 1995:237). Therefore, justification of policy decisions and recommendations made by appointed advisory bodies are a prerequisite for the smooth implementation of public policies (Cheng, 1987, cited by Pun, 1996:66). To establish its legitimacy, the Hong Kong Government has a long-standing institutional establishment. The government created networks of advisory bodies to correspond to different policy areas. Public consultation is the most common process used to engage the public in the policy-making process. Concerning education, the Education Commission, which completed three rounds of public consultations and recommended a blueprint of system-wide educational reforms to the government in 2000, is on the top of the hierarchy of advisory bodies (See Table 1.1).

The above briefly introduces Hong Kong's political system and its characteristics. The following will discuss Hong Kong's press from a historical perspective.

CHANGING MEDIA-POLITY RELATIONS IN HONG KONG

Mass communication system in Hong Kong is predominantly a commercial system consisting of all types of electronic and print media. What make the press an important and interesting subject for research are firstly, newspapers are important information sources of public affairs in Hong Kong, and secondly, news media has become more politically significant because the democratic reform has been brought into Hong Kong since the early 1980s.

In general, newspapers are ranked as the second most important information source of public affairs in Hong Kong. Despite most people obtaining political information from the television, the press was given a more favourable evaluation in terms of clear and comprehensive reporting, helpfulness in forming one's opinion on public affairs and in understanding other people's concern, and thought-provoking. Television is perceived primarily as a vehicle for entertainment. Electronic media are subject to strict regulation and are monitored by the government due to their huge reach and influence (note the 1985 study of the ethos of the Hong Kong people, as cited in Kuan and Lau, 1988:17; Chan, 1992b:114,123; So and Chan, 1999:3). Compared with television channels, the press enjoys more freedom. This implies that newspapers could have more diverse coverage of public issues.

In the last half of the 20th century, the newspaper landscape and the relations between the press and local politics have seen some remarkable changes. The development of the Hong Kong press system in the last 50 years can be divided into three phrases (Chan, 1992b:106). The first phase, the period before the late 1960s, is marked by a weak relationship between the press and local politics. In the second phrase, the period from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s, the Hong Kong press mainly performs as public relations agents for the government. The third phrase, from the mid-1980s to 1997, is the most colourful period marked by the unprecedented sovereignty transition. In the sovereignty transition period itself, the press enjoyed the greatest freedom it ever had, and since July 1997 development is still continuing. As news media *per se* are social institutions rooted in particular social, political and economic context, to illustrate the change of the media-polity relationship in Hong Kong, the following discussion will describe the press structures of each phases and the historical context in which the Hong Kong press flourished.

The First Phase (up to the late 1960s)

Chan (1986) noted that the press structure in Hong Kong before the late 1960s was a result of the interaction among three political powers: the Chinese Communist Party, the Kuo-Ming-Tang (some writers prefer to use Nationalist Party), and the British colonial government. Based on political ideology and partisan allegiance[4] of the press, Lee and Chan (1986) categorise Hong Kong's press into four types: ultra-leftist (party press), centrist (commercial press), mainstream rightist (commercial press), and ultra-rightist (party press) (Chan, 1986). This categorisation emphasises political ideology as the most prominent feature of Hong Kong's press.

In this stage, the relationship between the local Chinese press and the polity in Hong Kong was weak. Studying Hong Kong politics in the colonial period, Lau (1982:18, 25) asserted that "the political system of Hong Kong was a secluded bureaucratic polity" which had successfully maintained its political autonomy "by limiting its functions, by preventing the emergence of other autonomous political actors and by depoliticising the Chinese society". Lau (1982) maintained that Hong Kong's social-political system was a "minimally-integrated social-political system" in which the bureaucratic polity and the Chinese society coexisted with limited linkages and exchanges between them. In a later study, Kuan and Lau (1988) utilised the concept of minimal-integrated system to characterise Hong Kong's media–political system.

The notion of "minimally-integrated system" suggests both the individual interactions between the media and the political elites and the structural linkage between media and political institution were weak; interaction between the mass media and the local political institutions was restricted (Kuan and Lau, 1988:2-5). Kuan and Lau, nevertheless, emphasised that the media–political system in Hong Kong is neither the transmission-belt journalism in a totalitarian regime, nor the development journalism of Third World nations. Under British rule, the press enjoyed a

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[4] Four criteria were used by Lee and Chan to determinate the political ideology and party allegiance: (1) source of financial support and party affiliation; (2) place of registration; (3) choice of national day celebration and calendar; and (4) ways of addressing the Beijing and the Taipei regimes.

high degree of press freedom. This mainly resulted from the exercise of self-restraint by both the government and the press (So 1999:106). As Ku (1999) pointed out, although there are over thirty "very strict" ordinances to restrain press freedom and secure ultimate control over mass media, they had been rarely enforced. Instead, the colonial government had maintained a minimum intervention policy toward local cultural and customary matter provided that the press did not challenge the legitimacy of British rule. This had been a tactical understanding between the press and the government, and this long-standing practice contributed, to a great extent, to the development of the press system in Hong Kong that is dominated by commercial papers.

Another important factor which contributed to the weak relationship between the media and politics is the China-orientation of the press. During 1960s, over fifty per cent of Hong Kong population were refugees who fled from mainland China,[5] and a majority of these people hoped to either leave Hong Kong for elsewhere or to return to China. In contrast to their apathy towards local affairs in Hong Kong, they were eager for information about the development in mainland China. Responding to the market, coverage about China was given priority over local affairs by the mainstream rightist (non-party) press.[6] Consequently, the China-orientation made the press irrelevant to local politics (Kuan and Lau, 1988).

The Second Phase (from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s)

Since the late 1960s, the party press had gradually declined due to the commercialisation of the Hong Kong media, the inhibitive policy of the colonial government over the political activities in Hong Kong and the change in demographical structure—the second generation of the Chinese refugees who were Hong Kong born became the majority of media consumers. To replace the

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[5] Chan (1992b) mentioned that, between 1945 and 1951, there were over 1,500,000 refugees, who fled from mainland China in the wake of the Communist takeover, and entered Hong Kong. By 1961, the proportion of the non-native born in the whole population was still over 50%.

[6] Comparing the circulation data of the years 1956 and 1966, So and Chan (1999) found that the rightist (non-party) papers, *Wah Kiu Yat Pao*, *Wah Kiu Man Pao* and *Kung Sheung Daily News* were ranked the first, second and third in 1956. In 1966, the rightist (non-party) *Sing Tao Wen Pao* was ranked the first, with the centrist *Sing Pao Daily* second and *Ming Pao* third.

party press, the commercial press whose political stances were either independent or apolitical (Chan et al., 2000:532-535; Lee and Chu, 1998) became the main players in the print media market. So (1999) demonstrated, in his study of news treatment of government news, that the commercial imperative was as important as political ideology in shaping the press structure in the context of advanced capitalist societies. He categorised Hong Kong newspapers into four types: leftist-political, rightist-political, popular-commercial, and elite-commercial.

The interaction between the press and the government increased during this period. A growing proportion of native-born gave rise to a variety of pressure groups. Reflecting the social change, increasingly, local news appeared on the front pages of newspapers. There were strong social movements against the government on local affairs. The government also started to pay more attention on controlling information after a dramatic social crisis.

As Kuan and Lau (1988) and Chan (1992b) pointed out, the 1966 riot, which was triggered by the rise of five cents in ferry fares by a franchised company, was a remarkable event which marked the passing of the refugee society and the rise of the local identity. It fundamentally changed the media–politics relationship in Hong Kong. The government realised the need for information control in the wake of the riot. The inquiry report into the event expressed a communication gap between the government and the public, and that mass media needed to be managed to close this gap (Hong Kong Government, 1967). A series of new mechanisms were erected to strengthen the information management of the government. The Government Information Service (renamed as Information Services Department after the 1997 handover) was expanded. The Government Information Service sent information officers to staff all governmental departments and it also started publishing the *Daily News Bulletin* and disseminating it to all media outlets through electronic means on a daily basis.

There are different views about the roles of the news media in Hong Kong's social–political system. Generally speaking, during most of the time before the mid-1980s, the press

operated a public relations model of media–government relationship.[7] Chu and Lee (1995:7) explained that, under the public relations model, the media are pro-government. The government and the media maintain a friendship. The media only publish materials positive to the government but will not make up stories or distort facts to assist the government's political control, while the government hardly uses coercive power to control the media, the media will benefit from helping to promote the government.

Although the media were generally not a propaganda machine of the political authority, there was one exception. During the leftist riots in 1967, which shook the capitalist system in Hong Kong, not only the rightist press but all non-leftist media, be they electronic or print, supported the government's suppression of the leftist movement and played a propaganda role overtly (Chu and Lee, 1995; Chan, 1992b). This was a result of the interplay of the prevailing apolitical sentiment among Hong Kong people, the information control of the government, and the commercial interest of the press. For Lau, the press in Hong Kong were politically impotent due to their commercial nature and the information control of the government (Lau, 1982:149). Some researchers, in contrast, deemed that news media play a prominent role in Hong Kong's social–political system. Bhatia (1997) argued that news media is an important communication platform in public consultation. That the press act as a public forum and present diverse coverage on public issues is supported by So's study (1999); this, however, only happened when social conflict emerged. As Chan (1992b:125) suggested, when conflict between pressure groups and the government arises, the press act as a third party heavily sought by both sides to mobilise public support. This is especially important to the colonial state, as the Hong Kong people had been denied the rights to participate in the formal decision-making process.

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[7] Chu and Lee (1995) suggested a framework using these five models: the propaganda model, the public relations model, the marketplace model, the reformist model, and the revolutionary model, to illuminate the of media–government relationship in Hong Kong at different stages of development.

The Third Phase (from the mid-1980s to 1997)

The change of media–polity relations could be observed in the sovereignty transition period and attracted great scholarly effort. So and Chan (1999) indicated that there was an evolution of the press structure in the 1990s. During this period, the traditional leftist papers remained relatively stable in number and position but the rightist papers either ceased operation or changed their political stance.[8] So and Chan (1999) suggested that the structure of Hong Kong press no longer echoed the political struggle between the Chinese Communist Party and the Kuo-Ming-Tang, which was basically alien to the Hong Kong people. The press was increasingly divided into pro-Hong Kong or pro-China groups in reflecting Hong Kong's internal dynamics and contradictions. The pro-Hong Kong commercial press can be further divided into conservative-pro-Hong Kong and liberal-pro-Hong Kong.

The signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984 sealed the fate of Hong Kong to revert to China. In their studies of media and power transition, researchers (Chan, 1986; Chu and Lee, 1995; Tsang, 1999) noted, during the transition period, the increasing influence of Chinese authority and the democratic reform introduced by the colonial government had great impact on the media system. Since 1984, a dual power structure emerged as a result of the fade-in of the Chinese rulers and the fade-out of the colonial British rulers. Although the British remained the legal government to rule Hong Kong, the legitimisation of the Chinese authority lent her the power to intervene more and more in Hong Kong affairs. On many issues, especially those straddling the 1997 period, the Hong Kong Government was forced to seek the consent of the Chinese Government. Strife between the two parties increased, especially on the issue of political reform in Hong Kong.

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[8] The *Hong Kong Times* (a Kuo-Ming-Tang party press) folded in 1993, and the *Hong Kong United Daily* and *China Times Magazine*, publications owned by the two largest Taiwanese newspapers, retreated from Hong Kong in 1995 and 1996. The traditional rightist paper pro-Taiwan *Sing Tao Daily* abandoned its rightist stance marked by Aw, the chairwoman of the Sing Tao Group, whose visit to mainland China and was warmly received by the Chinese Communist Party leaders in 1992 and the *Wah Kiu Yat Pao* ceased operation in 1995 due to financial difficulty.

Reflecting the development of electoral politics, the rise of local political parties, and the power transition, Hong Kong media have substantially increased their coverage of local political affairs since the early 1980s. They also criticised both the Hong Kong and Chinese governments. Chu and Lee (1995) argued, during the transition period, the political struggle between the Chinese and her British counterpart had created a relative power vacuum which gave Hong Kong media a chance to perform as a vehicle of social–political reform. In addition, the then newly formed political parties, be they pro-democratic or pro-China ones, were eager to gain media coverage to mobilise public support and to legitimise their power. This further consolidated the role of the media as a public sphere in the sovereignty transition period.

Post-1997 Period

Lee and Chu (1995) argued that when the Chinese government gradually took over Hong Kong, the monolithic power structure regressed and the mass media resumed to be a mouthpiece of the government, at least for a short while after 1997. However, recent developments show that the reality is more complicated.

Lee and Chu (1995) predicted that the Hong Kong media system after 1997 would become a "relatively repressive system" and that the media would choose to exercise a public relations or propaganda model of media–government relationship. The bases for these predictions was that, first, that there was the political structure would be less liberal in post-1997 Hong Kong, second, that Hong Kong economy is dominated by Chinese and pro-China conglomerations, third, that the media have a profiteering media proprietor's culture, fourth, that the journalists have a more job than profession-oriented media practitioners' culture and finally, that the audience is apathetic to politics.

The predictions are reasonable as the ownership of many media companies, such as the Asia Television, the *South China Morning Post* and the *Ming Pao Daily*, were acquired by pro-

China or China-affiliated businessman (Fung and Lee, 1994). In fact, the frequently reported cases of self-censorship that happened during the transition period did alert the public and the media professionals to the decline of press freedom. Researchers, such as Lee and Chu (1998) and Sciutto (1996) devoted their efforts to reveal how the Chinese Government influenced media coverage by putting pressure on individual journalists and media organisations.

Nevertheless, the situation has turned out to be more complicated. Fung and Lee (1994:127) pointed out that, in post-1997 Hong Kong, the news media will have to "cope with the dilemma of ingratiating themselves with China without impeding media legitimacy in Hong Kong's market environment". This argument implies that it would be difficult for the press to adopt a coherent political stance in their daily practices. It may in turn result in a fragmentation of political stance. To cope with the difficulty, the media may develop an issue-specific strategy of newsmaking by distinguishing sensitive political issues from local public issues. As can be observed in the past few years, the press were cautious in reporting political issues such as constitutional reform in Hong Kong, human rights movement in China, and the Taiwan issue but were very critical to the Hong Kong Government on local issues such as the collapse of housing market and the bird-flu crisis.

STUDYING NEWS AND POLITICS IN HONG KONG

To investigate news and public policy in Hong Kong, this research seeks to contribute to the study of political communication in Hong Kong. In a broad sense, then, this research is about news and social change. By examining how journalistic practices interact with the policy-making process and questioning about what are the consequences of this, this research inquires into one of the most important political impacts of news, which is still a less explored aspect of political communication in Hong Kong.

There have been two characteristics of political communication study in Hong Kong in the last two decades. Firstly, considerable attention has been given to newsmaking, especially the internal dynamics of the press (because of the higher availability of newspaper materials). Chan (1992a) pointed out that this was likely due to the late introduction of electoral politics in Hong Kong and the monopoly of power by the Communist Party in China. Unlike their counterpart in Western countries concentrating their study on public opinion and election campaign, Hong Kong communication researchers focused on the institutional interaction between news media, mainly the press (because it is more accessible than electronic media), and political power centres, i.e. the colonial government, the Chinese Government and the Hong Kong Special Administration Region Government after 1997. The result of this was that newsmaking has become the most studied area of communication research in Hong Kong. Significant results were produced throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Some milestones were reached by studies such as Chan and Lee (1984) who studied political ideologies and news reporting. They put forward the concept of journalistic paradigm[9] and suggested that there was a party–press parallelism in Hong Kong by conceptualising the Hong Kong press as belonging to different journalistic paradigms. Later, Chan (1986) studied the power transition and the change of journalistic paradigm in Hong Kong press. So (1999) expanded the understanding of newsmaking in Hong Kong by revealing how newspapers perform under different reportorial modes—routine mode and crisis mode of reporting—and how commercial imperatives of the news organisations, as political ideologies do, act as important elements in determining news content. Hong Kong researchers were also interested in how media legitimatises power establishments (see Lee and Chu 1998; Yip, 1999). There were, however, few but growing number of studies done

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[9] "Drawing on Kuhn's concept of 'paradigm', Chan and Lee (1984)…defined 'journalistic paradigm' as a gestalt worldview that informs the media as to what social facts to report (and what not to report) and how to interpret them. In essence, journalistic paradigm refers to the set of assumptions that governs the newsmaking process" (Chan, 1986:3). This concept includes a set of sub-concepts. Chan asserts that political ideology is the central element of the Hong Kong press's journalistic paradigm and a shift of journalist paradigm often occur when there is change of power or radical social change occurs. So, (1999) argued that media phenomena in Hong Kong cannot be explained by political factors alone and that one has to consider the commercial dimension.

concerning other aspects of mass communication, such as media and culture identity, public opinion, news and policy-making, and the like.

Secondly, there was a fascination with the unique sovereignty transition in political communication study in Hong Kong. Since the early 1980s, major studies have focused on events involving political struggle. Many of these events were episodes during the course of the sovereignty transition, such as the Sino-British talks on sovereignty transition, political reform, the election of legislators and the first Chief Executive Officer of the post-1997 Hong Kong Government. Other political events examined include the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown in China and the death of Deng Xiao-ping, but other types of issues or events and other aspects of political communication in Hong Kong were largely left unexplored. Although it was suggested that "only when a crisis situation [that creates a crisis mode of reporting] arises [from a critical event] can we see the divergent journalistic orientations and contrasting roles performed by newspapers of different camps…we should put more emphasis on the analysis of critical events in order to understand how [journalistic] paradigms shift from one to another" (So, 1999:131), the fascination of the historical scene of 1997 is more than a methodological consideration. The political transition was a matter of paramount importance to the destiny of Hong Kong people. It also was an unprecedented chance given by history "for observing how different political configurations influence mass media and how the mass media adapt to immense environmental pressure" (Chan, 1986:3).

The established studies accumulated valuable knowledge about how political, economic and organisational factors influence the structure and the internal dynamics of news media in Hong Kong. However, one has to be circumspect about generalising the findings of case studies about sovereignty transition and critical events to the political communication process in a normal state of politics because the situations which arose from those events were unique. The critique of the political communication studies of elections in Western countries made by

Deacon and Golding, to a certain extent, can be applied to the political communication research in Hong Kong, as the communication in elections in Western countries and that in the political events in Hong Kong shared some common characteristics. Deacon and Golding (1994:10) argued, in the election periods, "the [media] content and volume of public debate, the intensity of political rhetoric, the attentiveness of citizens, and the energy and partisanship of political media are all totally atypical".

While this study has taken into account the established knowledge of the Hong Kong press, it endeavours to move beyond it also. As So and Chan (1999:25) pointed out, there is a need, in studying the press and politics in Hong Kong, to enlarge the scope of research by expanding "the idea of political communication to include all the roles of communication in political processes". It is certain that the role of the news media in the policy-making process is one of the most important aspects of political communication. This research inquires into how journalism integrates into public policy process and influences policy decisions in Hong Kong, which has been a largely unexplored aspect of the field. The study concerns itself with the political impact of news. Insofar as policy development is a gradual process of institutional change, the research is about routine journalism rather than journalism in crisis situations. Though educational issues are also political in nature, they are substantially local policy issues rather than issues concerning the Chinese government. The social, political and economic configuration of covering news on local policy issues is different in the main from those events closely monitored by the Chinese government. Despite incidents such as the protest involving 6,000 teachers in June 2000, the largest teachers' protest since 1973, which created a confrontational situation and triggered a political storm, its nature was largely different from that of the Tiananmen Square crackdown which rocked the communist regime. In bringing one-sixth of the Hong Kong population, a million people, onto the street, the latter created a crisis situation that "[defied] normal organisational rules and routines" and in dealing with it "journalists do not have standardised

16

procedures or much experience" (So, 1999:102). In contrast, the former situation (the 2000 protest) was covered within the scope of routine news operation. Educational activities are daily practices within an established social order. The reportorial context of educational news is characterised by routine events. In other words, educational news is produced in a "routine mode" of reporting by which So (1999) refers to the reportorial context that is characterised by the values of objective reporting and the economic consideration of the organisation.

For analysing educational news, the present research focuses on commercial press coverage and simply categorises these papers into popular and elite press. Classifying newspapers by their target market, the popular–elite demarcation emphasises the commercial nature of the press. The research focuses on the commercial press because, firstly, the readership of the two party press is too small to represent a significant section of public debate on educational issues; secondly, the study done by So (1999) showed that the political nature of Hong Kong newspapers seems not to influence their routine news practices; and finally, the pro-China–pro-Hong Kong typology is not suitable for the study of news coverage on local policy issues. The typology presupposes conflict between China and Hong Kong that is not found in Hong Kong's educational issues. Furthermore, the typology cannot be applied consistently. In a normal situation, the leftist party press is definitely pro-China and supported the post-1997 Hong Kong Government. Among the commercial press, except the anti-communist *Apple Daily*, all other press showed a vague and inconsistent political stance. On the one hand, the commercial papers overtly and covertly exercised self-censorship on reporting China-affairs and adopted a "partisan Chinese perspective" in reporting sensitive issues (Lee and Chu, 1998), such as human rights issues and Taiwan's first presidential general election in 1996. On the other hand, rigorous criticism of the Hong Kong Government and senior government officials can be easily found in news coverage, such the heavy coverage of the opinion poll rigging scandal[10] and the

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[10] In July 2000, newspapers reported, a leading pollster, an academic at the University of Hong Kong, alleged that he was pressured by the then Chief Executive Officer, Tung Chee-hwa, through senior university officials to stop carrying out survey of Tung's popularity and the government's credibility. Consequently, the then vice and pro-vice

less concerned story about a senior accountant criticising the government over the lack of transparency in public finance.[11] Beyond that, in the past few years, newspapers frequently reported plunging opinion-poll ratings of the government and its officials. This phenomenon indicates that it would be difficult to classify mainstream commercial papers as pro-Hong Kong or pro-China coherently. The political stances of newspapers are more likely to be contingent on the nature of issues and the interest of the press rather than determined solely by political ideology. This implies that political ideology may not always be the most important factor of newsmaking. Rather, priorities given to different factors of newsmaking change in accordance with the nature of issues.

The above briefly introduced the structure of Hong Kong press and its historical context, and a critical review of the study of political communication in Hong Kong was presented to help identify the significance of this research. The use of the popular versus elite categorisation was also discussed. The final segment of this chapter will introduce the current developments in education policy in Hong Kong.

EDUCATION ISSUES IN HONG KONG

In general, the main trend of educational development in Hong Kong follows the global "tidal wave of marketisation" (Chan and Mok, 2001). Nevertheless, the marketisation has been practised in a Hong Kong style that evolves from Hong Kong's particular social context.

After a rapid quantitative expansion between the 1950s and the 1980s, a growing concern of educational quality has been widespread in the community. The educational system has been heavily condemned, mainly by the business community, for having a severe quality problem

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chancellors of the University of Hong Kong resigned under pressure before an investigation found that the two had tried to stop the academic continuing his polling because of concerns expressed by a senior special adviser of Tung.
[11] The *South China Morning Post* reported on 31 December 2001 a former president of the Hong Kong Society of Accountants had criticised the government's financial reports for lacking in transparency and being inadequate. The senior accountant also accused the then Chief Secretary of the government to want "the ability to do what is wrong".

which was perceived as a major cause for the deterioration of Hong Kong's economic competitiveness.

Responding to the call for improvement, the colonial government introduced a series of schemes and initiatives in the 1980s. After the 1997 sovereignty transition, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government conducted a comprehensive review of the education system and commenced a thorough education reform at all levels of the system. In September 2000, after three rounds of consultations conducted between January 1999 and July 2000, the Education Commission announced a document titled *Education Blueprint for the 21ˢᵗ Century: a Review of Education System and Reform Proposals*, and symbolically précised its gist by a slogan—"excel and grow"—on the cover of the document.

The reform was seen by different communities including educational professionals as an urgent and necessary change when Hong Kong suffered from an economic slump since the Asian financial crisis of 1998. The prevalent opinion deemed that it was the inability of the educational system to produce a competent workforce which should be accused for the decline of economic competitiveness. A consciousness of crisis spread and created the right social climate for the government to promote education reform. The education community was supportive to the idea of reform. However, some controversial policies, such as the compulsory use of mother-tongue as a medium of instruction in secondary schools, caused disputes and scepticism of the entire reform. The government was strongly condemned for its incompetence in formulating and implementing the right policies.

