

## *Emerging Media: Hong Kong and the Early Evolution of the Chinese Press\**

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The newspaper has been a key element in China's modernization.<sup>1</sup> A large body of literature on the history of China's modern press, works of varying degrees of accuracy and analytical depth, has been produced, and yet, there are still many gaps in our knowledge of its development.<sup>2</sup> Here, I will discuss one newspaper, the *Zhongwai xinwen qiribao* (hereafter, the *Qiribao*), published between March 1871 and April 1872, to show how, at a very crucial stage of the press's development, Chinese journalists emerged from under the appen-

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<sup>1</sup> See Chang Hao, 'Intellectual Change and the Reform Movement, 1890–8', in *The Cambridge of History China*, Vol. 11, *Late Ch'ing, 1800–1991*, part 2, ed. John K. Fairbank and Kwang-Ching Liu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 274–338, pp. 333–6.

<sup>2</sup> The most authoritative, if rather pedantic, study of Chinese newspapers in the 19th century is Toh Lanseng, *Zhongguo jindai baoye fazhan shi 1815–1874* (Taipei: Zhengzhong shudian, 1998). One of his main contributions is in correcting many oft-repeated errors through a meticulous examination of original newspapers, especially rare copies deposited in libraries around the world. Previous to Toh, several works which were frequently cited as authorities include Roswell S. Britton, *The Chinese Periodical Press, 1800–1912* (Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, 1935) and Ge Gongzhen, *Zhongguo baoxue shi* (The History of Chinese Journalism) (Hong Kong: Taiping shuju, 1964) but unfortunately they are full of mistakes. Toh's book was originally published in Japanese. Different parts of it have appeared as articles in Chinese in *Xinwen Yanjiu Ziliao* (Materials for the research on the press) and *Xinwen xue yanjiu* (Mass Communication Research). However, despite the many corrections he has put forward, the same mistakes continue to appear in recent works by others.

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ticeship of Westerners and shaped this new medium to their own social, political and cultural needs.

### Nineteenth-Century Hong Kong

The early Chinese press cannot be seriously studied without also taking into account the development of the English press.<sup>3</sup> Hong Kong, which became a British colony in 1842 and where since the 1840s the English-language press had flourished, also became fertile ground for the germination of Chinese newspapers. Though it was in Malacca that the first Chinese magazine was produced, it was Hong Kong and not Malacca that evolved into a major centre of Chinese journalism, a status that it still enjoys to this day. The English newspaper became the incubator for Chinese who first served as printers and translators and finally as writers, editors and managers themselves. Free from the social and political constraints operative under Chinese jurisdiction, Chinese newspapers in Hong Kong had more room to grow than in any other locality in China.<sup>4</sup> Taking their cue from English newspapers that took upon themselves the function of watchdog of the government, Chinese newspapers provided a vehicle for Chinese eager to speak out on public affairs, giving a voice to commoners who had hitherto been denied access to the authorities. Indeed, the Qing government had banned public discussion of politics, and even among scholar-officials, political opinions were not freely communicated.<sup>5</sup> The circumstances prevailing

<sup>3</sup> For foreign newspapers on the China coast, see Frank H. H. King and Prescott Clarke, *A Research Guide to China-Coast Newspapers 1822-1911* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1965); Prescott Clarke, 'The Development of the English-language Press on the China Coast 1827-1881' (M.A. Thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1961). For the impact of foreigners on Chinese newspapers, see Fang Hanqi (ed.), *Zhongguo xinwen shiye tongshi* (History of Chinese Journalism) (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 1992), pp. 243-446. Fang was much less generous to the foreign pioneers of the Chinese press in an earlier work, *Zhongguo jindai baokan shi* (A Modern history of the newspapers and magazines of China) (Taiyuan, Shanxi: Shanxi sheng Xinhua shudian, 1981).

<sup>4</sup> The only legal constraint on newspapers in Hong Kong before 1871 was an 1860 ordinance requiring a surety of £250 against damages and cost of conviction should editor or publisher be found guilty of libel. King and Clarke, p. 23. For the debate on the press ordinance, see James William Norton-Kyshe, *The History of the Laws and Courts of Hong Kong from the Earliest Period to 1898* (Hong Kong: Vetch and Lee Ltd, 1971; first published 1898), vol. 1, 653-5.

<sup>5</sup> See Chang Hao, 'Intellectual Change and the Reform Movement, 1890-8', p. 336.

in Hong Kong also enabled Chinese to express their views as subject people of the colonial government. Later, toward the end of the century, political parties made Hong Kong a base for action as well as for polemics and propaganda, leading to further outbursts of journalistic energy.

The commercial nature of Hong Kong likewise played a vital role, not only by creating a demand for quick and accurate commercial information for Chinese businessmen but also by creating a need to promote the interests, aspirations and values of merchants through the media. The success of some of the English newspapers, moreover, showed Chinese entrepreneurs that news was a saleable commodity and that investing in a commercial newspaper could be profitable. Interestingly, we will find that besides owning Chinese language papers, Chinese entrepreneurs later invested in English papers as well.<sup>6</sup> In terms of occupation, journalism offered a new career for Western-educated Chinese; and for a number of Chinese literati, who, for whatever reasons, found themselves in Hong Kong in the latter half of the nineteenth century, frustrated and alienated from the conventional avenue of advancement, the civil service examinations, journalism offered an alternative career path and livelihood.

While the primary position of Hong Kong in the history of Chinese newspapers has been widely acknowledged and discussed, the *Qiribao* has, until recently, been largely overlooked.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, there has been an overemphasis on the pioneering role of Wang Tao's *Xunhuan ribao*. An examination of the *Qiribao*, launched three years before the *Xunhuan ribao*, offers a rare opportunity to raise new questions and provide new perspectives on the nature of Chinese journalism in the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> What did these Chinese pioneer journalists hope to achieve with the newspaper? How did they make the newspaper relevant and appealing, in terms of content and

<sup>6</sup> In 1901, the *Hong Kong Telegraph* was purchased by a group of Chinese investors, including Sir Robert Ho Tung. In 1903, Chinese money was invested in the company founded to publish the *South China Morning Post* (King and Clarke, p. 27).

<sup>7</sup> Toh Lan Sang's account is primarily concerned with format rather than putting the newspaper in a wider historical context. A brief description of the *Qiribao* is also given in Fang Hanqi, *Tongshi*.

<sup>8</sup> Many works have touched on Wang Tao and the *Xunhuan ribao*; however, there is a question how many of the authors have really read significant issues of the original paper that are extant. Reading the actual paper may give a very different perspective from reading only Wang's writings extracted from it. See especially Lai Guanglin, 'Wang Tao yu *Xunhuan ribao*' (Wang Tao and *Xunhuan ribao*) *Baoxue* 3:9 62-64 (1967), pp. 52-64.

style, to its diverse audiences—officials in China and Hong Kong, merchants, shopkeepers, clerks and others making up Hong Kong's polyglot population? How did the newspaper evolve as a new social space as it addressed and engaged different groups? How did this voice from the margin create a new social order as it demanded attention from the Centre?

### The English Language Press

The *Qiribao* first appeared on 11 March, 1871 as part of the *China Mail*. By 1871, the English press in Hong Kong had accumulated three decades of experience. The history of Hong Kong's English press began with *The Friend of China and the Hong Kong Gazette* in 1842. It was followed by the *Hong Kong Register* which began in 1843 and the *China Mail* itself in 1845. Prior to the 1860s, an assortment of other papers appeared and disappeared in rapid succession. Of the three major newspapers, however, only the *China Mail* survived beyond the 1860s, as *The Friend of China* ceased publication in 1859 and the *Register* in 1863.<sup>9</sup> Thenceforth, the *China Mail's* main rival was the *Daily Press* which, founded in 1857, pioneered the daily newspaper in Hong Kong.<sup>10</sup> Hong Kong dominated South China journalism when several efforts to start a newspaper in Guangzhou failed, but after 1860, Shanghai's growing importance was felt in Hong Kong in journalism as in other fields.<sup>11</sup> But the fact that during most of this period, three or more English newspapers co-existed in a relatively small European community testifies to the intense commercial activities and the important role information and the information business played in Hong Kong.

The *Daily Press* was equally important for pioneering the first Chinese newspaper in Hong Kong, the *Xianggang Chuantou huojia zhi* in 1857. This weekly paper was the first privately published Western

<sup>9</sup> Some have argued that the *China Mail* was successful because it had the government contract to publish the gazettes, all official announcements, proclamations, and other notices. From 1845 to 1853 these were printed in the newspaper, and from 1855 to 1858, the *China Mail* had the contract to print it as a separate publication. Besides its local market, it also had a home market in Great Britain. It was also part of a larger establishment, A. Shortrede and Company (King and Clarke, p. 23).

<sup>10</sup> King and Clarke, p. 20.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 20.

style newspaper in the Chinese language. It was later renamed *Zhongwai xinbao*.<sup>12</sup>

The *China Mail*, in its own way, played a number of roles in the history of Chinese journalism. It began indirectly when Andrew Shor-trede, who owned the company that published the *China Mail*, financed the American education of Wong Shing at Monson, Massachusetts in 1846–1848. Among other things, Wong became editor of the *Zhongwai xinbao*. Later, he was to organize the *Xunhuan ribao* with Wang Tao.<sup>13</sup>

More directly and more importantly, the *China Mail* contributed to the development of Chinese journalism by publishing Chinese newspapers itself. In 1864, it published the *Jinshi bianlu* (Hong Kong News), with, according to some sources, Wang Tao as editor.<sup>14</sup> Then, in 1871, it published the *Zhongwai xinwen qiribao*.

Of these papers, only scattered issues of the *Zhongwai xinbao* are extant, while the *Jinshi bianlu* has not survived at all except for fragments reprinted in other papers. We are therefore fortunate that the *Qiribao* has survived intact to bear witness to this juncture in the history of the Chinese press.

The emergence of the *Qiribao* in Hong Kong in 1871 was no accident. The late 1860s saw great changes in the Chinese population. With a growing number of wealthy Chinese operating larger business concerns, the *China Mail* must have recognized a market for one more newspaper.<sup>15</sup> In addition, as the Chinese became better educated, more socially active and aspiring to higher things—and even perhaps harbouring greater gentry pretensions—they demanded a more sophisticated paper, something more intellectually stimulating

<sup>12</sup> Toh, pp. 116–26.

<sup>13</sup> King and Clarke, p. 65. Baptized while abroad, Wong was placed in charge of the printing establishment of the Anglo-Chinese College operated by the London Missionary Society. He continued as manager for 10 years until he left to join the staff of the Chinese Government School which was being established in Shanghai, but he returned to Hong Kong after a short time and resumed management of the LMS Press. See Carl T. Smith, 'The Emergence of a Chinese Elite', in his *Chinese Christians: Elites, Middlemen and the Church in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 103–38, 134–5 and *passim*; see also Smith, *A Sense of History: Studies in the Social and Urban History of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Educational Publishing Co., 1995) for the church and Chinese Christians in Hong Kong.

<sup>14</sup> Toh, p. 215, quoting Roswell Britton, p. 42.

<sup>15</sup> See Elizabeth Sinn, *Power and Charity. The Early History of the Tung Wah Hospital, Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 84–5; Chan Wai-Kwan, *The Making of Hong Kong Society: Three Studies of Class Formation in Early Hong Kong* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

than bare-bone news reporting, and superior in literary quality.<sup>16</sup> It is also conceivable that, with an increasing sense of self-importance, the merchants felt entitled to a greater voice in public issues, both local and national, and that the *Qiribao* was created in part to provide the venue for such expression.

