

# HKU Journalism

Newsletter  
October 2020

---

## Message from Keith

Last month, *The Washington Post* ran a terrific [story about student reporters](#) as the “journalism heroes of the pandemic era”.

With many of America’s coronavirus hotspots occurring at colleges or in university towns, the *Post* reported “student journalists have been kept busy breaking news of campus outbreaks, pushing for transparency from administrators and publishing scathing editorials about controversial reopening plans”.

As many mainstream media outlets struggle with declining advertising revenues, an uncertain online business model and layoffs of full-time staff, student journalists have stepped in to fill the void, producing top-notch reporting and helping keep communities informed. Some student-run outlets are the only daily newspapers in their towns, like my alma mater *The Michigan Daily*, which this year is celebrating 130 years of continuous publication.

Also, as the number of online media sites has proliferated, many of those sites are hungry for stories, pictures and video—now called “content”—and the key providers are students and freelancers. And many freelancers are fresh graduates of journalism schools still looking for that elusive first staff job.

The entire media ecosystem has shifted. When I graduated from *The Michigan Daily*, after occasionally dropping in on a few classes at the University of Michigan, the typical path was to get an internship that hopefully led to a full-time staff job with all the perks and benefits. Some stayed at the same publication

for many years, or decades. Others maybe had one, two or three job switches over a career. But that career trajectory is now about as common as a Detroit factory worker staying in the same assembly job for 40 years before retiring with a full pension

That new media ecosystem applies to Hong Kong. And that is why it was so disheartening to see the Hong Kong Police Force in September unilaterally impose new restrictions that will adversely affect student reporters and freelancers, who are the [journalism heroes of the past 16 months of protests](#).

It was [HKU Student Union's Campus TV](#) that captured the dramatic moment on October 1 last year when a protester became the first to be shot with a live police round. Freelancers and students were on the front lines to witness the stabbing of a police officer last July, the police beating and pepper spraying of commuters at Prince Edward MTR station on August 31 last year, and the July 27 police assault on protesters at Yuen Long. Last month, when [police violently tackled a 12-year-old girl](#) buying art supplies, a student journalist team was on the scene.

HKU Journalism joined with six other university and college journalism programmes in Hong Kong to [denounce the restrictive new police policy](#), which amounts to a de facto registration system for reporters—something that Hong Kong, with its long free press tradition, has never had before.

The police claim this [new policy](#)—recognising only reporters registered with the government or “renowned” international media—is aimed at eliminating so-called “fake journalists,” who they allege, without any evidence, are obstructing their operations. But the police have no more ability or right to determine who is a “real” or “fake” journalist based on the government registration system than I have to decide who is a “real” or “fake” police officer who doesn’t display a warrant card.

In today’s media world, dominated by student reporters, freelancers and citizen journalists, anyone with a smartphone might be at the scene and has every right to record what’s happening. For example, we know that a white Minneapolis police officer knelt on George Floyd’s neck and killed him because concerned bystanders—acting in the moment as citizen journalists—recorded the scene and released the video to the media.

Police who behave professionally and responsibly, following their own guidelines and using minimum force when necessary, should welcome more media to record their actions. They should have nothing to fear from the media spotlight.

Keith B. Richburg  
Director, Journalism and Media Studies Centre

---

## Highlights

# HKU Journalism

## WeChatSCOPE

Journalism and Media Studies Centre

The Journalism and Media Studies Centre, along with six journalism schools in Hong Kong, issued a statement on 23 September denouncing the [proposed policy by the Hong Kong Police Force](#) regarding press credentials--police will only recognize journalists who are registered with the government's Information Services Department or are a member of an internationally known media organization. The schools called on the police to rescind the proposal and called on the government to halt the proposal from becoming policy in view of the damage on freedom of the press in Hong Kong. Read the full statement [here](#).