As in other countries, debate on educational affairs in Hong Kong is mixed with the popular discourse of the knowledge-based society and economic globalisation. Chan and Mok (2001) indicated that "marketisation" and "quality education" have become the dominant themes in the global discourse of education. They closely examined consultation reports produced by the Education Commission and concluded that the Education Commission Report No. 7 argued

for a managerialism which advocated clear plans and targets for educational development, proper appraisal systems, incentives, strong management direction, and a system which relates funding to school performance.

Managerialism has dominated policy-making in Hong Kong since the early 1990s and has been continued by the government after the sovereignty transition. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government "has committed herself, both ideologically and practically, to the practice of managerialism"; "the initiation of a quality assurance movement and the obvious shift to a far more management-oriented approach in Hong Kong's education have clearly demonstrated how popular are the ideas of corporate management in shaping and managing the educational sector in the territory" (Chan and Mok, 2001:37).

Against this backdrop, education has become a "hot-button" issue in Hong Kong. Problems which are perceived as having a relationship with economic performance, such as the university graduates' declining language proficiency in both Chinese and English and their lack of critical thinking skills and creativity, have become central concerns. The "spoon-feeding" educational system with poor teaching quality has been accused as being the main culprit. In particular, policy issues including the medium of instruction in secondary schools, the Language Benchmark Assessment for teachers, university funding, curriculum reform, reform of admission systems, and the public examinations system are the most controversial issues and have received a large amount of news coverage.[12]

THESIS STRUCTURE

Chapters 2 and 3 lay the foundation before the substantive research materials in chapters 4 to 7 are analysed. Chapter 2 outlines the research design. Chapter 3 will start by introducing current developments in education news, then it will review scholarly studies of education news. By

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[12] These issues were identified by the interviewees of this research including the education editor and an education reporter of the *South China Morning Post*, a deputy news editor and a principal reporter of the *Apple Daily*, an executive committee member and the secretary of the Education Convergence.

drawing on the newsmaking and agenda-building literature, the chapter establishes an analytical framework for the study of news and policy-making.

Chapters 4 to 7 are case studies, which will mainly present the results of content analysis of four educational issues in Hong Kong. Each chapter will first briefly introduce the issue then this is followed by the analysis of news coverage of the issue. Utilising the typologies discussed in Chapter 3, the analysis of news content includes categorising news sources and identifying their agendas.

Chapter 8 is the concluding chapter. By drawing on the approach established in this study, the chapter will pull all the threads from the case studies together to scrutinise the implications of this research to the understanding of news and policy-making in Hong Kong.

The thesis is presented in two volumes. For the reader's convenience, charts and tables are organised separately.

Chapter 2   Research Design

This study attempts to contribute to the understanding of political communication in Hong Kong. The study of political communication in Hong Kong has concentrated on journalism in crisis situations and its research design have emphasised examining "critical events" which, in most cases, were political conflicts involving the Chinese authorities and other political forces in Hong Kong. This study, instead, concerns routine journalism and local social policy in Hong Kong, areas which have been less investigated. Rather than seeking understanding of political communication in those extraordinary moments in Hong Kong's history, this research endeavours to explore political communication in daily life in Hong Kong.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In regard to the more general understanding about news and policy-making, three sets of empirical questions are central. Firstly, where in the policy process does media coverage occur? Secondly, how do the media assess education issues? Who are the major sources of media agenda of education issues and how does the media conceive the newsworthiness of these sources? Thirdly, what are the agendas of major sources? This is to ask how news sources define issues and justify their definitions of education issues. The final aim of this study is to find out what are the impacts of the publicity obtained by news sources on the policy agenda.

As noted in the previous chapter, education has become a high priority issue to Hong Kong and its citizens, and so also a high priority issue for its newspapers. The present research scrutinises four cases about substantial policy issues. The issues are the compulsory mother-tongue teaching in secondary schools, language benchmark assessment for teachers, sex discrimination in the Secondary School Places Allocation System, and cuts of university funding between 2001 and 2004. Language proficiency has been a critical problem in Hong Kong.

Although this is not a substantial policy issue, the public debate on this issue is closely related to the issue of mother-tongue teaching. Hence, in this study the proficiency problem is treated as part of the mother-tongue teaching issue. News items related to the language proficiency problem were coded separately in the content analysis.

In order to attain comprehensiveness, these cases were chosen for their diverse nature. This helps to ensure the analysis adequately captures the very nature of news about education policy and creates a broader base for making inferences. The four substantial policy issues covered the range of education from primary to tertiary in Hong Kong. The issues of compulsory mother-tongue teaching, benchmark assessment and school place allocation related to primary and secondary education. This first two were about introducing new policies. The issue of school place allocation was unexpected by the society and likely a surprise for the Hong Kong Government as well. It involved two public institutions in a legal battle. University funding was an ongoing issue.

The issues involved all major political actors in the education field including government authorities, major advisory bodies related to the making of education policy, teacher organisations, school managements and related organisations, parents groups and student organisations. Some of these groups were aligned at times, and the interest of the general public toward these issues also varied.

In selecting these cases, the time frame of a policy was also considered. Since the four cases have gone through their policy cycles, studying these cases can help to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay of the newsmaking and the policy-making process.

CONTENT ANALYSIS

As a widely used research method, content analysis produces systematic data to quantify the manifest features of a large amount of text and provides a base for making broader inferences

about the processes and politics of representation (Deacon et al., 1999; Holsti, 1969:2-5, and Winmer and Dominick, 1987).

Selection of Newspapers

To ensure the validity of the data, two criteria, the size of readership and the nature of newspapers, were adopted for selecting newspapers. Accordingly, the *Apple Daily*, the *Ming Pao Daily*, the *Oriental Daily* and the *South China Morning Post* were chosen.

Although there is a wide range of newspapers in Hong Kong, the market share is highly concentrated. The top three Chinese-language newspapers, the *Oriental Daily*, the *Apple Daily* and the *Ming Pao Daily*, make up almost 80% of total newspaper readership and almost the same percentage of total newspaper circulation (see Table 2.1 and 2.2).

The nature of the newspapers is another important consideration. As discussed in the previous chapter, although Hong Kong press consists of privately owned and party-financed newspapers, the newspaper market is dominated by commercial press which can further be divided into popular and elite press according to their target readership.

The popular press represents mass culture and enjoys immense social influence given its large readership, which is mainly from the lower to middle classes; whereas, the elite press that represent the elite culture and serve the powerful constituencies of Hong Kong society are influential opinion leaders (Chan et al., 2000:532-535). This evaluation was supported by six credibility surveys of Hong Kong media which was conducted between 1990 and 2001 (School of Journalism and Communication, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2001; see Table 2.3 and 2.4). The ranking of the newspapers may have changed in the past few years. The *Apple Daily* endeavoured to establish its credibility and other newspapers might have lost their reputation somewhat for taking a more pro-China stance in reporting political events.

Nevertheless, since this research focused on the period between 1997 and 2001, the results of the credibility surveys were valid.

Data Collection

Five sets of news items were collected corresponding to the four substantial policy issues and the language proficiency problem. All news items were published within the period from 1 January 1997 to 31 August 2001. For Chinese news, items in 1997 were selected manually by checking the hard copies of the three Chinese newspapers; all the items published between 1998 and 2001 were collected from *WiseNews* (the online Chinese publications database) by using a keyword method. Different combinations of keywords (see Appendix I) were used to search categories including headlines and text. (This database does not provide the search-by-subject function, the category "text" includes the lead paragraph.)

All English items were collected from the *South China Morning Post*'s electronic database through two online publication databases, the DIALOG@CARL and the Don Jones Interactive. Different combinations of keywords (see Appendix I) were used to search the categories including headline, lead paragraph, text and subject.

A pre-reading of news items was done to ensure the keywords were appropriate and the use of these keywords could filter out the most of relevant news items.

Table 2.5 shows there are 2,400 news items in total collected from four daily newspapers, of which 1,908 items (1,656 electronic and 252 hard copy items) were published in Chinese, the other 492 in English (electronic). The electronic items have been screened to filter out irrelevant items.[13] As shown in Table 2.6, 53 per cent (1,133 items) of all electronic items are selected. Finally, there are 1,385 newspaper items included in the content analysis.

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[13] News items were considered irrelevant because in these articles the four policy issues and the language proficiency problem only appeared in the context of reports about other topics or comments on other issues.

Coding Scheme and Qualifying Criteria

A coding scheme that operationalises the key concepts of the theoretical framework and a set of qualifying criteria which can be applied systematically to identify the unit of analysis are two critical components for a successful content analysis. The analytical framework will be discussed in Chapter 3. This part of the introduction focuses on the coding scheme and the qualifying criteria of the content analysis.

As demonstrated in Table 2.7, to identify a news item, the publishing date and source newspaper are used as indicators. The major part of the content analysis focuses on news content. This includes measuring newsworthiness of educational issues and news sources, and exploring the interpretations of the issues. The analysis examines news coverage of the press as a whole and compares coverage of individual newspapers. The strongest indicator of newsworthiness of a particular issue is the size of coverage of the issue. Since the majority of the collected news items in this research are on electronic file, one is unable to measure the width and height of headlines and body text. Instead, the number and word count of the news items are coded as the measure of size of coverage. If only the number of news items were counted, the results could be misleading because the number of news items do not reflect how much space the items physically occupy on newspapers. Therefore, the word count, which to a certain extent reflects the measure of space on newspapers, was also adopted as a measure of coverage size.

In addition to the size of coverage, the composition of coverage, to a certain extent, also indicates how newsworthy an issue is. To cover a newsworthy topic or event, newspapers give it not only a larger coverage but also a more diverse coverage; besides the main story, special reports, features, commentaries, interviews, even investigative reports associated to the main story will be written. Hence, article types are coded as a measure of the diversity of coverage. In understanding the making of education news, the counting of different types of articles is an

indicator of the use of organisational resource. In most instances, apart from management problems, producing news pages is much more costly than producing commentaries such as opinion pages, columns and letters-to-the-editor. Compared to the salaries for reporters, contribution fees to the public who write to the press are relatively low. As for columnists, the rates are varied according to the reputation of the columnist, but on the whole maintaining a team of reporters is more costly than using freelance writers. In addition, producing news pages involves some administration costs, such as transportation fees, photos, etc., which may not be involved in the production of an opinion page. Therefore, a press has to devote more resources if it produces more news reports than commentaries on a particular topic.

Where a story appears in the newspapers also indicates its importance. It is obvious that front page stories are considered more important than stories on the local news page. However, there are limitations in using news sections as an indicator of media evaluation of public issues, since not every newspaper has the same set of news pages and there are no objective criteria for judging which story is on which page. To determine which space for a story is a practical decision made everyday by editors who have to consider several factors concurrently. Thus, data generated by coding news sections is difficult to interpret. Despite this, whether an issue has been reported on the front page of newspapers is still a part of media evaluation of issues. In particular, when news coverage of an issue stretches over a long period of time, the number of times an issue is reported on the front page, as an indicator of newsworthiness, is more reliable.

The measure of newsworthiness of a particular news source includes the number of quotes attributed to that source and how a source appears in the news; that is whether the source is quoted directly or is paraphrased by reporters. To avoid confusing media presence with media access, when a person, group or institution's name only appeared in the context of other people's comments, these were not counted. The primary data generated form coding news sources is

further grouped into regular/non-regular sources and advocates/arbiters, and these two sets of concepts are discussed in chapter 3.

The interpretive dimension of news content is about issue definition. To conceptualise the interpretative dimension of news, Gamson and Modigliani (Gamson, 1988:165-166; Gamson and Modigliani, 1989:3) suggested conceiving news content as a set of "interpretive packages" that assign meaning to an issue. Gamson and Lasch (1983:398) argued that "the ideal elements in a culture do not exist in isolation but are grouped into more or less harmonious cluster or interpretive packages. The different idea elements in a given package mutually support and reinforce each other. Frequently, it is possible to suggest the package as a whole by the use of a single prominent element." They distinguished the framing elements from the reasoning elements of issue interpretation. The framing part of an interpretive package is a central organising idea for making sense of relevant events of an issue and for suggesting what the issue is about. The core frame of an interpretive package is not only to provide an epistemological framework for the audience to mentally organise the otherwise chaotic world, it also implies a range of positions on an issue. To justify those positions suggested by the package, there has to include a reasoning part. In order to display the core frame and the positions, a package provides condensing symbolic devices. Gamson and Lasch (1983:399-400) identified five types of framing devices: metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions, and visual images; and three types of reasoning devices, which are roots (causal dynamics), consequences (effects or assumed effects of policies) and appeals to principle (moral appeals and general precepts).

Based on the above, text containing symbolic devices[14] directly related to the education issues in this research were included in the analysis. For example, statements such as the following were counted:

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[14] Since the collection of data only includes text, there is no visual images for coding.

"She said she supported mother-tongue education and it was evident that pupils taught in Chinese were more eager to learn since the policy was introduced in 1998" (3 May 2001, *South China Morning Post,* as stated by the chairman of the Education Commission).

"The assessment signifies the Education Department's distrust of language teachers and it will definitely hit their morale" (24 May 2000, *South China Morning Post*, as stated by the president of the Professional Teachers' Union).

The first statement suggested a clear position on the issue of mother-tongue teaching; it is a depiction of the issue, and the second statement also stated a clear the position on the issue of benchmark assessment, which also contained an appeal to moral principle and suggested a consequence of the benchmark assessment policy. Statements which mention any of the education issues as an example or as part of an argument or criticism related to other topics were not counted since they do not convey ideas of those issues *per se*.

The coding criteria were applied consistently throughout the coding process. Nevertheless, there would still be some texts which would be difficult to judge. For instance, statements related to more than one issue or the text itself is unclear. As Deacon et al. (1999) suggested, there is no right or wrong to the question of what should be included; as content analysis is aimed to quantify "salient" and "manifest" features of a large number of text, the judgement of including a unit of analysis is based on what is manifestly stated in the text; reading deeply into the semantics of the text is avoided.

To interpret the primary data generated from the coding process, the data is regrouped according to the analytical framework of this research. The analysis focuses on prominent aspects of issues including policy solutions, and the allocation of responsibilities and blame. In addition, to be manageable, the coding of news themes only include peak month items instead of all qualified items.

Besides the themes within texts, news format also contains the interpretation of issues. The title of a news page suggests to the audiences the nature of the stories it contains. Hence analysis of the interpretive dimension of news coverage will take account of this.

INTERVIEWS

The data collected from the interviews is the supplement of the content analysis. It helps to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the production of education news in Hong Kong and in turn the news coverage of education. Ideally, interviews should be conducted with media professionals including journalists and media managers, and all other main actors in the policy-making process, including activists and government officials. However, due to the reluctance of some individuals, the problem of scheduling, and institutional obstacles[15], not all the targeted organizations and individuals were able to be interviewed.

During a one-month period of data collection, there were seven interviews conducted with four journalists, one media manager and two individuals who represent the same interest group, but no government officials were interviewed (for the list of interviewees and which interview occurred, see Appendix II). In an attempt to understand how the news production process affects news coverage of educational issues, the interviews follow a list of open-ended questions regarding the media–source relationship and the selection of news is questioned (see Appendix III).

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[15] The Education and Manpower Bureau and the Education Commission are staffed with the same information officer seconded from the Information Services Department. The information officer said that she was not able to answer any questions regarding the daily practices of her work and her relationship with journalists and it would be very unlikely that anyone else at the Bureau or the Commission can/would answer those questions. The officer can only provide information which is available to the public.

Chapter 3   Education News And Public Policy In Hong Kong

NEWS COVERAGE OF EDUCATION AND ITS SCHOLARLY STUDY

Since the early 1980s there has been a global trend towards a significant increase in the news coverage of educational issues. This indicates that both the public and the news media perceive education as increasingly important to individual lives and to socio-economic development.

In the United States and England, traditionally, education was a secondary beat in news organisations. This has changed since a wave of education reform emerged in the West during the 1980s. A survey by Hynds (1989) documented the change by examining the demographic characteristics and employment conditions of education journalists. He also surveyed journalists' opinions about newspaper coverage of education, trends in education coverage and major education stories. Hynds (1989:696) concluded that most large daily newspapers in major cities in the United States have "improved and expanded their coverage of education by assigning more reporters, allocating more space, and giving better play to education news. Concurrently, they upgraded the education beat so that it is no longer considered a stepping stone but a highly desirable assignment." Baker (1994), a researcher who was also the education correspondent for the BBC, indicated the same trend occurring in Britain. He stated, "The media profile of education has risen sharply in recent years. This trend is reflected in the number of specialist education correspondents now employed by newspapers… The growth in education pages—while partly explained by the drive for lucrative job advertisements—also reflects the growing importance attached to the subject" (Baker, 1994:286). This view is shared by other researchers, such as Doe (1999:336).

Accompanying economic globalisation, the trend in education reform in Western countries has spread to the rest of the world. In the so-called greater China region, China, Hong Kong and Taiwan all carried out their education reforms in the 1990s. Since the discussion of educational issues has crossed over into the popular debates of the new economy and the knowledge-based society, the subject was elevated to a more prominent place in the public place and on government agendas. This, in turn, produced an increasing demand for information about education. Hoping to lure more advertising from the education sector and enlarge their readership, the Hong Kong newspapers, especially those targeting middle-class readers, substantially increased their coverage on educational affairs. The *Apple Daily* ran a page titled "Health and Education" for a short time in 2000. The *South China Morning Post* launched its Education Post, a weekly supplement published every Saturday, in August 2000 since the company recognised the growing demand and importance of education news. Its education editor said:

> We [journalists] realised that in Hong Kong education has become a big issue socially and politically, and education is also important to the public interest. To a certain extent, education becomes more appealing because the Chief Executive of the government picks up the issue[16]…For the higher-level managers [media executives], all they want is the education market. You can see in the Saturday paper [the *South China Morning Post*], in the main pages, there are sixty to seventy percent advertisements are related to education.

For some education journalists, the rapid change of the education system created "the golden era of education news", as the deputy news editor of the *Apple Daily* call it.

Despite the increasing news coverage of educational affairs, the existing scholarship on news and education policy remains relatively scarce. Only a handful of researchers studied news

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[16] In his maiden policy address in 1997, the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administration Region Government devoted a long section to addressing educational issues. He said, "I am convinced that we need to take a very careful look at the whole structure of our education system…By the end of this year, we will have reviewed the existing structure of executive and advisory bodies, with the aim of streamlining the system. In the coming year, we will: ask the Education Commission to begin a thorough review of the structure of pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary education…review our policy on private schools in order to foster a more vibrant and diverse private school system…review our examination system to take account of student performance at schools…and ask the universities to review their admission criteria for undergraduates to give recognition to excellence in extra-curricula areas, such as community service, arts and sports" (Policy Address 1997, section E, paragraph 101).

and education in the early 1990s but the quantity of studies is growing alongside the accelerating structural change of education systems in different countries.

The existing studies about news and education can be divided into two types in terms of their intellectual concerns. One type of study is mainly concerned about news coverage and the construction of public perception of education in general. Most of these studies are textual analyses of news stories about educational issues. By demonstrating what type of educational issues are covered, what aspects of those issues were reported, and what other issues were missing, some of these studies, such as those done by Saltmarsh (1998) and Pettigrew (1997), enriched the understanding of the relation between media coverage and the construction of public debate on educational issues. These studies directed attention to the ideological nature of the public debate. Others studies, such as by Clinchy (1997) and Lumley (1998), only blame journalists for their bias by showing how the media misrepresents teachers, students, and school life. Concerning the management of the education system, Doe (1999) inquired into the role of the news media in the centralisation of administration and the control of school systems in England and focused on how information control by the government and commercial interests of the news media interact to influence schooling.

The other type of study concerns news and education policy. Most of the studies endeavoured to reveal the relationship between media coverage and the formulation of education policy but few of them demonstrated satisfactory results. Adopting Gans's theory of newsmaking, McLendon and Peterson (1999) studied the press coverage of the 1995 appropriations conflict between two universities in Michigan. This case study aimed to examine the relation between the media and state-level higher education policy in the United States and it successfully documented the power of institutional sources in shaping news coverage of education issues. On the question about news effects and policy-making, however, they provided no more than a discussion of the major findings in media effects literatures. This, as

McLendon and Peterson suggested, only justified the significance of the research about news and public policy and examined "theoretically" the role of news in policy process. They further suggested that future empirical study should focus on the impact of news media upon policy-making.

Bowers (1988), in his PhD research, studied media effects on public opinion about local education policy in the United States, including a test of agenda-setting effect. Bowers hypothesised that there were significant media effects on public opinion towards education policy issues. Nevertheless, the agenda-setting effect has not been detected in his study. Media treatment of interest groups' and newspapers' positions on particular issues were not statistically significant in shaping public opinions. Rather, personal characteristics seemed to be more important in determining one's opinion. The study by Bowers is inconsistent with most other recent studies. His study also does not provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic. Some scholars adopted different textual or semantic analysis to approach the question about news and education policy.

In Australia, Thomas published two papers about news and education in 1996 and 1999, the earlier paper being the initial findings of her study into educational news coverage. Thomas clearly stated that the study aimed to explore the "influence of public discourse on educational policy making" (Thomas, 1996:168). The paper treated news as a textually mediated reality which legitimates existing power structures by constraining public debate on educational issues. The analysis, then, focused on news themes and news sources but gave no account of the relationship between news and policy-making. Following this line of thinking, her 1999 paper focused on identifying prominent figures featured in education news, their representations on news and their positions within social relations reflected in media discourses of education (Thomas, 1999).

Also adopting textual analysis, Treyens's (1997) PhD research applied framing analysis to explore the relationship between news frames and education policy outcomes. Studying news coverage of the higher education policy of Ohio in the United Sates, she argued that news coverage affects education policy decisions in different phases of policy process by structuring public debates and providing cognitive frames of educational issues. In its in-depth, time-spanning examination of news items and official documents of the workload issue in Ohio's tertiary institutions, Treyens's study showed measurable evidence of direct linkage between news frames and policy decisions by mapping news themes and policy outcomes. This research is significant but it only tells one side of the story. It demonstrated the effects of news content on policy-making but it did not reveal the intertwining processes of news construction and the formation of public policy.

The most comprehensive and theoretically important studies concerning news and education policy have been done by Wallace, a British education scholar. He maintained that "a refined conceptual map is needed to incorporate the media as an integral component of a theory which encompasses the interaction between interest groups, including media professionals and their employers, within and between the institution, local, national and even international levels" (Wallace, 1993:335). Wallace suggested a model in which the news media, as the most important communication channel besides the formal links between policy-makers, are placed at the centre of the web of relationships between actors in the realm of policy formation. This model emphasises the relative autonomy of media professionals in exercising news value in the production of news content and suggests that the media has influence in the production of policy text and the practice of policy. However, in Wallace's model, he loosely considers other pivotal elements of newsmaking. Based on his model and research agenda, Wallace (1998) did an empirical study on media–source relationships that illustrated the dependency and tensions between media professionals and news sources. At the end of the study, the scholar raised a

question over the consequences of the media–source interaction as regards the quality of the education policy process. However, further study has not been done to answer this question.

As regards the central concern of this thesis, the second type of study is more instructive. In general, these studies suggested that there are strong media effects on the formulation of education policy, though their findings are far from conclusive. This thesis attempts to expand the knowledge known about news and the making of educational policy by firstly, examining more closely the relation between the production of education news and the formation of education policy, and secondly by serving as a base for further comparative study.

In view of the centrality of news media in political communication, scholars from both the disciplines of political science and communication studies (such as Cobb and Elder, 1972, 1981; Deacon and Golding, 1994:8; Kennamer, 1992; Tiffen, 1989; Wallace, 1995 a, b) maintained that news media should be understood as an integral part of the modern policy process. This notion is the starting point for this present research.

UNDERSTANDING EDUCATION NEWS IN HONG KONG

How should news be understood? The answer varies in accordance with the different definitions which define news. Suggesting news should be understood as the product of the processes by which it is produced, the newsmaking approach, as Tiffen (1989:3) neatly stated, "directs attention to situations and processes rather than the qualities and biases of individuals performing set roles" in shaping news content. The approach, hence, neither simply conceives news as a "mirror of reality", nor as ideological domination of the powerful. Perceiving news as a product of the newsmaking process is to recognise the fact that news is "the product of the choices of many rather than the decisions of a few" (Sigal, 1973:2). In establishing theoretical generalisations about news, the approach accommodates the particularities of producing news content in different areas and scrutinises the interaction between human actions and institutional

structures of news production. The meaningful questions, then, which have to be asked are: how different forces influence news content in the course of production process and what are the consequences of this process?