### The *Qiribao*

The *Qiribao* first appeared on 11 May 1871. It was printed every Saturday as an integral part of the *China Mail*. In the first issue, it appeared on page 3, occupying 4 out of 6 columns, while the remaining 2 columns were in English. In subsequent issues, it took up one full page, and later it appeared on page 7 instead of page 3.<sup>17</sup>

### The Editor

Its editor, Chen Aiting,<sup>18</sup> was appointed assistant editor of the *China Mail* on 1 March and the *Qiribao* made its debut 11 days later. Educated at an Anglican school, St Paul's College, and baptized, Chen was very much a product of British Hong Kong. Given the special circumstances of the colony, the English language, offered in schools run largely by missionaries, opened doors to new social and economic opportunities for Chinese boys.<sup>19</sup> Before joining the *China Mail*, Chen worked for seven years at the Police Magistrate's court, first as 4th Chinese Interpreter and later as 3rd Clerk.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> According to the *Shanghai Courier*, the *Qiribao* was of a better quality than the other Chinese newspapers. *Shanghai Courier*, 15 June 1871, reprinted in *China Mail*, 21 June 1871. See below.

<sup>17</sup> A possible reason why the newspaper has been largely overlooked for so long is that it is buried in the middle of an English language paper. Historians who read the English part of the newspaper would mostly not be interested in the Chinese parts and Chinese scholars would not have thought of seeking a Chinese newspaper inside an English one. As it is not a separate entity, it also has not been separately catalogued in libraries.

<sup>18</sup> Chen Aiting was also known as Chen Yan, or Chen Xian, and by his foreign friends, as Chen Ayin. he was a native of Xinhui county, Guangdong province.

<sup>19</sup> Carl T. Smith, 'English-educated Chinese elite in nineteenth century Hong Kong', in his *Chinese Christians*, pp. 139–71.

<sup>20</sup> According to the *Hong Kong Blue Books*, he was first appointed 4th Chinese Interpreter in the police Magistrate's court on 1 Feb. 1864 at an annual salary of 45 pounds; in 1865, his salary was raised to 62 pounds, 10 shillings; in 1866 he became 3rd clerk at an annual salary of 120 pounds which was increased to 175

He was widely known among Westerners for his linguistic talents. On many occasions he acted as interpreter for deputations to the Governor and in particular, John Pope Hennessy, governor from 1877 to 1882, was very impressed by him.<sup>21</sup> Hennessy later referred to him as 'a friend of mine'.<sup>22</sup> He was also interpreter for the Commission to investigate the working of the Contagious Diseases Ordinance, and was appreciated as 'an interpreter of the highest value' and for his 'intimate and thorough knowledge of his countrymen and of their modes of thought and feelings'.<sup>23</sup> His reputation as a 'young Cantonese linguist' found its way even to distant Shanghai.<sup>24</sup>

Wang Tao, one of the most progressive reform thinkers of the late Qing period, a pioneer of modern Chinese journalism and a classical scholar of some repute,<sup>25</sup> was full of praise for Chen, especially for his knowledge of the law which he must have acquired at the Magistracy. Not surprisingly, Wang recommended Chen to the service of Ding Richang, who was among the most reform-minded provincial officials of the day.<sup>26</sup> Surely, Wang argued rather rhetoric-

pounds in 1868 and things remained unchanged for 69 and 70. There is no entry for 1871.

<sup>21</sup> 'Statement of Hennessy', *Hong Kong Government Gazetteer* 1881, pp. 421 and 426.

<sup>22</sup> 'Minutes of the Meeting of the Legislative Council' 3 June 1881, in *Hong Kong Government Gazette*, 4 June 1881, p. 388. Hennessy also added that he believed that Chen was currently receiving a salary of \$1200 per annum as an officer of the Chinese Government in Cuba where he was the Consul-general.

<sup>23</sup> Great Britain, *British Parliamentary Papers: China* (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1971-), XXV, p. 523.

<sup>24</sup> *Shanghai Courier*, 15 June 1871, reprinted in *China Mail*, 21 June 1871.

<sup>25</sup> Scores of articles have been written about Wang Tao; one of the earliest is Lo Hsiang-lin, 'Wang Tao zai Gang yu Zhongguo wenhua fazhan zhi guanxi' (Wang Tao in Hong Kong and the development of Chinese culture) in Lo Hsiang-lin, *Xiang-gang yu Zhong Xi wenhua zhi jiaoliu* (Hong Kong and the cultural interchange between China and the West) (Hong Kong: Zhongguo xuehui, 1961), pp. 43-76. Recent monographs include Xin Ping, *Wang Tao pingzhuan* (Critical biography of Wang Tao) (Shanghai: Huadong Shifan Daxue, 1990) and Zhang Hailin, *Wang Tao pingzhuan* (Critical biography of Wang Tao) (Nanjing University Press, 1993). Paul A. Cohen's, *Between Tradition and Modernity: Wang T'ao and Reform in Late Ch'ing China*, though written almost a quarter of a century ago, is still a basic reference. For Wang Tao and Hong Kong, see Elizabeth Sinn, 'Fugitive in Paradise: Wang Tao and Cultural Transformation in Late 19th Century Hong Kong', *Late Imperial China* 19:1 (June 1998), 56-81.

<sup>26</sup> For Ding Richang, see Jonathan K. Ocko, *Bureaucratic Reform in Provincial China: Ting Jih-chang in Restoration Kiangsu 1867-1870* (Cambridge, Mass: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1982); Lu Shi-qiang, *Ding Richang yu ziqiang yundong* (Ting Jih-chang and China's Self-strengthening) (Taipei: Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, 1972); Deng Yibing, *Ding Richang Pingzhuan* (Critical bio-

ally, Chen must be outstanding in Western learning, for why else would Westerners—his employers at the *China Mail*—be so impressed by him that they offered him a job?<sup>27</sup> Thus while foreigners valued Chen for his knowledge of his own people, the Chinese admired him for his ‘Western learning’. He seems to have been the ideal cultural broker.

Chen was also an active and respected member of the community. He was a member of the 1872 Committee of the Tung Wah Hospital,<sup>28</sup> which will be discussed below. He contributed to China’s modernization in a number of ways. In 1878, he joined the staff of the newly appointed Chinese minister to the United States, Chen Lanbin, and became Consul-general in Havana, Cuba. After ten years there, he returned to China and became Director of the Chinese Engineering and Mining Company and later, Director of the Shanghai-Nanjing Railway Administration. He died in Shanghai in 1905.<sup>29</sup>

graphy of Ding Richang) (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chuban she, 1988), and Zhang Lu, *Ding Richang Yanjiu* (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chuban she, 1988).

<sup>27</sup> Wang Tao, ‘Shang Fengshun Ding Zhongcheng’ (Letter to Ding Richang) in his *Taoyuan chidu* (Letters of Wang Tao), 12 *juan* (Shanghai: Zhonghua shudian 1959), pp. 121–2, p. 122. Ding obviously viewed Hong Kong students as an important source of talent for China. See Ding Richang, ‘Pai yuan fu Xianggang zhaowu xuesheng xi guanxia pian’ (Memorial on sending persons to Hong Kong to recruit student navigators), in *Jindai Zhongguo dui Xifang ji lieqiang renshi ziliao huibian* (Collected materials on China’s understanding of Western and other powers in modern times), part 3, vol. 1 (Taipei: Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, 1972). Ding was also an early advocate of the Chinese newspaper (Deng, p. 57).

<sup>28</sup> Cumulative list of Committee members, 1870–1933, in Tung Wah Hospital, *Zhengxinlu* (Annual accounts) 1933 (Hong Kong: Tung Wah Hospital, 1933).

<sup>29</sup> Lin Yulan, ‘Chen Aiting yu Xianggang Huazi ribao’ (Chen Aiting and Journalism in Hong Kong), *Baoxue* 10 (June 1978), pp. 131–3. This is so far the only article focused on Chen Aiting, but unfortunately there are a number of crucial mistakes. See also Carl Smith, ‘Emergence of a Chinese Elite’.

It would be instructive to compare the similarities between the career paths of Chen Aiting and Wu Tingfang, Hong Kong’s first Chinese barrister and member of the Legislative Council. Wu, who had known Chen since his youth, went to the same school, St Paul’s, and also started his working life as a translator in the police courts. Likewise, he worked for a Chinese newspaper, the *Zhongwai xinbao*, although the exact nature of his work there is still uncertain and awaits further research. They both entered China’s diplomatic service, with Wu ending up as Chinese minister to the United States. While Chen contributed further to China’s modernization by working in mining and railway administrations, Wu was instrumental in reforming Chinese laws in the last days of the Qing empire. See Wu’s obituary on Chen, originally printed in *North China Daily Press* and reprinted in *Hong Kong Daily Press*, 26 August, 1905. For Wu’s biography, see Linda Pomerantz-Zhang, *Wu Tingfang (1842–1922) Reform and Modernization in Modern Chinese History* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1992).



*Objectives and Expectations*

In promoting his paper, Chen Aiting pronounced on the function of the newspaper as well as his expectations of the *Qiribao*. In doing so, he manifested his perception of what the market demanded while elucidating his own political and social ideals. His newspaper, Chen claimed, was primarily aimed at enriching the knowledge and broadening the vision of Chinese merchants and literati. It was not aimed at making a profit. The cynical will not take this sales talk too seriously. What is more important, however, is to examine whether the paper delivered what it promised. Chen stated that it would take a broad approach. It would translate from Western newspapers reports on every aspect of Western countries, including state policy, social conditions, military and legal affairs, commerce and industry, but equal attention would be paid to current affairs in China. It would report on anything that would be beneficial for Chinese to know, he emphasized, and would do so completely honestly.

In fact his 'broad approach' needs qualification. With regard to matters of interest in China and overseas, especially about Chinese abroad, the coverage was indeed comprehensive in scope. However, where Hong Kong was concerned, it only covered matters and issues with a direct bearing on Chinese residents, omitting those that did not. Even so, it was remarkably cosmopolitan in outlook.

Moreover, Chen saw his paper as a public forum, calling upon readers to write in to express their views on current events, both in China and overseas. As long as they were not libelous, 'Any lofty comments or observations which have the ability to enlighten the ignorant and increase their wisdom' would be printed.<sup>30</sup> He kept his promise and a number of very interesting letters and articles from readers appeared, as we shall see.

Behind this declaration of aims lay a more fundamental philosophy concerning the role and power of the press. Certainly, from a business point of view, it was essential for Chen to highlight the usefulness of the newspaper not only to meet market needs, but also to *create* a market for his product. In the past, Chen claimed, Chinese did not realize the newspaper's vital importance. They despised it out of ignorance<sup>31</sup> despite the fact that in the West, it was highly regarded. He explained that, apart from simply providing informa-

<sup>30</sup> QB 25 March 1871.

