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Comparative Studies on Development History of Chinese Diasporic Media in the West

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Abstract: This study compares and presents the similarities in the development of Chinese diasporic media in Western countries, especially focusing on the influence of the Chinese diaspora and the homeland political economy, from the past to the present. An investigation was conducted on the research sample—the Chinese diaspora and diasporic media in Australia and New Zealand through documentary and field research. The research results suggest that the transformation of sub-Chinese groups (from Hong Kongese to the mainlanders) and Greater China's political economy simultaneously determine the readership, advertisements, ownership, as well as media content from the early 19th century to the present. Subsequently, comparisons of the development of the Chinese diasporic media in the US, Canada, and Western Europe suggest the same two influential factors. Furthermore, the results of the findings show that contemporary Chinese diasporas and the mainland political economy impact are two of the most influential factors in the boom of overseas Chinese digital media. Overall, although Chinese diasporic media are varied and diverse, their development is determined by two external factors: the Chinese diaspora and the homeland. These findings could serve as a reference that contributes to both the diasporic media industry and research.

Keywords: Diasporic Media, Diaspora, Overseas Chinese, Historical Analysis, Global Communication

Introduction

Special Global Media “Flowers”

In the global media “garden,” there are some special “flowers” in both affluent states and developing countries. These “flowers” include the Chinese diasporic media. Their history commenced in the 19th century. One of the typical examples can be found in Australia. The Chinese Advertiser, which appeared in 1856 in Melbourne, was the earliest Chinese–English bilingual newspaper and the second oldest Australian diasporic media (Wang and Ryder, 1999). In the early 1940 s, Chinese newspapers ranked second in Australia, only after the English language media, higher than those of other diasporic press such as Italian and German diasporic newspapers (Fitzgerald, 2008).

Currently, more than 32 Chinese newspapers (dailies, weeklies, and bi-weeklies) are published in Australia. Data from the State Department Community Relations Commission shows that in New South Wales (NSW), there are approximately 100 diasporic newspapers in 40

languages, with Chinese newspapers accounting for more than 30%. While the three mainstream English language dailies are published in Sydney, there are six Chinese dailies launched in the State.

Data from the 10th Global Chinese Media Forum (Shijiazhuang, China, Oct 13-14, 2019) showed that 420 diasporic Chinese newspapers are being published in more than 55 countries across five continents, which is significantly higher than the diasporic newspapers in other languages in the world (Bai, 2010; Lin *et al.*, 2010). The forum data also demonstrate that more than 150 Chinese TV and radios are spread across the five continents worldwide.

Furthermore, the diasporic Chinese digital media, especially overseas WeChat public accounts, have gained popularity worldwide, from “Micro Sydney” (微悉尼) and “Here in the UK” (英国那些事), to “Chinese in America” (美国华人). More than 5,600 overseas WeChat public accounts (frequently updated) were recorded in June 2020, based on statistical analyses in the researcher’s project. These diasporic digital media play deliberate and overtly political, economic, cultural, and

inter-personal roles in both the diasporic and local communities. For instance, during the national and local elections in some Western countries, several political parties would advertise "soft articles" (election advertisements) on local Chinese WeChat accounts to attract Chinese migrant voters.

The aforementioned media landscape in Western countries provides an interesting and important comparative study topic: Is there any similarity among the Chinese diasporic media from the past to the present? However, it is difficult to determine a clear answer in the current research.

Research Significance and Methods

Literature Review and Research Gap

Global Chinese diasporic media are diverse in many aspects, including in area, orientation, staff background, and medium form. Nevertheless, they continue to exist overseas and are published by and for Chinese communities. They continue to have deliberate and overt contact with their Homelands-Greater China (the mainland, Hong Kong, and Taiwan). In this case, there are undoubtedly some similarities, especially in Western countries. However, a reference search shows that there is a paucity of the comparative project.

Research on the Chinese diasporic media can be divided into three categories. The first category is historical research. For example, early in the 1960 s, Gilson (1967) investigated diasporic media in Australia, including the seven historical Chinese language papers in the country. Later, Wang and Ryder (1999) revealed the earliest Chinese-English newspapers in Australia. Similar cases can be found in other Western countries, for example, Lai (1987) demonstrated and discussed the historical Chinese papers in California in the 19th century.

