

## A Critical Examination of Chinese Language Media's Normative Goals and News Decisions

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***Abstract:***

Ethnic media are an integral part of a multicultural communication infrastructure benefiting all Canadians, as they provide services pivotal to immigrants' settlement, integration, and participation in Canadian society, yet numerous studies of ethnic media reveal deficiencies in their performance. This analysis informed by interview data examines Chinese language media's normative goals in relation to news decision-making. Outlet news workers convey commendable goals, and those who stress citizen building dedicate themselves to journalistic roles despite unfavourable circumstances. Meanwhile, Chinese language media outlets operate according to norms of social responsibility divergent from mainstream media. Narrow definitions of social responsibility, audience tastes, and perceived community needs influence content and boundaries in and for Chinese language reportage on Canada. Market competition and profit concerns also shape reporting quality, with normative goals trumped by commercial aims. New Canadians with language barriers require informational help if they are to truly become part of Canadian society, exercise their rights, and live up to their responsibilities as citizens. Improvements include professional training for ethnic media workers, inclusion of minority narratives into mainstream media, and publicly funded multilingual communications.

***Keywords:*** Chinese Immigrants; Ethnic Media; Journalism; Media's Social Responsibility; Multiculturalism; News

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**Résumé:**

Les médias ethniques font parties intégrantes de l'infrastructure des communications multiculturelles profitant ainsi à tous les Canadiens, ce en offrant un service pivot aux immigrants concernant leur lieu d'habitation, leur intégration et leur participation au sein de la société canadienne. Cependant, de nombreuses études sur les médias ethniques révèlent des insuffisances au niveau de leur performance. Cette recherche, basée sur des données collectées lors d'entrevues, examine les objectifs normatifs de médias de langue chinoise en matière de nouvelles prises de décision. Les travailleurs de nouvelles véhiculent des objectifs louables, tandis que ceux qui soulignent le renforcement des citoyens se consacrent à des rôles journalistiques en dépit de circonstances défavorables. Pendant ce temps, les médias de langue chinoise fonctionnent selon des normes de responsabilité sociale divergentes de médias traditionnels. Les définitions précises de la responsabilité sociale, les goûts du public, et de la communauté doivent influencer le contenu et les limites des reportages concernant le Canada en langue Chinoise. La concurrence du marché et le profit sont des préoccupations déterminant également la qualité des rapports avec les objectifs normatifs forgées par des objectifs commerciaux. Les nouveaux Canadiens ayant des barrières linguistiques ont besoin d'aide et d'information si elles veulent faire partie intégrante de la société canadienne, exercer leurs droits, ainsi que de répondre aux responsabilités citoyennes. Les améliorations comprennent la formation professionnelle pour les travailleurs des médias ethniques, l'inclusion de récits minoritaires dans les médias grand public, ainsi que des communications multilingues financés par la fonction publique.

**Mots-clés:** Immigrants Chinois; Journalism; Média ethnique; Multiculturalisme; Nouvelles; Responsabilité sociale des médias

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**Introduction**

The 2011 Canada Census indicates there are approximately 1.6 million Canadians of Chinese origin; this population is predicted to grow in the coming decades due to continual immigration (Statistic Canada, 2013). Over the past three decades or so, immigration has greatly contributed to the growth of commercial Chinese language media, a sector consisting of outlets owned by immigrant entrepreneurs, transnational media corporations, and Canadian media corporations. The precise number of Canadian Chinese language media outlets is unknown, as some are short-lived and new outlets appear at intervals. It is safe to say that dozens of print, electronic, and Internet sources now serve the population in need of Chinese language services. These outlets have become important bridges between mainstream society and a population with considerable voting power in certain electoral districts. As well, their presence may testify to the strength and success of multiculturalism. A recent study of Fairchild Television programming concludes that "Canadian multiculturalism policy has played a pivotal role in developing a professional and

responsible Chinese media” (Kong, 2013: 133), which provide services essential to Chinese immigrants’ settlement, integration, and participation in Canadian society. The important social functions of ethnic media in multicultural societies have been widely recognized by academics. Philosophers, political theorists, and media scholars agree that in a multicultural immigrant-receiving society, minority representations are emblematic of the recognition of minority rights and indicate the society’s democratic deliberation. A diverse media environment is crucial to newcomer integration and minority participation as equal citizens (Husband, 2000; Kymlicka, 1995; Silverstone, 2007; Young, 2002; Yu & Murray, 2007). With the presence of a seemingly strong Chinese language media sector, can we then assume that recent Chinese immigrants can better integrate into Canadian society in a transition from formal citizenship to substantive citizenship?