<sup>31</sup> QB 2 March 1872.

tion, the newspaper could achieve a variety of significant political and social goals. In this respect, the *Qiribao* seems to have consciously assumed a role that the other Chinese newspapers and magazines, which concentrated mainly on simple news reporting, commercial information, general and scientific knowledge, and even proselytizing, rather than dealing with social and political issues, did not intend to play.<sup>32</sup>

On one level, Chen conceived of the newspaper as the vehicle for advancing pure and disinterested advice on governance (*chi qingyi*) and the *Qiribao* addressed itself to both the Chinese and Hong Kong governments on various issues.<sup>33</sup> It was particularly concerned with improving China's governance (*zuo Zhong zhi*). One way of achieving this was to broaden people's intellectual horizons by opening the world to them. Through translating the foreign press, the newspaper could enable readers to understand the working of politics, the strengths and weaknesses of governments and the means by which Western countries gained wealth and power. They could read about state policies, military movements and international relations as well as the commercial activities of businessmen, the political orientation of the people and the social norms of Western society, and adopt the good methods and principles of the West as reference for understanding the Chinese situation. China could also learn Western crafts and industries.<sup>34</sup> The key to good governance, Chen seems to indicate, was knowledge; the newspaper empowered the readers by providing new and useful knowledge and this in turn made the readers' views worthy of government attention. Certainly, equipped with a broader range of information, interpretation and debate on areas that involved moral and political, social and cultural choices, readers were enabled to register dissent and propose alternatives.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> For example, see 'Notice', *Shanghai xinbao*, 24 June 1862 which shows that its objectives were confined to disseminating commercial information.

<sup>33</sup> Chinese officials did pay close attention to Chinese newspapers published in Hong Kong. In 1862, the Governor-General of Guangdong and Guangxi was so upset by two articles in the *Zhongwai xinbao* accusing him of corruption that the Chinese government protested to the British Foreign Office. See Robinson to Newcastle, 23 April 1862, # 77: Great Britain. Colonial Office. Series 129/85, pp. 370-8.

<sup>34</sup> QB 8 July 1871.

<sup>35</sup> See Peter Golding and Graham Murdock, 'Culture, Communications, and Political Economy' in James Curran and Michael Gurevitch (eds), *Mass Media and Society*. 2nd edn (London, New York, Sydney, Auckland: Arnold, 1996), pp. 11-30, p. 18 for the ideal situation for communication systems to contribute to the making of citizens. Here, however, citizenship is not an issue.

On another level, Chen claimed the newspaper had an immense moral role to play. Not only could it show the government what was right, it could also instil the right spirit in people's hearts. By praising the good, condemning the bad and warning against evil, it acted as a moralizing force. In Chen's view, it could play a very lofty role, for by establishing the just opinions of the people the high moral principles of the Three Dynasties—a legendary time in high antiquity when the sage kings were perfectly wise—could be maintained. The newspaper had the power to reform public morality, manners and customs, and like a mirror, enabled people to see themselves more clearly.

What distinguished the newspaper from other forms of literature, Chen explained, was that the former's views were based on facts while the latter used flowery language to make empty talk. The newspaper, as he represented it, was a new phenomenon in the Chinese order of things. It opened an avenue for non-titled commoners to speak out on political matters as well as to play a moralizing role in society, a role reserved by convention for the Confucian scholar-gentry alone.<sup>36</sup> In this way, the newspaper became an unorthodox voice forcing itself onto a system that had been rigidly bound by convention and protocols of hierarchy. As there were few existing channels of communications between the common people and the rulers, this was a new and important departure. Though, theoretic-

<sup>36</sup> It is commonly acknowledged that the merchant occupied a social position secondary to the scholar-official. However, merchants, we are told by scholars who argue against this long-held view, did participate to some degree in local elite activities in late Imperial China. It is interesting to note that historians like Yu Ying-shih argue that merchants had been enjoying higher social status than commonly assumed since as early as the 16th century. See Yu Ying-shih, *Zhongguo jindai zongjiao lunli yu shangren jingshen* (Religious ethics and merchant ethos in modern China) (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1987). In particular, Mary Rankin and R. Keith Schoppa stress the diversity of the local elite and the fusion of merchant and gentry groups, especially in the commercialized provincial centres. (See Joseph W. Esherick and Mary Backus Rankin (eds), *Chinese Local Elites and Patterns of Dominance* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1990), 'Introduction', pp. 6–9; R. Keith Schoppa, 'Power, Legitimacy, and Symbol', in *ibid.*, pp. 140–61; Mary Backus Rankin, *Elite Activism and Political Transformation in China, Zhejiang Province, 1865–1911* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986) and her 'Managed by the People: Officials, Gentry, and the Foshan Charitable Granary, 1795–1845', *Late Imperial China*, vol. 15, no. 2 (December 1994), pp. 1–52). But despite these works the dominant position of the scholar-gentry class remained the rule and the Confucian discrimination against merchants lasted into the late 19th century. See Wang Tao's sympathy for merchants' plight in 'Dai shang Su Fu Li Gongbao shu' (Letter to Li Hongzhang), Wang Tao, *Taoyuan chidu*, pp. 269–88, especially p. 284.

ally, good government depended on the people's conditions being transmitted and made known to the rulers (*xiaqing shangda*), in practice, it was up to the officials to seek out what society thought and felt and report it back to the court. In this sense, the *Qiribao* by claiming an alternative and direct channel of access to Chinese officialdom and power, was undermining the old social structure.

Chen's paper, addressing itself directly to the rulers, marks a crucial turning point not only in the development of the Chinese press, but in Chinese history itself. Up to this point, Chinese newspapers run by foreigners had been fairly marginal in Chinese society. Print materials primarily concerned with evangelical missions were targeted at the common people not the court, while commercial papers providing shipping news and price lists were targeted at merchants. Now, Chen was transforming the newspaper into a device for commoners like himself and his readers, to speak, however tenuously, to the authorities and demanding their attention. In the process, he was redrawing boundaries and introducing new rules for the public sphere. His task was all the more formidable in view of the multiple marginalization he faced. He was, in fact, the quintessential marginal man. As non-gentry, he was excluded from conventional elite society; English-educated, he was outside of Chinese intellectual orthodoxy; working in Hong Kong, he operated under a foreign, colonial regime beyond Chinese jurisdiction. Indeed, the newspaper itself was such an alien invention that he had to work hard to persuade the majority of his fellow-countrymen of its value. This multiple marginalization made his efforts to address the centre all the more formidable and historically significant.

The *Qiribao* was an innovation in another sense. Chen was keen to present the *Qiribao* as a *Chinese* paper. Though aware that it was not the first Chinese newspaper he emphasized that it was the first ever to be *controlled* by Chinese. Like other Chinese papers of the time, the *Qiribao* was owned by foreigners, but unlike them, Chen claimed, it was controlled by a Chinese editor who made its rules and determined its direction. Of course, we cannot judge conclusively if this was the case, but what is noteworthy is that Chen thought it was appropriate to accentuate this as a selling point. At least he showed that he valued the idea of the independence of a Chinese editor, free from the proprietor's interference.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Whether editors are ever completely free is of course questionable, and political economists certainly argue that the financing of 'cultural production' affects

And yet, despite this claim, Chen was not entirely unambivalent on this point. Notwithstanding the fact that the Chinese editor of a foreign-owned newspaper could be highly independent, as he would show, he admitted that it would be even better if the newspaper were owned outright by Chinese, and lamented that so far, there was no Chinese-owned paper. Setting up a newspaper, he admitted, was too expensive a venture for one person to undertake, and could only be done through organizing a partnership. How much more satisfactory it would be for the Chinese community if people could come forward to finance a Chinese newspaper!<sup>38</sup> The English editor of the *China Mail* too felt that a Chinese-owned paper was preferable, but apparently for very different reasons. The reason why Chen was so frustrated by the absence of a Chinese-capitalized newspaper becomes clear when we see the *China Mail's* attitude toward the *Qiribao*. In a notice announcing the transfer of the Chinese section from page 3 to page 7, the *China Mail* stated:

The change is not unimportant to at least some of our subscribers. Hitherto, our Chinese page has been included in the inner form, with the ordinary local and general foreign material; and thus, when an intelligent houseboy or coolie wanted to 'savez' what was going on, he could only do so at the risk of inconveniencing his master. By the new arrangement, the intelligent house-boy or coolie may divide with his master (always with his master's consent) the contents of our Saturday publication, and the master will escape the infliction which has been entailed upon him hitherto by the literary propensities of his native servants.<sup>39</sup>

How this dismissive and condescending tone mocks Chen Aiting's own lofty visions! The readers he hoped for were certainly not the 'intelligent houseboy' nor the 'coolie who wanted to "savez" what was going on'. Rather, envisaging the newspaper as the vehicle for the pure and disinterested advice for rulers and an instrument for the rectification of society's moral behaviour, Chen had intended it for the enlightenment of Chinese merchants, literati as well as officials of both China and Hong Kong. One can easily see the considerable, perhaps irreconcilable, distance between the expectations the European staff of the *China Mail* had for the *Qiribao* and those of Chen himself. Thus, though it might be true that the Chinese editor was able to 'control' the newspaper, one may imagine the likely tensions existing between the owners of the *Qiribao* and its editor.

the ranges of discourse and representations in the public domain (see Golding and Murdock, 'Culture, Communications, and Political Economy', p. 11).

<sup>38</sup> QB 6 and 30 March 1871.

<sup>39</sup> CM 12 Aug. 1871.

*Layout and Approach*

After the first issue, the *Qiribao* occupied one whole page of the *China Mail*. In general, each issue included the following sections:

1. Advertisements and government notices,
2. Local/Hong Kong news (*'Ben Gang xinwen'*) including reports of Legislative Council meetings, court cases, ordinances, treaty negotiations, etc.,
3. China and foreign news (*'Zhongwai xinwen'*) covering major overseas events. Some, such as the Franco-Prussian war, the Paris Commune and the unification of Germany, were very fully covered. At the same time, trivial anecdotes and tales of curiosities from abroad were also included. Sometimes, the heading was more specific, e.g. Japan news (*'Riben xinwen'*),<sup>40</sup>
4. Letters to the editor which were sometimes printed in full, sometimes in excerpts,
5. Guangzhou news (*'Yangcheng xinwen'*), which tended to include trivial anecdotes,
6. Selections from the Beijing Gazette (*'Xuan lu Jingbao'*) including memorials of Chinese officials, edicts, treaties,
7. Treatises (*'lun'* or *'shuo'*) on specific topics. There is no indication whether these were written by the editor himself or contributed by others,
8. Lead articles which appeared occasionally.

Curiously, there was no section headed 'editorial' apart from the lead article.<sup>41</sup> Instead, we find most of the editorial comments accompanying news reports,<sup>42</sup> or as comments on letters to the Editor. Despite this, these comments taken as a whole show a clear and consistent editorial position, as we shall see.

The *Qiribao* was not a mere replica of the *China Mail*, even though the latter was its major source of information. Given Chen's vision for the Chinese newspaper, the *Qiribao* necessarily differed from the parent paper in significant ways. The differences in tone, emphasis and content were underlined by fundamentally different policies and ideological positions in major issues. We see a crucial turning point in the history of the Chinese press as Chinese journalists struggled

<sup>40</sup> QB 8 July 1871.

<sup>41</sup> QB 8 July 1871 has one signed essay by Chen on the establishment of a Chinese newspaper in Hong Kong.

<sup>42</sup> Li Liangrong, *Zhongguo baozhi wenti fazhan gaiyao* (Outline of the development of literary forms in Chinese newspapers) (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 1985), p. 8, discusses the type of text which is a mixture of news reporting and commentary.

to emerge from under the shadow of Europeans who were not only their mentors but also their employers.