The second type of relevant research is the role of media. So and Lee (1995) reviewed the functions of overseas Hong Kong newspapers in Canada, providing information, liaising with the homeland, and assisting the audience to integrate into mainstream society. Other researchers, including Lin *et al.* (2010) and Xu (2006), also found similar roles in the US.

Third, some researchers reconsider these media on social and cultural aspects. A book, titled *Media and the Chinese Diasporas* (Cunningham and Sinclair, 2001), examined the dilemma, illustrating that the diasporic Chinese media has attempted to help their readers integrate into local societies, while simultaneously resisting mainstream cultures. Recently, some researchers explored the Chinese diasporic digital media culture. For instance, Told 2015 demonstrated how overseas Chinese students use WeChat with countrymen in Macao.

The aforementioned research constructs a strong terrain to reconsider global Chinese diasporic media.

However, there is a lack of comparative studies from the past to the present, as most projects only focus on an individual country. Both theoretically and practically, are there any common characteristics among the Chinese diasporic media in Western countries? This is a valuable research topic since this question is not only confined to overseas Chinese communities but also closely related to local mainstream societies, and not only confined to the media industry but also serves as a referral for research and the society. Therefore, this study aims to ascertain these research questions and fill the research gap.

Research Questions and Methods

This study aims to explore the similarities of the Chinese diasporic media in Western countries and examine the factors influencing them. The experiences of the Chinese diasporic media and relevant research show that local Chinese communities and the homeland's political-economic impacts were two of the most important factors in their development. Based on these, the following three research questions can be generated: What common characteristics can be concluded in the development of Chinese diasporic media? How do local Chinese communities shape these media? How does the homeland political economy influence these media?

Considering that there are hundreds of Chinese papers, radios, and TV stations worldwide, it is impossible to investigate all of them. However, since most of these media are located in Western countries, they could be representative. Consequently, this study intends to select the Chinese diasporic media in Australia and New Zealand as samples, compare the media in North America and Western Europe and finally elucidate their characteristics.

Australia and New Zealand were chosen because many Chinese have migrated to these two countries since the early 19th century, especially to Australia and their diasporic media also appeared in the two countries relatively early, 1856 in Australia and 1872 in New Zealand. Therefore, the stories in these two countries would be representative of Western countries. Subsequently, this study will also compare the diasporic media in North America and Western Europe and summarize their characteristics at the global level.

This study explores the three research questions by historical analysis employing two methods: Documentary and field research. Documentary research includes newspaper investigation and reference analysis. Newspaper investigation includes physical or electronic copies of the four major Chinese dailies in Australia (ACD-Australian Chinese Daily, DCH-Daily Chinese Herald, ST-Sing Tao Daily, and ANED-Australian New Express Daily) in the NSW State Library. Special attention was paid to reports from the mainland, which is to discern how the mainland political economy influenced media content. Reference analysis encompasses government records,

such as official statistics on Chinese migrants in the Australian Bureau of Statistics and newspaper copies in the local authorities.

Field research was conducted in Australia, the UK, and China. Since most Australian-Chinese papers are published in Sydney, the researcher paid monthly visits (2008-2012) to 12 towns where many Chinese people reside, including Chinatown, Eastwood, Parramatta, Ryde, Burwood, Hursville, and Chatswood. He collected Chinese community papers that were not in the libraries and interviewed local publishers and readers. The researcher also resided in London and Edinburgh between January and October 2019, where he visited and investigated Chinese communities and local media in England and Scotland.

In China, the researcher examined the largest global professional conference of the Chinese diasporic media—the 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th Global Chinese Media Forums—which was held in Qingdao in September 2013, Guiyang in August 2015, Fuzhou in August 2017, and Shijiazhuang in October 2019, respectively. He interviewed more than 20 editors from five continents and summarized their stories, concluding their stories for the development of this industry. Below are the summaries and analyses of documentary and field research results.

Influences of the Chinese Diaspora

Impacts on Media's "Birth" and "Death"

Comparative research results show that the transformation of the Chinese diaspora in Australia and New Zealand is the most influential factor in their diasporic media's birth and death. Since the mid-19th century, the Chinese diaspora had offered a reader market to their media. While the Chinese diaspora experienced tough situations, their media quantity significantly shrank, with all newspapers disappearing. On the contrary, while the Chinese diaspora experienced a prosperous period, it brought positive momentum to their media.