Numerous studies of ethnic media show that ethnic media underperform mainstream media and have yet to become active agencies in the broader public sphere (Karim, 2002, 2009; Murray, Yu & Ahadi, 2007; Yu & Ahadi, 2010). Low financial and human capital and prioritization of economic bottom lines produce this underperformance (Huston, 2012; Yu & Murray, 2007). Still to be probed are institutional norms of ethnic media in daily operations, editorial decisions, and journalistic practices. In-depth interviews provide insight into institutional goals, collective and individual aspirations, news decisions, as well as obstacles to the realization of goals. Based on interview data, this paper offers an analysis of commercial Chinese language media’s normative goals in relation to their Canadian news decisions. A brief account of Chinese immigration and the Chinese Canadian mediascape is presented first. This is followed by an examination of commercial Chinese language media outlets’ normative goals and their news decisions. The paper concludes with an analysis of how the media outlets’ normative goals are trumped by narrow definitions of social responsibility and commercial interests.

### **Chinese Immigration and the Evolution of the Chinese Canadian Mediascape**

Chinese immigration to Canada dates from 1858. Most of the pioneers who settled in the province of British Columbia came from California to work in the gold mines. In the 1860s and 1870s, pockets of Chinese appeared in most frontier settlements of Vancouver Island, the lower mainland, and the British Columbia interior. Workers recruited from China to construct the last section of the Canadian Pacific Railway further enlarged the Chinese population. By 1911 there were Chinese living in every part of Canada with the exception of the Yukon and Northwest territories. Most Canadian cities with a significant Chinese population had established Chinatowns, providing services for the Chinese population at the perimeter of mainstream society. Further immigration was hindered by anti-Chinese immigration legislation and the imposition of a “head tax”. The *Chinese Immigration Act* of 1923 affected families and the community at large until its repeal in 1947. A large wave of Chinese immigrants then proceeded with family reunification and refugees from Mainland China via Hong Kong, bringing the Chinese population to 58,197 in 1961 (Chan, 1983).

In 1967, Canadian immigration reform removed what had been racist selection criteria. The number of Chinese in Canada rose to 90,118 between 1968 and 1976 due to a new applicant point system. By 1991 the Chinese population increased to 633,933 (Chan, 1983; Li, 1998; Ng, 1999). The third wave of Chinese immigration includes a large number of wealthy, well-educated applicants from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China. In 1998 immigrants from Mainland China outnumbered those from Hong Kong. China has remained one of the top source

countries of immigration to Canada for nearly two decades (Government of Canada, 2013; Zhang, 2010). According to the 2011 Canada Census, Chinese were the second largest visible minority group in Canada with 1,324,700 persons (Statistics Canada, 2013).

The history and patterns of Chinese immigration have shaped the Chinese Canadian mediascape. Historical accounts noted the presence of Chinese language press in Victoria, Vancouver, and Toronto at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and bilingual and English language publications would surface later. Most Chinese language newspapers discussed affairs in the home country, but English language media outlets such as the *Chinese News Weekly*, *New Citizen*, and *Chinatown News* served the interests of young bilingual members of the community and focused more on local life. In the 1950s and 1960s, young and better educated immigrants utilized Chinese language newspapers such as the *Chinese Voice* to articulate their views (Ng, 1999; Yang, 2009). A new type of Chinese Canadian media appeared in the 1970s and 1980s when young community activists established English language media outlets such as *Pender Guy Radio*, *The Asianadian Magazine*, and *Rice Paper* to spread the messages of the Asian American movement and civil rights and to inject Asian Canadian voices into Canadian society (Li, 2007). This effort coincided with high immigration, which led to significant growth of the Chinese language press and new Chinese broadcasting. A large North American Chinese immigrant population provided incentives for media corporations in Hong Kong and Taiwan to expand overseas. Between the 1970s and 1990s, three dailies, the *World Journal*, *Ming Pao*, and *Sing Tao* set up offices in New York, San Francisco, Toronto, and Vancouver. *Sing Tao* was particularly successful in Canada. In 1998, Star Media Group bought approximately 50% shares of its Canadian operation (Star Media Group, 2015). Chinese language broadcasting took off after Thomas Fung, a Hong Kong immigrant, acquired existing Chinese language radio and television stations and established the national networks of *Fairchild Television* and *Fairchild Radio*. Other Chinese television programming is offered by the multilingual *Omni Television* of Rogers Communications. Chinese print dailies and *Fairchild Television* are now accessible online. Also available are free print weeklies and bi-weeklies, E-editions, and other materials that are produced by entrepreneurs from China in the Mainland.

