## Asian Journalism

Cherian George
cherian@hkbu.edu.hk

The more than 30 countries of the Asian region[1] are staggeringly diverse. Most scholars find it more meaningful to focus on a subcontinental scale, treating East, South, Southeast and Central Asia as separate analytical regions. East Asia and South Asia each has a larger population than any other continent, while Southeast Asia is more populous than either North or South America. The size of many Asian countries makes them unwieldy for even single-case studies. Asia has the planet's only two countries with billion-plus populations, and they together account for more than one-third of the world's people. Of world's eleven other countries with more than 100 million people, five are in Asia.

For media scholars, language is another major complication. India has 22 officially recognized languages, while even the small city-state of Singapore has four. Different language media often have their own histories and political orientations. Economic inequality is another factor that makes Asian countries internally heterogeneous, requiring any claims about people's media consumption to be qualified: the Asian newspapers that are most researched, for example, may not reach beyond the urban middle class. Although Asia's substantial and growing middle class consumes enough to sustain vibrant commercial media sectors, most large countries continue to grapple with poverty. More than one-quarter of the populations of Afghanistan, India and Pakistan are in what the United Nations calls severe multidimensional poverty.

Another noteworthy feature of this region is that almost all Asian nation states date their formation to the two decades following the end of World War Two. Therefore, compared with Europe and the Americas, Asian countries have had a much shorter time to develop the norms and institutions supportive of a strong media ecology, such as a resilient professional ethos among journalists, a liberal political culture, or an independent judiciary that protects press freedom.

## Media ecologies

Asia possesses the full range of media organisational forms and formats. Some of the world's most-read newspapers are found here. Asian newspapers, particularly those in Japan, India and China, dominate the world's list of titles with daily circulations exceeding one million. Japan's *Yomiuri Shimbun* (9.69 million in 2017) and *Asahi Shimbun* (7.45 million) are in the top two places; *The Times of India* is the world's most-read English-language newspaper. Print newspapers have suffered declines in sales and advertising revenues as a result of people's attention shifting to the internet, but not as dramatically as in the mature markets of advanced industrial countries. All-news television channels are found in most Asian countries. South Korea's *OhMyNews*, founded in 2000, was one of the pioneers of large-scale citizen journalism. Japan and South Korea were among the first countries in the world to take to mobile phones as information devices. Middle-income countries have since embraced the mobile internet. By 2015, Indonesia had the world's highest percentage of Facebook users (more than 90 per cent) who accessed the social media platform via mobile phones.

One striking feature of Asia's media ecologies is the absence of independent public service broadcasters in the BBC mould. Only Japan's NHK comes close. Hong Kong's RTHK has a tradition of independent journalism, but since it is structured as a government department, there is little to stop

---

[1] Some 20 other countries are geographically part of the continent of Asia but are excluded from this chapter as they tend to be politically and culturally grouped with Europe (including Russia and Armenia) or the Middle East (Iran, Turkey, Israel and the Arab states).

the authorities from aligning its output more closely to official perspectives, which they are expected to do as China tightens its grip on the territory. Indonesia's national television and radio networks, TVRI and RRI, have enjoyed greater freedom since the collapse of Suharto's New Order regime in 1998, but their makeover into well-funded and independent public service media has been delayed by political bickering. The post-communist transformation of Mongolia's national broadcaster has also been inhibited by a lack of political commitment to media independence. Similarly, the Thai Public Broadcasting Service, established in 2008 with a clear mandate to serve the public interest without political interference, has faced repeated threats to its funding by politicians unhappy with its coverage. The Philippines, because of its American-influenced political system, did not develop a state-funded broadcast sector. As for former British colonies such as India, Malaysia and Singapore, none of their governments opted for BBC-style public broadcasters. Officials claimed they needed to control the airwaves so that this powerful medium would be used to support their urgent economic development and nation-building agendas.

