

**THE SEARCH FOR FREEDOM OF THE PRESS IN HONG KONG:
FROM MISIDENTIFICATION TO REASSERTION**

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Abstract

Hong Kong's return of sovereignty to China has caused flurries of fear and anxiety about the future. Rounds and rounds of speculation have been going on about the kind of changes that Hong Kong is going to face under the model of "one country two systems," and the degree of autonomy that China is willing to allow. One particular concern is whether the previously enjoyed liberties can exist. Among them, freedom of the press is a critical issue as it is generally believed that China will not tolerate dissenting voices.

Despite the constant invoking of the free press concept, very few have seriously questioned what freedom of the press means and what it entails. This thesis aims to bring into focus the debate by asking two fundamental questions – what does freedom of the press mean to Hong Kong society at the time of transition and what factors are threatening its survival? To answer the first question, this thesis will outline the classic theories on freedom of expression and freedom of the press. By setting up an ideal model of a free press, it can be determined how far Hong Kong is away from the standard. The answer to the second question calls for examination of the Hong Kong's press from various fronts. Through a review of the historical development of the press, an evaluation of legislation and judicial decisions touching on free press issues, an analysis of the statistical study on self-censorship, and interviews with Hong Kong journalists, this thesis argues that the Hong Kong press suffers from both external and internal, historical and institutional problems. It is too simplistic to identify China as the sole culprit threatening the survival of the free press. The thesis concludes by asserting that the press should find an alternative critical voice to fight for its freedom and that legislative intervention may be necessary to end the economic warfare in the newspaper industry. Only by identifying the real causes can Hong Kong make a breakthrough and actualize its vision and dream of having a free press.

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