### **Probing Chinese Language Media's Normative Goals**

Ethnic media are complicated, multifarious phenomena that can play a role in constructing counter-narratives and new identities for their respective communities, help to unite a community, facilitate social integration, and provide citizenship education (Baffoe, 2012; Bai, 2010; Fleras, 2009; Kong, 2013; Lin & Song, 2006; Matsaganis, Katz & Ball-Rokeach, 2011; Zhou & Cai, 2002). In Canada, they are seen as valuable social capital and a key pillar of a multicultural communication infrastructure facilitating ethnic minorities' civic engagement by filling gaps left by the mainstream media and connecting members of their community to the larger public sphere (Fleras, 2009; 2011).

On the other hand, researchers have found that ethnic media contribute inadequately to newcomer integration (Karim, Eid & Ebanda de B'Berri, 2007; Lindgren, 2011), are weak in the promotion of intercultural awareness and exchanges and, in some cases, even fail to help formulate "functioning cultural citizenship" within their community (Ahadi & Murray, 2009; Murray, Yu & Ahadi, 2007; Yu & Ahadi, 2010). Such deficits have been explained in terms of inadequate resources and market pressures, but other aspects of ethnic media, including norms of social responsibility, deserve probing (Yu & Murray, 2007). There is reason to explore ethnic

media outlets' institutional goals in relation to news production, especially how news decisions are made, and what news selection and framing criteria guide editors, producers, and reporters.

Interviews with Chinese language media personnel provide some answers. Between 2010 and 2014, 21 persons in the Greater Toronto Area and Vancouver who work in the Chinese language media sector served as informants. These included publishers, editors, reporters, television and radio news, and current affairs program producers. Some had formal journalism training in places of origin or postsecondary education in the field of communications or journalism in North America. Others were recent arrivals without a formal background in journalism or communications. Semi-structured interviews were taped. All except three interviews were conducted in Chinese, the language chosen by the interviewees. Interview questions sought to explore news workers' understanding of Chinese language media's social responsibility and gain insight into news decision-making, as well as the challenges they face.

On news media's social responsibility, former journalist Nick Russell wrote that "whatever the consumers of news see as the role of the media, a primary requirement is information on which they can base life decisions" (2006: 4). Russell went on to discuss the news media's role in democracy, namely, enabling audience participation in the democratic process, and numerous ethical issues such as honesty, fairness, and accuracy with which journalists must deal. The primary focus of this analysis is Chinese language media's role in democracy and citizen-building with several theoretical approaches informing the analysis.

First, democratic theories assert that news media are an integral part of democratic processes, instrumental to the cultivation of a well-informed citizenry involved in a society's democratic deliberation (Gans, 2004; Habermas, 1989; McChesney, 2000; Voltmer, 2013). As ethicist Elliott (cited in Russell, 2006: 31) emphasized, journalism has a basic moral responsibility to tell people what they need to know for self-governance. In light of democratic theories and media ethics, ethnic media's minority status and specific obligations toward their communities do not exempt them from the aforementioned responsibility. This is because their audience depends on them for information about Canadian society and their involvement as citizens is, in part, contingent upon their understanding of the important issues of the day. Secondly, the sociology of news can shed light on Chinese language media's news-making practice. Tuchman (1980) states that news is an information product created daily for consumers. Located, gathered, and disseminated by professionals working in organizations, "it is inevitably a product of news workers drawing upon institutional processes and conforming to institutional practices" (Tuchman, 1980: 4). Although compared to mainstream media, Chinese language media are much less involved in gathering news and producing original reporting, they make news decisions daily, guided by explicit and implicit criteria derived from necessity, inspirations, and understandings of their social responsibility. Examining how news decisions are made and what criteria are employed bring to light some issues overlooked by previous studies. Lastly, following the political economy of communication, this analysis pays attention to how economic considerations affect Chinese language media's journalistic practice. Although ethnic media occupy a marginal space in society and most media outlets are small in size, they are not devoid of some of the influences identified by Herman and Chomsky (1988). Ownership, advertising, market competition, and profit orientation do impact journalistic practices within the ethnic media sector. Yu and Murray (2007) found Korean media in Vancouver cut corners by printing more news from the place of origin than about Canada. Recent cuts of its multicultural programming by Rogers Communications are another example of how ownership and profit motives can weaken multicultural or "ethnic reporting".