The 1990s saw major restructuring of broadcast media systems (Chadha and Kavoori, 2015). Most state-owned broadcasters lost their monopolies during that decade as commercial providers successfully pushed regulators to open up markets. Even Bhutan, which became the last country in the world to introduce television broadcasting when it lifted the ban on the medium in 1999, allowed more than 40 cable channels. The effect on countries' television news, however, has been mixed. In the case of Singapore, there was pluralisation of entertainment and international news options, but domestic television news and current affairs programming remained the monopoly of the state broadcaster. China's national broadcaster CCTV must compete with news programmes produced by large provincial commercial players such as Hunan TV, the Shanghai Media Group and Guangdong TV, but are all party-owned—and all are required to carry CCTV's half-hour national news bulletin every evening. In Malaysia, the government broadcaster lost its monopoly over local TV news in the 1980s, but the new entrant was a station owned by the ruling party, ensuring that the increase in variety would not be at the expense of political control. In contrast, India, Pakistan and South Korea are among the countries that experienced the big bang of television privatisation, complete with ratings-driven tabloidisation of news.

More than in Europe and the Americas, many Asian countries' media markets are linguistically divided. Their English-language outlets, being more accessible to an international audience, tend to attract the lion's share of research attention despite the fact that they may not be the most influential or representative media in the country. English-language titles are the main national newspapers in India, the Philippines and Singapore, but even in these countries local languages are preferred by television news viewers. In Indonesia and Thailand, English-language newspapers are mainly read by educated urban elites and expatriates. In Malaysia, the largest-circulating newspaper is neither in the national language of Malay nor in the urban working language of English but in Chinese, serving the country's largest ethnic minority community. The pull of language is also a major factor in India, where regional languages such as Bengali, Malayalam, Tamil and Telugu create sizeable media ecosystems, including sustaining newspapers with million-plus circulation figures. India's federal democratic system protects states from any unwanted imposition of Hindi, the country's unofficial national language. In China, provincial stations and their loyal audiences have ensured dialect programming thrives alongside Standard Mandarin.

Asia's economic growth is reflected in swelling media industries, but major gaps remain. Alternative media of various kinds try to fill these underserved niches. Though relatively small, they contribute significantly to Asia's media pluralism. Many rely on external funding by international media development foundations. Several of these projects try to address their respective countries' democratic deficits by providing more critical coverage of public affairs than mainstream media do (Weiss, 2014). Prominent examples that have grown into important political players include Malaysia's *Malaysiakini*, an online-only independent news outlet, and the Democratic Voice of Burma, a radio and television network founded by Myanmar exiles. Other alternative media projects focus on serving grassroots communities neglected by metropolitan media. The non-profit People's Archive of Rural India, founded by veteran rural affairs reporter P. Sainath, generates and hosts reporting on the countryside. Another noteworthy Indian project is CGNet Swara, a network that allows citizen reporters to post audio reports via mobile phone (Chadha and Steiner, 2015). Thailand has a particularly active community media sector, with several thousand small radio stations in operation.

At the other end of the size chart are Asian media vying for a global audience. Several countries have state-funded external broadcasting services for public diplomacy purposes. NHK World has an English-language television channel and a radio service broadcasting in 18 languages. Radio Taiwan International broadcasts its radio programmes in 13 languages. Singapore's Channel NewsAsia is beamed via satellite across the region as well as on the internet. The biggest player on the international stage, though, is China (Thussu, Burgh, and Shi, 2017). Its suite of global media includes CGTN, with news and documentary television channels in English, Spanish, French, Russian and Arabic. The English-language *China Daily* prints 600,000 copies in more than 30 print centres outside China. It also produces *China Watch*, a monthly insert distributed with other newspapers. Xinhua is now the world's largest news agency in terms of the number of correspondents employed.

## Media freedom and independence

Asia is characterised by media environments where journalists are constrained in their ability to provide robust reportage and commentary on the powerful. According to Freedom House, only Japan, Papua New Guinea and Taiwan could be said to enjoy a "free" press in 2017. Other major Asian democracies—India, Indonesia and the Philippines—were rated "partly free". The bottom three places in Freedom House's table were occupied by Asian countries—Uzbekistan, North Korea and Turkmenistan. Vietnam and China, together with North Korea, were on the Committee to Protect Journalists 2015 list of "10 Most Censored Countries". CPJ's Impunity Index (which calculates the number of unsolved journalist murders over the previous decade as a percentage of the country's population) places the Philippines, Pakistan, Bangladesh and India among the dozen worst offenders.