Different stages of news construction, including planning, gathering, selecting and presenting information, have been explored in a wide range of researches. Insightful studies[17] revealed that in order to secure a continuous and sufficient supply of information, and to select and present raw materials of news in formats appealing to audiences, news media rely on three institutional and cultural devices, as Tiffen (1989:4) suggested: institutionalised routines, predictable and productive means for gathering news, and shared conventions about newsworthiness and presentation. By using this threefold framework, the following segment will discuss the production of education news in Hong Kong newspaper companies.

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[17] Major studies of newsmaking include those by Epstein, 1973; Sigal, 1973; Tuchman, G. 1978; Gans, 1979; and Fishman, 1980.

Organisational Requirements

Institutionalised routines are the "standard operating procedures" of both news organisations and the profession of journalism (Fisherman, 1980:14; Sigal, 1973:101). The concept can refer to the everyday activities within the newsroom, such as editorial meetings, informal discussions between reporters and editors about particular stories, and daily news activities carried out by reporters. News routines are a systematic way of tapping, filtering and packaging information to ensure a regular production of news. This is developed and modified to meet a set of organisational demands. From the production sense, news stories, in the first place, have to be presented within the limits of "time" (deadlines) and "space" (the size of the news pages in print media and the length of the broadcasts on electronic media). The cyclical rhythm varies in accordance with different types of media ranging from hourly, daily, weekly, to monthly. However, it is the set times and the predetermined size of space that profoundly sharp journalistic practices and the content which are produced. Another factor interrelated to the time and space factors is the position, both political and commercial, of media organisations. Among Hong Kong newspapers, except for the few partisan press controls set the Chinese Government, all others are privately owned businesses. However, even for the partisan press, to maximise profit and to expand business are prime imperatives of Hong Kong's commercial media system. In this sense, journalistic practices are organised to produce content that is able to maintain and extend readership.

Depending on which segment of readership the newspapers appeal to, the priority given to education news, the writing style and the overall news format of educational reports are varied. At the time this thesis was written, in Hong Kong, few of the elite press had an education section. These included the *South China Morning Post*, the *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, *Ming Pao Daily*, *Sing Tao Daily*, and the *Hong Kong Economic Times*. The first two publish their education page weekly and the last three publish daily. The *Apple Daily*, a popular press

having a large middle-class readership, is one of the two largest circulated newspapers in Hong Kong, also ran a "health and education page", which it has now ceased publishing.

When a newspaper decides to run an education page, it needs the resources to sustain the production of that page. Journalists, clearly, are the most important and expensive among those resources. The elite press running an education page employ reporters and editors who specialise in the field. The education editor of the *South China Morning Post* said that she had specialised in the field for over ten years. Under her supervision, the page was staffed with reporters covering different parts of the field. The whole education area is divided into several news beats, such as basic education and tertiary education. The papers without an education page have a lower capacity to cover the education beat. The *Apple Daily* had no education editor specialising in the education area. The editor who oversaw the education beat said that the division of newsbeats in the *Apple Daily* was not very clear, as one editor had to look after several beats. Moreover, she said that while stories about education were normally passed to her, she was not the only one who could edit education news. The *Apple Daily* did have a separate education beat but the number of reporters was far less than that of the papers which had an education page. When talking about the difficulties of reporting on education, the principal reporter of the *Apple Daily* said,

> Competition is fierce in the education beat. However, we only have two people to cover the whole field, while other papers [papers which have an education page] have larger teams.

To reporters, the pace of the production cycle, the available space and the nature of news page are given conditions of reporting. Associated with this is the question of the news format.[18] In newspapers without an education page, the reporting of education is essentially event-driven. Stories about education events are treated as part of the broad and loosely defined category of local news; in turn, education news has to compete for space with other local news stories. This

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[18] Tiffen (1989) suggested that "format" can refer to "both the total mix of a news program or publication and to the structuring of individual stories". In discussing the reporting of education, I refer to the second meaning.

treatment results in the compressed coverage of education and the limited choice of topics. Education news is disadvantaged in competing for space on local news pages. As the deputy news editor of the *Apple Daily* said, "Education news is intrinsically static; there are generally very few education events which become big news".

Furthermore, since local news target general audiences, as the education reporter of the *Apple Daily* indicated, stories are chosen "from the viewpoint of the general public rather than from that of the education professionals". Thus, many stories about educational activities will be ruled out. Newspapers such as the *Apple Daily* still run features and special reports on education issues. However, they are published occasionally as follow-up to those "really important" events and, as well as daily news, they still have to compete for space. In newspapers which have a weekly education page, the reporting of education is divided into two parts. For example, in the *South China Morning Post*, daily news still needs to compete with other news for space on the local news pages. That is no different for the popular papers. "It has to be a really big event in the education area to become a story on the news pages", as the education editor of the South China Morning Post said.

Compared with the daily coverage, the reporting on its education page is different. When discussing how she and her colleagues covered their beats, the education editor of the *South China Morning Post* said, "We respond to daily news, but as a weekly paper, we have to break our own news and do our own research". Her subordinate concisely described their reporting as "issue-driven". Making a daily education page would be a great challenge. Those newspapers that run a daily education page provide readers with both timely information and comprehensive coverage of the education area. The Press such as the *Ming Pao Daily* not only report more education events that would otherwise not be covered by other papers, but they also run a great deal of features, columns written by educators, and other planned content on a regular basis.

It is obvious that deadlines are strictly applied to daily news items but not to planned coverage. Thus, in a production sense, the making of an education page, whether it is a daily or weekly publication, is relatively predictable and controllable. It is clear that planned coverage offer greater opportunities to enclose contextual details and analyses. In turn, running a separate education page, newspapers can attain a more comprehensive and deeper coverage of the education world. This is also the expectation of both journalists and readers, especially the attentive readership including education professionals, some students and parents, and those interested in education.

The above discussion compares the organisational arrangement and basic structure of news content in newspapers with and without an education page. The different styles of education news between the elite and popular press are the response of many factors including the commercial positioning of newspapers, the production rhythm, size of space, and the nature of news pages.

News Gathering

The institutional structure of news beats not only affects the quality of the news content by confining journalists' access to information but it also affects the nature of news-gathering activities. Talking about the scope of topics and organisations to be covered, both the principal reporter of the *Apple Daily* and her editor emphasised that education is a "very large beat". From kindergarten to university, there are slightly more than two thousand education institutions in Hong Kong. The beat also includes government agencies, advisory bodies, and many interest groups. Therefore, there is a huge variety and a large number of events as potential stories.

Tiffen (1989:33) revealed that a physical centre encourages a strong social base to a news beat by providing a place for reporters from different organisations and their sources to mix on a daily basis. The concentration of sources and journalists facilitates formal and informal

information dissemination. It further generates social support and work ethos among reporters themselves, which produces more autonomy for journalists to shun the influence of both their employers and their sources. However, the sources of education news are situated in diverse locations. There is no physical venue, such as a pressroom in a central government building, which facilitates the work of both sources and reporters by simplifying the public-relation efforts of the former and helping the regular productivity of the latter. Without the concentration of sources and reporters, the education beat is closer to the type of news beat with a weak social base where —"reporters work out of their head office and see their competitors irregularly; routine information dissemination is haphazard or non-existent; newsworthy events are widely dispersed; there is little continuity of sources over different stories; and there is a variety of story types"[19] (Tiffen, 1989:33).

Education news is diverse for the reasons that there is a lack of strong common news input and a wide range of educational activities, which could become interesting stories, are going on. From human interest to policy issue, an education story can be about a school accident, a pre-scheduled event like an inter-school sports competition; a promotional activity of sources such a news release about academic research project, a tip-off from school personnel about a school scandal, an interest group activity, or a government announcement. Without a venue for a concentration of sources and journalists, discovering newsworthy events is dependent on sources' promotional activities and reporters' personal networks. As there is no robust collective dynamic among the education reporters, education reporting is likely to be influenced more by organisational values and the evaluation of education news in different media.

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[19] For understanding institutional accommodation of news media, Tiffen (1989:33) illustrated a spectrum of news beats: "At one extreme is a strong social base, frequent contact with other reporters and with regular sources, the institution has accommodated itself to the presence of the media with well-developed routines of information dissemination, and most of the stories involve similar skills and generate a cumulative store of relevant knowledge. At the other extreme, there is no social base to the round [beat]—reporters work out of their head office and see their competitors irregularly; routine information dissemination is haphazard or non-existent; newsworthy events are widely dispersed; there is little continuity of sources over different stories; and there is a variety of story types".

The Sources

As reporters are unable to witness all newsworthy events, they inevitably rely on news sources to supply information. The centrality of sources in news production is, therefore, indisputable. In this section, the discussion of news sources will focus on the structure and orientation of news sources for reporting on education in Hong Kong. As for the significance of the media–source relationship and how it relates to policy-making, this will be addressed in a later discussion about the political impacts of news.

As mentioned above, to cover the large field of education, other than government sources and education reporters, there is a heavy reliance on active members of interest groups as sources to supply news and story ideas. The *Apple Daily*'s principle reporter said:

> For government policies or official events, we have to use government sources. Other than that, we have to rely on our own network of sources. The field is just so big. There are too many teachers and headmasters, and there are more than a million students. Stories come from all levels of educational institution and are about all aspects of education. For efficiency, we focus on the leaders of interest groups. Through them, we can contact many different individuals.

Besides, there is one type of source especially prolific in the education beat, the "complainants in schools" who could be students or teachers or other people in the schools. The *Apple Daily*'s education reporter said:

> Comparatively, people are more often complain in education field. Most of them come from parents, students and teachers. This is probably because people in the education system come from very different backgrounds and they occupy different positions in the system. It's just so easy to have conflicts.

The orientation of sources affects news reporting and the relationship between journalists and news sources. Generally speaking, educators are more in favour of the elite press. Both the deputy editor and the principal reporter of the *Apple Daily* blamed education professionals as being too conservative. The editor said:

Frankly, we don't have a good relationship with educators…For us, one of the difficulty in doing education news is that the education professionals, especially schools headmasters, are reluctant to talk to us. They said we are sensationalists and feel that they cannot control our writing. We

have never had any leaks from the educationists. They are in favour of the elite press and only pass information on to them.

However, the sources also have complaints. A member of the Education Convergence[20] who is also a vice-principal of a high school said:

> The media are inclined to exaggerate, especially in the popular press, they place too much stress on readers' taste…We are happy to have interviews. At least we have a chance to express our view but, certainly, we cannot control the news coverage. It is quite often that there are only two out of a hundred words we said which are reported in the news and it may not then be accurately reported.

Journalists from the *South China Morning Post* experienced things differently and made a positive comment on their relationship with news sources. The report said:

> I found that many educators are quite open and willing to talk to me. In general, new schools are better than famous elite schools since there are more avant-garde teachers. Members of interest groups are also a good source; I found many good points in conversations with them. I like to develop a relationship with academics. There are many interesting things going on in the universities but the academics won't tell the media; we have to discover things for ourselves.

The Journalists

In studying news production in Hong Kong, one has to acknowledge some common endemic defects as reporters' lack of specialist knowledge. The problem could be more serious for the education beat than other beats. It is likely that since education is a secondary beat in most news media, there is greater difficulty in retaining experienced reporters. This lack of specialist knowledge is suggested by a member of the Education Convergence as one of the problems in reporting educational issues:

> Education reporters change beats so often. Many of them do not have sufficient knowledge about the current of education development. So their writings can't really touch the crux of the problems.

> The interviews with journalists pointed in the same direction. All reporters and one of the two editors interviewed said that they did not have any specialist knowledge about Hong Kong

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[20] When he was interviewed, he was a vice-principal of a secondary school and was an executive committee member of the organization.

education before they started reporting on educational affairs. Except the education editor of the *South China Morning Post* who had specialised in education for more than a decade, all the other respondent reporters had under three years experience in the field when they were interviewed. "I am just learning on the job" is the common answer to the question about how they acquired specialist knowledge in their area. The lack of specialist knowledge may render journalists vulnerable to the influence of news sources because they may rely more on their source to provide story ideas and accounts of educational issues.

This, in fact, reflected the general demographic feature of the news profession in Hong Kong. Chan et al. (1998), by comparing survey data from Hong Kong, the USA and Australia, found that there were 66 per cent of Hong Kong journalists under the age of 34 while only 41 per cent of American journalists were in this same age range, and half of Hong Kong journalists had less than two years experience in journalism.

Inexperience was not the only or the worse defect of Hong Kong reporters. According to Lowe (1996:332-333) indicated, most journalism students, who were prospective media workers, were "seriously handicapped by their lack of knowledge and lack of interests in the processes and institution that governed and controlled their society…They had very little conceptual and practical understanding of the role and workings of institutions like the legislature and the judiciary".

This led to a suspicion that reporters' lack of knowledge of public affairs might encourage some powerful sources with strong publicity interests to dominate media coverage. For the journalists who were unable to raise critical questions when doing interviews, those powerful sources would have control of the media agenda.

News Values and News Selection

Another factor ruling news production is news values. News values constitute a set of criteria for judging the "suitability" (Gans, 1979:146) of news. Although some common story attributes can be listed, such as massive public concern, human interest, immediacy, novelty, conflict, and the like, there is no exhaustive list with a universal and accurate definition for any of them; rather, they are vague and fluid. What story attributes are preferable and how are they defined, to a certain extent, are determined by individual newspapers.

To approach news values, Tiffen (1989:68) suggested, "it is more fundamental to understand them [news values] as responses to the various cross-pressures in news production than to construct imaginary formulas of newsworthiness"; and the "ideas about newsworthiness are a response to presumptions about current audience interest, to the mutual monitoring and shoptalk that accompany the industry's competitive ethos, and to the agendas of major sources." News values are vital to the production of news content. They transform the ambiguous and overloaded work of news selection into routine and unproblematic choices by reducing doubts and options; news values give news media the flexibility to cope with the industrial environment composed of audiences with a wide range of taste and beliefs, sources with interest conflicts, news organisations with their own commercial interests, and journalists working under pressure from news sources and their own organisations. (Gans, 1979:146, 281; Tiffen, 1989:66, 68-69). These notions are instructive for the study of news and education policy since it is more sensitive to the daily operation of news production, which is dominated by fast and concrete decision-making accommodating the peculiarities of news stories.

Audience Interests

A striking aspect of news values in relation to making education news in Hong Kong is the audience interest. In order to maintain and enlarge a readership, all commercial press, especially

the popular newspapers, place great stress on reflecting public concerns in selecting and presenting news events. It is, however, important to recognise that audience demand is largely perceived rather than accurately and effectively measured. There are inherent difficulties to incorporating audience interests into the news selection because audience appeal can conflict with the ideas of professional journalism and there is a lack of effective measuring of audience interests.[21] Examining journalists' knowledge of audiences, Tiffen (1989:55) concluded that "there is a lack of satisfactory evidence about the audience but more elaborate and expensive measures are not likely to be particularly enlightening or contribute to improved quality".[22] Eventually, as journalists rush through their busy schedules, they can only refer on established perceptions of audiences when deciding news menus; to the media, sales figures become the ultimate evidence to prove or disprove their success.

How journalists perceived audience interests affects the evaluation of a particular field of news in a paper; in turn, this determines the quantity and quality of the kind of content in that paper. The editor of the *Apple Daily* pointed out that, excepting the *Ming Pao Daily* and *Sing Tao Daily*, the *Apple Daily* probably had the third largest coverage on education since the paper had many middle-class readers highly concerned about educational issues. The popular press may not report less education news but what they do focus on seems largely different from the elite press, especially those running education pages. Outlining a direction of education reports, the *Apple Daily*'s editor said, other than general news such as a release of matriculation exam results or related official news:

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[21] The *Apple Daily* gave an interesting example: Around October 2001, the paper eliminated its pornography page partly because reader focus groups convened by the paper suggested it made good business sense and they hoped that a cleaned-up version of the paper would capture more readers and advertising from companies wary about their image. However, the news stand sales fell sharply after the pornography page had been removed and the advertising boom did not materialize. The paper, therefore, brought the sex section back and expanded it to two pages. This is an example where it even serious market research does not generate reliable information of audience interest.

[22] See Tiffen (1989:53-57) for the discussion of journalists' knowledge of audiences.

> I believe stories about under table exchange within the education system have great potential. It is more likely to find good stories if we focus on the bad and deep-rooted practices in the education system…and it is the media's responsibility to disclose it.

Not surprisingly the popular press prefer stories about school scandals rather than creative teaching practices in schools. Most people would be interested in the former but not even parents who have children in schools would be interested in the latter; as the education reporter of *Apple Daily* pointed out, "We write for the public rather than educationists". With the idea of writing for people interested in education, the editor of the *South China Morning Post* illustrated a different idea of education news. She said:

> We try to create a more accurate view of the education area…to discover the structural force of the education system and tell people how the system works…Education news is not necessarily boring; it should be and can be fun and intellectual at the same time…When we got great feedback on our report about a new teaching method of Chinese language, we found that we have a role to play in spreading good educational practices.

She also emphasised:

> We did many features about educational issues in other countries; to provide international perspectives is one of the features which make us different from other local papers.

Organisational Values

Although there is no accurate and objective measure of audience interests, journalists do not hold absolute power to decide what become news. Rather, it seems to be true that the reporting of local issues, such as education, in Hong Kong is largely affected by organisational values of the media. Journalists' autonomy varies with power structures within media organisations. Furthermore, even in the same media, journalists are treated differently; some, normally senior and specialist reporters, are given more autonomy than others are.

Generally speaking, journalists adopt organisational values when there is a more centralised power structure and fierce internal competition for space within news organisations. Chatting on the decision-making process inside newsroom, the journalists of the *Apple Daily* expressed their feelings of constraint. The principle reporter of the paper said:

I do not decide what to write. What I do everyday are reporting to my direct superior, my editor, about stories I have and making suggestions on what points in the stories worth to stress on. The editorial meeting not only decide which story on which page, sometimes they even decide which part of a story should be focused on.

Her direct superior, the deputy editor said:

There is not much I can do in deciding the content on my page. All I can do is 'to sell' as much stories as I can in the editorial meeting by stressing on how important and interesting they are. But all the final decisions are made by the editor-in- chief.

It is not a coincidence that the editor of the *Apple Daily* identified "interesting"[23] as a particularly important attribute of news stories and the big boss **(**the owner**)** of her company said, "You can't be in the media business and be boring; that's the greatest sin"[24], when he was interviewed by Business Week. To ensure reporters embrace organisational values, newspapers do not necessarily need explicit control such as formal guidelines of reporting. As the former general manager of the *Apple Daily*, who was an editor of the paper, said, "We don't have a written editorial policy. The best way to ensure an editorial line is using a chief editor who firmly believes in it". By hiring journalists whose values are compatible with those of the news organisation, adopting a centralised power structure and encouraging fierce internal competition, a newspaper can force and reward journalists who adhere to an editorial line. On the social level, socialisation happens within newsroom (Breed, 1955). Through day-to-day contacts, journalists absorb the norms and values defined and promoted by the news organisations for which they work. Consequently, as the former general manager of *Apple Daily* said, "every newspaper looks like its boss".

When journalists have been given more latitude to make decisions, they tend to adopt their own values. The education editor of the *South China Morning Post* pointed out, while editors have less power to determine daily news, they have more in writing features; even before Education Post started, the *South China Morning Post* were running features about education

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[23] The editor of the Apple Daily said, "For our paper, whether a story interesting is especially important. We don't want our readers to feel bored. By interesting, I mean stories have to be resonant to readers and be able to be understand easily, don't need any deliberation".

[24] This is quoted from an interview with Jimmy Lai, the owner of the *Next Media* which owns the *Apple Daily*, in *Business Week*, 9-4-2002.

issues almost every two weeks because some feature editors were interested in education. The reporter under her supervision also expressed that she enjoyed her job because she has been given great autonomy. The editor said that the management level is not interested in education affairs, they will not intervene the editing of the Education Post "provided that the advertising keep going into the main paper [the *South China Morning Post*]". Although journalists are allowed to exercise their personal values in some area of their work, "the capacity and limits of individual's attitudes to influence their work can best be understood only within an appreciation of the general organisational processes" (Tiffen, 1997:195).

NEWS, AGENDA-BUILDING AND EDUCATION POLICY IN HONG KONG

To link news content and policy-making, the following discussion draws on the literatures of agenda-building from both the disciplines of political science and media studies. Cobb and Elder (1972:12) suggested a broad concept of agenda-building for the study of policy process. They considered the study of agenda-building as the study of dynamics of democratic politics. In viewing policy as governmental treatment of social conflicts, the very concerns of agenda-building is the evolution of policy issues and the questions to ask are: "How does an issue come to be viewed as an important and appropriate subject to attention? How does it come to command a position on the agenda of legitimate political controversy? Or how is it denied this status?" (Cobb and Elder, 1972:12) In this sense, agenda-building is referred to "the way [process] in which groups articulate grievances and transform them into viable issues that require decision-makers to provide some type of ameliorative response" (Cobb and Elder, 1972:13). In sum, agenda-building can be regarded as the process by which public issues emerge and move onto the public and policy agendas or are blocked outside.

As political scientists, Cobb and Elder centred their study on the relationship between the public and the policy agendas. Although the two researchers did acknowledge the centrality of mass media in the policy process and proposed that media "helps to structure the policy process and serve a number of important linkage functions…relating to different phases in the process" (Cobb and Elder, 1981), they paid little attention to how news plays a part in the policy process.

Communication scholars studying media effects under the label of "agenda-building" tended to identify the importance and the role of news media in policy formulation. However, they considered agenda-building differently. For Rogers and Dearing (1988) the central concern is how the construction of policy agenda is influenced by the media and public agendas. For Berkowitz (1992), however, agenda-building only concerns the construction of media content. A more balanced view is suggested by Kosicki. He maintained that each part of the agenda-building process is incomplete and unsatisfactory in itself as a way to understand the phenomena of political communication, "A solid contemporary model of media influence" (1993:101) ought to consider all three types of agendas. Although the focus varies in different studies, the central idea of agenda-building is that the construction of media content, the directing of public attention, the provision of knowledge about public issues and the formation of policy are manipulative and interrelated processes.

While agreeing with Kosiciki's view and acknowledging that news media is not the sole source of political information, the present research is interested in the construction of media agenda and how this relates to policy-making, in particular, media-policy interaction and its effects on the construction of public policy.

News and Policy Process

The policy-making process is often divided into several phases by scholars who study it. There is no universal scheme for dividing policy process. Scholars used different models in their

studies, such as Deacon and Golding (1994) who divided policy process into nine phases in their study of the Poll Tax policy in Britian, Treyens (1997) adopted a more common five-stage model. No matter using what model, the discussion of the role played by news in policy process is necessary for putting the study of news and public policy into the right context.

Media coverage of a policy issue can occur at any point in the policy process. The media can track an issue from its emergence through to the final stage of the policy cycle, or sporadically report individual events related to the issue throughout the process, or only concentrate on one phase in the process. The provision of information influences actions of political actors in the course of policy-making, and in turn, shapes policy outcome. Hence, who provides what information, at what time in the policy process is critical. Linsky's empirical study (1986) of press and policy-making in the United States of America discovered that news coverage influences policy process at certain points of the process in different fashions. Furthermore, conditioned by news sources' positions in the power structure and where in the process they have the most influence, different news sources prefer news coverage to happen in different phases of the process. This links the newsmaking process to the policy-making process by directing attention to the interaction between news sources and journalists that occur in the policy process.

In Hong Kong's executive-led system, the making of public policies is substantially different from Western representative democracy. The social-political system in Hong Kong on the one hand, shares some of the distinctive features of what scholars call the "party-state authoritarian system"[25]; on the other hand, it is imprinted within its unique colonial history. To

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[25] "Party-state authoritarian system" is widely used by Asian and some Western social scientists such as Liao, Yi-Shin (1993), Lee, Mei-hsien (1996), Yang, Kai-yun and Liu, Dsih-chi (1998) (see Chinese reference), and Rigger (1999) to refer to the one-party state. A party-state authoritarian system is a social-political system that has a capitalist market but the political power is highly concentrated in the hand of the ruling party. The alliance between the ruling party and the conglomerates, which are normally controlled by a few illustrious families, is the dominant economic and political power. The traditional left-right dichotomy cannot adequately describe this type of social-political system. Members of these societies enjoy economic liberty but are restricted in their participation in political activities. The social and economic developments in these societies, to a certain extent, are planned but market mechanism is used as a tool to achieve development plans under social and economic control. This type of society can be easily found in Asia in the modern age, such as Taiwan, before the democratic reform marked by the

conceptualise the distinctive policy process in Hong Kong, Bhatia (1997) divided the process into five phases: (1) the "conceptualisation" phase during which the government investigates and identifies the needs for policy change by using internal or external advisory bodies; (2) the "consultation" phase, used for promoting government proposals for a particular desirable social change and soliciting initial public response to the proposed policy; (3) the "consolidation" phase in which the government studies and reports on the consultation result and further reviews its policy proposal; (4) the "construction" phase in which a policy proposal is turned into either an ordinance or a statute through legislation; and (5) the "communication" phase during which the government implements a new policy by promoting and educating the public to comply with the new legislation.