The Chinese are one of the oldest diasporic groups in Australia, dating back to the early 19th century. In the late 19th century, an estimated 88,000 Chinese lived in Australia, which was the second-largest diasporic group only after the British people (Fitzgerald, 2008). Given that the language, customs, and history of these people are different from mainstream Australians, this marginalized group required a special medium.

Since the late 19th century, a few Chinese people became affluent after entering farming, laundry, commerce, or import companies in Australia. They had more urgent needs on a special ethnic media providing business and the other information for them. It implied that a special reader market had matured (Jupp, 2001). Consequently, some rich businessmen established the Chinese Australian Herald in Sydney in 1894, followed by Tung Hua News in 1898, Patriotic News in 1902, and

Republic News in 1914 (Pan, 1994; Rolls, 1996; Kuo, 2009). A Chinese diasporic media landscape emerged. It can be seen that the birth of the early Chinese diasporic media can be attributed to the development of the local community.

However, after the "White Australia" policy was announced in 1909, the Chinese were forbidden from entering the country and their population gradually dwindled. The lowest number recorded was in 1947, at 4,700 people. Moreover, many of them suffered from poverty in the absence of political rights in the country, because of racial discrimination. The limited number of readers was unable to support a media market anymore, so their newspapers were suspended. Eventually, when the Australian Chinese Times ceased publication in 1957, there was no Chinese publication in the country until 1982 (Liu, 1989).

In New Zealand, the situation was the same as in Australia. The earliest Chinese who headed to the country were the laborers ("coolies") and they suffered from a miserable political and economic situation. Therefore, they could not launch or use media. At that time, the earliest Chinese media, the Chinese Herald (1872), was not established by the Chinese, but by a New Zealand priest. However, insufficient reader support led to the paper finally ceasing publication (Yang, 2008).

Since the late 19th century, an increasing number of Chinese headed to the country, which gradually led to the formation of a media market. New Zealand Herald was published by the Chinese in 1923. Thereafter, two other papers emerged. Similar to Australia, the "White New Zealand" policy (the late 1920 s) led to fewer Chinese entering the country. The shrinking and poor community could not support their media anymore. Finally, all Chinese papers terminated publication between 1972 and 1987 (Li, 2013). Overall, the early history of the Chinese media in Australia and New Zealand suggests a commonality: Political economic statuses of diasporic communities determine their media's birth and death.

Impacts on Media's "Revival"

Since the late 1970 s, both the Chinese diaspora and the diasporic media experienced similar stories in both Australia and New Zealand. These two countries adopted a multiculturalism policy and reopened their doors to migrants, which resulted in the revival and boom of the Chinese diaspora. Along with an improvement in the political economy of these diasporic people, a new reader and advertising emerged. These contributed to the media's revival.

In the early 1980 s, a considerable proportion of Hong Kongese, Taiwanese, and Southeast Chinese headed to Australia and New Zealand. The proliferation of the diasporic population suggested a mature media market (Bell *et al.*, 1991). The first contemporary Chinese medium in Australia, *the Sing Tao Daily* Australian edition,

was published in Sydney in March 1982.

Subsequently, these “media flowers,” including dailies, weeklies, and bi-weeklies, continued to flourish, resulting in 12 Chinese newspapers published in Australia in 2001 (Liu, 2012). Data retrieved from the Australian Bureau of Statistics showed that the Chinese have become the largest diasporic group in the country since 2006. The expanding community built a stable and prospective audience market, resulting in their newspaper volumes soaring to 32 in 2012 (Liu, 2013).

A similar situation occurred in New Zealand. The proliferation of Chinese migrants in the 1980s provided “fertile soil” to their media flowers. The first contemporary Chinese medium *Sing Tao Weekly*’s New Zealand edition was launched in 1987, followed by other Chinese radios and TVs (Li, 2013).