Interview data suggest a spectrum of understandings of what Chinese language media ought to do, and these seemed to shape content production. In addition, there is a perceptual convergence among interviewees regarding services to the “Chinese community” as their key social responsibility. Since “community” is a loaded term, a critical examination of what it means to outlets and news workers is necessary. Third, a number of criteria are unconsciously and consciously employed by Chinese language media in making news decisions, indicating that both the normative goal of serving the community and economic considerations shape their Canadian reportage.

Overall, a range of institutional goals were stated by interviewees. These include providing a kind of advocacy on behalf of the community, spreading knowledge of China in the West, and helping the younger generation to learn Chinese language and culture. A couple of interviewees stressed importance of serving as a public watchdog to ensure government accountability. Some stated that Chinese language media should help maintain community members’ links with places of origin and facilitate intercultural and intergroup understanding. Most interviewees emphasized and elaborated how Chinese language media should assist immigrant settlement by informing audiences about Canada, enabling community voices to be heard, and enhancing Chinese participation in Canada’s political life. In other words, these three main aims are at the heart of social responsibility in an unwritten approach that is not necessarily the main concern of upper level management or media owners. Although lacking in Canadian journalistic training, some news workers seemed to have a basic understanding of democratic theories, affirming an essential relationship among news media, an informed public, and democracy deliberation. As one interviewee stated:

Our job is to serve the Chinese community, informing them of the most important issues of the day . . . shortening the distance between them and the larger Canadian society. . . . Without informing our audience of HST’s potential impact, the Chinese community might have had little influence in the provincial referendum . . . If as a voter you have little understanding of the situation, how can you decide whom to vote for? Unless you know a candidate’s policy platform or his or her behaviour, you may vote for someone who does not really deserve your support. In this way, even if you exercised your democratic rights, it is not good to the political system.

(Y. Ye, personal communication, August 22, 2012)

Interviewees shared a belief that reporting on political issues can encourage immigrants to participate in political events and learn about the political system in the process, and that this knowledge will enable them to exert their influence on Canadian politics. It was seen as important that people knew that they “can protest if they do not like a government policy” (H. Lin, personal communication, August 30, 2012). The concept of *voice* was emphasized by most interviewees and particularly by daily editors and television news producers. Some stressed that media outlets must function as “the people’s voice” (G. Ding, personal communication, August 20, 2012) or “help the Chinese to voice” (C. Ma, personal communication, August 20, 2012). A veteran news worker believed that Chinese language media must do more than fulfill the social responsibility of delivering information to the public. Besides facilitating community development and helping newcomers to develop a sense of belonging and obligation, Chinese

language media should help audiences to understand the importance of “making noise” in cases of injustice. He stated that:

We used to be afraid of voicing our views because we feared criticisms and rejections from the English society. We should stop seeing things that way. If something is unfair, you should voice your objection. It is [our] media's role to help people to voice.

(C. Ma, personal communication, August 20, 2012)

To voice one's views publicly is an exercise of citizenry, according to another interviewee. She stressed that her newspaper's readers were not sojourners, but people who wanted to be part of Canadian society. Thus, “we need to act as citizens of this country, to participate. We hope our voices to be heard” (Y. Zhang, personal communication, August 18, 2012). The interviewees cited ways of getting Chinese voices heard, such as giving coverage to politicians or political candidates of Chinese background and using community members as news sources and commentators. This conscious prioritization of Chinese voices appears to be a widespread framing practice within the sector. It is a strategy that some believe can help connect their audiences to issues they may see as irrelevant to them and that can alert people to the potential impact of government decisions on the Chinese community. It is also meant to counteract the absence of Chinese voices in mainstream media and to bring Chinese perspectives into the broader public space, especially to governments. There appears to be little awareness that a limited number of sources can also limit the range of perspectives presented to their audience. This may have resulted in many single-source stories in Chinese language media reporting (N. Keung, personal communication, June 10, 2014) and decisions not to cover certain national issues (J. Au, personal communication, October 15, 2013).

Most interviewees saw Chinese language media as an instrument of social integration. Social integration was understood as learning “Canadian ways”, adopting Canadian values, and developing a sense of belonging to Canada. They stressed the need for newcomers to understand and accept Canada's values. As one interviewee stated, “[O]ur newspaper and radio programs have always engaged in discussing how immigrants can intermesh organically, their nationalist sentiments and Canadian values, which are not mutually exclusive”. He held that the media may not educate and guide people but can raise questions and let the audience reach their own conclusions (R. Mu, personal communication, June 7, 2013). Some interviewees saw that their outlets offer guidance to their audience and equated addressing integration issues with citizen education. Newcomers are reminded to treat Canada as home and observe its laws and rules, to “reposition” themselves, and see things from Canadian perspectives. Chinese language media facilitate this process through storytelling by, for example, reporting cases of cultural clash and legal matters.