Bhatia's model accommodated the specialities of Hong Kong's polity system. However, signifying the final phase of the policy process as "communication' tends to suggest a narrow definition of the concept of communication, in that it means "promoting" and "marketing" policy and hence could be confusing as communication happens at all points of the policy process. Hence, in this thesis "implementation" is used instead of "communication" for signifying the final phase of policy process.

Bhatia indicated that the mass media, which is used for the marketing of government initiatives and for soliciting public opinion, plays a prominent role in the policy-making process. Using Hong Kong housing and environmental policies as examples, Bhatia argued that the conventional consultation methods create a social distance between the government and the public as participants in public consultation. "This may be one of the reasons why other channels of communication, especially the mass media…which are seen to bridge social distance between participants are therefore also used to communicate with people in Hong Kong" (Bhatia, 1997:521). In the consultation and consolidation stages, the media is one of the major sources of public response concerning policy changes posed by the government. From the

termination of martial law in 1987, and Singapore.

53

various media sources considered for the 1985 Green Paper on Housing Subsidy to Tenants of Public Housing, including editorials, news reports, letters, articles from two English and eighteen Chinese newspapers, sixteen Chinese and six English TV and radio programmes, Bhatia revealed that the Hong Kong Government has made a comprehensive attempt to monitor media feedback. This attempt was genuine. The "former director of Government Information Services, John Slimming, emphasized that editorials and letters-to-the-editor served as very useful pointers to the mood and intensity of public opinion", as quoted by Chan (1992b:117).

Media, News Sources and Media Agenda

The above discussion underlines Gandy's view. He suggested there is a need "to go beyond agenda-setting to determine who sets the media agenda" (Gandy, 1982:7). It is an interdict for journalists to fabricate stories. News is the words and deeds of others. Thus individuals and institutions that become news sources are primary suppliers, although not the sole source, of public information; they occupy advantage positions in the power structure to define public issues (Schlesinger, 1990; Deacon and Golding, 1994:9). However, not all news sources have the same ability to influence media content. Power and resources of information control is available differently to individuals and institutions. There is a hierarchy of news sources that largely reflects the broader configuration of political and economic power. Those at the pinnacle of power control more resources to make them "available" and "suitable" for news (Gans, 1979:80-83, 116-145). Thus, to explore the relative influence of individuals and institutions in shaping media content is to analyse strategic power in our society (Deacon and Golding, 1994:12-13).

Journalists and their sources engage in an exchange relationship in which information is bartered for publicity. Interviewees in this research, including journalists and representatives of education groups, unanimously described their relationship with each other as "mutually

beneficial". Studies (e.g. Sigal, 1973, Gans, 1979, Ericson et al., 1987) showed that reporters are compelled by the mandate of newsmaking to heavily rely on a few regular sources for gathering information. For journalists, in order to cope with the enormous pressure of meeting deadlines, to reduce uncertainty and to maintain journalistic credibility, they only invest their precious time and effort in the pursuit of the most productive and reliable sources. This explains why economic elites and government officials are frequently used by the media. The economic and political elites are in the position to authorise access to critical information and to speak for the groups they represent. Hence, they are accredited sources heavily sought by journalists. In addition, the powerful own or command resources, which are not available to most of the rest, to plan and implement public relations strategies to actively promote their interests. To ensure positive coverage, powerful sources, such as governments, political parties, public institutions, business corporations and large civil organisations, hire media specialists, many of whom were journalists who know media operations very well, to direct public relations activities that fit into the routines of news production. By offering news media what Gandy (1982) termed "information subsidies", powerful sources minimise the production cost of the media to cover their stories and, in turn, make their information more available to the public. In this way, powerful sources are able to mobilise support for their definition of issues in the policy process. Powerful sources not only have advantages to promote their interests through disclosure but also have the ability to minimise or eliminate harm by enclosure (Ericson et al., 1989). Having the power and resources, powerful sources are able to monitor information flow within and outside their organisations; also, they can sanction individuals and organisations for journalistic transgressions such as dissemination of information the sources want to keep secret for whatever reason.

The above discussion shows the significance of news sources in agenda-building. It is, nevertheless, not suggesting that powerful sources have absolute power to determine media-

agenda exclusively. Gans (1979:117) pointed out that "in any event, sources can only make themselves available; it is the journalists who will decide if they are suitable". Also, Schlesinger and Tumber (1994) rightly stated, where there are conflicts, there is competition for media access between the sources. To emphasise powerful sources is to suggest that in building media-agenda, some have more advantages than others.

In most situations, it is the powerful sources, rather than reporters, who can dominate the interaction since they have more control on where and when to release what information. Personal relationships between reporters and sources can be managed in a very organised way to ensure the outcomes that resourceful sources expect. A good example are the luncheons given by newly listed companies in Taiwan[26]. In Taiwan, there was a tacit agreement between reporters and listed companies. Before the debut of a company in the security exchange, the companies invite reporters to attend a luncheon conference. This kind of event is normally organised by security brokers at expensive venues. All reporters who are assigned to cover news about that company will be invited and given a "red pack" containing a few thousand dollars in cash. This is a "personal gift" for reporters. Although some reporters disagree with this practice, no one dares to refuse the bribe since most of the others, especially the senior reporters, accept it. If anyone refuses to take it, it will be very difficult for her/him to affiliate with other journalists. This practice is no secret in Taiwan's media community. Most media companies let reporters keep the money. Others collect it to set up internal funds for employees benefits; this is not for media ethics but for the "fairness" of internal management. However, either way renders reporters vulnerable to the power of sources. There are many other tactics in which sources use to influence reporters. For example, a very common manoeuvre is a special lunch or dinner meeting arranged by a source with "friendly" journalists, most of whom work for large media organisations. Since other competitors are excluded, those reporters who are invited perceive this as a privilege. Obviously, the reporters have to reward the sources in order to maintain the

[26] This example is my personal experience.

relationship. News sources can also suggest story ideas to individual reporters. This way is more effective where sources are able to be trusted, such as experts or insiders of large institutions. These practices put media autonomy under question. The relative autonomy of journalists is conditional on news beats, media organisations, the ability of news sources to control information, and the level of social skills and knowledge of journalists themselves.

Following the previous discussion, it is sensible to conceptualise news sources into regular or non-regular. In the case of education news, according to interviewees for this research, sources who are regularly contacted include government information officers, representatives of political parties, education groups including teachers' union, student unions of tertiary education institutions, and other non-union education groups such parent groups. Individual education professionals, scholars and experts, and other individuals such as parents and students are identified as non-regular sources. Reporters also indicate that high-ranking officials are not regularly contacted. This typology helps researchers to determine whether there is domination or competition in shaping media content, and who are the main players, on what issues.

To further our understanding of the characteristics of media–source relations and its implications to agenda-building, the second typology is adopted. Deacon and Golding (1994:15) distinguished "advocates" from "arbiters" in news and refer the former to "the sources that journalists recognise as having explicit, vested political or professional interests which frame and inform their contributions", and the latter to the "sources who are used to evaluate assertions and interpretations made by advocates in a political debate". In the case of education news in Hong Kong, it is obvious that individuals such as the head of the Education Commission, the headmasters of universities and the presidents of teachers' unions are advocates; teachers in education groups such the Education Convergence are sometimes treated by journalists as arbiters. This typology reflects some qualifications of media–source relations. Deacon and Golding's study showed, firstly, journalists apply far less scepticism to arbiters than to

advocates; secondly, arbiters do not pursue journalists; they are selected and most highly valued by journalists where issues are new, complex and uncertain; thirdly, media friendliness, which is assessed by the arbiters' co-cooperativeness and their ability to render complex issues intelligible to journalists and the public, are important considerations in selecting arbiters. In most cases, journalists trust arbiters. Their expertise and perceived objectivity grant them the power and authority to publicly comment on important issues. However, such journalists might be placed in a vulnerable and dependent position, especially in the case of a complex and controversial issue. Arbiters' objectivity is questionable. Although many commentators seek to be as accurate and objective as possible, their words can never be completely value-free. Their verdicts are professional judgements derived from institutional vantage points and personal experiences (Deacon and Golding, 1994:17). Beyond that, arbiters might have their own agenda and become covert advocates when they are commenting. An interesting example in this study is the Education Convergence, which is highly valued by journalists as a group focusing and commenting on education policy. The Education Convergence is an education professionals' group, having a small number of approximately two hundred members. Although it is not as large an organisation as the teachers' unions, its members are frequently invited by media to give their opinions because the group is reputed to be "a progressive education group that is professional and critical to the government" (an executive member of the Education Convergence, 2001). Besides, the Education Convergence is given regular columns in four newspapers.[27] The group evaluates columns and public forums in newspapers as the most comprehensive and controllable channels for delivering massages (from interviews of two executive members of the Education Convergence, 2001). The example showed how knowledge can be used in exchange for publicity. By nature, the knowledge-base power of arbiters is

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[27] The Education Convergence has columns in the *Ming Pao Daily*, the *Sing Tao Daily*, the *Hong Kong Economic Journal* and the *Hong Kong Economic Times*. These columns are written by members of the Education Convergence.

different from the political power of advocates. As such, the contributions of these two types of sources in building policy-agenda are also dissimilar.

News, Audience, Issue Definition

News means to communicate. However, that communication is not neutral. As news helps audiences make sense of the world, powerful sources seek to influence others' decisions and actions by the provision of information. The political implication of this epistemological process is obvious. For a long time, studies of media effects have attended to this. "Agenda-setting" is one of the major research traditions in this field. A seminal empirical study of this kind was conducted by McCombs and Shaw. They found that there is high correlation between what media treat as important and what voters consider to be important. The two researchers considered the agenda-setting function as an unavoidable by-product of journalistic practices and concluded that mass media is capable of influencing the salience of issues, thereby setting the public agenda (McCombs and Shaw, 1977, c1990: 75). Because the concept of agenda-setting concerns issue priorities on media and public agenda, the concept is too limited for the analysis of news and politics. As Tiffen suggested (1989:6), "The political impact of news must be sought in its effects on how politics is conducted, how news practices interact with political processes and outcomes, how the presence of the media affects the distribution and bases of power".

Publicity is not equally distributed to all political actors and all public issues. Considering the fact that news coverage and organisational resources of mass media are limited, news is necessarily selective. The decision of allocating resources to cover a given event or quote a particular source is made according to their newsworthiness. Thus, in terms of importance, news stories and plots within a story are presented in a hierarchical order; news sources are quoted differently in ways and frequency. As such, news connotes evaluation of issues and news

sources. News also interprets issues. It implies issue definition since it tends to selectively highlight some aspects of issues (Tiffen, 1989:188). It is certain that news does not merely present facts to audiences. By providing "symbolic devices"[28] (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989), news suggests to audiences what an issue is about, what events are relevant or irrelevant to the issue, it implies a range of positions on the issue, and provides justifications of the positions. As such, news poses reference frameworks for the audience to make sense of occurrences.

What are the political implications of this definitional process? Issue definition is crucial to policy-making since it implies solutions and responsibilities (Cobb and Elder, 1983). Most policy issues are indeterminate by nature; they are largely matters of interpretation. Issue priorities and issue definitions are not givens; rather, they are socially constructed (Cobb and Elder, 1983; Gamson, 1988). To define an issue is to answer the most important and most simple question: what is it about? How an issue is defined has the effects of implying and delimiting solution possibilities—policy choices, determining which domain serves as the battlefield for conflicting interest groups, engaging and disengaging groups in the conflict, and allocating responsibilities and blame (Cobb and Elder, 1983; Mahon, 1993). In a social conflict, there is always a contest of issue definition between rivals. News, in this contest, is a strategic resource for contending groups to mobilise public support of their interpretation of issue.

As discussed, in Hong Kong, growing public concern and higher priority within government policy-making regarding education resulted in a considerable increase of education news. This development not only indicates a need for an understanding of how news influences

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[28] To analyse the interpretative dimension of news, Gamson and Modigliani (Gamson, 1988:165-166; Gamson and Modigliani, 1989:3) suggested conceiving news content as a set of "interpretive packages" that assign meaning to an issue. Gamson and Lasch (1983:398) maintained that "the ideal elements in a culture do not exist in isolation but are grouped into more or less harmonious clusters or interpretive packages. The different idea elements in a given package mutually support and reinforce each other. Frequently, it is possible to suggest the package as a whole by the use of a single prominent element." They distinguished the framing part from the reasoning part of issue interpretations. The framing part of an interpretive package is a central organising idea for making sense of relevant events of an issue and for suggesting what is the issue about. The core frame of an interpretive package is not only to provide an epistemological framework for an audience to mentally organise the otherwise chaotic world, it also implies a range of positions on an issue. To justify the positions suggested by a package, it has to include a reasoning part. Besides, in order to display the core frame and the positions, a package provides condensing symbolic devices. Gamson and Lasch (1983) identified five types of framing devices, which are metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions and visual images, and three types of reasoning devices, which are roots (a causal analysis), consequences (a particular type of effect), and appeals to principle (a set of moral claims).

the making of educational policy in Hong Kong but also provides good cases for the empirical study of the topic. To approach this topic, the above discussion established an analytical framework by drawing on studies about newsmaking and agenda-building in Western liberal democracies and taking into account the specialities of Hong Kong's media and political systems. By applying the framework, the following thesis examines four educational policy issues that happened in the last decade.

Chapter 4   The Instruction Medium Issue

The compulsory use of the mother-tongue, for Hong Kong it is Cantonese, as medium of instruction in secondary schools has been the most contentious issue in the education reform in recent years and the most radical change of the perennial instruction language policy in educational development in Hong Kong (for convenience, "instruction medium" and "instruction language" will be used interchangeable to refer to this issue). There are two reasons for selecting this issue. Firstly, it is an ideal case for studying the longitudinal change of media coverage of policy issues since the instruction medium issue stretched from early 1997 to the second half of 2001. The policy had been implemented, reviewed and changed within this period, and related news coverage can be easily collected. Also, the issue has a relatively clear start and end, making the comparison of media and policy agendas easier. Secondly, the issue engaged a variety of competing social groups in the process of defining and proposing resolutions. Owing to its large scale and rich texture, the issue is a good case for studying media–source relations.

THE ISSUE AND THE STAKEHOLDERS

Studies by Pun (1996) and Tsang (1998) indicated that the instruction language in secondary schools has been one of the long-lasting problems in Hong Kong educational development in the last fifty years. The evolution of the language policy can be traced back to the 1950s, as Tsang found. Pun (1996:117) discovered that since the early 1970s, the colonial Hong Kong government realised that the unsatisfactory quality of education was a result of using English as the instruction medium in secondary schools and it suggested solutions including the use of the mother-tongue as the instruction language in lower forms (Year 7-9).[29] However, it

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[29] The Hong Kong Government stated in the 1973 Green Paper on Education: "The medium of instruction bears significantly upon the quality of education offered at post-primary level. Pupils coming from primary schools where they have been taught in the medium of Cantonese have a grievous burden put on them when required to absorb new subjects through the medium of English. We recommend that Chinese become the usual language of instruction in

was not until a visiting panel from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) recommended the same in their report of the Hong Kong educational system in 1982 that the issue became a focus of the educational policy. Some of these suggestions were refined and implemented by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government after the 1997 sovereignty transition.

Pun (1996:64) indicated that the instruction medium issue is not just related to the intellectual and mental development of students but also to the economic and political development in Hong Kong. By examining the list of public views submitted to the Education Commission in response to its reports No.2 to No.5, Pun (1996:125) identified the key actors who actively shaped this issue. Other than the government and political parties, a variety of interest groups were actively involved in this issue including the two teachers unions, the Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers and the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union, school principals' representatives such as the Hong Kong Subsidized Secondary Schools Council and the Association of Hong Kong Chinese Secondary Schools, the Hong Kong Language Campaign, an employers' group, and the Linguistic Society of Hong Kong, which is a professional association.

It is interesting to note that the business community was vigorously involved in the issue of the instruction language, compared to their apathy on other critical education issues such as tertiary education and curriculum reform. Between 1989 and 1990, the business community launched the Hong Kong Language Campaign to enhance the English language ability of Hong Kong students and to promote public awareness over the importance of English through a series of community activities. Although the Hong Kong Language Campaign gradually reduced its activities, the business community, mainly represented by the Liberal Party, local and expatriate

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the lower forms of secondary schools, and the English should be studied as the second language. We recommend that every effort be made to develop good textbooks for all subjects written in Chinese, to train teachers capable of instructing through the medium of Chinese, and to adopt improved techniques of language teaching for both Chinese and English" (Board of Education, Hong Kong 1973:6-7, quoted by Pun, 1996:117).

commercial chambers, still exert great influence on the formation of language policy in Hong Kong. They linked the instruction medium issue to economic prosperity and imposed their ideology on the rest of the society through the media (Pun, 1996; Lin, 1997).

In contrast to the business community, a majority of the educational professionals supported the idea of using the mother-tongue to teach as it is proven by a wide range of educational studies that the mother-tongue is the most effective medium for teaching and learning. Tung et al. (1997:450) found in their survey of 5,000 students, 4,600 parents and 700 teachers that "it is clear the teachers favour strong government support for mother-tongue education". However, "teachers are aware of other difficulties in the implementation of Chinese-medium education" and "appear to hold more sophisticated views" (Tung et al., 1997:450, 453, 455).

As for parents and students, who are actually a group with members of diverse social backgrounds and age, Tung et al. (1997:455) concluded that "there is a relative lack of consensus among parents and students as to how the medium of instruction issue can be resolved"; to most parents, however, "the best" education in fact means English-medium education; whereas the students' responses "consistently" fell between the parents and the teachers. According to this survey, it is clear parents and students agreed with teachers that Chinese instruction can be helpful to students' learning; parents and students, however, do not support using Chinese as the instructional language in lower forms in secondary schools and parents strongly favoured the English-medium in the upper forms.

The school management hold a different view on the issue. Secondary schools in Hong Kong are traditionally divided into two kinds, English-medium schools and Chinese-medium schools, the latter having gradually become a minority during the colonial period. Most elite schools are English-medium schools. Consider the reality that parents prefer English teaching

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and the competition between schools for students having good academic performance, most English-medium schools are reluctant to switch to Chinese-medium teaching.

As previously described, there is no one party totally in support of the policy for the compulsory use of mother-tongue teaching; there are conflicts between the business community and teachers, between teachers, school managements and parents, and between all these parties and the government.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT ON THE LANGUAGE ISSUE

Tsang (1998:235) identified three phrases in the development of the instruction language policy and the change of policy approach. Before the 1980s, the government maintained its non-interventionist ideology. Schools were free to choose their medium of instruction. Then in the early 1980s, the government decided to change the policy but, as Tsang criticised, did not have the courage to implement the compulsory mother-tongue teaching in the nine-year compulsory education (from Primary-1 to Form-3). Instead, the government initiated programmes and schemes hoping to "encourage" Chinese-medium teaching. As anticipated, there were very few schools who were encouraged, so that from the early 1990s, the government had to tackle the problem under pressure. It appeared to totally abolish its non-interventionism approach and planned to "give firm guidance to schools toward the right teaching medium". The government estimated that a "full implementation of the language policy will thus be achieved in 1998-99" (Education Commission, 1990:6.5.11).

Although the colonial government was promoting the use of Chinese as the instruction medium since the 1980s, the actual practice in schools was a very different picture. The majority of secondary schools used English or claimed that they were English-medium. However, a "mix code", mixing Cantonese and English in teaching, has been widely used by teachers in classrooms (Pun, 1996:63). In April 1997, the Education Department announced a consultation

paper titled "Arrangement for Firm Guidance on Secondary Schools' Medium of Instruction", which proposed the mandatory use of Chinese as the medium of instruction in secondary schools. The paper suggested that all government and subsidised schools must use the mother-tongue as the instruction language from Form-1 intake in the 1998 academic year. Schools, however, could apply for a special permission to teach in English but they would only be allowed to do so when they met the three requirements set down by the government, which were, firstly, at least 85 per cent of all student intakes in schools are able to learn in English; secondly, schools have to prove that their teachers are competent to teach in English; and, thirdly, schools have to have the resources and other support measures for the English-medium teaching.

The government launched a two-month public consultation regarding the compulsory mother-tongue teaching policy. Just before the end of the consultation, the Education Department announced that schools could switch to English-medium teaching from Form-4 if their students and teachers met the English standard and there were appropriate programmes and plans to help students study in English. This was perceived as a concession made as a response to the outcry from the public.

The final draft of the 'Guidance' promulgated by the government in September 1997 dropped the word 'Firm' from its title and four of the five proposed measures of sanctions against schools denied to teach in Cantonese (*South China Morning Post*, 25-9-1997). Tsang (1998) maintained this was still the clearest expression of the government's position toward language policy in fifty years. Nevertheless, the issue was not settled with the 'Guidance' and public debate was intensified in the early stage of the implementation of the policy. Accordingly, news coverage of the issue increased considerably.

After three years of implementing the compulsory mother-tongue teaching, on 1 September 2000, the Education and Manpower Bureau announced that the government considered introducing a two-mode teaching to allow Chinese-medium schools to teach some

subjects in Cantonese and others in English, but using the mix code in one subject was not permitted. In November 2000, the Bureau randomly selected ten schools to conduct a trial of the two-mode teaching and expended its scope to include all Chinese-medium schools from the start of the 2001 academic year. Although the government emphasised that this was only an experiment, this was perceived as a setback of the policy under pressure from the business community, parents, and school managements.

The instruction medium policy was subject to a review. During July 2002, when this research was still in progress, the newly appointed head officer of the Education and Manpower Bureau spelled out that the compulsory mother-teaching was the wrong policy, and that new measures would be accomplished on the basis of a review of the current policy of the instruction medium.[30]

NEWS REPORTING AND POLICY PROCESS

As previously discussed, the instruction medium issue did not become a media focus until the push for compulsory Chinese-medium teaching by the government in 1997. Chart 4.1 shows the shifting media attention of the issue based on the counting of news items published between January 1997 and August 2001 in four major Hong Kong newspapers. The chart also shows the occurrence of important events in different stages of the policy process.

Three important events fuelled press coverage about the issue. Firstly, the launch of the consultation paper about the compulsory Chinese-medium teaching policy in April 1997. Media coverage of the issue substantially increased in the consultation period, then dropped again. Within the consolidation period, the government revised the policy and briefed the Board of Education and the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research. There are, however, few stories about this process.

[30] Between February and June 2005, a consultation on the instruction medium policy and the secondary school places allocation system was done by an Education Commission working group that was led by a businessman. The working group finalised its recommendations on the two policies in July 2005.

Secondly, in September 1997, the government announced the 'Guidance of Medium of Instruction' and started the implementation of the policy, which had the effect of increasing media coverage to the same level as in the consultation period. The press focused on which and how many schools applied to continue English-medium teaching. The success of the applications was perceived by the media and the public as an official guarantee of quality education and the schools deemed that it was an affirmation of their elite status within the educational community. The coverage shrank in November as the press waited for the results of the vetting process, which would not be released until December.

Finally, on 1 December 1997, the education authority released the vetting results. Schools which failed to gain an exemption of Chinese-medium instruction were allowed to lodge an appeal through a special committee. This event dramatically escalated media attention. An outcry of the vetting results and the process rose from the failed schools. A confrontational situation was created by the spontaneous protest by students, the threat of strikes, and the talk of legal action against the education authority. This is all newsworthy. The front pages and important news pages including Hong Kong newspapers were filled with the sensational coverage of the emotional responses of parents, students and teachers. Stories contrasting the tearful complaints from teachers and students whose schools failed to acquire permission of English-medium teaching and the joy and excitement of those schools who were granted permission were too appealing. There are in total 112 items collected from the four Hong Kong newspapers published in December, and this outnumbers the amount of items published in the two lower peaks in the consultation period and the early stage of the implementation by almost three to one. However, the momentum did not last long. The coverage of the issue shrank sharply in January 1998 when the issue was no longer deemed hot by the media. Even new movements of the policy did not attract the press.