Compared to the past, the Chinese communities gained strength in both population and economy, which enlarged the diasporic media advertising market (Collins, 2002; Yang, 2008). First, the Chinese business migrants are one of the major advertising groups for their media. An increasing number of businessmen migrated to Australia and New Zealand, setting up various factories, restaurants, or companies. Since many products (e.g., food) and services (e.g., migration) have a natural ethnic tie-up with their community, these “bosses” would advertise in the local media and attract their fellow countrymen (Wu, 2003).

Second, enterprises with a non-Chinese background also ran advertisements in these newspapers. Many diasporic Chinese people obtained stable jobs and income in these two countries, especially the affluent migrants. They became potential customers for real estate, telecommunication, legal and financial services, and luxury products. This offered many business opportunities to local enterprises and international company branches. Therefore, these business organizations ran various promotions in Chinese papers to draw the attention of local Chinese customers (Collins, 2002).

Apart from the economy, the improved political status of the diasporic Chinese also contributed to their media advertising. Increasingly, people from Chinese backgrounds became Australian and New Zealand citizens and were entitled to vote in the elections. During the commonwealth, state, and council elections, political parties launched promotions in local Chinese media to attract these migrant candidates (Liu, 2013). Once again, the political and economic development of the Chinese diasporic communities in Australia and New Zealand reconstructed strong reader and advertising markets, contributing to the diasporic media’s revival and boom.

Sub-Diasporic Groups and Ownership Transformation

The transformation of the sub-Chinese diasporic groups in Australia and New Zealand also determined

the newspapers’ market and ownership. The 1970 s to the 1980 s are considered the “Hong Kong Diasporic Period.” Since the Hong Kongese were a dominant group among Chinese communities, several newspapers and TV/radios were established by them. Therefore, the Hong Kongese diaspora contributed to the birth of contemporary Chinese media in Australia. This included the two earliest and largest dailies: ACT (Australian Chinese Daily) and ST (*Sing Tao Daily*). As regards these media, a special case is the *Mirror*, a weekly established by a Hong Kongese in Sydney. On the top of the 1997 weekly issues, it was printed: “For the Hong Kong readers in Australia” (not for the Chinese mainlanders).

However, since the early 1990 s, it has been changed to the “Mainland Diasporic Period.” Considerable mainlanders have headed to Australia and New Zealand and eventually, they became the largest group among Chinese communities (Hugo, 2007). Consequently, the local Hong Kong and Taiwan background media gradually changed their market orientation in favor of the mainlanders.

For example, in the 1980 s, both ST and ACD adopted the “Right to Left” writing format used in Hong Kong.¹ However, to gain the favor of the growing mainland readers, ACD shifted their edition to “Left to Right” in 1990, followed by the ST and the other Taiwan background dailies. Likewise, a similar trend occurred in media ownership. In the 1990 s, 15 Chinese newspapers were launched in Australia, 11 in Hong Kong, and 2 in Taiwan background. In 2012, 25 of 32 Chinese newspapers in Australia had a mainland background, as most Hong Kong and Taiwan directors had sold their ownership.

Similarly, in New Zealand, all Chinese newspapers, TVs, and radios were established by the Hong Kongese or Taiwanese between the 1980 s and 1990 s. Since the early 21st century, an increasing number of mainlanders headed to the country, and some gradually became media heads. Since 2009, except for one newspaper, people from the mainland background had controlled the remaining five in the country. Subsequently, market orientation and media content also changed in favor of readers from the mainland. Essentially, similar stories in Australia and New Zealand show that the political economy of the Chinese diasporic community has become a crucial factor and significantly impacted the local media.

Influences on Homeland Political Economy

The results of documentary and field research showed that the homeland political economy of Greater China becomes a powerful factor, which significantly influenced the survival and development of their diasporic media, especially on media content and ownership. Specifically,

¹In conventional English, sentences are written from left to right. However, the traditional Chinese writing style is from right to left

the three Australian Chinese dailies, the “big two,” Sing Tao Daily and Australian Chinese Daily, as well as the “new rich,” Australian New Express Daily, relatively represent the two kinds of stories.