In sum, most informants understood Chinese language media as an agent of change or community betterment. Some referred to their role in British Columbia's anti-HST campaign in 2011 and in the reintroduction of the Citizen's Arrest & Self-Defence Act by the federal government. Regarding the latter, Chinese language media were the first to report on the case of Chen Wang, a Toronto Chinatown grocer charged with kidnapping a man who had stolen from his grocery store. They questioned the fairness of the existing Citizen's Arrest Act. That the media could reshape identities, laws, and government policies seems to be a strong motivator for some news workers.

However, idealism and social commitment expressed by some interviewees coexist with a pragmatic attitude in others. Two veteran news workers stressed survival and profit, downplaying the importance of social responsibility. They saw media outlets as economic entities first and foremost, instead of social institutions connected to larger democratic processes. Market imperatives were accepted as basic facts to which one must attend to survive and prosper. Their forthrightness reveals how news production, institutional survival, and financial success are intricately connected. This point will be discussed later after examining a key goal of Chinese language media—serving the Chinese community. What this community means and how news workers understand its needs often impinge upon news decisions.

### **Community, Community Needs, and News Priorities**

Social organizational and cultural accounts of news can shed light on Chinese language media's key normative goal of *servicing the community* and its function as the most important *new value* in the sector. Sociological analysis of news organizations delineates the constructed nature of news and the social relations embedded in news production. Cultural accounts of news highlight how news organizations and journalists operate within cultural systems and draw upon these systems. Both approaches help explain certain practices in the news media on which political economy explanations fall short (Schudson, 1992). On cultural accounts, Stuart Hall's observation (as cited in Schudson, 1992: 188) is insightful: the "news values" or "news sense" that journalists regularly talk about are "one of the most opaque structures of meaning in modern society" (cited in Schudson, 1992: 188). Richard Hoggart's view is also illuminating. He wrote that the most important filter through which news is constructed is "the cultural air we breathe, the whole ideological atmosphere of our society, which tells us that some things can be said and that others had best not be said" (cited in Schudson, 1992: 189).

Studies of ethnic media can benefit from these insights. Analysis of Chinese language media in Canada, especially the bigger outlets, should pay attention to their organizational cultures and the influence of sociocultural systems in which they operate. These media outlets are shaped by diasporic processes in which cultural values and social norms from places of origin coexist and mix with cultural elements of the so-called "host society". The self-professed goals and roles discussed above are indicative of unique institutional norms, revealing how being the media for the Chinese in Canada shape their purpose and practice. It is well worth probing how journalistic practices are influenced and constrained by the relationship between media outlets and audiences mentioned by most of the interviewees as their "community". Since serving their community is a common institutional goal and norm, one should investigate how this community is construed and how the intricate relationship between Chinese language media and the community impacts news making. Schudson (1995) argues that "news as a form of culture incorporates assumptions about what matters, what makes sense, what time and place we live in, what range of considerations we should take seriously . . . The 'what' of news is . . . a product of cultural presuppositions" (1995: 14-15). He pointed to instances where newspapers cater directly to readers' presumed needs and interests. How the Chinese community and its needs are construed *have* definitely affected Canadian reportage in the Chinese language media.

As they see it, the "Chinese community" is primarily constituted by first-generation immigrants who use these media as a primary news source about Canada. It also includes other members of the diaspora such as international students, visitors, and prospective immigrants. Together, these groups form the Chinese language media marketplace. The community is very



heterogeneous in terms of places of origins, linguistic differences, and the duration and nature of residence in Canada. In effect, it is “tribalized” and confronts issues of representation (R. Mu, personal communication, October 7, 2013). On the other hand, the community is presumed as a homogeneous entity because members share an experience of being away from “home” and belonging to a racial minority group in Canada. This conception of the Chinese community lies beneath media market positioning, whereby the outlets establish an organizational identity and goals vis-à-vis the market and competitors. That positioning guides general and newsroom operations. For instance, being “ethnic” or “community” media means that pursuing “breaking news” and covering events outside the community are not priorities. As well, a newspaper for the Chinese diaspora in Canada must cater to the diverse identities and interests of readers; accordingly, it does not need to emphasize integration issues or Chinese Canadian perspectives as done by some outlets.