### Policy Differences

One sign of the Chinese newspaper coming of age was its attempt to develop its own editorial position. The *Qiribao* and *China Mail* shared many ideas but they also diverged in a number of major areas, most notably, in their stances toward China and the Chinese government, the Hong Kong government and the Chinese community in Hong Kong. Both papers were keen for China to reform, but the *China Mail's* goal was to open China for British commercial interests and missionary activities.<sup>43</sup> In different degrees the English newspapers all condemned the corruption and inefficiency of the Chinese bureaucracy and sneered at the ignorance and backwardness of the general public. On the whole, they urged the British government to pressure China for more concessions, and to ensure that she observed her treaty obligations. In 1871 when the *Qiribao* was started, the hottest topic in the Hong Kong press was the Tianjin Massacre and the overall opinion was for the home government to be resolute and not let the Chinese get away, literally, with murder. Above all, they wanted China to allow foreign ventures to develop her natural resources.

It is of course easy to see that Hong Kong's Chinese merchants too stood to benefit from any improvement in China's business environment, which may explain why the *Qiribao* advocated economic reforms, but its earnestness for China as a state to achieve wealth and power through reform is also evident. Even when it denounced official corruption and ignorance in China, it took every opportunity to suggest positive means of improvement for China's own benefit. On this issue, it spoke with the voice of a loyal, and often impassioned, Chinese subject.

On matters related to Hong Kong, both papers believed that the government should treat the Chinese fairly but the *Qiribao* departed from the *China Mail* by taking a much stronger stand against racial discrimination and by advocating strong leadership within the

<sup>43</sup> A number of Mainland historians claim that western newspapers in Hong Kong and the treaty ports were essentially instruments of imperialism. This is valid, although it should be qualified by saying that it was also critical of the home government as well as the local colonial government.

Chinese community. Another topic that dominated the pages of both papers was Chinese emigration. The *China Mail*, along with other English newspapers adopted a strong humanitarian stand against the abuses of the 'coolie trade'. The *Qiribao*, however, was further concerned for the wellbeing of the Chinese living abroad, and suggested that the Qing court take the unprecedented step of establishing consuls to protect them.

### Reforming China

#### *Achieving Wealth and Power*

We can illustrate the divergence in policy between the *Qiribao* and the *China Mail* towards reforming China with the following. On 3 June, 1871 a lead article in the *China Mail* referred to a geological report on China's rich mining deposits. After noting the abundance, the editor derided the fact that so much was left untapped, concluding that under a strong government, this wealth would have been fully developed. Moreover, the editor asked, 'Was it justifiable for any government to prevent other countries from opening such fertile fields of such wonderful richness, and deprive the rest of mankind of the enjoyment and richness?' Thus, while not passing up the opportunity to criticize the weakness of the Chinese government, the *China Mail* also demonstrated its imperialist tendencies. Clearly it was more interested in how foreign countries could raid China's richness than in how China herself could become rich.

The *Qiribao*'s position was very different. Following on the heel of the above article, it published four essays on mining over the next few weeks.<sup>44</sup> The writer strongly advocated that China should seek wealth and power by exploiting her mineral resources. Ignorance was a basic weakness; in this case, it was the ignorance of geological knowledge and technical know-how that deprived China of the oppor-

<sup>44</sup> The essays were entitled 'Kai mei kang lun' (On opening coal mines); 'Jin yin kang lun' (On gold and silver mines); the third and fourth essays appeared without a title. They appeared on 10, 17, 24 June and 1 July, 1871. It is not known whether they were written by Chen Aiting himself. But, judging from the fact that the general view of the essays was very close to that of the editorial comments made throughout the paper, we may speculate that either Chen had written them himself, or at least endorsed the view. An interesting development was that later in his life, he became the Director of the Chinese Engineering and Mining Company.



tunity to capitalize on her assets. But, even more fundamentally, she was hampered by an impotent and conservative fiscal policy, not to speak of pervasive corruption that impoverished the common people. It was time, therefore, for China to adopt a more dynamic and developmental outlook.

The entrepreneurial spirit, manifested in these essays on mining as in many others, advocating a more aggressive economic policy, was the essence of commercial Hong Kong where merchants, whether Chinese or foreign, were not shy to propound the virtue of wealth. Openly acknowledging that Hong Kong was founded for trade, the British provided it with a legal structure that made the protection of property a sacred duty. Chinese who learned to manoeuvre in such a framework prospered. They grew familiar with new business practices and institutions—joint-stock companies, stock markets, incorporations, bankruptcy laws, company laws, modern banking, patents. Possibly the first ever Chinese newspaper report on the proceedings of a shareholders' meeting of an incorporated company appeared in the *Qiribao*.<sup>45</sup> The newspaper, with daily reports on commercial notices—stock prices, commodity prices, transfers of ownership, foreign exchange rates, etc.—must have been a useful instrument schooling the Chinese in alternative ways of making money. And the *Qiribao* was impatient to show China new ways of creating wealth.

### *Japan as Model*

The *Qiribao* also urged China to reform by using Japan as model. Hong Kong offered a new vantage point to look at the outside world, and a country such as Japan appeared very different from Hong Kong than from China. Frustrated by China's sluggishness while fascinated by Japan's great progress, self-strengthening efforts, the *Qiribao* gradually elevated Japan as a paradigm of reform. Such admiration for a country long despised as China's pupil marked a significant change in attitude.

<sup>45</sup> This was the meeting of the Chinese Insurance Co. Limited, which, its prospectus claimed, was founded to give Chinese shareholders a chance to share the profits of foreign insurers (QB 30 March 1872). The report should have given a very good idea of how a western-style shareholders' meeting was conducted, and must have been educational to Chinese readers.

We can see this admiration in a long essay in the 15 July 1871 issue. It began with a quotation from the *Book of History*: ‘The rise and decline of a nation depends on how much the rulers are ready to change.’ Japan had reformed quickly and effectively, and had risen faster than any country since antiquity. Twenty years ago, its strict prohibition against foreigners had severely obstructed trade. Then, suddenly, by heaven’s grace, Japan changed and learned everything from the West. ‘Where there is a will there is a way’, the essay claimed, and Japan’s progress would be infinite. The author made no bones about his feelings by saying, ‘How can I not be filled with profound admiration?’<sup>46</sup>

One area in which the *Qiribao* felt that Japan was particularly successful was in the training of talent. Japan by this time was already able to employ many of her own people in new areas of expertise such as navigating modern ships without depending on foreigners. The *Qiribao* asked, ‘Our China has always had an abundance of the wise and talented, and yet, at this moment when there is an urgency to strengthen itself, to make progress, to strive toward success, our skills are still not up to standard. Are we not even comparable to Japan?’

Japan’s progress in diplomatic relations was also admired. The *Qiribao* believed that vigorous reforms had made Japan so strong that Britain and France were withdrawing half the troops that used to be stationed there to protect their nationals.<sup>47</sup> The moral was of course that if China wished to repel imperialism, the first step was to reform herself.

The message the *Qiribao* conveyed about Japan’s success was that change was mandatory, and it was no longer enough to imitate the methods of the sages and emperors of the past. It was necessary to seek new ways, to go beyond the classics and be pragmatic. ‘How could China rely on petty scholars to save the situation?’ the author asked rhetorically,<sup>48</sup> thus striking at the very heart of the Chinese literati-centred bureaucracy and power structure.

#### *Call for Chinese Consuls*

Also high on the *Qiribao*’s agenda for China’s reform was the establishment of consuls to protect the many Chinese abroad. In general,

<sup>46</sup> QB 15 July 1871.

<sup>47</sup> QB 19 Aug. 1871.

<sup>48</sup> QB 2 March 1872.

all newspapers in Hong Kong were appalled at the excesses of the 'coolie trade'. Their main target of criticism was the Macao government, where the worst practices of the trade occurred. Another target was the Hong Kong government which was criticized for abetting this inhumane trade by allowing Hong Kong merchants to provision emigrant ships from Macao. In addition, there was widespread coverage of the hardship of the emigrant workers in the destinations, and sympathy for their conditions.

Apart from holding the above views, the *Qiribao* further called for the establishment of Chinese consuls in the host countries, contending that this was the only effective way to protect Chinese abroad. This call not only demonstrates the *Qiribao's* independence from the parent paper, but, more importantly, it was, within the Chinese context, a radical suggestion.

First, it should be remembered that even as late as the early 1870s, China's ideas of diplomacy had changed very little. Accustomed to believing that she was the Middle Kingdom and centre of civilization, China was reluctant to accept the principles behind the new world order based, rather hypocritically perhaps, on Western concepts of diplomatic equality that had been forced on her after the Treaty of Nanjing. Though too weak to resist the foreign envoys and consuls imposed on her, she was slow to see the benefits of sending envoys abroad herself. During the 1858 negotiation of the Tianjin treaty, the Chinese negotiators were urged to send envoys abroad to oversee their subjects and though, in time, individual members of the Zongli Yamen, including Prince Gong, Wenxiang and Chonghou, expressed their approval, the matter dragged on.<sup>49</sup> Psychological and cultural resistance against such a move remained intransigent among officials and scholars.<sup>50</sup> Thus, in 1871, when the *Qiribao* brought up the subject, the issue was still unresolved.

Secondly, seeking protection for emigrants was a sensitive subject since emigration of Chinese had been banned since the Ming dynasty, and under the Qing government, the ban was further tightened. In 1712, an edict prohibiting trade in Southeast Asia stated: 'As for those who go abroad and live for a long time, the said governor

<sup>49</sup> Robert Lee Irick, *Ch'ing Policy Towards the Coolie Trade, 1847-1878* (Taipei: Chinese Materials Centre, 1980), pp. 273-89. See also John King Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968; first published 1953).

<sup>50</sup> Even when Guo Songdao, China's first minister to England, returned to China, he was relentlessly attacked (Irick, p. 277).

general shall communicate with the foreign countries ordering them to send our people living there back in ropes for beheading.<sup>51</sup> With the ‘coolie trade’ to Peru and Cuba and the wholesale emigration of Chinese to California and Australia during the gold rushes in the 1840s and 50s, these prohibitions were violated, hardly for the first time, but on an unprecedented scale. Yet the Beijing government never considered modifying its policy to openly permit emigration until forced to do so by the British and French in the Convention of Beijing in October 1860. Yet, even then, the government did not remove the laws from the books until 1893.

Given this background, the *Qiribao* recognized that it would be difficult to expect the Chinese government to change its views and practice about diplomatic representation in order to protect out-laws.<sup>52</sup> However, it was natural that the *Qiribao* should take special interest in the emigration question. With many of the emigrants being natives of Guangdong province, it was a matter of immense regional interest. Hong Kong in particular, was, besides Macao, a major emigration port. While most of the emigrants departing from Macao were destined for Cuba and Peru, those leaving Hong Kong went mainly to the United States, Canada, Australia and later, Southeast Asia and the West Indies.<sup>53</sup> In the process, Hong Kong also became a nerve centre for the widespread network of Chinese overseas,<sup>54</sup> and abounded with the latest news about conditions of Chinese overseas.

In an essay entitled ‘*Bao min shuo*’ (On the protection of the people), a public plea was made for consuls based on the need to protect Chinese abroad.<sup>55</sup> The first duty of a good ruler was to protect the people—not just those within the borders, but those beyond as well. Unfortunately, the author explained, China was too stuck in its old ways and too reluctant to start a precedent, preferring to leave her people unprotected than introduce innovation. It was vital for the Chinese government to realize that even though the emig-

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Irick, p. 12.