Homeland Impacts on Sing Tao Daily Australia Edition

Homeland political economy in Hong Kong and the mainland significantly influenced this daily since the 1960 s, including its establishment, political standpoint, and media content. Given that the media market in Hong Kong is prospective, but small and competitive, they have to explore overseas markets. In this case, Sing Tao media’s owner, Ms. Sally Sian Aw (胡仙), was a forerunner. She established the Sing Tao Los Angeles and Toronto versions in 1968 and 1972, respectively, and the Australian and New Zealand editions in 1982 and 1989, respectively. Earlier, the Chinese media had vanished in Oceania for more than two decades, but Sing Tao’s global expansion opened a new era for the Chinese diasporic media worldwide.

Until the mid-1990 s, the Australian and New Zealand editions of Sing Tao Daily had paid widespread attention to Hong Kong news and limited interest in the mainland. However, owing to the impact of the homeland (the Hong Kong Handover and the rise of mainland China), the daily gradually changed its orientation, news content, and political stance.

First, the mainland news pages steadily increased. In 1995, there was one page of mainland China and Hong Kong news each. Later, the mainland news pages increased to two in 2003 and three in 2006, more than the HK news pages. Since 2004, ST has launched the mainland finance and stock news pages and Beijing/Tianjin/Shanghai city news 2006. Specifically, the mainland pages are significantly more than the Hong Kong pages.

The news content has gradually become neutral to the mainland. An examination was conducted on the news topics on the front pages, Australian Chinese community news pages, and mainland China news pages in the Sing Tao Australian edition. Overall, 9,210 news pages were examined between 2005 and 2012. No sensitive political topic regarding the mainland was found. A further review of the 2013 and 2014 online versions showed the same trend.

The daily editing staff also acknowledged being “depolitical.” As a staff member said: “We don’t publish [political] editorials. It seems to me, if you put in an editorial, to some degree, you have to take sides right? So our policy is to just publish the [neutral] news...” (Berger, 1994, p.15). Essentially, this “depolitical” is a deliberate political standpoint. Given the mainland impacts, these dailies conducted self-censorship and canceled sensitive

news. Later, the Sing Tao media group was sold to Mr. Lock Ho, who has a large business on the mainland. The daily has to take a neutral stance, as a researcher reveals: “Sing Tao Daily reflects the business interests of its owner in China” (Cleary, 2012, p.25).

Homeland Impacts on Australia Chinese Daily

Similar to Sing Tao Daily, the development of Australian Chinese Daily (ACD) also clearly reflects the homeland influence of Hong Kong and the mainland. Regarding the Hong Kong impacts, ACD originated from the Hong Kong Daily News group. In the early 1980 s, the media headquarter had the ambition to occupy the overseas Chinese media market, so established their overseas edition-ACD-in March 1987 in Sydney.

The mainland impact also significantly changed the daily. In the 1980s, both ACD and ST targeted the Hong Kong audience in Australia. Since ST was established earlier and had more readership, ACD confronted negative readers and advertising circumstances. However, the “Tiananmen Incident” offered an opportunity to ACD. Following this incident, many mainlanders headed to Australia, but no daily offered service to them. ACD shifted media orientation to cater to these readers, and frequently published the relevant information to them, including visa, residency news, and government migration debates. Gradually, considerable mainlanders in the country became its readers.

Later, because of the Hong Kong Handover and the rise of China, the daily content has gradually become “depolitical,” even “pro”-China. The researcher conducted scrutiny of the first pages, Australian Chinese community news, and mainland China news pages between 2006 and 2010. In the 2,928 pages, no news reported sensitive political topics. A further review of the electronic version between 2011 and 2013 showed a similar trend. The editor also recognized the impact of the mainland: “We do not get complaints from the [Chinese] Consul-General about what we publish, [because of no sensitive reports]” (Cleary, 2012).

Similar to ST, ACD also constantly increased its mainland news pages. In 2000, one page each was allocated for the mainland and Hong Kong/Taiwan news. However, since 2003, there had been three pages on the mainland, only two on Hong Kong/Taiwan news. Together with the experiences of ST and ACD, the political-economic influences of the Chinese homelands can be seen in their diasporic media.

Homeland Impact on Australian New Express Daily

In 2004, a “new rich,” Australian New Express Daily, appeared in Sydney. The owner and content of this mainland “international daily” represent another story of the salient homeland influences on media

ownership and content.