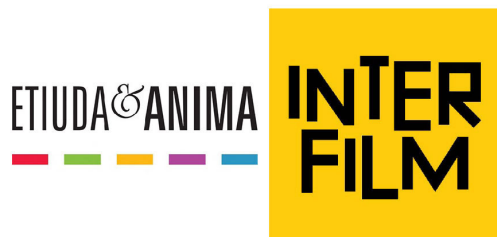
Dr. King-wa Fu and our WeChatscope team published their first peer reviewed paper about internet censorship in China, "[Specificity, Conflict, and Focal Point: A Systematic Investigation into Social Media Censorship in China](#)". Sample WeChat articles collected by WeChatscope and analysis showed that "article specificity raises the odds of being censored." Key findings: It appears that social content with elements (e.g., specific terms and textual units signaling conflicts) contributing in constructing focal points (e.g., perceived crises) may be more likely to be suppressed by the censors.

---

**Alumni & Student News**



Congratulations to Vanesse Chan (BJ 2021) and Chermaine Lee (MJ 2018), who were part of the Channel 4 News / ITN team that won the [International Emmy Award for News & Current Affairs](#) for their protest coverage, "Hong Kong Year Of Living Dangerously". Vanesse worked as a fixer and Chermaine was the local producer for the team when they were in Hong Kong last November.



Zhang Yiling's (MJ 2020) *1 A.M. in Hong Kong* has been accepted for competition at two major documentary festivals in Europe, the [International Short Film Festival Berlin](#) and [International Film Festival Etiuda&Anima](#). The film, which Yiling made for Ruby Yang and Uli Gaulke's Documentary Film Production class last spring, "captures the scenery and people of Hong Kong from 1 a.m. to 4 a.m. It shows ordinary people's attitudes towards life, their inner struggles and explorations of identity in Hong Kong."

---

## Faculty & Staff News



[Masato Kajimoto](#) spoke at this year's [APAC Trusted Media Summit](#), held from 1-2 October. He gave a talk on news literacy education and also shared his research on "trust in media" in seven APAC countries that he collaborated with our post-doctoral fellow Lex Xia.

[Diana Jou's](#) production house, Semi Circle Studios, produced two motion graphics video that debuted at the event. The first video summarizes the state of misinformation in 2020

and the second looks at what social media platforms have done to address the problem. In addition to speaking with First Draft News and the International Fact-Checking Network, they also interviewed Masato and representatives from Google, YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and TikTok.

---

## HKU Journalism in the news



(9 September) Poynter: [Amid National Security Law uncertainty, women journalists in Hong Kong forge ahead](#) (Sharron Fast)



(19 September) New Media & Society: [Speaking up or staying silent? Examining the influences of censorship and behavioral contagion on opinion \(non-\) expression in China](#), by Yuner Zhu and King-wa Fu



(23 September) Stand News: [七大專新聞系聯署 指警修改通例損新聞自由 促撤回](#)



(23 September) Hong Kong Free Press: [Hong Kong police say new journalists definition will aid frontline officers, only select media briefed on change](#)



(23 September) South China Morning Post: [Seven Hong Kong journalism schools blast police's media access restrictions, warning of threat to city freedoms](#)



(24 September) Nikkei Asian Review: [Hong Kong journalists brace for impact of new police order](#) (Keith B. Richburg)



(24 September) South China Morning Post: [How a Chinese network of fake Facebook accounts influenced online debate on South China Sea, US politics](#) (King-wa Fu)



(2 October) Hong Kong Free Press: [How Hong Kong's student reporters fear being silenced under new police rules](#) (Keith B. Richburg)

---

## Coming up



[Keith Richburg](#) will be on a Zoom panel on 7 October (HKT) co-organized by the [East-West Center](#) and *South China Morning Post* to discuss "The Future of US-China-Hong Kong Relations and Media Challenges". The panel will be moderated by Angie Lau of Forkcast.News. Other panelists include Lingling Wei of *The Wall Street Journal* and SCMP CEO Gary Liu and North America bureau chief Robert Delaney. Sign up to attend [here](#).