<sup>52</sup> QB 18 March 1871.

<sup>53</sup> See Elizabeth Sinn, ‘Emigration from Hong Kong before 1941: General Trends’ and ‘Emigration from Hong Kong before 1941: Organization and Impact’, in Ronald Skeldon (ed.), *Emigration from Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1995), pp. 11–34, 35–50.

<sup>54</sup> Elizabeth Sinn, ‘Hong Kong’s Role in the Relationship between China and the Overseas Chinese’, in Lynn Pan (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Chinese Overseas* (Singapore: Archipelago Press and Landmark Books), pp. 105–7.

<sup>55</sup> QB 3 June 1871.

rants had left their homeland, they remained Chinese subjects and had not become outsiders simply by going overseas.

This essay was possibly the first Chinese public statement on the need for the state to protect and maintain links with 'overseas Chinese'. What is also noteworthy is that Chen Aiting, who might or might not have written this essay, was deeply committed to the belief that China must break away from her obsolete concept of the world order and assert its international presence in a more positive way. No doubt, this and other ideas put forward by the paper were not lost on Chinese officials. As we have seen, in 1878, when Chen Lanbin, the first Chinese minister to the United States, went on his mission, he took Chen Aiting with him, and Chen Aiting himself became the Consul-General of Cuba which was notorious for its harsh conditions.

### Advising the Hong Kong Government

Of course, the Chinese in Hong Kong were not only concerned with developments in China. In its self-appointed role as policy adviser, the *Qiribao* also tried to engage the Hong Kong government in dialogue. Here, the tutelage of the English newspapers was obvious. In Hong Kong, all the English newspapers were, to varying degrees, critical of the colonial government. Slander against the government was an integral part of the history of the English press, and even the *China Mail*, which tended to be less virulent than the *Daily Press*, could not avoid being charged. The *Qiribao* also took it upon itself to criticize the Hong Kong government, speaking on behalf of the Chinese population and defending their interests. In this area, as in others, the divergence between the *Qiribao's* standpoint and its parent newspaper was conspicuous.

On occasions, the *China Mail*, out of a sense of justice and fair play, criticized the government's discriminatory treatment of the Chinese. And yet, more basically, it was suspicious of the Chinese population's trustworthiness as colonial subjects. Thus, it constantly alerted the government to the need of keeping a tight rein on criminal and subversive elements. The Chinese were not only cunning, it warned, but more dangerously, given their instinctive anti-foreign feelings, they were inherently subversive. This sense of insecurity is perhaps understandable when Europeans formed only a minuscule portion of the population which was predominantly Chinese, and

when within miles lay a huge and hostile China. At the same time, however, it was perhaps unfair judgement on the Chinese community, judgement that encouraged a harsher and more discriminatory policy than they deserved.

The *Qiribao*'s view was naturally different, and on many occasions and using a variety of tactics, it condemned discrimination and demanded equal treatment for the Chinese. Quite early on, it expressed high expectations of the noble ideals of British justice and equality. In an article on the Chinese in San Francisco, it rebuked the US government for not allowing Chinese to testify in court. This was unreasonable, it argued, not only because it was bullying the Chinese but also because it violated the moral principle of equality. In practical terms, such law put the Chinese at a great disadvantage, as, without legal recourse, they became helpless victims of all sorts of crime. The British government was, however, more just and lenient compared to the American. In Victoria, Australia, they used to debar Chinese from giving testimony too, but the rule was later abolished on the grounds that all subjects of the British crown, including Chinese, should be treated equally. Thus, the article commented, British policy accorded with the principles of morality and righteousness.<sup>56</sup>

British ideals of justice were of course more rhetorical than real, and in Hong Kong discrimination was a real concern.<sup>57</sup> Such concern was sometimes manifested in amusing ways. In a letter to the editor, a correspondent raised the interesting question of whether it was lawful to urinate on the street. The correspondent, claiming that he was under the impression that it *was*, asked why it was that when foreigners did it, they were not arrested. He therefore wrote to the newspaper to seek clarification, saying, 'If this was forbidden, then it should be forbidden to all. I fear that when Chinese first arrive in Hong Kong and see foreigners doing this, they may think it is permissible and do the same, and end up getting severely punished.' In other words, there would be confusion when law was inconsistently enforced, but more than that, between the lines, one can hear a real grievance being vented against discrimination.

In response to this letter, the editor noted that originally the law had applied to all. When offenders were not charged, it was only

<sup>56</sup> QB 18 March 1871.

<sup>57</sup> For an excellent analysis of the discrepancy between the rhetoric of the rule of law and practice, see Christopher Munn, 'Anglo-China: Chinese People and British Rule in Hong Kong, 1841–1870' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1998).

because police officers did not detect them. There was no intention to discriminate. It may appear that the editor was making an excuse for the government, but it might have been more a matter of tactic than principle. He seems to be shaming the government into practising what it professed, as he went on to insist on the importance of enforcing the law consistently. 'It is advisable to instruct policemen to be consistent in enforcing the law. Offenders, regardless of being Chinese or foreigners, should be treated as stipulated by the law. In this way, this ban would be effective and the streets would be kept clean.'<sup>58</sup>

In the *Qiribao's* view, there should be no discrimination in law enforcement; neither should there be discrimination in the government's provision of services. One contentious issue in Hong Kong at the time was the water supply. In April 1871, both the *China Mail* and the *Qiribao* complained about the delay in the completion of the Pokfulam reservoir, and deplored the inefficiency involved, one of the problems being that in some areas water was supplied in others, not. The *China Mail* complained about the unfair distribution of water.<sup>59</sup> So did the *Qiribao*, but it further raised the issue of equality, in that only pipes in the foreign quarters were running but not those in the Chinese, and hinted at government's selectively supplying water as a measure of discrimination.

After all, it argued, everybody paid for water when they paid the government rates. There should be no difference between foreigners and Chinese. Recognizing that despite their resentment and frustration the Chinese dared not protest, the paper suggested that rather than keep silent, they should petition the Registrar General, the Hong Kong official charged with protecting the Chinese, and air their views. Apparently, where the interests of the Chinese residents were concerned, the *Qiribao* took a more aggressive stand, and emphasized the idea of equality to a greater degree. In fact, the difference was in kind as well as in degree. The *China Mail* exhorted the government to treat Chinese justly from above, but the *Qiribao* encouraged its readers to speak up and demand their rights from below.

The *Qiribao* used a variety of tactics to induce fairer treatment from government; another approach is manifest with regard to the ordinance on lanterns. In 1870, an ordinance for better securing the

<sup>58</sup> QB 22 April 1871.

<sup>59</sup> CM 8 April 1871.

peace of the colony was amended, stipulating that in addition to the Night Pass, Chinese residents going out after dark had to carry a lighted lantern.<sup>60</sup> The paper, instead of launching into a tirade against the obvious injustice, suggested alternative ways to police the Chinese community so that the new regulations might prove unnecessary.

The Chinese community was understandably furious and presented a petition against the new system to the government. Typically, the *China Mail* printed the petition without comment. Given that the ultimate objective of its consistent clambering for law and order was the protection of European lives and property against Chinese criminals, the *China Mail's* tacit support for more rigorous control of the Chinese population comes as no surprise.

The *Qiribao* adopted a different position. In a lead article, its editor predicted that the new light system would not improve law and order. There were other more effective ways, such as introducing the *baojia* system or giving the Chinese district watchmen more power.<sup>61</sup> He explained that when the latter system was first introduced it worked quite well, but its value declined when the government did not give the watchmen sufficient power. The government did not seem to realize that since most criminals were Chinese, Chinese watchmen who understood the desires, mentality and habits of their own people, would do a more effective policing job than foreign policemen.

The *Qiribao* was clearly not afraid to speak up to the Hong Kong government, and as noted, this was one useful lesson it learnt from its English mentors. In their role as watchdogs of the government, moreover, Chinese journalists made good use of the newspaper as public space for the defence of community interest. The important

<sup>60</sup> Peter Wesley-Smith, 'Anti-Chinese Legislation in Hong Kong', in Ming K. Chan (ed.), *Precarious Balance: Hong Kong Between China and Britain 1842–1992* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press), pp. 96–7; Tsai Jung-fang, *Hong Kong in Chinese History: Community and Social Unrest in the British Colony, 1842–1913* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

<sup>61</sup> The *baojia* system was a type of mutual security system based on family units. See Joseph Ting, 'Native Chinese Peace Officers in British Hong Kong, 1841–1861', in Elizabeth Sinn (ed.), *Between East and West: Aspects of Social and Political Development in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong, 1990), pp. 147–58. The district watchmen were established in 1866. Originally the system was proposed by Chinese but soon the supervision was taken over by the Registrar-General but the Chinese continued to pay for it. See 'The District Watch Committee', *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 11 (1971), pp. 116–41.



thing to note, however, is that while learning the function and power of the press from Westerners, the voice was a Chinese voice, expressing Chinese desires and aspirations.

### Rallying the Chinese Community

By now it should be clear that the *Qiribao* departed from the *China Mail* on many issues, but nowhere was the difference in ideological positions more glaring than with regard to the Tung Wah Hospital. The Hospital, whose Directors consisted of the leading Chinese merchants in the colony, was originally founded in 1869 to provide Chinese medicinal care for the Chinese. The scope of its services, however, expanded quickly as it opened schools, provided shelter for destitute Chinese and repatriated them, protected women, fought emigration-related abuses and offered a range of other services, for both the living and the dead. It was recognized by the Chinese community as its leader, based on the moral authority derived from its philanthropy and its exercise of Confucian, patriarchal principles; in turn, representing itself as the spokesmen of the Chinese community, it assumed the role of middleman between the Chinese and the colonial government.<sup>62</sup>

The *Qiribao* reflected the Chinese community's high regard for the Hospital, and also Chen's own involvement with it as an Assistant Director.<sup>63</sup> We can see this clearly in the following episode. In May 1871, the *Dolores Uqarte*, an emigrant ship, caught fire and sank, causing innumerable deaths among its passengers. The Tung Wah Hospital took an active part in providing shelter for the survivors while making elaborate arrangements to repatriate them to their villages. Both the *China Mail* and the *Qiribao* were full of praise for its charitable efforts,<sup>64</sup> but the *Qiribao's* tone was noticeably more passionate and adulatory.

The *Qiribao* regretted the dreadful fate met by workers who had to leave home to make a living abroad—'they were as helpless as sails blown wildly in the wind'. The Hospital out of compassion, 'had created numerous sacred rafts that would ferry the survivors across the sea of suffering to the safety of their homes'. When they finally

<sup>62</sup> Sinn, *Power and Charity*.

<sup>63</sup> The Tung Wah Hospital had a three-tiered management with a Board of Directors, a Committee of Assistant Directors and Ordinary Committee.