Regarding ownership, this daily was initially set up by a Taiwanese media group in 1994. Later, the Chinese diaspora in Australia entered the Mainland Period and the Taiwanese population constantly decreased, so the daily readership decreased. Finally, the Taiwanese owner had to sell the media to an Australian millionaire from the mainland, Dr. Chau Chak Wing, who changed its name to *Australian New Express Daily (ANED)* in 2004, the Australian edition of the *Guangzhou New Express Daily* Group that he owns.

Under the new owner, this study maintained deliberate relations with China. One of the examples is that the daily “helped” the Chinese government in March 2008, the Olympic Torch Parade in Australia. In the Parade, some Tibetan dissidents were against the Games. *ANED* quickly bought many Chinese Five-start Red flags and distributed them to the Chinese people at present, which was to support the Torch Parade and “strike” the Tibetan protesters (Snow, 2009).

In terms of content, the researcher reviewed each topic on the first page and the China news pages of the daily between 2008 and 2014. The results showed that no sensitive political topics were published. As the director, Ms. Winky Chow says: “We do not run stories like that [sensitive news]” (Cleary, 2012, p.25). In addition, the mainland news pages are edited in the Guangzhou headquarter, so “unsafe political reports” are filtered.

Similarities of “Media Flowers”

Similarities of Global Chinese Diasporic Media

A comparison of the development of Chinese diasporic newspapers in Oceania, North America, and Western Europe suggests that the Chinese diaspora, especially the transformation of sub-diasporic groups and the homeland political economy, significantly contributed to the Chinese diasporic media market and ownership. Essentially, the Chinese diasporic media in the West showed a similar journey because they are influenced by the same factors.

Yin (2009) and Zhou *et al.* (2006) revealed that the Chinese diaspora is one of the primary influential factors in their media in the US. Between the 1950s and the 1960s, the Chinese diaspora experienced negative situations in the US, for example, they were politically marginalized and their population declined. With a shrinking readership, the Chinese papers suffered from a difficult period and many terminated their publications. Since the 1970s, the Chinese diaspora in the US gradually entered a positive period. The proliferation of the Chinese population reconstructed the reader market and led to the redevelopment of their papers.

Furthermore, the transformation of sub-diasporic

groups shifted the reader market and ownership. Before the late-1980s, the Hong Kongese and Taiwanese were composed of the dominant groups in the US–Chinese communities, so most media owners came from these areas (Yang, 2008). Subsequently, the mainland Chinese population constantly increased in the US and some have succeeded in various industries. Gradually, an increasing number of mainlanders had established or bought TV, radio, or newspapers and became owners. Considering the change of ownership and the reader market, mainland reports soared in their diasporic media.

Regarding the homeland political impacts, Chinese newspapers in the US and Oceania demonstrated a similar trend. Between the late 19th and the early 20th century, many US-Chinese newspapers supported either the Qing Dynasty Emperor or the Revolutionists. Between the 1960s and the 1990s, several newspapers were grouped into one of the two “political camps”—mainland or Taiwan (Lai, 1987). Since the early 21st century, many newspapers became “de-political” or were in favor of the mainland, because of the expanding mainland political and economic influences. In sum, as Lai (*ibid.*, p. 39) comments, “most organs (diasporic Chinese newspapers) spoke for the interests of specific (political) groups or factions.”

Likewise, the Canadian-Chinese newspapers, radios, and TVs have started a prosperous period since the early 1980s, because the Hong Kongese migration wave enlarged the reader market and most media owners came from there. However, the transformation of sub-Chinese diasporic groups changed the situation again. Since the 1990 s, mainlanders have increasingly migrated to the country and gradually established their media companies, which drove media ownership changes. Moreover, Hong Kong and the mainland’s political economy contributed greatly to these media, as most content has to be “depolitical” (So and Lee, 1995).

Similarly, Nyiri and Saveliev (2002) reiterated that the Chinese diaspora and homeland political economy significantly influenced the local Chinese newspapers’ market, ownership, and content in Western Europe. Overall, the Chinese diaspora and homeland political economy make a salient contribution to their diasporic media in Canada, West Europe, and Oceania.

“Flowers” and Influential Factors in a Digital Media Age

The Internet era began in the early 21st century. The diasporic media also increasingly went online, as Brinkerhof (2009) states that it is the “digital diaspora” age. How did the overseas Chinese communities and their homelands impact the digital diasporic media in the new era? Research results show similar influent factors in both traditional and Internet media ages.