Therefore, Asia has no shortage of research settings for anyone seeking to understand restrictions on media. When examined more closely, however, the picture is more complex than one might assume. Constraints on journalism are applied by a wide range of actors using diverse methods. Brutal and overt repression, such as the jailing of media workers and the banning of news outlets, tend to attract the most attention. Precisely because of this, however, many states tend to use subtler methods of control that, although less flagrant, may be equally effective in diminishing the media's capacity as a watchdog on power. Furthermore, even states with authoritarian dispositions appear to understand that they need to apply coercion selectively and not stand in the way of their citizens' desire for a better life. The North Korean totalitarian model is therefore an extreme and unstable outlier. China and Singapore, in contrast, have allowed significant freedom to their citizens, including in media and communication, in areas that do not threaten the dominance of their ruling parties. Also complicating the picture is that not all threats to media independence come from the state. Businesses, religious organisations, organised crime, intolerant mobs and media themselves—acting independently or as instruments of other actors—can also thwart independent journalism and endanger media workers.

*State controls*

States' widening repertoire of methods to restrict media has been noted by press freedom monitors and scholars (Simon, 2015). Among the most powerful tools are restrictions over who gets to run the largest and most influential media. As mentioned above, public television and radio stations tend to be directly controlled by political leaders who wish to use them as government mouthpieces, instead of independent bodies mandated to serve the public interest. In some countries, such as Malaysia and Singapore, newspapers require an annual publishing licence, which can be denied or revoked at the government's discretion, with no reason given. In many countries, the licensing or regulation of broadcasters is controlled directly by political office holders rather than independent public bodies; lucrative private television licences are thus handed out to government cronies. Instead of serving as checks on power, therefore, the media are part of an overarching crony capitalist political economy. In such environments, there may be very little obvious friction between media and government.

Most Asian countries formally declare their respect for free speech in their constitutions. Most have ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which upholds freedom of expression (the exceptions are Bhutan, Brunei, Malaysia, Myanmar and Singapore; China is a signatory but has not ratified the treaty). Irrespective of these commitments, though, countries in the region tend to use their speech laws in ways that international human rights norms would consider illegitimate or

disproportionate. Instead of treating defamation as a strictly civil matter, for example, many countries still allow cases to be filed under criminal law. Defamation has been decriminalised in Sri Lanka, but not in India or Indonesia. The Maldives removed criminal defamation in 2009, but reintroduced it in 2016. South Korea is one of the few countries in the world where truth is not an absolute defence in defamation cases; even if a defendant proves that his allegations were true, he can still be found guilty if it is established that he was motivated by personal gain.

Aside from defamation, journalists in most Asian countries must contend with official secrets and security laws that governments have made more sweeping and onerous under the umbrella of their anti-terrorism efforts. Another tactic is to attack freedom of expression indirectly, using laws and regulations that are not immediately associated with censorship. For example, authorities mount tax or labour investigations as a way to harass troublesome media organisations. The 24-year-old *Cambodia Daily* was forced to close down in 2017 after being slapped with a dubious bill for back taxes. The government of Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines placed the family owners of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* under investigation for alleged tax evasion; the intense pressure led to the newspaper's sale in 2017 to a tycoon known to be friendlier to the president.

Governments also apply economic pressure to punish critical journalism. One widespread tactic is to withhold spending on advertisements in media that are out of favour, resulting a major loss of revenue in markets where the public sector is a major advertiser. In India, for example, the Kolkata-based daily *Anandabazar Patrika* and its sister newspaper *The Telegraph* lost all state government advertising after they opposed the powerful chief minister Mamata Banerjee in her successful 2016 re-election bid. In Indonesia, local governments and politicians are the main source of advertising revenue for provincial-level and city-level media outlets, and it is customary for media to align their editorial positions accordingly.