For a comprehensive understanding of the instruction language issue, a closely related issue, the problem of "declining language proficiency" in Hong Kong will be included in latter discussions. The set of data related to the language proficiency problem included 65 newspaper items; 22 per cent (14 items) of the data were commentaries, the other 71 per cent (46 items) were news reports.

Rather than a specific policy issue, the language proficiency was a broad and discursive issue. The issue appeared on the news coverage of a wide range of events such as the release of open examinations results, survey results about employer satisfaction of university graduates' language abilities, the debate about the necessity of university exit language examinations, and even in reports about teaching programmes in universities, job skills training, the declining English standard of young lawyers and doctors, etc. Also, it is an ongoing issue. Whenever an event related to language education occurs, the debate on the issue is reignited. Hence, the coverage of the language proficiency problem will be treated as part of the media agenda of the instruction medium issue in the following discussion.

PRESS COVERAGE OF THE INSTRUCTION MEDIUM ISSUE

Among the four educational issues in this study, the instruction medium issue received the most attention by the Hong Kong press. Compared to the coverage of other issues, the instruction medium issue was given both the largest and the most diverse coverage. In total 1,385 news items were examined, 42 per cent of these items (583 items) are related to the policy of compulsory mother-tongue teaching (see Table 4.1). When measuring by word count, the coverage of the instruction language policy is approximately 1.8 times larger than the coverage of the benchmark assessment policy, the second most attentive issue in this study (see Table 4.2).

The analysis of coverage composition found, as in Table 4.1, the coverage of the instruction medium issue consisted of 57 per cent of news reports, 26 per cent of commentaries,

11 per cent of letters-to-the-editor, 3 per cent of editorials and 3 per cent of features. In the other four sets of data, news reports accounted for 67 per cent or more of each set of news items. The coverage of the instruction medium issue was the only data set of which less than 60 per cent were news reports, and it has the highest proportion of letters-to-the-editor and features (see Table 4.4 and 4.5). Table 4.1 also shows the instruction language issue has been reported on front-pages seven times. It was one of the two issues reported the most on newspapers' front-pages (see Table 4.6). The following segment will compare the difference between the coverage of individual newspapers.

Individual Newspapers' Coverage

On the whole, two salient features emerged from the content analysis. Firstly, all four major Hong Kong newspapers rated the issue of instruction medium the most newsworthy among the four educational issues. Secondly, despite the similarity, there are significant differences in size and composition of individual newspapers' coverage.

Table 4.2 compares size of coverage of all educational issues. It can be seen, coverage of the instruction language issue comprised the largest proportion of each newspaper's total coverage of the four educational issues. Except for the *Oriental Daily*, the coverage of the issue comprised at least 40 per cent of every other newspapers' total coverage. Table 4.7 shows the composition in each newspaper's coverage of the instruction medium issue. Every paper had a diverse coverage. The instruction medium issue was the only one of the four issues that had been given features on every newspaper (see tables 4.7 to 4.10). No features about the other three issues were found in Chinese newspapers. These findings indicate that all newspapers rated the instruction medium issue as the most newsworthy.

In spite of the similarity, significant differences between the newspapers' coverage were found. Table 4.3 shows the *Ming Pao Daily* provided the largest coverage. In terms of word

count, the *Ming Pao Daily*'s coverage accounted for more than a half of the total coverage of the instruction language issue. The second largest coverage was recorded from the *Apple Daily*, then followed by the *South China Morning Post*. The *Oriental Daily*'s coverage was the smallest; it accounted for only 9 per cent of total word count of all news items related to the issue. By comparing the composition of coverage, it was found that the elite press had more news reports than the popular press, while the later had more commentaries. Table 4.7 shows that of the *Ming Pao Daily*'s total of 273 items, 73 per cent (198 items) were news reports. The *South China Morning Post,* although having a smaller coverage than the *Apple Daily,* had more news reports than the latter; with 58 per cent (62 items) of its coverage of the instruction medium issue being news reports (see Table 4.9). The *Apple Daily*'s coverage was the second largest but only 36 per cent (51 items) of its news items were news reports (see Table 4.8); this amount was less than that of the *South China Morning Post* both in absolute and relative terms. The *Apple Daily* published the largest number of commentaries about the instruction medium issue, with its coverage containing 44 per cent (63 items) of commentaries. When counting commentaries, editorials and letters-to-the-editor together[31], these non-news articles comprised approximately 64 per cent of the *Apple Daily*'s coverage and outnumbered news reports almost by two to one. The pattern of *Oriental Daily*'s coverage was largely the same as the *Apple Daily*'s (see Table 4.10); it contained only 37 per cent of news reports, but commentaries, editorials and letters-to-the-editor together accounted for 60 per cent.

Table 4.6 shows the number of front-page items about the educational issues.[32] Both the *Ming Pao Daily News* and the *Apple Daily* had published stories about the instruction language issue on their front pages but none had been found on the *Oriental Daily*'s. It seems that the

[31] As commentaries, editorials and letters-to-the-editor contain mainly opinions, they can be counted as one category and contrast to news reports to show the differences in newsmaking.
[32] The electronic items collected from the *South China Morning Post* did not record news section of the items. Therefore, the English items were not included in Table 4.6.

instruction medium issue was considered more newsworthy in the *Ming Pao Daily News* and the *Apple Daily* than in the *Oriental Daily*.

WHO SHAPED THE NEWS AGENDA OF
THE INSTRUCTION MEDIUM ISSUE

To analyses news sources, the whole group of 583 items were coded. The analysis of news sources focuses on firstly, identifying major news source and, secondly, on how they are represented in the news coverage. The analysis divided the newspaper content into two categories: news and non-news content. The former includes news reports and features and the latter includes articles from newspaper columns, opinion pages and forums, letters-to-the-editor and editorials. This enables the understanding of how newspapers give access to different sources and what type of coverage is available to what sources.

In items from the news category, 19 groups of news sources were found (see Table 4.11). Although there are a variety of news sources, a concentration of news sources is evident. In total 1,397 statements, which were either directly quoted or paraphrased by reporters, were taken from 351 items in the news category and coded. The two most frequently quoted sources together account for 57 per cent of all coded statements. The education authorities including the Education and Manpower Bureau and its subordinate organization, the Education Department, have the highest rate of media access. Between January 1997 and August 2001, the education authorities were quoted 449 times, which accounted for 33 per cent of all recorded quotes. The majority of them, 92 per cent (or 411 statements), was paraphrased. The education authorities were directly quoted 38 times only. The second mostly quoted source was the school managements including individuals and organisations such as associations of school headmasters. This group was quoted in the four newspapers 343 times. These quotations comprise 25 per cent of all coded statements, and 283 (83 per cent) of the 343 statements were

paraphrased. The school managements were directly quoted 60 times, which almost doubled the number of direct quotations of the education authories.

Some interesting results emerged from regrouping the data in Table 4.11 by adopting the typologies of news sources discussed in Chapter 3. Table 4.12 shows 78 per cent of the sources quoted in news reports and features were regular sources. This indicates that newspapers heavily rely on these sources. Table 4.13 shows when categorising news sources into advocates and arbiters, the advocates accounted for 88 per cent of all sources quoted in news reports. Comparing data in the two tables found the regular sources and the advocates were largely the same group of organisations and individuals. It was evident that the news agenda of the instruction language issue was dominated by two advocates, the government and school managements, who have vested political and professional interests. In spite of this, the arbiters were indispensable to news. Scholars and experts quoted as arbiters to evaluate the assertions of the two major advocates were the third largest group of news source. However, the coverage of the academics was considerably less than that of the major advocates. Quotations of the scholars and experts accounted for only 9 per cent of all coded statements.

The teaching professionals had a minute coverage which comprises 8 per cent of the whole coverage. This is interesting as teachers are one of the most important groups of stakeholders on the instruction language issue. However, their views obviously were not represented in the news. This could result in an incomprehensive coverage of the issue. This point will be discussed in the final chapter.

As for the writers of non-news articles, data was organised as in Table 4.14. In total, 211 articles were found directly commenting on the policy of the instruction medium, with 46 per cent of these articles being written by members of the general public[33]; which is the largest group of writers. The second largest group is the columnists who wrote 36 articles about the issue,

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[33] The "public" includes all individuals whose articles were signed without a title, such as school teacher, to indicate which group the individuals represented. It is presumed that many parents and students wrote on the issue of the instruction medium.

which accounted for 18 per cent of all non-news items. Scholars from all disciplines make up the third largest group, and 19 articles were written by the academics. Educational professionals had 17 commentaries and 2 letters.

Individual Newspapers' Use of Sources

This part of the chapter compares news sources featured in different newspapers. It was found that the pattern of using news sources in news reports and features in the four newspapers is largely the same. Although the elite press had more diverse news sources than the popular press, education authorities and school managements remained the most frequently quoted sources in all newspapers; statements attributed to the two major sources comprised more than 50 per cent of all statements (see Table 4.15). On the *Ming Pao Daily* and the *Apple Daily*, the two major sources have an even higher rate of media access; quotes attributed to them account for approximately 60 per cent of all quotes.

Looking closely, however, there are some significant differences between the coverage of the four newspapers. On the whole the elite press gave a more balanced treatment of the two major sources. In particular the *Ming Pao Daily* gave the education authorities and the school managements largely the same share of coverage. The *Apple Daily* relied the most on the education authorities, quoting them three times more than the school managements. On the *Oriental Daily*, statements attributed to the education authorities were about 16 per cent more than those attributed to the school managements.

Scholars and experts comprise the third largest group of news source. In news reports and features, they were non-regular sources used by the newspapers as arbiters. Generally speaking, the elite papers gave scholars and experts more media access. Among the four newspapers, the *South China Morning Post* had the highest proportion of quotes attributed to scholars and experts (see Table 4.16), with 64 statements on the *South China Morning Post*'s

news reports and features attributed to them. These quotes accounted for approximately 23 per cent of all quotes recorded by the *South China Morning Post*. In the other three newspapers, quotes attributed to scholars and experts comprised less than 7 per cent of all quotes. Although the *Ming Pao Daily* did not quote scholars and experts in news and features as frequently as the *South China Morning Post* did, it published the largest number of commentaries and letters-to-the-editor written by academics. As shown in Table 4.19, 17 articles in the *Ming Pao Daily News*, which accounted for approximately 27 per cent of all commentaries in the paper, were written by scholars.

As for the popular papers, both the *Apple Daily* and the *Oriental Daily* did not frequently quote scholars on news pages, and they also published few commentaries written by scholars. The *Apple Daily* has only two commentaries written by scholars, while it had the largest number of commentaries and letters-to-the-editor about the issue of the instruction medium. The *Oriental Daily* had no commentaries or letters-to-the-editor written by scholars. The analysis (see Table 4.19) showed that more than two thirds of the commentaries and letters on the *Apple Daily* and all commentaries and letters on the *Oriental Daily* were written by members of the public and newspaper columnists.

ISSUE DEFINITION IN PRESS COVERAGE

To examine the definition of the instruction medium issue, the analysis now turns to the press coverage of the issue of declining language proficiency. The problem of language proficiency was fundamental to the debate on the instruction medium issue, particularly because of the involvement of the business community on that problem.

As discussed in the beginning of this chapter and chapter 2, the business community took an active role not only in promoting public awareness of the problem of declining language proficiency, but also in the formulation of education reform with a series of policies including

the language policy. Their involvement was a powerful force driving the prevalent sentiment against Chinese-medium teaching.

It was indisputable that the problem of declining language proficiency was closely related to the instruction medium issue. Although the employers and their political representatives were not the major advocates appearing in the news coverage about the policy of the instruction medium, they were the most prominent news source in the coverage about the problem of declining language proficiency (see Table 4.20). The business community strongly argued that there was a decline of English language ability among Hong Kong's university graduates. For Hong Kong, as an international city and a regional services hub, this would become an obstacle of its economic development (see Table 4.20, under "problems" and "effects"). The employers suggested to solve the problem by giving students more and new types of language tests in schools, in open exams, and to integrate language tests in the recruitment process.

It is difficult to quantitatively measure the influence of the employers' activities in shaping the media agenda of the issue of the instruction medium. However, given the fact that in Hong Kong, as in other non-English speaking countries, the English language is considered a necessary skill for getting a good job. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand that when powerful employers, particularly the large corporations, publicly stated that the university graduates' lack of English proficiency was contributing to Hong Kong's declining economic competitiveness, thousands of parents and students would follow the employers' economic approach to the issue of instruction medium. By linking language education to economic performance, the employers groups indirectly defined the issue of the instruction medium as an economic issue rather than a narrowly educational one.

Now the discussion turns back to the instruction medium issue. The examination of the issue definition will focus on the peak month coverage. As showed in Chart 4.1, the coverage of the instruction medium issue peaked in December 1997. In total, 112 items of all types of

content were collected in the peak month's coverage and from which 277 statements were coded. These themes were further grouped into five aspects: "negative effects and anti-Chinese-medium teaching", "positive effects and pro-Chinese–medium teaching", "problems and criticism of policy implementation", "policy content and process", and "social values and perceptions related to Chinese-medium teaching".

To examine the interpretation of educational issues in different newspapers' coverage, news items were grouped into two categories: news and non-news. The division was done for the reason that grouping all items together for analysis would distort the overall picture of the educational issues. This is particularly important in the case of the instruction medium issue, as the non-news items comprised 55 per cent of the peak month coverage of the issue (see Table 4.21). The two types of content featured with different sources and focused on different aspects of the issue.

The content analysis found that, firstly, whether on news reports or commentaries, newspaper coverage of the instruction medium issue during the peak month was negative. Secondly, while the focus of the news was on the implementation problems, the commentaries were mainly concerned about the social values within the debate of the issue.

In news reports and features, the two most highlighted aspects, which comprised 58 per cent of the peak month coverage, were negative coverage concerning the policy of compulsory Chinese-medium teaching (see Table 4.22). Due to media coverage concentrating on the implementation phase of the policy process and particularly on a single event, the release of the list of English-medium schools, "problems and criticism of policy implementation" (35 per cent) became the most highlighted aspect of the issue (see Table 4.22). After the release of the results of the vetting process on 1 December 1997, the media focused on the conflict between the government and schools which failed to gain an exemption of Chinese-medium teaching. What the government was accused of and how it responded, and the actions that the schools and

students, as victims of the policy, took against the policy were wildly reported. Major advocates, government authorities (23 per cent), particularly the education authority, schools (16 per cent), parents (14 per cent) and students (13 per cent) were heavily pursued by the media in the peak period (see Table 4.22). Obviously the media agenda was dominated by those against the instruction medium policy, including the schools which failed in the vetting process, the students studying in these schools and their parents. These sources together gained 43 per cent of the peak month coverage. The schools and their students accused the government of two allegations: first, adopting an incomprehensible criteria for assessing a school's application for exemption of the compulsory Chinese-medium teaching, and second, the vetting committee lacking in openness and impartiality (see Table 4.23). Of course, the government denied both of these charges.

The "negative effects and anti-Chinese-medium teaching" (23 per cent) was the second most reported aspect of the issue (see Table 4.22). The major advocates who talked about this were not only the schools who failed to gain an exemption but also others, such as the Professional Teachers' Union, parents and students (see Table 4.22). They strongly believed the policy would cause a "labelling effect" and "a revival of elitism". This became the most common theme to appear in the whole peak month coverage (see Table 4.23). In addition, the schools and students argued that the policy would be differential and produce conflict within the educational community by creating a few "elite" English-medium schools and a majority of second-class Chinese-medium schools and students; so that with the compulsory use of Chinese-medium teaching, it would deprive equal opportunity for the majority of students to learn English.

Trying to gain support for the policy, the government denied the policy reflected a kind of elitism and that granting exemptions to some schools was a temporary measure. The education authority stressed on the positive effects of Chinese-medium teaching and the reasons

78

to support its decision. In particular the government emphasised that the "mother-tongue is the most effective instruction medium" (see Table 4.23). The Professional Teachers' Union also supported the idea of Chinese-medium teaching. From an education point of view, the Professional Teachers' Union and some teaching professionals underscore the benefits of using the mother-tongue in teaching and learning. The government further emphasised that "English-medium teaching is not a synonym for good education" and additional resources would be given to Chinese-medium schools to boost their English teaching and learning (see Table 4.23, under "social value…" and "policy content…"). However, some education professionals, parents and students were in favour of the economic approach in defining the issue, and they strongly argued that "English is a necessary job skill". Although students cannot learn effectively when they are taught in English, they should be given more chance to use English. Also, parents and some teachers deemed that the policy was "against the principle of free choice". The confrontation and the debate made "social values and perceptions related to Chinese-medium teaching" the third most reported aspect in the peak month coverage (see Table 4.22).

Table 4.24 shows that, rather than the implementation of the policy, the non-news content focused on two other aspects of the issue: the "social values" (34 per cent) and the "negative effects" (31 per cent). Most of the articles on the opinion page, forum and letters-to-the-editor in the peak period were contributed by members of the general public (44 per cent). Many of them would be from students or parents having children in secondary schools. Other commentators, including individual educational professionals (12 per cent), columnists (12 per cent) and scholars (8 per cent) also contributed a substantial amount of articles about the instruction medium policy. As shown in Table 4.25, the public, educational professionals and other commentators were deeply concerned about the negative effects of the compulsory use of Chinese-medium teaching and, in particular, whether the policy would produce a labelling effect and lead to a revival of elitism. Beyond that, the commentaries reflected that defining the issue

79

in economic terms was common, and "economic considerations" was the second most focused theme in the commentaries. The articles, by comparison, highlighted the importance of the English language to Hong Kong's economic development. Commentators emphasised that "English is a necessary job skill" and they expressed concern that the policy would disadvantage students in Chinese-medium schools.

Individual Newspapers' Issue Definitions

The content analysis found striking differences between the coverage in different newspapers. However, the grouping of the newspapers, as in the analysis of news sources, did not divided in line with the elite–popular demarcation. Examining the news reports and features found in the four studied newspapers, excepting the *Apple Daily*, implementation of the policy was the most highlighted aspect. In each of the three newspapers, this aspect occupied more than 30 per cent of the content (see Table 4.26). As for the second most highlighted aspect, while the *South China Morning Post* focused on the "social value and perception related to Chinese-medium teaching", the *Ming Pao Daily News* and the *Oriental Daily* highlighted the more "negative effects" of the policy (see Table 4.26).

The differences between the peak month coverage of the newspapers did not result from using different news sources. As discussed in the analysis of news sources, the pattern of using news sources in news reports and features in the four newspapers is largely the same. A possible explanation for the differences in issue definition is that the differences resulted from the selection of content in individual newspapers. In fact, the *South China Morning Post* is the only one newspaper which had more content about the "positive effects" than the "negative effects", although this is not significant in absolute terms.

The *Apple Daily* had a distinctive pattern. First of all, there were fewer statements coded from the *Apple Daily* than the other newspapers because it has the fewest news reports on the

issue in the peak period, and secondly, the most highlighted aspect on the *Apple Daily* was the "negative effects". The newspaper published only three news reports but 22 commentaries in the peak month (see Table 4.21). Reading these items, there were few statements qualified according to the coding criteria set in the methodology. Rather than some statements conveying a clear idea of the policy issue itself, the news reports were full of emotional language describing the anger of students and teachers from the schools which failed to gain an exemption of Chinese-medium teaching. In showing these tearful faces, the coverage on the *Apple Daily* was negative but the reports did not explore the substance of the issue. This might also be as a result of the news value of the newspaper. The differences between the *South China Morning Post* and the *Apple Daily* are striking. While the former tended to define the issue of the instruction medium as an educational issue, the latter obviously defined the issue from an economic perspective.

As for the non-news coverage in the peak month, it can be seen that the non-news articles on the two popular papers concentrated on two aspects (see Table 4.27). Above 40 per cent of the statements recorded from the two newspapers' non-news articles were concerned about the "social values" aspect and approximately 33 per cent were about the "negative effects" of the compulsory mother-tongue teaching policy. *Ming Pao Daily*'s non-news articles had a relatively comprehensive discussion of the issue. Both the "social values" and the "positive effects" comprised 22 per cent of the *Ming Pao Daily*'s non-news articles, and 28 per cent of these articles were concerned about the "negative effects". There were only two statements recorded from the *South China Morning Post*'s non-news-report articles, which cannot be considered of any significance.

Chapter 5   University Funding 2001 to 2004

The university funding issue (2001-2004) was dissimilar in nature from the other three issues. Firstly, while other three issues were concerned about the new policy and long-term changes to Hong Kong's educational system, the university funding issue is an ongoing issue. Secondly, while all other issues were about basic education, the funding issue was the only one concerning tertiary education in this study. Thirdly, the actors involved in the issue were mainly institutional ones.

THE ISSUE AND THE STAKEHOLDERS

There were three main parties involved in the decision-making process of tertiary funding for the period between 2001 and 2004. These were (1) the education authorities, the University Grants Committee and the Research Grants Council; (2) the Legislative Council; and (3) the publicly funded tertiary institutions including eight universities, the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts and the Hong Kong Institute of Education.

The University Grants Committee (UGC) and the Research Grants Council are two advisory bodies related to tertiary funding. The former is appointed by the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Government and it advises on the development and funding of higher education and administers public grants to the publicly funded tertiary institutions; whereas the latter advises the government, through the UGC, on the needs of tertiary institutions for academic research and the funding required. It also monitors the use of public research grants. These two organisations comprise local and non-local academics, local professionals, and businessmen.

The University Grants Committee has reviewed tertiary funding every three years since 1994 and it propounds a suggestion to the government. In addition, it assesses the development proposal and funding requests submitted to the UGC by tertiary institutions. Based on the

suggestions, the government puts forward a proposal for approval to the Legislative Council, which might use a funding method different from that used by the UGC.

The case chosen for this study is the issue of cutting tertiary funding in the period from 2001 to 2004. The final proposal passed by the Legislative Council included four per cent cuts of total tertiary funding that was equal to 1.9 billion Hong Kong dollars. This was the second time the government cut its tertiary funding after a ten per cent decrease over three academic years since 1998.

Before the official announcement of the proposal for a further decrease in tertiary funding between 2001 and 2004, in August 1999, the rumour was out and being discussed for a while. Some university presidents expressed that their institutions would face serious financial difficulties if the government continued to reduce funding.

The decrease in tertiary funding was confirmed in the University Grants Committee's proposal announced in September 2000 but the rate of the cut was not yet decided. The UGC explained that the proposed cuts only reflected the deflation in Hong Kong after the Asian financial crisis. However, it seems that the overall policy direction delineated a year before the announcement by the then Secretary for Education and Manpower Bureau mirrored the reality. The Secretary

> called on tertiary institutions to be more resourceful when confronting the challenges that lie ahead…in the view of the budgetary constraints facing the public sector and the need to enhance the quality of basic education, we [the Education and Manpower Bureau] would expect the tertiary education sector to come up with innovative ways to do more with less resources and higher quality (*South China Morning Post*, 3-6-1999).

Responding immediately, the president of the Chinese University of Hong Kong expressed strong opposition to the proposed funding cuts. Despite the strong protest from the tertiary institutions, the Education and Manpower Bureau still proposed to cut tertiary funding up to 1.9 billion. Based on a funding method different from that used by the University Grants Committee, the funding cut proposed by the Education and Manpower Bureau was 1 billion

greater than that suggested by the UGC. The proposal was approved by the Executive Council but the legislators from the Democratic Party said that they objected to the proposal, and legislators from the then second largest political party, the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong, said they would not accept the proposal given the one billion increase.

Nevertheless the Education and Manpower Bureau presented the proposal to the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council for the first time in early February 2001 but later withdrew it due to the fierce opposition by legislators. The education panel of the Legislative Council invited presidents of all tertiary institutions to attend a special meeting during February 2001, but they all unanimously refused to attend. Instead, a discussion was held by the university heads themselves. The president of Lingnan University warned that if the Legislative Council endorsed the funding plan, Lingnan would have to face an 80 million deficit or initiate mass layoffs.

The Education and Manpower Bureau negotiated with the presidents before putting forward the funding plan at the second Legislative Council meeting and it seems that great pressure was exerted on the presidents from the Bureau to adjust their position. Just before the second Council meeting, all eight presidents dramatically changed their stance to support the government's proposal. The proposal was eventually passed in the Legislative Council in spite of strong appeals from students and university teaching staff, and the student unions accused the presidents of betraying the universities.