<sup>64</sup> CM 17 May 1871.

returned to their native places, the *Qiribao* observed, the emigrants were bound to beat their breasts and say, 'It is my father and mother who have given me life, but it is the Directors of the Tung Wah who enable me to be born again.'<sup>65</sup>

The *Qiribao*'s enthusiastic support for the Hospital was highlighted in another case involving emigration, where an American labour recruiter was suspected of having obtained 200 workers by deceit. The Hospital's Directors alerted the Hong Kong authorities to this, and as a result of their intervention, over 100 prospective passengers, who might have been deceived in one way or another, changed their minds and left the ship just before it was about to set sail. This stirred up strong feelings in Hong Kong. The *Daily Press* accused the Hospital of interfering with and usurping the authority of the Registrar General, and warned that the Hospital's Directors would soon become unduly influential. This view was a clear manifestation of the European community's fear of a Chinese force inside the colony that could lead the general population in revolt against the British regime, a fear that underlined much of the inter-communal hostility. In retaliation, the *Qiribao* rebuked the *Daily Press*, launching into a lengthy defence of the Hospital's good works, while praising its uprightness.<sup>66</sup> In its opinion, the Hospital, being well informed about matters relating to the Chinese community, was in a special position to advise Hong Kong officials. Its work had nothing to do with power, it claimed. Obviously aware of the European community's paranoia, the *Qiribao* assured it that since power was safely in the hands of the government, there was nothing to fear. In fact, it insisted the Directors shared the same objectives as the Hong Kong government in making the colony safe and free of evil.

It is revealing that the *China Mail*, which was wont to get into a tussle with the *Daily Press* at the drop of a hat, stayed out of the fray between the *Qiribao* and the *Daily Press* on this occasion. While it reported on how the emigrants came to abandon their trip, the *China Mail* did not mention the Tung Wah Hospital's role in the event. Instead of being pleased that the emigrants had been rescued, which would have been more consistent with its usual denouncement of emigration-related abuses, it lamented the coolie brokers' loss. 'The coolie trade is a very difficult one, and it is gradually being encom-

<sup>65</sup> QB 27 May 1871.

<sup>66</sup> QB 14 Oct. 1871.

passed with additional intricacies,' it commented, as if complaining that the Tung Wah's interference was a form of mischief.<sup>67</sup>

We can again see the divergence of views between the two papers when the new hospital building was officially opened in February 1872. The event was marked by great fanfare, with long and elaborate rituals and street processions performed by the Tung Wah Directors and watched by huge crowds. Both papers reported the occasion fully, but with different emphases and purpose. For the *China Mail*, the occasion was worth recording because it was 'curious'—typical of the patronizing attitude it consistently displayed toward the Chinese. The *Qiribao*, on the other hand, explained that it was recording this momentous occasion so that people in Hong Kong could remember it with pride, and that the mercy and goodness of the Directors would live forever, like the Hospital itself.

Such discrepancies in reporting show only too clearly that the difference between the *Qiribao* and the *China Mail* was ideological as much as social and political. The *China Mail* obviously did not share the *Qiribao*'s enthusiasm for the Tung Wah Committee of Directors' role as protectors of the Chinese community, or as a rallying point for the greater coherence of the Chinese population. Fundamental to this indifference, indeed resentment, was the fear that the Directors might become overly powerful and end up challenging British authority in Hong Kong. Critical though the *China Mail* was of the colonial government, it never doubted its sovereign right, and would defend this sovereignty against any Chinese attempt to usurp it. Its high opinion of the Hospital's charitable works did not reduce its fear of the Hospital's potential subversiveness, and its hostility became apparent when it later attacked the Hospital as an 'imperium in imperio'.<sup>68</sup>

### Journalism, Chinese Style

#### *Form, Fact and Fiction*

The *Qiribao* became a Hong Kong Chinese voice, but how that voice expressed itself to find resonance among its readers needs to be

<sup>67</sup> CM 15 Oct. 1871.

<sup>68</sup> CM 8 Nov. 1875.

analysed. Designed for Chinese readers, the paper's content was selected primarily on the basis of what its editor, Chen Aiting, thought would be of interest to them. From the outset, reports on the cultural events of Europeans such as concerts and plays, sports and horse-racing that were reported profusely in the *China Mail* were routinely omitted in the *Qiribao*. Obviously, the *Qiribao* believed that Chinese readers would not be remotely interested in any of these, since in 19th century Hong Kong, Chinese and foreigners led essentially separate social and cultural lives.

Moreover, the *Qiribao* had to present itself in such a way that would be meaningful and comprehensible to its anticipated readers—Chinese literati, merchants, shopkeepers, artisans in addition to officials in Hong Kong and China. Though the *China Mail* remained its chief source of data, when reproducing items from the parent paper, it inevitably repackaged them for Chinese consumption. The resulting differences in content, tone and style are best illustrated by a report on a parliamentary debate on the issue of marriage to a deceased wife's sister. The *China Mail's* account:

Marriage with a deceased wife's sister—Feb 15—Mr T Chambers moved the second reading of his Bill for legalizing marriage with a deceased wife's sister. After a short debate the House divided, the numbers being—for the second reading, 125; against 84; majority 41.<sup>69</sup>

The *Qiribao's* translated version of the same account is as below:

On 15 February, the Lower House debated on the matter of marriage with a deceased wife's sister. At the time, there were noble views and grand arguments expressed with great eloquence, which cannot be fully recorded. The voting after the debate ended with a split into two sides, those voting for numbered 125 while those against 84. According to the rules of Parliament, the minority must follow the majority, and therefore the Commons should adopt the view of the majority. Still, we do not know what the Lords' decision would be. Note that each time the Commons support something, the Lords would reject it. Each has its own reasons for adopting or rejecting the motion. The Lords rejection is based on [social] form while the Commons' adoption is based on compassion. Between holding principles and being pragmatic, between deciding to change or not to change, the important thing is to maintain moral standards.<sup>70</sup>

As we can see, while the issue was reported briefly and objectively by the *China Mail*, the *Qiribao* coloured its report by adding several new elements. Firstly, it felt the need to explain to its Chinese

<sup>69</sup> CM 8 April 1871.

<sup>70</sup> QB 15 April 1871.

readers the workings of the British parliament. This is understandable considering that most Chinese would be unfamiliar with the British parliamentary system. Secondly, it interpreted the opposite standpoints of the two Houses in terms of the difference between upholding social form and taking account of human feelings, a dichotomy familiar to the Chinese mode of thought. Thirdly, it emphasized the importance of moral principles. One will in fact find that, throughout the entire year of its operation, the *Qiribao* took every opportunity to expound on moral principles. Interestingly, even though it was generally liberal and pragmatic in its approach to politics, and indeed daringly adventurous in its advocacy for economic change, its moral position was, for the most part, highly conventional.

Another example of a repackaged news item reflects the divergent news reporting styles between the *China Mail* and the *Qiribao* even more clearly. The *China Mail* reported on a case of sexual assault thus:

Duwan Allee, watchment to Mr Dorabjee Nowrojee's godowns at Wanchi (sic) was charged by a girl of 14 years of age with taking indecent liberties with her while she was walking near the godowns. The charge was supported by the evidence of the complainant and that of another girl who had happened to be passing by, and the prisoner was sent to three months' hard labour.<sup>71</sup>

Below is the much amplified Chinese version:

Du Wan Ya Li, an Indian is employed as a night watchman at the Nowrojee warehouse. He has always been frivolous. Whenever he sees a girl walking past, he gets lusty and thinks of ways to seduce her. On the 10th day of this month, a young girl of fourteen passed Ya Li's warehouse on her way to Western district from Wanchai. When Ya Li saw her, he waved at her. She was scared enough seeing his black and ugly face, and when she saw him waving at her, she became even more alarmed. So she hurried on, pretending she hadn't seen anything. Unexpectedly, Ya Li became inflamed with lust and began following her, and when he caught up with her, he reached for her bosom and explored her breasts (*doukou*, nutmegs) to see if they were budding. Thus humiliated, the girl was so afraid and ashamed that all she could do was scream. Just at that time, a girl not yet 15 walked by and seeing her, gave her help. Fearing the law, Ya Li immediately let go of the girl and ran away. All his lusty thoughts cooled down instantly. It was as if a bright pearl he had captured was sucked away from him by a dragon. Trembling, he sighed. The girl reported the matter to a policeman on patrol, and Ya Li was arrested. The case was heard on the 11th and

<sup>71</sup> QB 19 Feb. 1872.

fortunately, the magistrate understood the whole situation and sentenced him to three months' imprisonment with hard labour as a warning to frivolous people. Alas! To attempt illicit intercourse at an unexpected encounter is not something one should do. Thus, how can he excuse himself when he is charged with lewdness? People like Ya Li should take his example as a warning.<sup>72</sup>

Unlike the earlier instance of the marriage law, where the writer added practical information about the working of the parliament and commented on how political and moral decisions were made, in this case, the reporter added lurid details apparently to entertain and titillate. The highly suggestive style of the reporting, which we will discuss further, contrasts markedly with the staidness of the *China Mail* report. In addition, we may raise some questions about the basic mechanism of news reporting. What was behind the difference in the content of the reports? Did the *China Mail* send one reporter to the court who returned with a full account of the hearing and left the editors of the respective newspapers to process the materials as each saw fit? Did the *Qiribao* and *China Mail* each send its own reporter and so ended up with two different accounts? Or, to touch upon a more fundamental principle of news reporting, were the details appearing in the *Qiribao* fictitious or semi-fictitious?<sup>73</sup> We may never know the answers to these questions. Here, it is important to point out that the Chinese editor had made a conscious choice to publicize the case very differently from the English editor.

In fact, these narratives of happenings, full of colourful details, complete with dialogue, occurred with increasing frequency in the *Qiribao* as the year went by. Most of these stories had no counterpart in the *China Mail* in any form. They came from other sources, often identified as 'tales told by visitors'. The themes of the narratives varied.

Here is one example: A poor widow had a young son who was kidnapped. He later returned home with some money but found his uncle having an affair with his mother. The uncle, wishing to harm him, got a *yamen* runner to trap him, then beat him and blinded him. The mother went to an official, complaining that since her son had been unfilial, she had him beaten to teach him a lesson. Now she asked that he be punished so that he would not bring shame upon

<sup>72</sup> QB 24 Feb. 1872.

<sup>73</sup> See Pang Ge, *Xinwen wenxue* (Journalist literature) (Taipei: Xianrenzhang chuban she, 1969), pp. 129–42 for a discussion on the distinction between observation and imagination, news and fiction in journalism.

her deceased husband's name. Her lover corroborated with her testimony. Suspicious, the official reported this to the Shanghai magistrate. The young man's maternal uncle took pity on him and appealed to the court on his behalf, while the paternal uncle, the mother's lover, tried to get his way by bribing more people. Finally, after much ado, the young man was cleared.<sup>74</sup>

Another long story, taking up one and a half columns, went like this:<sup>75</sup> A young man, who was very poor, lived alone with his mother. He was betrothed to a girl who was too young for marriage. To make a living, he went to San Francisco and even when his mother died, he was too poor to return. Later, having made a fortune, he returned to his native place and visited his father-in-law who was very excited about the amount of gold the young man had with him. He conspired with his son to murder the young man. The plot was overheard by the daughter, who, looking forward to the marriage, became sad and alarmed. She consulted her neighbour who, horrified by the plot, promised to warn the young man to leave the house and suggested that the girl should also leave so that they could get married. In the meantime, the young man got the girl's brother drunk, and escaped, and when the father came in to stab the young man as planned, he stabbed his own son instead. But even then, the father's evil scheming did not end. He blamed the son's death on the young man. The girl married the young man, and he, taking pity on the tragic death of his brother-in-law, tried to use money to save his father-in-law from prosecution, but in vain.