Political pressure can also be brought to bear on private sector advertisers that value good relations with the government. One target has been Hong Kong's most popular newspaper, *Apple Daily*, which is a fierce watchdog against China's growing influence in the territory. Firms have reportedly been advised not to advertise in *Apple Daily*, despite the paper's unmatched circulation. In 2015, the Bangladesh military applied similar clandestine methods to undermine the country's most popular Bengali and English newspapers. Officials successfully pressured major corporations to restrict their advertising in the sister papers *Prothom Alo* and *Daily Star*, apparently in retaliation for their reports on army operations. Such pressure on advertisers can be thought of as a kind of outsourcing of government controls. The arm's-length, behind-the-scenes approach makes intervention harder to prove and thus less costly politically. At a time when the sheer volume of news and information is impossible for censors to vet, outsourcing is also a more efficient way to regulate media. This is especially the case with online media. China, therefore, puts part of the onus of censorship on internet intermediary companies.

Aside from a shift to less visible modes of control, many authoritarian states in Asia have learnt to be more selective in their interventions, restricting only the most politically threatening communication while encouraging the pluralisation of other news options, and especially business, entertainment and lifestyle media. This strategy can satisfy the media appetites of most citizens most of the time. In addition, the divide-and-rule strategy means that large segments of the media industry and journalism profession can flourish virtually unimpeded, keeping them acquiescent.

In practice, this approach means that objectionable content is spread across a spectrum ranging from the totally unacceptable to the tolerated. As sensitivities tend to change and are never made completely clear, media gatekeepers in authoritarian countries pay close attention to signals from the government. Even in China, where explicit do's and don'ts are handed out to all media by the propaganda authorities, the instructions cannot cover every conceivable situation; gatekeepers have to feel their way around a constantly changing terrain (Lorentzen, 2014). The politics of Taiwan, Tibet and other controversies concerning sovereignty are issues where there is a clear "red line" of censorship. News about major accidents and disasters, on the other hand, may not be banned outright but instead subject to opinion guidance, with the propaganda apparatus shaping the approved narrative.

China's censorship regime also distinguishes between episodic exposés of lower-level official misdeeds and systemic critiques that threaten the top leadership. The former may even be encouraged by the central government as part of their efforts to root out misconduct among local subordinates that threaten the party's legitimacy. On many other matters, the news media are able to function unimpeded. Financial news outlets are often given more leeway, as most Asian governments want to

appear business-friendly; besides, these media tend not have a mass following. Similarly, some governments are less sensitive about English-language media that cater to cosmopolitan urbanites and expatriates, while media in the local language, such as Malaysia's Malay-language media, remain tightly supervised because of their influence among the regime's mass base. In Pakistan, television was selectively liberalised in 2002, resulting in a boom in cable and satellite channels, including dozens of all-news channels; however, the government continues to monopolise free-to-air terrestrial broadcasting, such that the state's grip on rural TV audiences remains unchallenged.

Meanwhile, most Asian countries that exercise authoritarian controls over news have liberalised their citizens' access to entertainment media. Therefore, if Asians lack media choices, it is a deprivation that most people do not feel most of the time. This applies to the world's most extensive and ambitious censorship system, China's policing of internet content. The country's national firewall makes it difficult for users to access sites on the global internet that the government disapproves of; targeted filtering and blocking inhibits discussion of controversial issues; and blacklisting and punishment of dissenters discourages citizens from crossing lines of political acceptability. All these restrictions, however, still leaves plenty of room for social and commercial activity on the internet, as evidenced by the fact that China's internet companies have grown to become among the largest in the world. The persistence of censorship has to be seen within this larger context, where citizens are nonetheless enjoying vastly increased choice in their media as well as expanded opportunities for self-expression. This helps explain why there have not been stronger demands for liberal democracy from Asians despite their rising income and educational levels.