NEWS REPORTING AND THE POLICY PROCESS

As shown in Chart 5.1, coverage about tertiary funding (2001-2004) gained its momentum in September 2000 when the University Grants Committee expressed that it planned to cut funding to tertiary institutions in the new tri-annual term and mentioned its negotiation with the

government on the subject. The university presidents, however, did not express their strong opposition immediately. Therefore, in September and October, news coverage about the issue did not increase significantly. Fewer than ten relevant items were published in the four newspapers during these two months.

In November 2000, the Education and Manpower Bureau confirmed the proposed cuts of tertiary funding, and it was then that the presidents started to speak out publicly on the issue. This conflict made the issue more attractive to the media. The amount of coverage then increased moderately but dropped off again in December.

Press coverage of the issue dramatically increased in January 2001 because the conflict between the universities and the government was intensified by the Executive Council's approval of the proposed funding cut. There were more and stronger condemnation from the presidents. In addition, the financial committee of the Legislative Council scheduled to discuss and vote on the funding proposal in February 2001. Therefore, coverage of the issue between January and February focused on the dispute between the universities and the government and the response of the legislators from different parties while the media waited for the voting result of the funding proposal.

Coverage of the funding issue sharply increased and peaked in February 2001. However, this ebbed quickly after the government proposal was approved by the Legislative Council at the end of February. In March 2001, there was still a small amount of news items concerning the funding issue in relation to the debate of importing expatriate professionals, but there was no longer a focus as before.

PRESS COVERAGE OF THE UNIVERSITY FUNDING ISSUE

Compared to other three policy issues, the university funding was the least important one. Firstly, in quantitative terms, the university funding (2001 to 2004) was the smallest substantial

policy issue in this study. As shown in Table 5.1, a total of 182 news items, representing 13 per cent of all news items, is related to the funding issue, and these were collected from the four newspapers researched. By word count, this data accounted for 12 per cent of all news content examined in the analysis. In each of the four newspapers, the university funding was also the smallest issue (see Table 4.2).

Secondly, the coverage composition of the university funding issue was relatively simple and concentrated. Analysis found coverage of this issue was the only one not to make front page reportage or receive letters-to-the-editor (see Table 5.1). Also, of the 182 items about the funding issue, 81 per cent (148 items) were news reports and 19 per cent (27 items) were commentaries. This coverage composition is the most concentrated in the four cases. All other sets of data contain less news reports (about or less than 71 per cent) and more non-news articles (about and more than 30 percent) (see Table 4.4).

Individual Newspapers' Coverage

Comparing the size of coverage by the four newspapers, the ranking of the newspapers was largely the same as that found in the analysis of the instruction medium issue. As presented in Table 4.3, the *Ming Pao Daily News* provided the largest number of items and the *Oriental Daily News* had the smallest coverage. However, the difference between the newspapers was smaller in the case of university funding.

As for the composition of individual newspaper coverage, all papers had relatively simple and concentrated coverage. Firstly, there were no letters-to-the-editor about the funding issue (see Table 4.7 to 4.10). This suggested the public was apathetic on the issue. As the editor of the *Apple Daily* stated, compared to basic education, few people are concerned about tertiary education issues mainly because the number of university students is far less than that of primary and secondary students[34]; most people feel university funding is not relevant to them. In

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[34] Despite the expansion of tertiary education in 1980s and 90s, the number of tertiary students in Hong Kong is still

addition, the editor said, "The public has no sympathy for the universities. Most people consider the universities are wasteful in managing their resources."

Secondly, only the *South China Morning Post* wrote features about the funding issue. Four features were published by the *South China Morning Post*. This suggests the funding issue held greater importance to the *South China Morning Post* than to the Chinese newspapers. In her interview, the education editor of the *South China Morning Post* did identify the funding issue as one of the important educational issues in Hong Kong. She defined the issue of university funding as a part of the more general problem of education quality in Hong Kong. Noticeably, this view was different from that held by the editor of the *Apple Daily* and this was a result of having different parameters of news production. The *South China Morning Post*'s editor was in charge of a weekly education page targeting readers who are interested in education. She was also given great latitude to make her own decisions in news selection. Accordingly, she perceived issues from an educational point of view. Whereas the *Apple Daily*'s editor, who worked on a local news page targeting a broad range of readers, faced a more strict control of news selection in her organisation. As a result of this, she treated educational issues as simply local issues.

Finally, comparing the coverage of the funding issue with that for the instruction medium issue, coverage varied more significantly in the popular papers than in the elite papers. Although in absolute terms, coverage of the instruction medium issue is much larger than that for the university funding issue, the composition of the coverage of these two issues, in both the *Ming Pao Daily* and the *South China Morning Post*, was basically the same pattern in which news reports made up the largest part. News reports comprised slightly more than 73 per cent of the *Ming Pao Daily*'s coverage of the instruction medium issue, 58 per cent of the *South China Morning Post*'s coverage of the instruction medium issue, 88 per cent of the *Ming Pao Daily*'s coverage of the funding issue, and 86 per cent of the *South China Morning Post*'s coverage of

limited to 20 per cent of an age group.

87

the funding issue (see tables 4.7 and 4.9). Other types of articles comprised only a small proportion of the coverage by elite papers.

As for the popular press (see tables 4.8 and 4.10), both the *Apple Daily*'s and the *Oriental Daily*'s coverage of the instruction medium issue comprised approximately one third of news reports and two thirds of non-news articles but both newspapers' coverage of the funding issue comprised more than two thirds of news reports and less than one third of other types of articles. Interestingly, while the two popular papers' coverage of the instruction medium issue was about two to three times larger than their coverage of the funding issue, their news reports about the instruction medium was not significantly more than those about the funding issue. The *Apple Daily* had 38 about the funding issue and 51 news reports about the instruction medium issue. The *Oriental Daily* had 19 about the funding issue and only 22 about the instruction medium issue. This suggested that the popular press relied more on external sources for news content, such as letters and commentaries written by the public, in covering educational issues. On the one hand they do not have the imperative to fill up an education page as the elite papers do, and on the other hand they seem to have limited ability to increase their internal production of education news when necessary.

WHO SHAPED THE NEWS AGENDA OF THE UNIVERSITY FUNDING ISSUE

Of the news reports and features, although nineteen groups of news sources were found (see Table 5.2), a concentration of news sources is evident. In total, 627 statements, for both directly quoted and paraphrased, were recorded from 148 news reports and 4 features. The most frequently quoted group was the university presidents. Quotes attributed to the presidents (210 statements) accounted for approximately 34 per cent of all quotes, and a majority of these quotes, approximately 80 per cent, were paraphrased. The education authorities, which include the

Education and Manpower Bureau and the Education Department was the second mostly quoted source. Thirteen per cent (81 statements) of all quotes were attributed to the education authorities, and approximately 86 per cent of these quotes were paraphrased. The third mostly quoted source was the University Grants Committee, and 12 per cent (76 quoted) were attributable to the committee, 84 per cent of which were paraphrased.

Legislators also obtained a substantial amount of coverage. Quotes by legislators of all parties comprised about 13 per cent of all quotes, which is as large as the coverage from the education authorities. The legislators were newsworthy because the funding proposal needed to be approved by the Legislative Council.

Table 5.3 shows the grouping of regular and non-regular sources, with slightly more than a half of all quotes recorded from news reports and features being attributable to regular sources. Table 5.4 shows that when categorising news sources into advocates and arbiters, 98 per cent of quotes were attributable to the advocates. The coverage which highly concentrated on the advocates was not only because there were few people made comments on the funding issue but also because in this case scholars, who usually appeared in the news as arbiters, became advocates.

Table 5.5 sums up the results of the news source of commentaries in all newspapers. In summary, 27 articles were written by nine different groups of sources found in newspaper columns and opinion pages. A majority of the articles, 11 items, were written by the columnist of newspapers. Each of the other sources contributed little to the debate of the issue. The results indicated there was few people concerned about the funding issue.

Individual Newspapers' Use of Sources

When grouping the sources into regular and non-regular, it was found that the total percentages of regular sources quoted in each newspaper was in between 52 and 56 per cent (see Table 5.6).

When distinguishing the sources into advocates and arbiters, the concentration of news sources was much higher. In all the four newspapers the advocates occupied over 95 per cent of the coverage (see Table 5.8).

Not surprisingly, the university presidents gained the largest coverage, with 30 per cent or more of the statements from each newspaper being attributed to the presidents. Although the university presidents were not regular sources of news, in this particular case, as they were the prime decision makers of tertiary institutions, they became the media focus.

The second and third largest coverage were given to the education authorities and the University Grants Committee. These government bodies were all advocates of the funding cuts. Together they gained close to 30 per cent of the two elite papers' coverage, and approximately 25 per cent of the *Oriental Daily News*'s, but only about 17 per cent of *Apple Daily*'s coverage. It is evident that the powerful decision makers on the two sides of the funding debate dominated the media agenda of the funding issue. By and large the newspapers' coverage of the two sides were balanced except in the *Apple Daily*.

In the *Apple Daily*'s coverage, the Democrat legislators (19 quotes or 13 per cent), instead of the education authorities, were the second major source; 20 per cent of statements from the *Apple Daily* were attributed to legislators while only approximately 10 per cent of the statements from the *Ming Pao Daily News* and the *Oriental Daily News*, and 8 per cent of quotes from the *South China Morning Post* were attributed to legislators of different parties. As all newspapers have largely equal access to legislators, a possible explanation of this result is that the *Apple Daily* quoted legislators more frequently because the provocative language used by legislators to criticise the government was a preferable element of "interesting" stories that was highly valued by the *Apple Daily*. Another possible explanation was that in the *Apple Daily*, the reporting of the Legislative Council's debate on the funding issue was assigned to the reporters encamped with the Council, rather than to the education reporter. This arrangement would lead to the result

90

found because the reporters assigned to the Legislative Council tended to focus on the legislators' words and deeds.

As for the commentaries, 40 per cent of them were written by the columnist of the newspapers (see Table 5.10). The *Apple Daily* had the largest number of commentaries on the funding issue while the *South China Morning Post* had the least. The *Ming Pao Daily News* and the *Oriental Daily News* both had the same number of commentaries. Interestingly, the two elite papers had few articles written by members of the public while the two popular papers had none. As the absolute number of commentaries is small, however, the difference between the elite and the popular press might not seem significant.

ISSUE DEFINITION IN PRESS COVERAGE

In total, 61 news items published in the peak month were included in the analysis of the issue definition of the university funding issue (see Table 5.11), 18 per cent (11 articles) of the items were commentaries, and 82 per cent (50 articles) were news reports. 191 statements are recorded from the peak month news reports and 43 statements from the peak month commentaries (see tables 5.13 and 5.15). The coverage of the funding issue has a pattern same as that found in the case of the instruction medium issue. The popular press had more commentaries than the elite press while the latter had more news reports. The difference between the two types of newspapers is significant.

First of all, among the four policy issues in this study, the university funding and the instruction medium issues were the only two issues to be reported in the local politics pages of the Chinese newspapers (see Table 5.13). The funding issue was reported in the local politics page twelve times by the *Apple Daily*. The instruction medium issue was reported in the *Ming Pao Daily News*'s local politics page three times and on the *Apple Daily*'s once only. Reporting an issue in the local politics page suggests to the readers that the issue is political to a certain

extent by nature. In broad terms, it is difficult to argue that the funding issue is more political than the instruction medium issue or the other issues. Given there was only one newspaper which reported the funding issue in the local politics page, the issue was more frequently reported in local politics page because the issue involved the legislative process, and the *Apple Daily* assigned its reporters encamped in the Legislative Council to cover the funding issue. The government's funding proposal had to pass the Legislative Council. This formal political process could give the funding issue more of a flavour of politics. The legislative process gave the legislators a stage to act on and to gain publicity. As demonstrated on Chart 5.1, the media coverage of the issue was focused on the voting of the funding proposal. The voting and the interactions between the legislators, the education authorities and the university presidents before the voting became the focus of the peak month coverage of the issue in February 2001.

The funding issue involved a conflict mainly between the universities and the education authorities. The analysis found that the peak month coverage of the issue focused on the financial adverseness of the funding cuts. As shown in Table 5.13, in the news reports about the funding issue, "economic and financial effects of funding cut" (26 per cent) was the aspect which appeared the most. Within this aspect, "voluntary resignations and staff lay-offs", "freeze or reduce salary", "increase universities' financial burden or deficits" were themes referred to the most (see Table 5.14). Not surprisingly, the major advocates of these themes were the university presidents and staff, and the Democrat legislators also lent firm support to the universities.

The second aspect was the "effects of funding cut on the quality of education" (19 per cent), (see Table 5.13). University presidents and staff, student organisations and Democrat legislators strongly argued that the quality of education would deteriorate if there were funding cuts to tertiary education. It was demoralising for the tertiary institutions. As shown in Table 5.14, the overarching theme was the "deterioration of education quality" and had the highest

92

appearance in this aspect. All other themes of this aspect were elaborations of the overarching theme and gave it more substance.

The other three aspects which had the same size of coverage (12 per cent) were "criticism of the government", "values, principles and perceptions related to tertiary education" and "justification of funding cut" (see Table 5.13). The criticism mainly came from the legislators, especially the Democrats who severely condemned the government for using time pressure to threaten the universities, accusing it of insulting the university presidents and described the government as distrustful (see Table 5.14).

In the discursive debate of the "social values, principles and perceptions related to tertiary education", most of the coverage of this aspect was gained by the university presidents and legislators. They argued that compared to other developed countries or regions, the cost of tertiary education in Hong Kong was not high and stressed that "education is not business" and cutting university funding goes against long-term educational and economic development.

The education authorities and the University Grants Committee strived to justify the decision to cut funding by repeatedly emphasising that in 1996 the government and the tertiary institutions had already reached an agreement over the funding issue and there was a time limit to get the funding proposal through the legislative process (see Table 5.14 under 'Justifications of funding cut'). The government urged the universities to accept the proposal or the tertiary institutions would face serious financial problems if the proposal was not approved on time. An argument of "a better education does not need more money" was also put forward by the government to justify its position. Other than putting pressure on the universities, the government and the University Grants Committee also criticised the university presidents that they being were unreasonable and exaggerated the adverseness of the funding cuts. However, the government did not promote its arguments efficiently and the "justifications of funding cut" did not gain large media coverage (see Table 5.14).

In the non-news coverage, newspaper columnists wrote 8 of the 11 peak month commentaries. Hence, as shown in Table 5.15, they were the largest group of arbiters who commented on the funding issue. The advocates were not keen on writing articles to newspapers and there was obviously a lack of public input on the debate.

While the columnists discussed many aspects of the issue, they focused on the "social values, principles and perceptions related to tertiary education". As presented in Table 5.15, 28 per cent of all statements recorded from the peak month commentaries were related to this aspect. However, it was very likely that the discussion of the social values and principles of education was too broad and it therefore lost its focus. As shown in Table 5.16, none of the top five themes of the peak month commentaries was about social values, principles or perceptions related to tertiary education. The columnists condemned the government for ignoring students and staff of tertiary institutions and having excessive economic consideration. However, they were not completely in support of the university presidents, instead they criticised the presidents for turning to accept the funding cut at the last minute before the second meeting of the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council. In discussing the funding cuts, the quality of education and educational development in Hong Kong, the columnists joined the scholars and tertiary students to strongly agree that funding cuts contradicted Hong Kong's long-term educational and economic development and would lead to a deterioration in the quality of education.

Individual Newspapers' Issue Definitions

Comparing news coverage in the four newspapers, the "economic and financial effects of the funding cut" was the aspect referred to the most in all newspaper coverage (see Table 5.17). Apart from this, individual paper coverage was somewhat different and a common pattern was not found. The newspapers did not split along the popular/elite demarcation or with the language line.

Other than the economic effects, the *Ming Pao Daily*, which had the largest peak month coverage, also focused on the effects of funding cut on the quality of education, which was almost the same size as for the aspect of economic effects. The *Apple Daily* had a relatively comprehensive coverage of the issue. Other than economic effects and the education quality, "criticism of the government" and "justifications of the funding cut" were also stressed in the *Apple Daily*'s coverage. In the *Oriental Daily*'s coverage, the second largest aspect was the "justifications of the funding cut", and the third was the "effects of funding cut on the quality of education". The *South China Morning Post* gave the government and its critics the same space to present their arguments. The "criticism of the government" and the "justifications of the funding cut" had the same coverage on the *South China Morning Post*.

As for the commentaries, first of all, the *South China Morning Post* had no commentaries published in the peak month. Table 5.18 shows the commentaries in the two popular papers focused on the social values aspect, the "criticism of the government" and the "effects of funding cut on the quality of education". Commentaries in the *Ming Pao Daily News* mainly focused on the social value aspect and "the operation of funding mechanism".

As there were few authors who wrote on the funding issue, the newspapers might have little choice but to publish most of the articles they received. In turn, the differences between the commentaries in the *Ming Pao Daily News* and in the two popular papers was more likely due to the source's own choice rather than the newspapers' selection. In fact, the analysis found that the *Oriental Daily News* had six articles, all of them written by the paper's columnists; the *Apple Daily* had three commentaries, two of them written by the paper's columnists; and the *Ming Pao Daily News* had two articles published in its forum, one of them written by an academic and the author of the other article is unknown.

In conclusion, the newspaper coverage of the funding issue was dominated by the university presidents. If splitting the sources into two sides of the funding debate, the pro-

funding cut camp, including all related government bodies and the Liberal party, only had about 30 per cent of the news coverage of the issue. Overall, the coverage was negative on both the policy and the government.

Chapter 6   Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers

THE ISSUE AND THE STAKEHOLDERS

The Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers, the so-called benchmark test, was another controversial issue in the development of Hong Kong's education in the past few years (for convenience, the "benchmark assessment", "benchmark test" and "benchmark issue" will be used interchangeably to represent the issue).   Benchmarking teachers' language ability was considered one of the solutions for tackling the problem of declining language proficiency among Hong Kong students.   The concept of "benchmark" qualifications was first introduced in a government report of language proficiency in 1994.   Then after two rounds of consultation, which took four months, the policy of a compulsory benchmark test for teachers was suggested by the Education Commission.   The commission stated in its Report No. 6 that:

> The concept of benchmark qualifications for all language teachers should be explored by the Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualifications [the ACTEQ is a part of the Education Commission] with a view to making proposals to the Government as early as possible in 1996. Minimum language proficiency standards should be specified, which all teachers (not just teachers of language subjects) should meet before they obtain their initial professional qualification. The standards should be designed to ensure that new teachers are competent to teach through the chosen medium of instruction (*Education Commission Report No.* 6:11-12).

The concept of benchmarking was further established and has become a policy since 1997.   The policy was stated in the first policy address of the Chief Executive Officer of the Hong Kong Government:

- Set language benchmarks for all teachers in 1998-99;
- Require all new teachers to meet the benchmarks before they join the profession in 2000 (the start of an academic year is in September);

- Provide training for in-service language teachers, so that within five years of the benchmarks being set, all will be able to reach them; and
- Provide more teachers to support school library services and the Chinese and English Extensive Reading Schemes in primary school.

(1997 Policy Address)

The education community generally accepted the idea of benchmarking. The formation of the policy faced little resistance from teachers during the consultation period. However, the problem with the benchmark test was who should be benchmarking.

When the government put forward the detail measures of the policy that required all language teachers including in-service teachers to meet the benchmarks, it encountered strong opposition from the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union, many teachers and students of education. Teachers argued that requiring in-service teachers to sit the assessment negated their professional qualification. It was estimated that more than 14,000 English and 4,300 Putonghua teachers were affected.

In the meantime, the Hong Kong Institute of Education urged the Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualifications to consider giving exemption to the graduates of the two-year education diploma. The committee, however, responded that it was more important to test the diploma students in order to ensure the highest teaching level. The Education and Manpower Bureau added that considering the expectation of the public, instead of giving teachers a benchmark once they passed the assessment, there would be a plan to make teachers take the assessment on a regular basis, with exemption of some parts of the Putonghua test being granted to some teachers, but this could undermine the authority of the Institute of Education and the educational faculties of other universities.

As the government insisted on its decision, the president of the Professional Teachers' Union, who was also a member of the Democratic Party and represented education constituency in the Legislative Council, responded that the benchmark test "signifies the Education Department's distrust of language teachers and it will definitely hit their morale" (*South China*

Morning Post 25-5-2000). The union also called for a protest rally to boycott the "insulting" test. The pro-China teachers Federation of Education Workers reacted moderately: Instead of encouraging a boycott, it suggested that extra pay or a certificate be given to teachers who passed the test, and it urged the government to provide sufficient retraining for those who failed the test.

Parents and business groups were also actively involved in the benchmark test issue. Either by making public announcements or holding a public event, both parents and business organisations lent firm support to the government for the policy and strongly opposed the teachers' boycott of the benchmark test. They maintained that teachers should prove to the public that they are qualified. Teachers felt offended because it seemed that suddenly they became the sole criminal of the language proficiency problem.

Negotiation between the Professional Teachers' Union and the government continued. While the government insisted on the mandatory language benchmark test, it made some concessions to soften the resistance from teachers. The amendment included four measures: the first was to extend the deadline of new teacher benchmarking from one year to two years; the second related to new teachers in the academic year 2000—that they be considered as in-service teachers because the policy was announced in April 2000; the third measure was to postpone the first benchmark test from October 2000 to March 2001; and finally, to provide 725 additional positions of Director of English Language in primary schools which would be open to teachers who obtained the level four in the benchmark test.

However, the union's bottom-line was that the government should abolish the assessment and provide teachers with continuous training. The union continued to protest and was supported by six civic servant organisations. Their action provoked seven parent groups to hold a public event to express their opposition to teachers.

Nevertheless, the first benchmark assessment was held in March 2001 and the results were released in June. The results proved unsatisfactory. The teachers expressed that the content and

the format of the test was problematic, while they were blamed for being irresponsible. In August 2001, the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research, an advisory body related to the Education and Manpower Bureau, suggested setting up a general language ability test for all Hong Kong citizens as a reference for employment and enrolment in educational institutions. The suggestion was welcomed by the Professional Teachers' Union.

NEWS REPORTING AND POLICY PROCESS

Chart 6.1 shows the boom and burst of the news coverage of the benchmark test issue between March 1997 and August 2001. In March 1997, the Education and Manpower Bureau had announced a pilot scheme of the assessment to test teachers' language ability and their language teaching methods. It also established standards for benchmarking all language teachers, and the bureau planned to test three groups of teachers: primary teachers who use Chinese (Cantonese) as the instruction medium, primary Putonghua (mandarin) teachers and Form-1 (Year 7) to Form-3 (Year 9) English teachers. The Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualifications released the results of the trial test in September1999. The trial test of March 1997 had been given only a small coverage of less than ten stories about the event, and from April 1997 to March 2000, there was virtually no news about the issue.

The media started to pay attention to the issue again from April 2000 when the government created a confrontational atmosphere after restating its decision to hold the first benchmark assessment in October 2000 and requiring all in-service teachers to meet the benchmark by August 2005. The Professional Teachers' Union responded by calling for a series of actions against the policy. Then the coverage peaked in June 2000 because of the massive demonstrations lead by the Professional Teachers' Union. The protest drew around six thousand teachers and their supporters onto the street and naturally this became a media focus. In total, 84 news items published in June 2000 were collected from the four newspapers reviewed.

However, coverage of the benchmark issue dropped dramatically after the protest. Less than ten relevant items were found in the four newspapers in July 2000. In September 2000, the Professional Teachers' Union organised another protest and this time about five hundred teachers walked out onto the street. In the same month, the government released an amendment of the original measures after a negotiation with different education groups. These events boosted coverage of the issue again.

As said above, the first ever benchmark assessment for language teachers was held in March 2001. Media coverage of the assessment was moderate. The result of the benchmark test was released in June 2001 (48 items were published). As Hong Kong society was highly concerned about the performance of teachers, media coverage of the issue was intensified again but the coverage completely dropped off in July 2001.

PRESS COVERAGE OF THE BENCHMARK ASSESSMENT ISSUE

As organised in Table 6.1, in total 337 news items, which accounted for 24 per cent of all news items examined in this study, were about the benchmark issue. In terms of size, coverage of the benchmark issue was the second largest in the coverage of the four educational issues (see Table 4.2).