Let me just give one more example of these anecdotes. Mr Li, a native of Shunde county was betrothed to a girl surnamed Su, but was too poor to hold the wedding banquet. He appealed to his relatives and friends who raised money for the wedding. The day after the wedding, Mr Li's relatives and friends found him sick and hardly able to speak. When they asked what happened, he said that on the wedding night, his wife had given him some tea to drink. They became suspicious because it was well-known that in the bride's native place many virgins learnt witchcraft which they used against their husbands, sometimes even killing them. So the women in the groom's family were sent to find out more from the bride. Upon interrogation, she denied having caused her husband's sickness, but claimed that if he would give her ten taels of silver, she could find

<sup>74</sup> QB 18 Nov. 1871.

<sup>75</sup> QB 30 Sept. 1871.

an antidote. The women consulted each other and said that Li, being penniless, could never come up with ten taels. So they went to the brides' home to talk to her mother, who denied that her daughter practised witchcraft. They went back to confront the bride again but this time she denied having said anything. Frustrated, the women wanted to take the bride to the *yamen*, but they were also afraid that without an antidote, Li might die. So they suggested that Li should go at night into the room and force her with a knife to provide the antidote. When he did so and tried to frighten her, she seemed quite impervious to his threats. So, angered, he chopped her with the knife until she was all cut up and died. After she was put into a coffin, the mother was informed of the death and she kicked up such a fuss that even by the time this report appeared, the coffin was still not interred.

There were other sensational stories: A kind master who helped his young manservant marry the maid, even though a rich man wanted to take her as a concubine.<sup>76</sup> An attempted rape of a six year old girl.<sup>77</sup> A lascivious Guangzhou man first had an affair with one servant and then another, and after both died, he almost died as well, being haunted by them.<sup>78</sup> There was even one report on the lives of five prostitutes provided by a frequenter of brothels. The anecdotes covered a wide range of themes—murder, official corruption, theft, incest, adultery, family quarrels, jealousy, brothel brawls, witchcraft—all sensational and sensationalized. It would seem that the *Qiribao* would not miss any opportunity to splash sex and violence across its pages. Interestingly, this is one aspect of the development of the newspapers that historians of the Chinese press do not dwell upon.

Several points should be noted from these narratives. First, many of their plots were similar to those in the *xiaoshuo* popular at the time. Classified as *tongsu xiaoshuo*, they were a major source of urban entertainment. Even though the reports were presented in the *Qiribao* as news, they resembled fiction in that there was a story line constructed in chronological sequence, with a cast of characters and even complete with dialogue. In addition, their reliability is doubtful since the newspaper admitted that they were based on hearsay.

These news items also resembled popular fiction in the highly suggestive and inflated language in which they were written. For

<sup>76</sup> QB 14 Oct. 1871.

<sup>77</sup> QB 18 Nov. 1871.

<sup>78</sup> QB 6 Jan. 1872.



example in the first episode given above, the young man's loneliness in San Francisco was described thus: 'Having left home at an early age, he sighed in vain at the quick passage of time. Soon, his mother died of illness, and though he heard about it, what could he do when the mountains were difficult to climb? Besides he had exhausted his travelling money. Thus he could only weep in silence and cry as if washing his face with tears.' When the girl in the same story discovered her father's conspiracy, she was distraught. She told her neighbour, 'Seeing my husband return with his achievements, I was especially happy. The peach tree will soon be blooming (i.e. she will soon be getting married) and we will enjoy the pleasure of fish and water (i.e. have a happy married life). I don't want a beautiful garment to be spoiled (i.e. having anything untoward to spoil the perfection of the situation) so that I would end up grieving by myself. And, seeing the willow trees on the path between the fields (i.e. parting from each other) I feel sad when spring (i.e. the season for love and romance) comes.' This intense use of melodramatic tone and figurative language, characteristic of Chinese fiction, prevailed in the anecdotes in the *Qiribao*.

*Wen yi zai dao: Words as Vehicles of Morality*

Like contemporary fiction, there was also a moral to each narration. As mentioned, the social values the *Qiribao* upheld were essentially conventional. One central theme was that of recompense (*baoying*)—evil deeds will bring disaster and grief and good deeds will bring good fortune. In the anecdote about the father who killed his son by mistake, the narration began like this: 'Yesterday, I heard something that is a manifestation of just recompense. It is horrifying to hear. I am recording it so that it may be of some help in bettering the world.' In fact, the idea of just recompense, one of the basic ideas governing individual behaviour in China, appeared regularly throughout the paper.

The virtues the *Qiribao* expounded were mainly Confucian virtues, especially with regard to familial matters. The story of the girl who practised witchcraft ended with this comment: 'A man and a woman living together is a universal norm. The *yin* and the *yang* combining is the great desire of human beings. It is right to be intimate in married life and follow the four virtues; loving couples should learn about the three degrees of dependence to be observed by a woman.

Why resort to supernatural means and forget the nuptial promises?’

Corrupt officials who mistreated the people were consistently condemned. After telling the story of one incompetent official who was terrorized by bandits, the author wrote, ‘The Han Confucianist Mr Dong Zhongshu said, “Officials are the people’s teachers and commanders. The state uses them to carry on the good tradition and teach morality. If the teachers and commanders are unethical, the emperor’s benevolence will not be disseminated adequately. Besides the abuses of *yamen* runners are more poisonous than snakes, and more fierce than wolves. And what do they care about the people’s hardship?”’<sup>79</sup>

This format, bracketing highly suggestive writing with moralistic conclusions, was standard in *xiaoshuo*. This was partly because, theoretically, all literary work, even the most *tongsu* (popular or vernacular) was aimed at disseminating moral teaching. The function of literature was both to entertain the emotions (*yuxin*) and exhort goodness (*quanshan*).<sup>80</sup> Defenders of this type of writing argue that to write about lewdness is to warn against it.<sup>81</sup> However, it seems that often the writing was more devoted to entertain in the most sensuous, even pornographic, way than to exhort to goodness.<sup>82</sup> Certainly the newspaper, like other forms of writing, also had to uphold its role as a moralizing force.

There is one more point to note. The *China Mail*’s style of news reporting was simple and terse even though the language in lead articles could be pompous and pedantic. What was definitely missing, however, was the spiciness and eroticism that prevailed in the *Qiribao*’s news reporting narratives. We may interpret this as a reflection of the *China Mail*’s Victorian puritanism when it came to sex-related subjects, a prudishness common among English newspapers in Hong Kong.<sup>83</sup> The choice of a different tone of expression by the *Qiribao*

<sup>79</sup> QB 27 Jan. 1872.

<sup>80</sup> See Chen Chi-wen, ‘A Study of the Ordeal Stories in Chinese: Popular Fictions’ (Ph.D. thesis, University of Hong Kong, 1998), p. 15.

<sup>81</sup> Xie Xin *et al.*, *Zhongguo tongsu xiaoshuo lilun gangyao* (Theoretical outline of popular Chinese fiction) (Taipei: Wenjin chuban she, 1992).

<sup>82</sup> It is interesting that pornography as a literary form is not discussed by scholars of journalism. It is particularly disappointing that even a work such as Li Liang-rong’s does not touch on the subject.

<sup>83</sup> Interestingly, the English press had not always been so prudish. In the 1800–1850 period, Sunday newspapers were principal organs of radical sentiment, and ‘dished up generous helpings of the week’s scandal and crimes, garnished with all the titillating or gruesome details . . .’. See Richard Daniel Altick, *The English*

may also be another sign of the independence of the Chinese editor from both the missionaries and their secular English fellow-professionals. This style, chosen by the *Qiribao* writers, made it a possible forerunner of the yellow press in the twentieth century. The *Qiribao* had discovered the need to entertain. It provided pleasure by writing light, readable prose, supplied sensational stories about ordinary people doing extraordinary things and filled the weekly page with sex and violence.

On the political level, the *Qiribao*'s source of moral authority was the sages of antiquity. In the paper, numerous references were made to antiquity—the Three Dynasties—as the paradigm of moral authority and political wisdom. We may see this as a way of legitimizing its own views. When the editor was not a member of the gentry, his claim to legitimacy and to be heard must rest on his adherence to orthodox ideology—alleged or real.

While there was nothing new about the *Qiribao*'s moral attitude, it is interesting to find that it was innovative in emphasizing that human behaviour was universal. That is, it did not assume, as was conventional at the time, that Chinese people were unique and different from foreigners; rather human behaviour and basic instincts were universal.

We see this tendency to universalize human experience in a report about an English woman who loved her husband so much that she died just hours after he did. It began with this aphorism: 'Zi Xia says, one's life and death are predetermined. Life and death, survival and extinction should be accepted without complaint. Human beings inevitably consider life as something to rejoice about and death as something causing misery. It never occurs that people would be happy about sad things and sad about happy things.' After relating the story, the author concluded, 'Since this couple were so loving when they were alive how do we know that it isn't the heavens that have silently arranged for her to die soon after he did so that they could keep their promise to each other? Their intention was so sincere that it influenced the heavens. Of course, people cannot avoid death, whether it is dying for a very noble reason, or for the most trivial, and whether it is a long life or a short life.'<sup>84</sup>

Human beings could be evil too, of course. Thus, concluding an episode about an Englishman who was swindled in Paris, the author

*Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 329.

<sup>84</sup> QB 6 Dec. 1871.

wrote, 'So we can see that in using trickery, the ideas and intentions of people in China and outside are surprisingly similar.'<sup>85</sup>

In fact, in reporting on world news and matters of human interest around the world, the *Qiribao* brought the world closer to its readers in a personalized way. For Chinese who were used to thinking of themselves as unique such open contact with the world was a valuable learning process, one which, in the open intellectual space of Hong Kong, enabled the evolution of a cosmopolitan outlook.

*Literary Style: Chinese 'Journalese'*

The fictionalizing tendency of the *Qiribao* is noticeably absent in Hong Kong's English newspapers. This reflects a fundamental issue relating to the cultural sensibilities of Chinese editors of this period as well as its readers who did not seem to distinguish, or care to distinguish, between objective and subjective reporting, between reporting and commentary, even between fact and fiction.<sup>86</sup>

In general, the prose style of the writing in the *Qiribao* was extremely literary and was considerably more polished than that of other contemporary Chinese newspapers. We may see this as another way for the prose to establish legitimacy and to appeal to a more genteel readership.<sup>87</sup>

Why did the *Qiribao* adopt such a highly literary style in reporting news and making commentaries? It should be remembered that when the first modern Chinese newspapers appeared in the nine-

<sup>85</sup> QB 16 March 1872.

<sup>86</sup> According to Fang Hanqi, *Tongshi*, pp. 405–17, there was always the tension between the tendency to transform news into literature and respect for news. The 1860s and 70s saw the peaking of the former tendency when there were a lot of stories about ghosts and other supernatural things, but that news reporting became more factual after that. However, judging from some of the 20/21st century newspapers, the tendency to fictionalize news is still alive and well. See Li Liangrong, p. 3. For an interesting comment on sensational writing and the spirit of irrelevance and a defence of the tabloid, see S.J. Taylor, *Shock! Horror!* (London, New York, Toronto, Sydney and Auckland: Bantam Press, 1991).