*Non-state encroachments*

For journalism to serve the public interest, it needs not only freedom from government control but also autonomy from media owners and other stakeholders whose interests may diverge from what professional judgments call for. Indeed, in several of Asia's more politically open countries, media owners are the main constraint on journalism in the public interest. In a small number of cases, publishers have been strongly supportive of editorial independence and high professional standards. Prominent examples include India's *The Hindu* and *Indian Express*, Indonesia's *Kompas* and *Tempo*, and Taiwan's *Business Weekly*. The norm, however, are media that are expected to serve their owners' private political and business interests. This problem manifests in various ways. In most cases, it takes the form of over-commercialisation of media, with editors required to meet audience and financial targets that can only be achieved through tabloidisation of content and cutting back on original reporting. Although Asian media are in general not in as deep a financial crisis as mature Western markets—and many remain profitable—some owners may be taking advantage of the industry's pessimistic mood to impose fiscal restraint on newsrooms or to introduce advertiser-friendly policies at the expense of editorial integrity.

In many cases, however, media properties are not viewed by their owners in narrow commercial terms. Newspapers and television stations are instead valued as vehicles of influence; owners exploit their media power to further their other business interests or their political ambitions. In some countries, including India and Indonesia, it is now possible to speak of a media oligarchy, comprising tycoons whose influence over the media agenda is large enough to entrench their power. Mukesh Ambani of the Reliance group, India's largest conglomerate, controls many of the country's television channels and other media outlets. Reliance media have reportedly shied away from negative coverage of its sister companies and of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whom Ambani supports. In Indonesia, media owners are viewed as a bigger threat than government to journalistic professionalism. Most media oligarchs have had political ambitions or partisan connections as well as diverse portfolios in property, telecommunications and other businesses (Tapsell, 2017). Some—such as Surya Paloh and Aburizal Bakrie—have openly stated that their outlets should further these interests. The result has been a greater degree of media partisanship than the profession itself regards as healthy. The pattern is similar in many other Asian countries. Owners may allow their editors enough professional autonomy to produce journalism of value to the public on many issues, but also expect their outlets to support, and certainly not undermine, their private agendas. In television, especially, this pattern has been encouraged by regulators. Licenses have tended to be issued to businessmen who can be counted on to reproduce structures of concentrated economic and political power.

In addition to corporate interests, non-state threats to public-interest journalism come from the people themselves. Long before intolerant populism emerged as a major concern in the West—as a result of the rise of far right politicians in Europe, the Brexit referendum and the election of Donald Trump in the United States—many Asian countries were grappling with the phenomenon of popular movements unchecked by civic norms. Intolerant groups engage in harassment and physical attacks on media workers and premises. Typical targets include media that criticise religious or political leaders with militant followers; or attempt to play a moderating or conciliatory role in politically polarised environments; or defend the human rights of unpopular ethnic, religious or immigrant minorities. Examples abound in Asia. In the Philippines, journalists investigating the human rights abuses of President Rodrigo Duterte faced threats of violence from his enraged supporters. In Indonesia, the country's largest newspaper, *Kompas*, receives open threats from hardline Muslim groups when it tries to defend the country's multi-religious, democratic constitution against rising religious intolerance. In China, rabid nationalist ground sentiment can sometimes be an even greater obstacle than government control to balanced media coverage of Japan.

The media have a complex relationship with mob power, or what Indonesians call "mobokrasi". In the aforementioned cases, media workers and organisations are victims of populist intolerance. However, in many other cases, the media are key agents of intolerance. This could be for a mix of ideological and economic reasons. Many media organisations are organically rooted in the specific communities they serve and represent, and are prone to the same biases as their audiences. For others, market logic inclines them to side with majoritarian viewpoints at the expense of minority groups that lack economic clout. As a result, several Asian media outlets and personalities have been accused of fomenting hatred. They include *Utusan Malaysia*, which has whipped up anti-Chinese sentiment among its Malay readership; Pakistani talk show host Aamir Liaquat Hussain, who incited hatred and violence against the Ahmadi sect as well as secular journalists, bloggers and activists; and Myanmar media outlets, including more independent ones such as *The Irrawady* and *Myanmar Times*, that have echoed official and popular prejudices in their coverage of the Rohingya crisis.