The 337 news items consisted of 67 per cent (226 items) of news reports and 33 per cent (111 items) of non-news items, including commentaries, letters-to-the-editor, editorials, and features (see Table 6.1). The level of concentration was higher than that of the coverage of the instruction medium issue but lower than coverage of the university funding issue and about the same for the school placement issue. There were four front-page reports about the benchmark test, which was less than for the instruction medium and the school placement issue as each of these were given seven front-page reports.

Individual Newspapers' Coverage

The benchmark issue was the second most important issue (measured by size and composition of coverage) in both the *Ming Pao Daily* and the *Apple Daily*. The coverage of the benchmark issue was the second largest of the four issues in the two newspapers. Twenty seven per cent of each of the two papers' coverage was given to the issue (see Table 4.2). Comparing the composition of news coverage of the educational issues also indicated that the benchmark assessment was the second most important issue in the *Ming Pao Daily News* and the *Apple Daily*. Sixty nine per cent of The *Ming Pao Daily News*'s coverage of the benchmark assessment consisted of news reports (see Table 4.7). This was slightly less concentrated than the paper's coverage of the instruction medium issue. However, the *Ming Pao Daily News*'s coverage of the benchmark issue did not contain any features.

The *Apple Daily*'s coverage consisted of approximately 53 per cent of news reports (see Table 4.8). This was obviously less concentrated than the *Apple Daily*'s coverage of the university funding issue but more concentrated than its coverage of the instruction medium issue.

In the *South China Morning Post*, the benchmark issue ranked third by both size and composition of coverage (see Table 4.2 and 4.9). 18 per cent of all *South China Morning Post*'s items were about the benchmark issue. 80 per cent of the coverage were news reports.

The *Oriental Daily News* was notably different to the other three newspapers. The *Oriental Daily News*'s coverage of the benchmark test issue only comprised 12 per cent of all news items collected from the paper (see Table 4.2). The composition of this coverage was the simplest compared to the paper's other coverage. This was because there was no news coverage in the *Oriental Daily News* of the teachers union protest in June 2000 found. The paper only covered the amendment of the policy, the first benchmark assessment and the release of the results.

It is very unusual that one of the two largest newspapers did not cover an important event such as the union protest. The most likely explanation is a possible problem with the database itself, as the search procedures worked well with all the other papers. In order to ensure that there were no errors in the coding process, such as unintentionally filtering out relevant items, all the original electronic files downloaded from the database containing news items about the benchmark assessment issue were screened at least twice, which confirmed that there were no such item published in the *Oriental Daily News* in June 2000. Another possibility was that inappropriate keywords were used in searching the database. This, however, was not the case in this research. As mentioned in the methodology section, a reading of the relevant news items had been done prior to the search to ensure that the keywords were the most common terms. In addition, the same set of keywords matched items found in the other two Chinese papers and the *Oriental Daily News* outside the period of June 2000. It is reasonable to believe that there were technical problems within the database system during the searching process, but as it was not feasible to do the data collection for a second time, the analysis could only be based on the original set of data.

A division between the popular and elite press in coverage composition also found in the newspapers' coverage of the benchmark test but it was not as significant as in the case of the instruction medium. Excluding the *Oriental Daily News*, as for that of the instruction medium, in relative terms the *Apple Daily* had fewer news reports and more commentaries than the elite press. In the *Apple Daily*, non-news articles, including commentaries, editorials and letters-to-the-editor together, comprised approximately 48 per cent of its coverage of the benchmark issue (see Table 4.8). Non-news articles accounted for about 30 per cent of the *Ming Pao Daily News*'s coverage and about 20 per cent of the *South China Morning Post*'s coverage of the issue (see Table 4.7 and Common Table 4.9). The difference between the popular and elite press was smaller in this case.

WHO SHAPED THE NEWS AGENDA OF THE BENCHMARK ASSESSMENT ISSUE

There were 21 groups of news sources found in the news reports and features about the benchmark assessment issue. In total 960 statements were recorded from 226 news reports and the only one feature. The two most frequently quoted sources were "teachers and teacher organisations" led by the Professional Teachers' Union and the "education authorities", including the Education and Manpower Bureau and the Education Department. As shown in Table 6.2, teachers obtained about 39 per cent of the news coverage and the education authorities about 34 per cent. Together, they occupied about 73 per cent of the news reports and features.

As shown in the tables 6.3, approximately 90 per cent of the statements were attributed to regular sources. Table 6.4 presents the grouping of advocates and arbiters. About 88 per cent of the total 960 statements are attributable to the advocates. The regular sources and the advocates were largely the same groups of organisations and

individuals. Among the arbiters, "scholars and experts" and the "universities" consisted the largest two groups. However, quotes of these two groups accounted for only about 7 per cent of all the statements.

As for commentaries and letters-to-the-editor, the analysis found that the public was highly concerned about the benchmark issue. In total, 82 commentaries in newspaper forums and opinion pages, and 16 letters were collected. Members of the public wrote 19 commentaries, which accounted for approximately 23 per cent of all the commentaries, and 11 letters, which comprised about 69 per cent of all the letters. In this group of items, about 31 per cent were provided by individuals, thus indicating that the public were highly concerned with the benchmark issue. The second largest source of non-news content were by scholars and they wrote 23, the largest number of commentaries about the benchmark issue. In total, their articles

comprised 25 per cent of this group of content. Newspaper columnists were also a main source of commentaries and they wrote 17 articles about the issue.

Individual Newspapers' Use of Sources

The results of a comparison of news sources quoted in news reports and features in each newspaper have been organised in tables 6.6 to 6.9.

It was no surprise that two advocates who were also regular sources, "teachers and teacher organisations" and "education authorities", were the two most frequently quoted sources in all newspapers. On the *Ming Pao Daily*, the *South China Morning Post* and the *Apple Daily*, the teachers gained slightly more coverage than the education authorities. For example, 42 per cent of the statements recorded from the *Ming Pao Daily News* were attributed to teacher organisations and individual teachers and about 36 per cent of the *Ming Pao Daily News*'s quotes were attributed to the education authorities (see Table 6.6). The other two newspapers' figures are very close to that of the *Ming Pao Daily*. On the *Oriental Daily*, the education authorities gained more coverage than the teachers.

The *Apple Daily*, which had the most imbalanced treatment of major news sources in its coverage of the instruction medium and the university funding issues, produced the most balanced coverage of the two sides in the conflict over the benchmark issue.

As for the sources of commentaries and letters-to-the-editor (see Table 6.10), the main source of commentaries for the two elite papers was from scholars and members of the public. The *Apple Daily*, although it had a large number of articles, was more dependent on its own columnists to provide commentaries, and it seemed that relatively less scholars wrote in to the *Apple Daily*.

ISSUE DEFINITION IN PRESS COVERAGE

Coverage of the benchmark assessment issue reached its peak in June 2000. As shown in Table 6.11, in the peak month, a total of 84 relevant news items were published in the three newspapers. The peak month coverage consisted of 62 per cent news reports (52 items), about 34.5 per cent of commentaries (29 items), and approximately 4 per cent editorials (3 items). As for coverage by individual newspapers, as found in the other cases about pre-tertiary educational issues, the popular press had a relatively larger proportion of non-news articles in their peak month coverage, and the more popular the issue, the larger the number of non-news articles.

There were in total 122 relevant statements recorded from the peak month news reports and features and 85 statements from commentaries and editorials. In total 65 themes was coded and regrouped into 11 aspects, as shown in Table 6.12. In the peak month, the anti-benchmark camp occupied the majority of news coverage of the benchmark issue. Three groups, including the Professional Teachers' Union, some individual education professionals, and the Democrat legislators, together had 65 per cent strong of the peak month coverage (Table 6.12). The pro-benchmark camp, led by the government and supported by parents, students and business groups, obtained 30 per cent of the peak month coverage.

The debate of the benchmark assessment issue focused on three aspects, the "anti-benchmark", "policy substance", and the "policy alternatives". Coverage about these three aspects comprised almost 60 per cent of the peak month coverage of the benchmark issue. These aspects were strongly promoted by the Professional Teachers' Union and other individual educators. It was evident that the union was very effective in gaining news coverage. Coverage of the Professional Teachers' Union and other individual education professionals together accounted for 48 per cent of the peak month coverage, which was a result of the massive teacher protest. The event boosted the coverage of the union and individual representatives of the union who were also were legislators. These powerful and well-organised sources put forward their

arguments effectively. Hence, unlike the coverage of the instruction medium issue, which was full of emotion, coverage of the benchmark issue had more substance.

The union and other individual teachers stressed that the benchmark test was an insult to teachers. The "insult" theme was the second most common theme in the peak month coverage. Teachers also argued that the compulsory assessment was not only putting more pressure and workload on teachers' shoulders, but it was also demoralising and was not effective in improving the education quality and ensuring a high language standard (see Table 6.13).

Other than criticising the policy and the government and expressing their emotions, the teachers' union, as an organisational actor, did make a great deal of rational comments on "substance" of the proposed policy and put forward their "alternatives". The union emphasised that the benchmark assessment in fact denied or de-legitimatised current tertiary education and professional teaching qualifications; the policy was also unfair to student teachers. The union required an exemption for in-service teachers and future teachers who held a degree in language subjects. Facing strong opposition, the government relented and negotiated with the union on exemption criteria. The union put forward their suggestions of policy alternatives. They requested a total abolition of the benchmark test and instead advised the government to develop a comprehensive continuous training and assessment system for teachers.

The government contended that an assessment was necessary as a choice for teachers to meet the benchmark and as an objective quality indicator of language teachers. Parents, students and business groups all supported the benchmark assessment and considered a compulsory test an effective means for maintaining and improving teaching quality.

As the thrust of the coverage was driven by the protest, the protest itself also became part of the debate. As a response to the benchmark policy, the teachers' protest was questioned by other stakeholders, particularly the parent groups. The education professionals were also not united on this matter. While the Professional Teachers' Union and some teachers were in favour

of the protest and suggested that it be a universal rights for all citizens, the pro-China Federation of Education Workers, some teacher groups, such as the Education Convergence, and the Hong Kong Institute of Education were cautious about the protest and worried that it might damage the social image of teachers. Parent and business groups condemned the action, saying that teachers were thus a bad example to their students.

In total 85 relevant statements were recorded from commentaries and editorials in the peak month. As shown in Table 6.14, individual education professionals and scholars contributed the majority of commentaries and each of these two groups had about 20 per cent of the peak month coverage. In the commentaries and editorials, the most arguable aspect was who was responsible for the language problem. Some scholars and columnists did support the teachers and argued that the teaching quality is not the only reason of the decline of language ability in students. This in fact was the most common theme in the peak month commentaries (see Table 6.15). Scholars also contended the idea that benchmarking reflects and follows the business doctrine of standardisation, so treating education as a value-added process that needs quality control. Teachers who wrote to the newspapers argued that the government was shifting responsibility and defended their protest action, while parent groups condemned teachers for being a bad example to students. In some newspaper editorials, writers supported the teachers' proposal that, instead of the compulsory benchmark assessment, a comprehensive continuous training and assessment system be required. Discussion about this idea was one of the five most common themes in the commentaries.

Interestingly, the policy process was focused on in some commentaries and editorials. Themes regarding the policy process and criticism of the government were also among the five most common themes (see Table 6.15). The government was mainly condemned by scholars, columnists and teachers for its authoritarian and bureaucratic attitudes. The question about the

government's legitimacy was also raised. Some newspaper editorials urged the government to engage with teachers and the public in developing a teacher training policy for the future.

Individual Newspapers' Issue Definitions

The newspapers' peak month coverage of the benchmark issue was similar in having the same first three aspects, the "anti-benchmark assessment", the "policy substance" and the "policy alternatives", but with different emphasis (see Table 6.16). The three main aspects comprised approximately 60 per cent of each newspaper's peak month coverage.

In the *Ming Pao Daily*, the most prominent aspect was "policy substance", whereas, in the *Apple Daily*, the "anti-benchmark assessment" was given the largest coverage. The *South China Morning Post* emphasised more on policy alternatives.

In the peak month, a majority of commentaries and editorials were published by the two Chinese newspapers (Table 6.17). There was only one editorial found in the *South China Morning Post*'s peak month coverage.

One of the focuses of the commentaries found in the *Ming Pao Daily News* and the *Apple Daily* was the question about who should be held responsible for the language problem in Hong Kong students (Table 6.17). Apart from that, in *Ming Pao Daily News*'s articles, writers (mainly scholars and the public) also focused on the protest itself, the *Apple Daily*'s writers (mainly the public and the paper's own columnists) charted the "anti-benchmark assessment" aspect. Some columnists were sceptical about how effective the policy would be to improve the standard of teaching. In its editorial, the *South China Morning Post* expressed that the paper supported the idea of benchmarking in general and suggested the benchmark assessment should be considered as a professional recognition.

Chapter 7   Sexual Discrimination in the School Place Allocation System

THE ISSUE AND THE STAKEHOLDERS

The issue to be examined in this chapter is about sexual discrimination in the Secondary School Places Allocation System ("school placement" will be used to label this issue). In Hong Kong, children are allocated a Form-1 (Year 7) place through the Secondary School Places Allocation System after six years of primary level education. The system, however, systematically discriminated against female students. The news coverage which covered the start of the issue and the later development of a legal battle between the education authority and the Equal Opportunities Commission who finalised the issue will be analysed.

The allocation system has been running since 1978. In the system, all primary students are classified into five bands, from band-one to band-five. Band-one students are those who have the highest academic merit and band-five students are those who have the lowest. The banding is based on exam results of a centrally administered Academic Aptitude Test and the results of examinations within schools. In the allocation process, students have to submit a list of preferred schools, and the system matches students with their choice of schools based on the students' academic merits. Before the "freedom of information laws" were enacted in 1998, banding information was not revealed to students. The Education Department only informed students about which schools they were allocated. However, under the news laws, the Education Department had to reveal the banding information and this triggered the sexual discrimination issue.

In 1998, some parents discovered that, while their children were not allocated a place in their preferred schools, their classmates entered the schools with lower banding scores. Hence, they believed their children were unfairly treated in the allocation system and they made complaints to the Equal Opportunities Commission. Responding to that, the commission launched an investigation in August 1998 and released the result a year later.

The Equal Opportunities Commission declared that the allocation system was indeed discriminatory and favoured male students. The investigation discovered more boys than girls had been admitted to their first three choices of school during 1996 to 1998, and the 1998 allocation results showed that girls in eleven out of eighteen school districts needed a higher score than boys to get into top-ranked schools, but in seven other districts, boys needed higher marks than girls.

Under mounting pressure from the public and the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Education Department admitted that some practices[35] in the allocation system might be violating the Sex Discrimination Ordinance. However, it defended the use of the long-standing and complex banding method. The Education Department explained that girls consistently perform better than boys in school exams and as school examination results are an important element of the banding system, the different academic performance between the two genders have to be taken into account in the allocation method in order to ensure the overall fairness of the education system.

Despite the Equal Opportunities Commission repeatedly and publicly requesting a revision of the system, the Education Department apparently did not want to make any changes in the short-term because it planned to abolish the Academic Aptitude Test[36] and the Secondary School

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[35] There were three long-standing practices which were deemed discriminatory by the Equal Opportunities Commission investigation report. Firstly, "boys and girls are separated in the banding process, resulting in different scores dividing the bands which determine what secondary schools they will attend"; secondly, "boys and girls in the same school have their final grades allocated separately and are ranked within their sex" group; and thirdly, "co-education schools are required to admit a fixed proportion of boys and girls, regardless of academic results" (*SCMP* 6/7/2000).

[36] The Academic Aptitude Test was abolished from 2001.

Places Allocation System in two to three years time. Instead of making any modification to the system, the Education Department sought an exemption of the use of the Sex Discrimination Ordinance to oppose the system by defining those accused practices as special measures. Responding to that, the Equal Opportunities Commission launched a lawsuit against the Education Department in July 2000 to seek a judicial review of the allocation system. About a year later in June 2001 the High Court ruled that the allocation system was biased against girls.

Under these circumstances, the Education Department anticipated that the verdict would cause a flood of appeals by parents who were unsatisfied with the 2001 allocation result. The education community strongly suggested reallocating all form-one students by processing boys and girls together. The Education Department, however, decided to set up an appeal mechanism as a temporary measure to accept appeals and to reallocate those students whose appeals were successful. This created a situation which was described by the media and the education community as chaos. By the end of July 2001, 3,001 out of 7,722 appeal cases were successful. There were, however, limited places available. Thus, the Education Department assigned a random number to each of those 3,001 students and eventually 2,261 students were given places in their preferred schools. The other 740 students whose random number came at the bottom of the priority order were not reallocated, and this raised further grievance among those students and their parents. Some of them planned to resort to legal action through the Equal Opportunities Commission. In addition, the Office of the Ombudsman launched a direct investigation into the failure of the Education Department to rectify the problem in the allocation system.

To ease the tension, the Education Department eventually required twelve schools to add extra classes to accommodate all students. Even though those schools were given two extra teachers and money for renovations, some classes still had no permanent classroom or they took place in small temporary classrooms.

NEWS REPORTING AND POLICY PROCESS

Chart 7.1 showed the shifting of intensity of news coverage about the school placement issue. As mentioned above, the Equal Opportunities Commission launched an investigation of the allocation system in August 1998. However, as can be seen in the chart, there was almost no news coverage about this event. The investigation was clearly not considered an event worth covering, and also the investigation report was not yet released (it was in August 1999). Despite the report confirming there was sexual discrimination in the allocation system, the school placement issue had not become a media focus. Only about 20 stories about the report were published in the four newspapers.

The lawsuit filed by the Equal Opportunities Commission against the Education Department was a turning point in the development of the issue. However, similarly to the investigation, it did not catch media attention. As shown in the chart, only about 10 stories about the launch of the lawsuit were published. The issue was being watched but it received little media attention until the High Court pronounced its verdict, which it did in June 2001, only a month before the release of the 2001 allocation results. Hence, the event intensified the coverage of the school placement issue. The media focused on the release of the allocation results and how the government responded to the High Court decision. Coverage of the issue peaked in July 2001. There were 91 news items collected from the four newspapers in July 2001; they accounted for about 42 per cent of the total coverage of the issue. Thereafter, coverage of the school placement declined dramatically in August 2001 as the appeals were settled.

PRESS COVERAGE OF THE SCHOOL PLACEMENT ISSUE

In total 218 news items related to the school placement issue were collected from the four newspapers (see Table 7.1), which comprised almost 16 per cent of all news items. In terms of

word count, coverage of the school placement issue also accounted for approximately 16 per cent of all news coverage examined in this study. In quantitative terms, the school placement issue ranked third in the four cases in this research (see Table 4.2).

As for the composition of the coverage about the school placement issue, the pattern was similar to that found in the coverage of the benchmark assessment issue. Coverage consisted of all five types of articles. Close to 70 per cent of the items were news reports and the remaining 30 per cent were non-news-report items. This pattern was similar to the coverage of the benchmark assessment issue. As for front-page reports, the school placement issue made the front pages seven times, which was greater than that given to the benchmark issue.

Although the coverage composition of the school placement and the benchmark issues were also close, the coverage of the school placement coverage was notably smaller than that of the benchmark issue (see tables 4.4 and 4.5). The results suggest that the school placement issue was less newsworthy than the benchmark assessment issue.

Individual Newspapers' Coverage

As shown in Table 4.2, in the *Ming Pao Daily*, the *Apple Daily* and the *South China Morning Post*, the school placement issue ranked third by size (word count).

As for the composition of the newspapers' coverage of the school placement issue, the *Ming Pao Daily*'s coverage consisted of 75 per cent of news reports (see Table 4.7). Comparing to the paper's coverage of other issue, this level of concentration fell in the middle. The overall pattern was similar to that found for the coverage of the university funding.

The *Apple Daily*'s coverage included 66 per cent of news reports (see Table 4.8). This was greater than its coverage of the benchmark assessment issue but obviously less than the paper's university funding coverage.

The composition of the *South China Morning Post*'s coverage of the school placement was similar to the paper's coverage of the benchmark test issue. The paper's school placement coverage accounted for 19 per cent of the paper's total word count (see Table 4.2), consisted of all types of articles, and 74 per cent of the were news reports (see Table 4.9). The results suggest that the *South China Morning Post* considered this issue as important as the benchmark test issue.

In the *Oriental Daily,* the coverage of the school placement issue (30 per cent of the *Oriental Daily*'s total word count) was smaller than the paper's coverage of the instruction medium issue but significantly larger than that of the university funding issue. The school placement issue accounted for 30 per cent (word count) of its total coverage (see Table 4.2).

WHO SHAPED THE NEWS AGENDA OF THE SCHOOL PLACEMENT ISSUE

There were 13 groups of news sources found in the news reports and features about the school placement issue (see Table 7.2). A total of 990 statements were recorded from 152 news reports and 3 features. The two most frequently quoted sources were the "education authorities", that is the Education and Manpower Bureau and the Education Department, and the Equal Opportunities Commission. The treatment of these two sources by the newspapers was quite balanced, with 31 per cent (309 quotes) of the total coverage of school placement issue being attributed to the education authorities and 27 per cent (263 statements) to the Equal Opportunities Commission, and about 88 per cent of all these statements were paraphrased. The two sources together occupied about 58 per cent of the news reports and features.

When the data was regrouped by adopting the typologies to the news sources, the analysis found 85 per cent of the statements were attributed to regular sources (see Table 7.3). Table 7.4

presents the grouping of advocates and arbiters: about 91 per cent of all recorded statements were attributed to the advocates.

As shown in Table 7.4, it can be seen that the legal professionals, as arbiters, were quoted more than the scholars. The legal professionals were not quoted in the coverage of other issues. Journalists selected them because the focus of the school placement issue was the court case. The legal professionals were not only asked to comment on the lawsuit but also to give suggestions to parents.

As shown in Table 7.5, columnists and scholars contributed the most commentaries, with each of these two sources writing more than 20 per cent of the commentaries. Unlike for the instruction medium and the benchmark issues about which the public showed strong concern, the public was less interested in the school placement issue. Members of the public contributed 12 per cent (or 6 articles) of all non-news articles.

Individual Newspapers' Use of Sources

The analysis found that three Chinese newspapers gave the education authorities and the Equal Opportunities Commission a largely equal share of news coverage, while in the *South China Morning Post* the education authorities were given much larger coverage than the Equal Opportunities Commission. Table 7.6 shows statements by the education authorities and the Equal Opportunities Commission respectively comprised around 30 per cent of each Chinese newspaper's total coverage of the school placement issue. As for the *South China Morning Post*, the education authorities received 43 per cent (112 quotes) of its coverage, while the Equal Opportunities Commission only received 29 per cent (74 quotes).

In this case, the characteristics of the major advocates were different from those in the other three cases where the two major sources were the government and a non-government source. Regarding the school placement issue, the two major advocates were government-

related bodies. This could explain the balanced coverage of the two sources, as they could have the same access to the media and addressed the media in a same manner.

With the use of arbiters, all newspapers had quoted legal professionals, particularly in the *Apple Daily* where 15 of its 16 quotes were from legal professionals.

As for authors of commentaries and letters-to-the-editor, most articles in the elite papers were written by scholars, columnists, and members of the public (see Table 7.10). This basically repeats the pattern found in the previous cases. The *Oriental Daily* very much relied on its own columnists, with 10 of its 13 non-news articles being written by columnists. The *Apple Daily* also had very few articles from the public. So the results suggest that readers of the popular press were generally not interested in the school placement issue.

ISSUE DEFINITION IN PRESS COVERAGE

Coverage of the school placement issue peaked in July 2001. As shown by Table 7.11, a total of 91 peak month items were collected from the four newspapers. The peak month coverage consisted of approximately 75 per cent of news reports (68 items), about 19 per cent of commentaries (17 items), approximately 4 per cent of editorials (4 items), one letters-to-the-editor, and one feature written by the *South China Morning Post*. As for coverage of individual newspapers, similar to the pattern found for the coverage of pre-tertiary education, the popular press had a relatively larger proportion of non-news articles in their peak month coverage.

In total 144 statements related to 56 themes were recorded from the peak month news reports and features. The themes were regrouped into seven aspects as shown in Table 7.12.

The peak month coverage of the school placement issue was more about technical than social values or ethical issues. The most prominent aspect of the peak month coverage was the "appealing and reallocation mechanism" which occupied almost 40 per cent of news and features in the peak month. In addition, "suggestions for parents" made by different groups in relation to

the appeals process comprised approximately 14 per cent of the coverage. Altogether, the content related to the appealing and reallocation process accounted for almost 54 per cent of the news and features in the peak month. Among the news sources, the analysis also found (Table 7.12, continued) the government gained the largest coverage in the peak month where it was given 35 per cent of the coverage. In the whole coverage of the school placement issue, the Equal Opportunities Commission was the second most frequently quoted source, but statements attributed to the commission only accounted for about 13 per cent of all recorded statements from the peak month coverage.