Tuchman observes that news is inevitably “a product of news workers drawing upon institutional processes and conforming to institutional practices” (1980: 4). In the case of Chinese language media, the institutional goal of “serving the community” is not manifested in written policy, but “a constant topic of conversation and discussion” in the newsroom that centres on the audience’s informational needs as news priorities. A consensus among the interviewees is that Chinese language media should report on what is “relevant” and “interesting” to the Chinese. This consensus is epitomized in the statement of the editor-in-chief of a daily:

The goal of our paper is to report what is interesting to the Chinese here, not just what happens within the Chinese community, but also outside of this community, as long as they are things or issues that the Chinese are interested in. Everyday there are 20 or 30 news items for us to use. We have to decide which ones go on the front page, the second page or the third page. We make our decisions on the basis of past experience. I should say that often I do this according to my own sense. If this is what our readers are interested in, I will put it on the front page.

(H. Lin, personal communication, August 30, 2012)

Decisions on headline news are also based on what “the Chinese community cares about, not what the mainstream society cares about” (H. Lin, personal communication, August 30, 2012). A retired editor-in-chief of the largest daily confirmed this practice, admitting, “when selecting news, the head of the newsroom and the translation department will look for things that the Chinese are interested in” (T. Ku, personal communication, June 6, 2015). When asked for examples, interviewees referred to matters of immigration, education, taxation, and crime involving Chinese offenders or victims. A quick review of Canadian coverage by the three paid dailies and *Fairchild Television* between mid-September and mid-November 2013 shows consistency in what was deemed important to Chinese in the economy, trade, security, Canada-China affairs, and major “homeland” events as dominant news topics.

Catering to an ethnic community’s needs and interests is an important social function performed by ethnic media. However, as a few news workers recognized, the media need to balance what audiences want to know, need to know, and ought to know. Audiences have multiple identities. They are immigrants, diasporic subjects, consumers, and citizens, and each identity requires different kinds of information. For instance, while newcomers need to know existing welfare programs and how to apply for them, audiences in general should also know

about important issues such as the contested oil pipeline projects. What is privileged in the end determines, at least in part, audience members' sociocultural adaptation and degree of involvement in Canadian society. What should be noted is that none of the media outlets had developed guidelines regarding how to balance informational needs in their Canadian coverage.

What seems to have prevailed is a narrow understanding of audience interests and needs. Clearly, audience members are seen as people coming to Canada to seek a better material life. The term "livelihood issues" was used commonly to describe issues that matter to their audience, such as immigration, education, security and safety, tax, and housing prices. A veteran news worker spelled out this consensus, stating that "what the Chinese care about is whether prices or taxes are increasing, what welfare is available, whether one may lose benefits after leaving the country" (T. Ku, personal communication, June 6, 2014). Another news worker explained low Chinese turnout in recent Greater Toronto Area elections in terms of Chinese not caring "what might happen to government when a political party is voted into office . . . but only care about how that may affect housing prices or whether their parents could come to Canada" (W. Yang, personal communication, October 9, 2013). Some interviewees admitted that national issues such as the prorogation of Parliament, Canada's military involvement in Afghanistan, and the senate spending scandal were less important than "livelihood issues" to their audience (Y. Li, personal communication, June 5, 2014; Tuo, personal communication, October 5, 2013).

The prioritization of "livelihood issues" may reflect a prevailing ideological orientation in the media sector given that, like their audience members, news workers are economic immigrants of middle class backgrounds preferred by Canada's neoliberal immigration policies, and they work for outlets owned by big media corporations or immigrant entrepreneurs. As Abu-Laban and Gabriel (2002) and Yu and Murray (2007) pointed out, neoliberal immigrants' life aspirations in the new country continue to centre on upward mobility. Few interviewees mentioned their ideological orientation or the role of ideology in their professional practice, but some referred to audience's class backgrounds and life aspirations when speaking of community needs and interests. Shared class background may explain why audience members are treated as economic beings rather than citizens, and why economic news is privileged over political news.