The problem of intolerance is exacerbated by existing speech laws. Under international human rights norms, governments should prohibit expression that incites the objective harms of discrimination or violence against vulnerable groups, but should not restrict speech that merely offends people's feelings or challenges subjective belief systems. However, Asia lags behind other regions in aligning its laws to these international standards. Unlike the Americas, Europe and Africa, Asia has no transnational human rights court nudging national jurisdictions in this direction. Although most Asian countries have anti-incitement laws in the books, these are selectively enforced such that unpopular minorities are unprotected against flagrant hate speech. On the other hand, the same countries have broadly worded insult laws that are exploited by intolerant groups to instigate state coercion against those they accuse of offending them, including journalists, bloggers and artists. These laws appear in varied forms. In the former British colonies of India, Malaysia and Singapore, the law punishes the wounding of racial or religious feelings. In Muslim-majority countries such as Bangladesh, Indonesia and Pakistan, blasphemy laws serve the same purpose. Thailand's lèse-majesté law prohibits insult of the monarchy. What these laws have in common is that action can be initiated by any member of the public lodging a police report. They have become favourite methods of non-state actors to harass and intimidate media in the name of protecting community honour.

**Professional norms and values**

Aside from examining systems of media production within specific political, economic and social contexts, Asian media can also be analysed in normative terms. This approach opens up multiple lines of inquiry, including: how Asian societies define good journalism based on their unique histories and cultures; how Asian journalists perceive their roles; and how ethical journalism is promoted. Early research tended to essentialise Asian journalism, usually extrapolating from stereotypes of Asian culture or political systems. In the 21st century, there has been much closer attention to empirical detail, resulting in the unsurprising revelation that Asian media—no less than in the West—have norms and values that are diverse, fluid, complex and even contradictory.

In the earlier phase, the "Asian" in Asian journalism was more than a geographical qualifier; it suggested that there was something qualitatively distinct and non-Western about media values and

practices in Asia. This view was actively promoted by some Asians themselves, so it is not surprising that it was quickly absorbed into the literature on comparative media systems. Discussions in the Philippines in the 1960s among regional theorists and practitioner crystallised in the idea of "development journalism", which called on media in Asia and the rest of the Global South to resist sensationalism and to respond constructively to their countries' pressing socio-economic needs (Romano and Bromley, 2005). As a professional movement, development journalism was a reaction to the deficiencies of the Anglo-American paradigm of commercially oriented journalism, with its tendency to prize amoral newsworthiness criteria over journalists' social responsibility. In that sense, it was similar to other reformist movements arising from within the profession in the West, like "peace journalism" and "public journalism". Although none of these overturned the conventional approach to news, these critiques may have influenced higher-quality media to devote some resources to formats that are more hospitable to socially-driven and morally engaged journalism. Thus, India's premier journalism prize, the Ramnath Goenka awards, includes a category for "Uncovering India Invisible", which recognises substantive reporting of rural issues. Several Asian media, such as the Philippines' ABS-CBN network, have used the opportunities of multimedia storytelling and citizen reporting to raise the quality and quantity of previously neglected grassroots perspectives.

The development journalism movement was also seized on by some governments as an opening to argue that media should be their willing partners in nation-building and economic development. From this perspective, Asian media should resist not only Western journalism's ritualistic adherence to sensational news values, but also its adversarial, Fourth Estate, role perceptions. States' naked attempt to capture the development journalism flag to justify their authoritarian control of media ensured that the term was not embraced by Asia's more independent media. The same was true of "Asian values", a debate that peaked in the 1990s. Some Asian leaders and establishment intellectuals argued that Asian cultures prized social harmony, order, community interests and respect for authority, unlike the West with its emphasis on individualism and liberty. They said that Asia's unwillingness to adopt Western-style liberal democracy—including press freedom—was in keeping with its deep civilisational values. Furthermore, the rapid economic growth of many Asian countries at the time proved that the Asian way worked. The West's insistence on exporting its own Eurocentric model showed its arrogance and its inability to adjust to a rising Asia, the argument went.