Parents and students, who were waiting for the release of the allocation results and hoping for a fair resolution to be implemented immediately, were highly concerned about how the government would respond to the High Court verdict, what would be its plan and how it would operate. As a result of this, the peak month coverage focused on the operational issue. More than a half of the 51 quotes attributed to the government related to the appealing and reallocation mechanism (see Table 7.12) and a large part of what the government said in relation to the appeals process was about how the mechanism would operate (see Table 7.13). Apart from the operation of the appealing and reallocation process, before the release of the allocation results and the start of the appeals process, the government also projected the results of the reallocation and warned parents and students that there was "not enough places for reallocation; the possibility to change school successfully is low". Schools were also aware about this situation. With regard to the appeals process, the Equal Opportunities Commission, which led the debate on the issue, had little to say at this stage except telling parents and students that it would offer to help by accepting complaints about the appeals process.

The government tried to "persuade parents to accept allocation results" but the Equal Opportunities Commission and some legal professionals argued that parents had the right to resort to legal action (see Table 7.13, note 4). "Suggestions for parents" who were confused by

the government's arrangement were offered by different sources who were sought out by journalists. The government and schools urged parents to "think carefully and not to lodge an appeal just for luck". The government also joined others, including social workers, scholars and teachers groups, to suggest that parents should take into account "the psychological effects made by the appeals on students".

Apart from the appeals process and the reallocation, the allocation system itself also became an important part of the peak month coverage of the school placement issue. As shown in Table 7.12, coverage about the allocation system comprised approximately 15 per cent of the news coverage and was the second aspect of the peak month news and features. Reading the content about the allocation system, one could have a strong impression that a vast majority of parents and students condemned the allocation as "unfair". The government replied that the allocation method would be totally changed in 2002.

The media closely watched the release of the allocation results and how the appeal mechanism worked. Teachers and parent organisation urged the government to reallocate all Form-1 students in 2001 but the government refused to do so. The appeal mechanism started but the process was not smooth. The Professional Teachers Union and other education groups described the situation as chaotic and resulted from the government's maladministration. The union also criticised the government as incompetent. Not surprisingly, the government defended its position, saying the situation was hardly chaotic. Whether it was or wasn't may not be worth arguing, but the wrath of the parents and students was real enough and they spoke out against the system's injustice by flooding the Education Department with more than seven thousand appealing and reallocation applications.

Forty-eight relevant statements were recorded from commentaries, letters-to-the-editor and editorials in the peak month. From Table 7.14, it can be seen that 35 per cent of the statements in non-news articles were recorded from newspaper editorials. The editorials played a vital part

in interpreting the school placement issue. Besides, columnists and scholars were the two other largest groups of writers who contributed to the discussion of the issue.

Unlike the non-news articles about the other three issues, which focused on social values and ethical issues associated to those issues, the non-news articles about the school placement focused on practical problems. Comments about the "allocation system" (25 per cent) consisted the largest aspect of the non-news content, which included discussion about the allocation method and the effect of reducing banding categories. Writers also suggested a comprehensive review of the allocation system. However, this aspect did not contain the strongest theme. The strongest single theme was the suggestion made by newspaper editorials, columnists and scholars that the psychological impact of the appeals process on students should be taken into account when parents decided to lodge an application for an appeal and reallocation, with 5 out of the 48 quotes relating to this theme (see Table 7.15).

The release of the 2001 allocation result was the second largest part of the non-news report content. Newspaper editorials described the situation as chaotic after the release of the allocation result and the start of the appealing mechanism, but instead of accusing the government of maladministration, the newspaper editorials, columnists and scholars recognised that the chaos was created by the reduction of banding categories and they described it as a kind of egalitarianism and communism (negative usage). Regarding the appeal mechanism, some legislators and the Professional Teachers Union made their point that the mechanism was illegal. However, the government insisted on its decision and refused to reallocate all students.

Individual Newspapers' Issue Definitions

The peak month coverage of the school placement issue in different newspapers was largely the same. The dominant aspect in each newspaper's coverage was the "appealing and reallocation mechanism". In the *Apple Daily*, content related to the appealing and reallocation mechanism

comprised 29 per cent of its peak month coverage. In all other newspapers, this aspect accounted for more than 40 per cent of their peak month coverage (see Table 7.16).

The other two aspects, the "allocation system" and "suggestions for parents", were either the second or the third most reported aspects in all newspaper coverage. In absolute terms, the actual coverage size of each of the two aspects was very close. The newspapers, whether elite or popular, Chinese or English, had largely the same coverage about the school placement issue.

With regard to the non-news articles about the school placement issue, the newspapers were split along the readership line. Both the *Ming Pao Daily* and the *South China Morning Post* had published only three articles in the peak month while the *Apple Daily* had ten and the *Oriental Daily* had seven (see Table 7.11). Also, each of the two popular papers provided around 40 per cent of all statements from non-news articles (see Table 7.17).

The difference between the two types of newspapers was not only significant in volume but also in content. The non-news articles in the elite press only cover three aspects of the school placement issue: the "allocation system", the " 2001 allocation result" and "suggestions for parents". The content of the articles in the popular press cover six aspects but emphasised three main ones. Discussion about the allocation system itself was focused on in the articles and popular papers) were interested in commentating on the situation raised by the release of the 2001 allocation result and made suggestions for parents with regard to the appeals process.

Chapter 8   Conclusion

Comparing the amount of news reports and non-news articles given to each of the four educational issues, it was clear that the instruction medium issue (333 news reports and 250 non-news articles) is the most newsworthy one (see Table 4.4). This issue was not only considered the most important by the press but also attracted the most public attention. Table 4.5 shows the instruction medium has the largest number of commentaries (149 articles) and letters-to-the-editor (62 articles). The second most newsworthy issue was the benchmark assessment issue, followed by the school placement issue, and finally the university funding issue.

When charting the criteria for news selection, the deputy news editor of the *Apple Daily* said,

> The "scope of impact" is an important consideration. The larger the number of people is affected by an event, the more coverage will be given to it. That's why we cover more primary and secondary education than tertiary education.

The above quote explains why the policy of the instruction medium was the most significant issue and why the university funding issue received the smallest coverage. The impact of the policy of compulsory mother-tongue teaching was more far-reaching to the public than all other policies. Almost the whole population of secondary students and their families were affected. Compared to that, the university funding issue was obviously much less important, as the number of tertiary students is much smaller than that of the pre-tertiary students. The benchmark test issue was very important to the teachers. Although it also affected students, the impact was not as direct as for the instruction medium policy. The sex discrimination in the school placement system was also an issue related to primary and secondary education. However, only a small number of Form-1 intake students were affected by the change of the system in 2001.

NEWS COVERAGE AND POLICY PROCESS

Where in the policy process media does coverage occur? The content analysis found press coverage of education policy issues was more concentrated in the last two stages of the policy process, the construction and implementation phases (Bhatia, 1997), although coverage also occurred in the consultation phase, as in the coverage of the instruction medium issue. Beyond that, the intensity of news coverage of education policies shifted during the policy process.

In the case of the instruction medium issue, the coverage increased moderately in the consultation phase and boomed in the implementation stage; then shrunk sharply after the release of the list of English-medium schools (see Chart 4.1). The coverage of the university funding issue peaked at the construction stage but with virtually no coverage before and after that (see Chart 5.1). In the coverage of the benchmark assessment issue, the intensity of press coverage shifted several times between the consolidation and the implementation phase (see Chart 6.1). Although the implementation of the benchmark test had quite substantial coverage, the coverage was concentrated on the teachers' protest which occurred during the construction phase of the policy process.

The school placement issue did not go through a normal policy cycle. In the sense that it was unexpected by the government and the society, the evolution of the issue did not follow a normal policy process; it was a disturbance for the government administration rather than a policy issue. In spite of that, the issue did go through a process in which a problem was identified and a decision was made for solving it. The coverage of the school placement issue started with the investigation of the allocation system that could be considered as the conceptualisation phase. The coverage in that stage was quite small. There was virtually no coverage between the investigation and the pronouncement of the High Court verdict. The pronouncement of the verdict was not given a large amount of coverage; rather, it was concentrated around the release of the 2001 allocation results and the appeal process.

123

The concentration of news coverage in the last two phases has two main explanations. Firstly, tensions and conflicts do not normally occur in the early stages of the policy process as typically policy issues are then still not clearly defined, and there is still a great deal of latitude for different parties to act and negotiate. Secondly, the lack of immediate impact on the public makes events in the early stages, such as a release of a public consultation paper, not newsworthy.

The shifting of the intensity of news coverage indicated that media coverage was not fundamentally driven by the policy process but rather by independent news events. This implied that the fluctuation in media coverage resulted from the interplay between journalists' professional judgement of the intrinsic newsworthiness of individual events and news source activities.

There was a coincidence between the content analysis data and the answers given by journalists in their interviews. As pointed out in the discussion about news values in chapter 3, the newspapers, in particular the popular press, prefer news events with immediate impact, public resonance, and simple implications that can be comprehended "straightforwardly", as the *Apple Daily*'s editor said. The content analysis found all the events receiving intensive coverage had one or more of these characteristics. These included the release of the list of English-medium schools, the massive teachers' protest, and the conflict between the university chancellors and the education authority. Also, in the school placement issue, the majority of the coverage was given to the release of the allocation results and the appeal process rather than the court case, which has long-term implications for education development in Hong Kong. All these events involved conflicts and human dramas that were appealing and had no complicated plots that could bore readers. This suggests that journalists' perceptions of newsworthiness have a crucial role in building the media-agenda of education policy and confirms the findings in other newsmaking literature, such as Gans (1979) and Tiffen (1989).

The other factor affecting news coverage is the activities of news sources. In addition to agreeing with the relative autonomy between journalists and news sources emphasised by Wallace's (1998) study of media-source relationship with regard to the construction of education policy, this study found that news sources are capable of generating news coverage. For example, in the coverage of the benchmark test issue, the teachers' protest most gripped media attention. It can be inferred that if the Professional Teachers' Union had not organised a massive protest, it is very likely that the more intensive coverage of the issue would occur in June 2001, in which the result of the first benchmark assessment was released. In fact, the release of the result is the second highest peak in the whole coverage (see Chart 6.1) and generally speaking the media always pay attention to the release of open examinations results.[37]

Another example is the employers' group in the coverage of the language proficiency issue. In the early stage of the development of the language proficiency issue, the employers' groups, the Hong Kong Language Campaign had successfully drawn media and public attention to the issue by organising a series of community activities. The newspapers reflected the influence of the business groups. The *South China Morning Post* wrote that "the Language Campaign has helped to raise the consciousness of the community at large about the threat of a declining level of English to the continuing success of Hong Kong as an international business community" (*South China Morning Post* 14-11-1989, cited in Pun, 1996: 136). In another report titled "Exam results show English skills in decline" (*South China Morning Post* 24-5-1994, cited in Lin, 1997: 429), the Hongkong Bank, one of the biggest employers in Hong Kong was selected by the *South China Morning Post* to comment on the results released by the Hong Kong Examinations Authority which showed a drop in the number of pupils passing the Use of English examination. Although from the late 1990s onward business groups were not as active they remained pivotal in shaping coverage of the language proficiency issue. The content analysis of

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[37] The deputy news editor of the *Apple Daily* said, "The release of open examinations' results is an annual focus of the education beat."

news items about the language proficiency issue published between 1997 and 2001 found that business groups were quoted the most.

WHOSE AGENDA?

The above discussion showed how the news values of journalists and news source activities influence news coverage of public policy during its formation. It is clear that not all sources are valuable and not all source activities are newsworthy. So it is logical to ask who are the major contributors to the media agenda on education policy? How do sources appear in the news, and does the publicity gained by news sources has any impact on the agenda-building of education policy.

The content analysis found press coverage of education issues was dominated by a few advocates although the press have access to a wide range of potential news sources. In all four case studies, 60 to 70 per cent of quotes recorded from news reports and features were attributed to three news sources, although there were 19 groups of sources recorded in the coverage of the instruction medium and university funding issues, 20 group of news sources featured in the benchmark test coverage, and thirteen groups of sources found in the coverage of the school placement issue.

Not surprisingly, government sources and influential stakeholders related to education issues[38] had the most press coverage, as they were at the pinnacle of the wider power structure and, more particularly, are primary to the making of those specific policies. The finding suggests the source structure of education news reflects the broader power structure in Hong Kong society. Generally speaking, organisations had more advantage than unavailable individuals as news sources. The study found that the more institutionalised the sources were,

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[38] The school managements of those schools unable to gain permission fromfor English-medium teaching and the Equal Opportunity Commission are the second most quoted sources in the coverage of the instruction medium and the school placement issues; the teachers organisation (mainly the Profession Teachers' Union) and the university chancellors are the most quoted sources in the coverage of the instruction medium and the university funding issues.

the more frequent and stronger an appearance they have in the news. For instance, when competing for media coverage with the education authorities, the Professional Teachers' Union, in the case of benchmark issue, had more advantage than the school managements in the case of the instruction medium issue. This is not only because the Professional Teachers' Union is powerful and resourceful but more importantly because the union is highly organised and has the ability to create newsworthy events, such as a massive protest. As for individual sources, except those who are endorsed by organisations, such as the university chancellors, individuals such as students, parents and individual teachers have very limited access to the media. They are commonly passive, unorganised, and represent no one but themselves.

Generally speaking, the amount of coverage given to major advocates broadly concluded the main contenders. Only in the popular papers' coverage of the instruction medium issue was the education authority given significantly larger coverage than were the school managements, who was competing with the authority in the instruction medium coverage.

Two points about the concentration of news sources need to be further discussed. Firstly, having the ability to secure regular access to the media does not necessarily secure positive coverage. For example, the government, in the coverage of the instruction medium issue, and the Professional Teachers' Union, in the coverage of the benchmark assessment issue, were negatively represented and faced public antipathy.

There seems to be a coincidence between media treatment of news sources and the newspapers' own positions on education issues and journalists' own judgements of news sources. The *Apple Daily*'s editor said,

> Our paper definitely opposed the instruction medium policy…Chinese-medium teaching might be correct theoretically but English is important to Hong Kong as an international city to maintain its status.

Commenting on the benchmark issue, the editor also said, "Teachers are wrong to oppose the benchmark test; they did it to save face". An article published in the *South China Morning Post* commenting on the benchmark assessment issue was critical of teachers, saying:

> It is to be hoped they [teachers who have a good command in English] will support the benchmark test as a measure of recognition of their own ability and to encourage their weaker counterparts to reach the required standards. The authorities might have erred in failing to consider the 'face' factor when introducing the benchmarking exercise. But all teachers should embrace it, both in the interests of maintaining their own professional image and to spare their own children the misfortune of being taught English badly (*South China Morning Post*, 29-6-2000).

This coincidence did not suggest that the negative representation of news sources was a direct result of the media's position on the policies and journalists' perceptions of news sources. However, the critical attitude of the journalists towards some news sources could limit the definitional power of news sources because journalists could raise critical questions that news sources must respond to, and can critically comment on the sources. For example, the education authority, in the implementation phase of the instruction medium policy, was forced to respond to accusations, such as creating labelling and dividing the education community, from teachers, students and parents after the release of the list of English-medium schools. The coverage was damaging to the government and helped to amplify public antipathy.

Secondly, the press tended to use news sources who held the most radical views to represent the debates of education issues and ignored many others who were situated in the middle of the spectrum of opinions. In the coverage of the instruction language, teachers' support of the idea of mother-tongue teaching and their caution about the implementation of that policy was reflected in news coverage in the consultation stage. However, the majority of teachers' voices were like a little raindrop compared to the large outcry from those of schools that failed to gain permission for English-medium teaching. Furthermore, in the sense that teachers are the ones most closely associated with the work of education and they are pivotal in making policies succeed, the lack of strong media exposure of teachers' views was a weakness in

the representation of the issue. It is questionable that if the sophisticated view of the teachers towards the issue had been highlighted to the public in the early stage of the policy process, the government would have opted for a different strategy to implement the policy. A senior member of the Education Convergence who is also the vice-principal of a secondary school concluded that the mother-tongue teaching policy is the "right" policy but implemented in a "bad" manner.

Before finishing this part of the conclusion, a few words about the arbiter needs to be noted. The arbiters were given very little coverage in news reports and features. Among the arbiters, the most important group are the scholars and columnists as they supplied the majority of non-news articles. Except for the analysis of the university funding coverage in which scholars were considered an important advocate, in the other three cases the academics commented on the issues in quite a valuable way. However, the influence of the commentaries written by academics and columnists seems to be minute. A significant example is the benchmark assessment coverage. Both scholars and columnists suggested that "teaching quality is not the only reason for the decline of students' language ability" and "the government shifted responsibility and made teachers the scapegoat" (see Table 6.15). These two themes were the most prominent in the non-news articles related to the benchmark test issue. However, compared to the prevailing public antipathy towards teachers, the influence of the arbiters on both public opinions and journalists' perceptions of the issues is slight.

INTERPRETATION OF EDUCATION ISSUES

Although the coverage of education issues concentrated on a few conflicts, the coverage was not necessarily lacking in substance and merely sensational. As routine journalistic practices and news values are constants in the production of news, when a policy issue appears in newspapers which aspects of the issue highlighted vary with the performance of news sources.

Conflicts attract media attention. As conflicts in different phases of the policy process bear different natures, the characteristics of the conflicts are reflected in the news. The content analysis of the education issues suggests that when conflict over an issue involves organisational actors and occurs in the construction phase, news coverage of the issue has more substance, as in the case of the benchmark assessment issue. When the conflict involves a group of actors who are loosely organised and occurs in the implementation phase, the coverage seems inevitably to focus on technical problems, as in the coverage of the school placement and the instruction medium issues.

The coverage of the benchmark test issue concentrated on the teachers' protest. As the protest occurred in the construction phase of the policy process in which the focus was the detailed measures of the policy, the story, although still sensational, by no means indicates a lack of concern about policy substance. As found, "policy substance" and "policy alternatives" together comprised approximately 38 per cent, the largest part, of the peak month coverage of the issue (Table 6.12). The performance of news sources is also critical. In the teachers protest, the protagonist was the Professional Teachers' Union. It was well organised. Its leaders were well prepared for facing the media. They gripped the chance to effectively put forward their arguments.

Compared to the benchmark test coverage, coverage of the instruction medium and school placement issues concentrated on the implementation of the policies. The press focused on the operation of the appeal and vetting process, the emotional outcry of parents and students, and the responses of a few schools. Responding to the strong resistance, the government was in damage control. The coverage is, thus, far from a true public debate on the merits of the policy.

When a policy moves into its implementation phase, all the details and measures of the policy have been decided upon, the dynamic of the policy process cannot be stopped, unless a very dramatic event occurs. In the implementation phase, the government's main job is to

enforce the policy, and the media's job is to discover the effects of the policy. Thus, news coverage at this stage focuses on technical issues, and this was found in the case studies. In both cases of the instruction medium and the school placement policies, the protagonists were individual schools, parents and students. These sources are diverse, unorganised and concerned about problems on an individual level rather than at an institutional level. They were sought out by journalists to give their personal testimonies as a representation of the whole picture of policy implementation. However, what was not represented in the news coverage, such as for the coverage of the instruction medium issue, were the views of a majority of schools, teachers, parents and students who might not embrace the policy but who did hope for some improvements.

The present study also found a change of issue definition in the news coverage as the policy process developed. For example, in the case of the instruction medium issue, between March and May 1997, before and after the consultation over the compulsory Chinese-medium teaching, newspapers such as the *Ming Pao Daily* and the *Apple Daily*[39] had commentaries and reports from different sources, including teachers, school headmasters, scholars, and other commentators who supported the principle of mother-tongue teaching but were skeptical about the feasibility of the policy. The coverage of the issue is by no means negative. Those articles explored the issue from not just an economic aspect but also from an educational, historical, cultural and administrational aspect. The ideas reflected in the news coverage were diverse and the implementation problem was clearly identified by many arbiters. However, the coverage did not trigger more public debate on the issue while the policy was still under construction. When conflict occurred in the implement stage of the policy process, the coverage concentrated on the unfolding the human drama and it became totally negative.

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[39] For example, the *Ming Pao Daily*: news report on 25-3-1997, commentaries on 4-4-1997 and 11-4-1997. The *Apple Daily*: commentaries on 29-3-1997, 4-4-1997 and 5-4-1997.

The development of the benchmark test issue followed the same pattern. In 1997 when the pilot scheme of the benchmark assessment was first announced, an article written by a scholar indicated the problem of unqualified language teachers was caused by a system failure. The article mentioned the fact that a majority of the language teachers were not trained for language teaching and suggested the benchmark test would only be a part of the solution to the problem and that better training for teachers was more important (*Ming Pao Daily*, 21-3-1997). The *Ming Pao Daily* reported (17-4-1997) on a government survey which found that only half of the English teachers had training in teaching English. The Professional Teachers' Union did a survey too and it found that about half of the teachers agreed with the principle of benchmarking but they opposed it as a "compulsory and punitive" policy (*Ming Pao Daily*, 23-6-1997). The news coverage showed that the teaching community did not initially reject the benchmark policy. It seems that the government tended to ignore the questions spelled out by the different parties and opted for a simple solution to the problem. When tensions accumulated in the later stages of the policy process, communication between the main political actors became extremely difficult. A commentator wrote that "many details of the policy needs to be discussed by the related parties; rejecting dialogue is not a way to solve the problem" (*Ming Pao Daily*, 14/10/2000). However, in conflicts the media functioned as a tool for advocacy rather than as a platform for rational public debate.

Constructive debates of the education issues were formed in the early phase of the policy process. However, news coverage of the issues in the consultation phase is normally too small an issue to bring to public attention and too weak to signal the government about the complexity of many issues. It is arguable whether interest groups and the government should put more effort to facilitate public debate of policy issues in the early stage of the policy process.

POLITICAL IMPACT OF EDUCATION NEWS

What are the effects of news coverage on the development of education policies?

The former general manager of the *Apple Daily* said,

> I do believe we [the *Apple Daily*] have the ability to set the public agenda. Mass media can trigger public discussion. The more people talk about an issue, the higher the pressure on the government to respond…I also found we are able to bring new concept into the debate. A good example is the debate of education vouchers. Very few people know and talked about education vouchers before we published some articles on this topic. Now many people know what this term means and it has become a part of the whole public discussion about Hong Kong education. Although the government rejects the idea, at the very least, it responded to the debate and did not turn its back on the public. I believe this is the effect of involving the idea of education vouchers in the media discourse of education.

The above assertions clearly indicate that the press are aware of their power in determining priorities of public issues and in interpreting them. The statement also corresponds to the media effects model as suggested by the theoretical framework of this research. However, as there is no reliable survey data about public knowledge of the four educational issues available, the discussion about the media effects on public opinion cannot proceed.

In summary, these four case studies found that the press coverage of education policies in Hong Kong is a result of an agenda-building process that involves the media and only a few powerful news sources. Despite the political and media systems in Hong Kong being different from those in Western liberal democracies, as concluded in many media studies of Western societies, such as by Gans (1979) and Tiffen (1989), this study suggests that news values, mainly those of the media organisations rather than the personal values of individual journalists, play a pivotal role in determining education coverage in Hong Kong. News values affect how the newspapers assess education news at large (reflected in the size of education coverage in the different newspapers) and how they assess and cover different educational issues. Those news values to a large extent reflect the media's perceptions of audience interest. Hence, education coverage is mainly driven by economic imperatives of news production.

Besides, the source structure in education coverage mirrored the wider power structure of Hong Kong society, as major decision makers are the most covered. However, secure privileged media access does not necessarily give major advocates definitional advantage. Media hostility

towards some advocates seems to come from journalists' own values and the positions taken by their organisations towards policy issues. In addition, arbiters did not play a significant role in defining education issues. This is different from what Deacon and Golding (1994) found in their study of news and poll tax policy in Britain where arbiters were influential in shaping the media's attitude towards policy issues and that the prominence of news sources in routine newsmaking secured them privileged access and in turn definitional advantage. Finally, as a result of the interplay of news values and news source activities, coverage of educational policies concentrates on conflicts that normally occur in the construction and implementation phases of the policy process.

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