First, the boom of the Chinese diasporic digital media is the result of contemporary Chinese diasporic communities.

In recent years, an increasing number of mainlanders went abroad, with young people, especially skilled migrants and overseas students, accounting for a major proportion. In China, young people are labeled as “the Internet Aborigines” (Internet generation). Considering their media consumption habit, they spend considerable time online not only for sending messages but also for entertainment and services. Consequently, thousands of diasporic Weibo and WeChat accounts were established for them. That is to say, the boom of diasporic Chinese digital media is the result of “digital fans” in overseas communities.

However, the Chinese diasporic digital media are also under the control of the homeland. This can be categorized into two types: Overseas individual accounts and institutional accounts. Regarding the first type, irrespective of the Weibo and WeChat accounts from other countries, they have to be registered by a Chinese mobile phone number. In China, using a mobile phone has to be registered with a domestic ID card. In this case, these digital diasporic accounts are under the surveillance of the mainland Chinese government. Especially, their accounts would be canceled if they publish sensitive political topics that the government does not like.

The situation is the same for institutional accounts. Overseas Weibo and WeChat accounts of Chinese state-owned media are under censorship, similar to newspapers and TV stations in their headquarters. Regarding the other overseas local media and associations (e.g., Sing Tao and Australian Chinese Daily), their accounts are also required to have self-censorship, otherwise the Chinese authorities will terminate their subscription. To gain the favor of the mainland, these digital media have to hold a neutral political standpoint and are unwilling to post negative news online, although they are “the overseas media.”

For example, Sing Tao Daily Los Angeles group has established their WeChat accounts, but most of the content is composed of overseas local information without sensitive news, which is the same as in their newspapers. This implies that the homeland’s influence on digital media is the same as on traditional media. So and Lee (1995) point out the homeland's influence in the traditional media age, but it can still be referred to in the present: “(these media branches) depoliticize the editorial contents so that the Chinese government and its representatives in Hong Kong would not feel offended” (So and Lee, 1995).

Conclusion

Referring to the three research questions, analyses and comparisons from the past and present of the development of Chinese diasporic media clearly show the first characteristic: All Chinese diasporic media “flowers” grow in their “soil”-diasporic communities. This is the reason why the Chinese diaspora, including the changes of sub-diasporic groups

from Hong Kongese to the mainlanders, determines their diasporic media’s birth and deaths from the 19th century to the present in Western countries, particularly in media content, orientation, and ownership.

Regarding the second characteristic, homeland impact is considered a double-edged sword. Meanwhile, the homeland political economy has a strong desire to manipulate its diasporic media. For instance, the Hong Kong media conglomerates established their overseas branches for overseas market occupation and they also restrict the political standpoint to “please” the mainland. At the same time, the Chinese government is also concerned about its global image and attempts to control overseas Chinese media through various channels. This would hinder the diasporic media's development.

Conversely, the Chinese diasporic media needs the homeland's support for survival. These media have various deliberate contacts with the homeland such as personal relations, news sources, and especially the current digital media platform-WeChat. Therefore, they have to adhere to this external force. One of the examples is that some institutional media owners have major businesses in the mainland and Hong Kong, and they use their overseas media as a “tool” for their benefit.

But the finding shows some similarities remain in both traditional and new media ages, despite the rapid development of digital media. The transformation is just the “medium,” the physical format of media: From paper/TV/radio to social media. However, the two crucial influential factors are not changed from history to the present: Diasporic communities and homeland impacts, which still determine overseas digital Chinese media at present.

Admittedly, the Chinese diasporic media are significantly diverse in Western countries from the past to the present. However, the similarities reflect the interactions between media development and external power (local community and homeland political economy). This study reveals the similarities of these media and the findings would contribute to both Chinese diasporic communities and mainstream societies, as well as media practices and theoretical research at the global level. Therefore, this comparative study is a valuable topic and it is imperative to launch further investigations and compare this special global media landscape and conceptualize new theories for the international academic community and media industry.

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Ethics

This article is original and to the best knowledge of the author has not been published before. The authors declared that there are no ethical issues that may arise after the publication of this manuscript.

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