The Asian values construct framed several studies of Asian media in the late 1990s up till the early 2000s. But it was not a productive line of inquiry. Even at the time, its conceptual flaws were obvious: at best, Asian values as described by its proponents represented a handful of Confucian societies in Asia, and even then only in caricature, since even China has a tradition of dissent and revolt alongside the emphasis on order and harmony. In hindsight, it is clear that the Asian values theory was mostly political rhetoric deployed by leaders such as Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew to fend off what they saw as the West's increasingly strident attempts to promote democracy in Asia following the end of the Cold War (George, 2018). The term lost much of its ideological utility by the early 2000s. The Asian Financial Crisis of the late 1990s robbed the Asian way of its economic justification. Furthermore, Indonesia, South Korea and Taiwan underwent democratic transitions that disproved the notion that Asians had no cultural appetite for freedom.

There continues to be scholarly interest in political values and attitudes of Asian populations, but newer studies, notably the Asian Barometer research programme, surveys representative samples of Asian populations rather than take a handful Asian spokesmen at their word. Not surprisingly, such surveys offer a far more fine-grained and nuanced picture than the 1990s Asian values theory. For example, one interpretation of data from the Asian Barometer series is that East Asians' preferred regime type is a government selected by multiparty competitive elections, but which then rules more paternalistically than in a liberal democracy (Shin, 2015).

Within journalism studies, there has been a similar transition from sweeping, essentialising generalisations towards survey-based and ethnographic research. Earlier work tended to underestimate the agency of media workers within authoritarian settings, assuming that journalists simply internalised the values of their political regimes. More recent research, such as the Worlds of Journalism studies, reveal a more complex picture. Each country appears to have multiple professional subcultures characterised by certain orientations regarding journalism's role in society. The relative strength of these subcultures vary, depending perhaps on factors such as the structure of the media industry, and the levels of political stability or social conflict. In both Indonesia and China, the two Asian countries

included in the Worlds of Journalism studies, around half of the journalists surveyed identified with the "opportunist facilitator" role, which sees media as partners of power. But almost four in ten of Indonesian journalists saw themselves as having an interventionist, adversarial role as "critical change agents", compared with only two in American journalists. Almost two-thirds of American journalists viewed themselves as "detached watchdogs", a role that only less than one in ten Indonesians identified with (Hanitzsch, 2011).

Any research into Asian media norms must also confront the reality of corruption within the profession. So-called "envelope" journalism is widespread: due to low salaries, reporters expect to be handed packets of cash from newsmakers when they attend media events. In several countries, some investigative reporters are motivated by the opportunity for blackmail: they demand hush money from politicians and businessmen once wrongdoing is detected. Higher ethical standards tend to be promoted by a handful of more principled media organisations, professional associations and press councils.

## Research directions

In addition to cross-national surveys, there is growing interest in in-depth, theoretically-driven case study research on Asian media. These not only enrich our understanding of specific Asian contexts but also provoke new ways of looking at media in general. While Western communication scholarship prematurely lost interest in questions of censorship, scholars of Asia continued to examine the subtleties of authoritarian controls on journalism. The burgeoning research on China has been particularly stimulating. Studies of investigative journalism in the country have helped to demonstrate that while democratic freedoms make it easier for journalists to serve the public interest, the professional impulse to do so transcends regime type. Indeed, some of the most committed and enterprising journalism takes place in challenging, high-risk environments. Most journalism in such contexts, however, have had to accommodate the realities of power. China, as well as Hong Kong and Singapore, have as a result been fertile ground to theorise self-censorship—pre-emptive self-restraints on publication under political or economic pressure (Lee and Chan, 2009).

Also on the Asian media research agenda is whether there are meaningful ways to articulate journalism's normative role that are more authentically grounded in Asian discourses and not reliant on liberal democratic assumptions. This would require deep dives into the histories of the Asian press as well as ethnographic work among contemporary Asian journalists. One such study suggests that Muslim journalists in Indonesia and Malaysia draw on their religious teachings in various ways to understand and explain their work (Steele, 2018). Media studies will also need to grapple with China's world-changing emergence as an economic and geopolitical power, and to what extent its global media will be able to challenge the hegemony of American and European players. On the technological front, the penetration of internet-enabled mobile devices is already creating ways of generating and consuming news and information that may challenge received concepts and frameworks. These and other developments will ensure that Asian media scholarship will have no shortage of phenomena to investigate in years to come.