Catering to a narrow set of needs and interests has a profound effect. A veteran news worker admitted, "the accumulative effect of this practice is that [audience needs and interests] have become the main criteria of news selection. This is why I consider Chinese language newspapers ethnic media" (T. Ku, personal communication, June 10, 2014). In practice, these needs and interests function as primary sorting devices for media outlets and newsrooms as they select news items from a range of sources, including material produced by parent companies and mainstream news organizations, as well as press releases from governments and major political parties. In addition, they frame events and issues, and determine the length and placement of news stories. In short, they help to render a complex world more manageable and make it easier to choose, discard, re-arrange, and construct a universe for their audience to consume. Consequently, this routine practice sets boundaries in and for Chinese language media's reportage about Canada. Although some news workers expressed intense interest in provincial and national politics, and although good reporting to date does exist in Chinese language media, one should wonder how well audiences are informed on issues of national importance. They are more likely to be informed on topics of interest to Chinese immigrants because the media consider them more relevant to the audience. The civil and political participation of those who consume primarily Chinese language media could be impeded. This becomes a larger issue when considering the factor of commercial interests.

### **Social Responsibility!—Triumph of the Profit Motive?**

The political economy of communication explains the influence of media ownership and commercial interests on the production of news and entertainment. A political economy perspective on ethnic media is relevant, since most ethnic media outlets are commercial entities. They are not quite connected to centres of power in Canada, but are privately owned and engage in constant competition for advertising dollars, market shares, and profit. Ownership, market structures, and business strategies affect their operations and content. Interviewee accounts reveal discrepancies between normative goals and actual practices, indicating that high profitability has not translated into professional staff training, better working conditions, or higher pay. These factors are all related to the quality of reporting. In the quest for stability and growth, Chinese language media outlets seem to routinely compromise higher goals. Examples given by interviewees suggest that owners and upper management prioritize profit over journalism quality or social obligations, a situation that may have worsened in recent years. Over the past decade or so, the Internet and new capital brought into Canada fostered a mushrooming of free newspapers and websites catering to newcomers, which diverted advertising dollars and audiences away from established outlets like the dailies.

*Singtao*, *Ming Pao*, and the *World Journal* are considered elite players in the Chinese language print media market that offer more credible products, but reduced advertising revenues has caused downsizing. *Singtao* and *Mingpao* laid off some Canadian staff recently with outsourcing to Asia after their parent companies set up offices and factories in Southern China. Camera people and the entire translation department are gone. In the name of making the operation of OMNI Television “revenue neutral”, Roger’s Communication significantly reduced its multicultural news programming. The OMNI Chinese program lost its weekend news magazine, national news program, and original reporting. Today’s OMNI Toronto Chinese language program is a mere shadow of its former self that, in its heyday, had 20 staff members plus freelancers (J. Au, personal communication, October 15, 2013). Individual outlet owners also prioritize the bottom line. The owner of a free newspaper stressed the importance of a media watchdog function and spoke proudly of his paper’s investigative reporting, but in order to maintain profit, he laid off one of two reporters (Y. Jia, personal communication, October 9, 2013). Chinese newspapers’ cost-saving measures also involve using Internet content to fill pages and collaboration with newspapers in China to lower production costs and increase shares in a market increasingly dominated by immigrants from Mainland China.

In the newsroom, outdoing competitors can be the foremost goal. An award-winning reporter recalled a time when she was working for the largest daily. She stated: “Our goal first and foremost is to defeat our arch rival. In the process we accomplish what a media outlet ought to do, that is, to tell stories that matter” (W. Yang, personal communication, October 9, 2013). Market competition impacts content as news selection and placement are decided, at least in part, by what rivals may or may not do. As an editor-in-chief admitted, “Every day we try to figure out what our competitor might do tomorrow and then decide what we will do” (L. Ho, personal communication, August 23, 2012).

In fierce market competition, the free daily, *Today Commercial News*, has the upper hand and its editor-in-chief spoke delightedly of the relief brought by a different business model. The only free Chinese language daily distributed across Canada, *Today Commercial News*, wins out against its competitors. Positioned as a tabloid that does not aim to be a “newspaper of record”, it is a carrier of information that “catches the eyeball”. The editor-in-chief was forthright in his

remarks: “My main objective is to attract and keep readers’ attention, ensure they will read the story and stay on that page where ads are at the bottom” (R. Leung, personal communication, June 6, 2014). He recognized that the newspaper has “the responsibility to educate our readers”, but experience told him that “hard news” is “boring news” not favoured by readers. Mr. Leung believed that in the Age of the Internet, newspapers have a future as long as they “create the habit of reading newspapers”, which could be achieved by providing “interesting news”. Leung has a degree in journalism from the United States and has worked in the Chinese language media sector for nearly four decades. He candidly stated that economics are always “a big part of the news business. If you cannot succeed financially, you cannot do whatever it is. Social responsibility, ha-ha! I could give you the basic official line, the big words, but that’s not how it works” (personal communication, June 6, 2014).