## References and further reading

- **Books**

    Jeffrey, R., & Sen, R. (Eds.). (2015). *Media at Work in China and India: Discovering and Dissecting*. Los Angeles: SAGE India.

    McCargo, D. (2002). *Media and Politics in Pacific Asia*. London; New York: Routledge.

    Punathambekar, A., & Kumar, S. (Eds.). (2015). *Television at Large in South Asia*. Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge.

    Romano, A. R., & Bromley, M. (Eds.). (2005). *Journalism and Democracy in Asia*. Routledge.

Simon, J. (2015). *The New Censorship: Inside the Global Battle for Media Freedom*. New York, N. Y.: Columbia University Press.

Steele, J. (2018). *Mediating Islam: Cosmopolitan Journalisms in Muslim Southeast Asia*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Tapsell, R. (2017). *Media Power in Indonesia: Oligarchs, Citizens and the Digital Revolution*. London: Rowman & Littlefield.

Thussu, D. K., Burgh, H. de, & Shi, A. (Eds.). (2017). *China's Media Go Global*. London ; New York: Routledge.

Zhao, Y. (2008). *Communication in China: Political Economy, Power, and Conflict*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

- **Chapters from edited collections**

George, C. (2018). Neoliberal "Good Governance" in Lieu of Rights: Lee Kuan Yew's Singapore Experiment. In M. Price & N. Stremlau (Eds.), *Speech and Society: Comparative Perspectives* (pp. 114–130). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Romano, A. (2009). Asia. In P. Norris (Ed.), *Public sentinel: News Media & Governance Reform* (pp. 353–375). Washington, D.C.: World Bank Publications.

- **Journal Articles**

Chadha, K. & Kavoori, A. (2015). The new normal: from media imperialism to market liberalization – Asia's shifting television landscapes. *Media, Culture & Society*, *37*(3), 479–492. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443715574478

Chadha, K., & Steiner, L. (2015). The Potential And Limitations Of Citizen Journalism Initiatives. *Journalism Studies*, *16*(5), 706–718. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2015.1054179

Hanitzsch, T. (2011). Populist disseminators, detached watchdogs, critical change agents and opportunist facilitators: Professional milieus, the journalistic field and autonomy in 18 countries. *The International Communication Gazette*, *73*(6), 477–494. https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048511412279

Kalyango Jr, Y., Hanusch, F., Ramaprasad, J., Skjerdal, T., Hasim, M. S., Muchtar, N., Ullah, M. S., Manda, L. Z., and Kamara, S. B. (2017). Journalists' Development Journalism Role Perceptions. *Journalism Studies*, *18*(5), 576–594. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1254060

Kenny, T., & Gross, P. (2008). Journalism in Central Asia: A Victim of Politics, Economics, and Widespread Self-censorship. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, *13*(4), 515–525. https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161208324644

Lee, F. L. F., & Chan, J. (2009). Organizational Production of Self-Censorship in the Hong Kong Media. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, *14*(1), 112–133. https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161208326598

Lorentzen, P. (2014). China's Strategic Censorship. *American Journal of Political Science*, *58*(2), 402–414. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12065

Rao, S. (2008). Accountability, democracy, and globalization: a study of broadcast journalism in India. *Asian Journal of Communication*, *18*(3), 193–206. https://doi.org/10.1080/01292980802207041

Shin, D. C. (2015). Cultural Hybridization in East Asia: Exploring an Alternative to the Global Democratization Thesis. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, *25*(1), 10–30. https://doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2014.953009

Weiss, M. (2014). New media, new activism: trends and trajectories in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. *International Development Planning Review*, *36*(1), 91–109. https://doi.org/10.3828/idpr.2014.6