A casualty of market dominance is the quality of reporting, a major issue faced by Chinese language media outlets and ethnic media in general. Outlets including the larger ones often hire new immigrants who face language barriers, have little knowledge of Canadian society, and have no journalistic background or media related training. Several interviewees spoke of how they had to learn on the job, in an experience similar to plunging into an ocean and having to learn how to swim. One interviewee recalled:

The next day after I was hired, I was assigned to go to Queen’s Park to cover a meeting about taxation. I knew nothing about the tax system in Canada, nor did I know what Queen’s Park was. I thought it was a park. I went to the meeting and had trouble understanding what was said. They gave me a pile of English documents to take home and I had to write a story on the subject that night.

(Y. Li, personal communication, June 5, 2014)

His employer was the largest and a highly profitable daily, and his experience was not unique among people working for Chinese language media.

Television, radio news, and current affairs producers expressed frustration at not being able to find qualified workers or to retain staff. The need for Chinese fluency and low pay were cited as foremost obstacles. Most Chinese language media outlets run on the backs of low-pay workers. Employment in the sector is a short-term solution for international students and others in need of “Canadian experience” or recent immigrants unable to find employment in their professions. One interviewee remarked that reporting for a Chinese media outlet was “a job that those who are good are not interested in, but those who are not good cannot do” (L. Tuo, personal communication, October 7, 2013). Many left the sector after gaining some experience. Those who have stayed are motivated by various reasons, some having to give up their profession altogether, while some others are indeed committed to serving the Chinese community.

One contributor lamented that few people working for Chinese language media outlets had passion or dedication and that “for Chinese media to improve . . . it has to start with human resources. We need more people with a sense of responsibility. How can we do our work without a sense of mission? This is a big problem” (W. Yang, personal communication, October 9, 2013).

## **Conclusion**

If ethnic media are an integral part of a multicultural communication infrastructure benefiting all Canadians, Chinese language media are important building blocks. The services they provide to their audiences are crucial to the latter's settlement, integration, and participation in Canadian society. Interviews with Chinese language news workers suggest that some media outlets and news workers have commendable goals. They intend to inform their audience on important matters of Canadian society, facilitate adaptation, and cultivate citizens. Those who are aware of their social responsibility and the media's role in democracy have worked dedicatedly despite unfavourable circumstances. On the other hand, Chinese language media outlets operate according to norms of social responsibility somewhat divergent from those of the mainstream media; their normative goals are often trumped by narrow definitions of social responsibility, audience tastes, and perceived community needs. As well, the prioritization of commercial interests clearly reduces their ability to provide adequate information for audience members to function as citizens. Lacking Canadian journalistic training may have resulted in a spectrum of understandings of what the media outlets ought to do, and differences do seem to impact their Canadian reportage. Especially, when serving the Chinese community is regarded as a key social responsibility, news decisions and priorities cater to certain interests and needs at the expense of others. In their quest for stability and growth, Chinese language media outlets routinely compromise higher goals and journalism quality.

Consequently, those who rely on Chinese language media as their main source of information about Canada may not be well informed on important issues. If new Canadians with language barriers are to truly become part of Canadian society, exercise their rights, and live up to their responsibilities as citizens, they need better information services. Like other ethnic media outlets, Chinese language media need to improve. Consigning them to the marketplace will not enhance professionalism or overall performance. Improved ethnic media can enhance presentation of issues and events in Canada (Yu & Ahadi, 2010). Professional training in journalism, if encouraged by state incentives, may help to improve the quality of journalism. The National Ethnic Press and Media Council has asked the federal government to subsidize the training of ethnic journalists and organized conferences for such training. Another partial solution lies in including ethnic minority affairs and narratives in mainstream media (Kymlicka, 1995). Mainstream media organizations, especially the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, should give more coverage to issues specifically concerning ethnic minority and immigrant communities and explore ways of collaboration with major ethnic media outlets. Alternatively, publicly funded communications should be considered after the example of Australia's multicultural and multilingual broadcasting. There is little justification for the absence of similar services when Canada is held up as a model of multiculturalism.

The fact that Chinese immigrants can remain on the margin of Canadian society despite two or more decades of residence points to a failure of Chinese language media and the policy of multiculturalism. National policies on immigration and media do affect social inclusion. Canada needs to reconsider its media diversity policy in relation to goals of adaptation and integration.

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