<sup>87</sup> Thus the *Qiribao*, though popular, was far from being the kind of mass communication that is discussed in Leo Ou-fan Lee and Andrew J. Nathan, 'The Beginnings of Mass Culture: Journal and Fiction in the Late Ch'ing and Beyond', in David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan and Evelyn S. Rawski (eds), *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 360–95. See Phyllis Frus, *The Politics and Poetics of Journalistic Narrative: the Timely and the Timeless* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1994) for a criticism of elitist journalism.

teenth century, all operated by foreigners, there was no ready-made Chinese prose-style comparable to that used in the English press. The missionaries who produced the first Chinese newspapers groped about for a style acceptable to a Chinese readership but they were severely restricted by their own limited knowledge of the language and culture—not to mention their puritanical sensibilities.<sup>88</sup> The early Chinese journalists thus had to adopt a suitable style from the repository of Chinese literature. For one thing, they had to write in a style acceptable to their readers who were themselves educated in the traditional prose style and accustomed to the old forms of literary expression. Besides, in order to gain respectability, the writings in the *Qiribao* were often loaded with classical allusions as if to flaunt the scholarship of the writer. Certainly, it reflected higher scholarship, greater familiarity with the Chinese classics and more elegance in style than what we can see in such contemporary papers as the *Zhongwai xinwen qirilu* and *Shanghai Xinbao*.<sup>89</sup> To put it in another way, it displayed much greater pretensions to literati status and yet at the same time, tried to cater to the taste of the common reader, including, if the *China Mail* is to be believed, the houseboy as well.

Contemporary observers did not overlook the *Qiribao*'s 'affected' style. The *Shanghai Courier* made its comments rather good-humouredly. Having scanned Chen Aiting's 'lucubrations' from the beginning, the *Courier* found them 'although frequently couched in the ultra-pedantic and affected style which is as a rule confined to examination essays', nevertheless 'of a considerably higher class in general than the majority of similar productions.' It was certainly a cut above the crude and colloquial use of Chinese in the earlier missionary-operated papers.<sup>90</sup>

The *China Mail*, well aware of the *Qiribao*'s grandiose and stilted tone, did not see it as a problem. Rather, it defended the practice,

<sup>88</sup> For the quality of missionary papers, see Li Liangrong, pp. 5–6. For a study of the missionary press, see Adrian N. Bennett, *Missionary Journalist in China. Young J. Allen and his Magazines, 1860–1883* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1983).

<sup>89</sup> Compared to the *Shanghai xinbao*, extracts of Hong Kong newspapers found in the *Shanghai xinbao* and the *Zhongwai xinwen qirilu* of Guangzhou, this is certainly true. The *Zhongwai xinwen qirilu*, edited by John Chalmers and published in Guangzhou, actually laughed at the mistakes in the *Zhongwai xinwen*, pointing out that that paper made mistakes related to Chinese language and customs because of the editor, Murrow's ignorance of Chinese (*Qirilu*, 20 April 1865).

<sup>90</sup> *Shanghai Courier*, 15 June 1871, reprinted in *China Mail*, 21 June 1871. The low standard of Chinese newspapers operated by missionaries was also commented on by Zeng Jianxiong, *Zhongguo xinwen pinglun fazhan shi* (The history of the develop-

claiming that the writing of Chinese in a newspaper had to be in tune with ‘the inflated idiom of Chinese speech’. What was more important, it claimed, was that the core and gist of the meaning of the news was extracted, although ‘these must be cast into idiomatic Chinese and in the usual style of the vernacular.’<sup>91</sup>

If Chen Aiting, who was educated in an English-language school, had any difficulty with the Chinese language at all, he could find help from his better-trained literati friends, and there were a number of them in Hong Kong he could call on. The one that comes immediately to mind of course is Wang Tao, a long time associate of Chen’s and one of the more outstanding men of letters to have visited and resided in Hong Kong in the nineteenth century.

Wang Tao, who had obtained the most junior (prefectural level) degree in the Civil Examination System, had arrived in Hong Kong in 1862 to escape arrest by the Chinese government which suspected him of being a Taiping sympathizer. In Hong Kong, while using his literary skills to help James Legge of the London Missionary Society to translate the Chinese Classics into English, he was also involved in other literary pursuits, such as co-writing the *Huoqi Lueshuo* with Huang Sheng. From these ventures we can see that despite his limited knowledge of English, by lending his Chinese writing skills to those with a better grasp of English than Chinese, Wang was able to play an important role in facilitating cultural transfer.

It is therefore natural that Chen Aiting also found occasion to collaborate with him. At least two essays that appeared in the *Qiribao* were their collaborative efforts. They were translated from an English work on prominent persons in the United States, with Wang writing down in Chinese what Chen translated orally from the original.<sup>92</sup> It is possible that they teamed up to produce other works in this way as well.<sup>93</sup> Thus, Wang Tao and other members of the literati, trained for the old examination system and steeped in the old literary style complemented the ‘new’ Chinese educated class in their effort to develop a wholly new medium. The synergistic effect of their

ment of news commentaries in China) (Guilin: Guanxi Shifan Daxue chubanshe, 1996), p. 12.

<sup>91</sup> CM 21 June 1871.

<sup>92</sup> QB 8 July 1871.

<sup>93</sup> It is likely that there were other occasions on which Chen collaborated with Wang. It is also tempting to speculate that Wang wrote other pieces in the *Qiribao*, but there is insufficient information to support these assumptions conclusively. Certainly many of the pet ideas in the *Qiribao* can be found in Wang Tao’s writings.

collaboration made the impact of the newspaper even more dynamic. Not only did Chinese accustomed to conventional literary styles encounter new ideas and new knowledge in the newspaper, the newspaper also helped to construct, or perhaps more accurately, to quick-fix, a literary 'tradition' in a largely commercial environment. Moreover, non-gentry in Hong Kong, using the Confucian rhetoric of the literati, transformed the newspaper into an unprecedented means by which to engage officials, a process by which the marginalized jostled their way toward the mainstream. The Chinese newspaper was thus a site for multi-faceted and multi-directional social and cultural change.

### **Open Forum: Letters to the Editors**

Besides shaping public opinion, the newspaper was also a public space allowing readers to speak their minds to the different audiences and so carry on dialogue on another level. The *Qiribao*, printing some of the earliest examples of letters to editors written by Chinese readers in a Chinese newspaper, enables us to see how Chinese public opinion in this form was expressed as well as the issues that concerned the Chinese in Hong Kong at that time.

Despite claims that the medium for public opinion existed in China before the appearance of the newspaper in the early nineteenth century,<sup>94</sup> there should be no dispute that public opinion found the means for wide circulation only after the introduction of modern newspapers. In Hong Kong, where the English press thrived, Chinese readers learnt from early on to use the newspaper as a public platform. In fact, a study of this class of text—English letters to the editor written by Chinese persons—would be a fascinating exercise in intellectual, social and discourse analysis. To this extent, not only was Hong Kong the cradle of the modern press on the China coast, it was also the cradle of the Chinese consumer of the modern press. More importantly, it was here that Chinese readers, by using the newspaper as a new channel to express their views on contemporary issues, helped to enlarge the new public sphere.

Throughout the fourteen months of its publication, only six letters appeared in the *Qiribao*, but they were revealing. The first letter,

<sup>94</sup> Lin Yutang, *A History of the Press and Public Opinion in China* (Shanghai, Hong Kong, Singapore: Kelly and Walsh for China Institute of Pacific Relations, 1936).

published on 25 March, gives some idea of the hard hitting nature of such letters. It was written in response to a court decision to charge members of the Saukeiwan neighbourhood association for illegal assembly. The correspondent argued that the ordinance against illegal assembly, on which the judgement was made, had been originally enacted in 1858 during the second opium war when the situation in Hong Kong was very tense. If Chinese were now made to observe every stringent article in this ordinance, he warned, they would sooner or later find it intolerable. Of course there were criminal elements in society, but these should be educated gradually through moral persuasion. Beneficial regulations rather than severe punishment should be employed to eradicate evil influences.

Moreover, the government should know that the neighbourhood association, far from harming the state, could benefit the community. By organizing meetings and allowing people to speak their minds, it enabled the government to discover how people thought and felt. Now, instead, the court was condemning it. The author further complained about the court's seeming arbitrariness in its treatment of public assemblies. Why was the Saukeiwan assembly prosecuted while the assemblies taking place at the Man Mo Temple assembly hall and at the Tung Wah Hospital were never interfered with?

The author demonstrated his knowledge of the law and people's constitutional rights when he took the matter one logical step further. Since the right to public assembly was enjoyed by all British subjects, he argued, to deprive people of that right would be contrary to the principle of self determination (*zizhu zhi li*). Besides, given that the ordinance had been enacted as a temporary security measure, it should only be invoked with great caution. It was inadvisable for officials to create resentment among the Chinese by making things so difficult for them. The enlightened official should be able to understand this, and eliminate any form of discrimination.<sup>95</sup>

To add more punch to the letter, the editor himself noted how impressed he was by this correspondent's insights. Since this letter concerned all Chinese people, moreover, he felt compelled to print it verbatim. This, he hoped, would provide the authorities with an opportunity to hear different views. In this fashion, Chen Aiting made it clear that he saw the *Qiribao* not only as an instrument for disseminating information and views but as a bridging mechanism

<sup>95</sup> QB 25 March 1871.



between the ruler and the ruled in Hong Kong, even as an instrument of public pressure.<sup>96</sup>

In interesting contrast to the above letter is one that praised the fairness of a judge who had convicted an Indian merchant for defrauding a number of Chinese merchants of huge amounts. The author of *this* letter found the judgement particularly gratifying since in a commercial world, trust was everything, and the law should punish anyone who had betrayed trust. Using conventional literary idioms, the author noted that the judge, by applying the law correctly, admonished the violent and protected the innocent. By identifying the wicked and evil and not letting the criminal go lightly, he was able to redress the grievances of the heavens and bring joy to people's hearts.<sup>97</sup>

Significantly, like the previous letter, the crux of the matter was again the law. The author emphasized how, after swindling the Chinese, the Indian merchant tried to declare bankruptcy as a ploy to escape his debts. Had the judge not been particularly shrewd, the culprit would have gone unpunished. Significantly too, the letter spoke on behalf of Chinese interests. The Chinese creditors were represented as victims of a ruthless foreigner who had travelled all the way to China in order to prey upon the Chinese. In this way, a commercial dispute was transformed into a racial one, a matter of 'we' against 'them'.

Letters such as these that highlighted the discrimination or victimization suffered by Chinese easily helped to galvanize the sense of community among Chinese in Hong Kong. With immigrants coming from many parts of South China, speaking widely different and mutually incomprehensible dialects, the written word was vital as a unifying factor, a form of social cement. The newspaper therefore played a valuable role in providing one voice for the many regional and dialect groups, a catalyst in the promotion of social integration.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>96</sup> QB 25 March 1871.

<sup>97</sup> QB 6 Jan. 1872.

<sup>98</sup> It should be noted that the belief in the acculturating function of the media is much debated. The conflict between those who believe in the cohesive power of the press and those who believe in its disintegrative potentials continues. See Harold Mendolsohn, 'Sociological Perspectives on the Study of Mass Communication', in Lewis Anthony Dexter and David Manning White (eds), *People, Society and Mass Communications* (New York: The Free Press and London: Collier MacMillan Ltd., 1964), pp. 29-36.

One further letter in the *Qiribao* gives us some idea of the readership pattern. On 16 August, a letter appeared in the *Zhongwai xinbao*, the Chinese paper published by the *Daily Press*. It was the time of the Civil Service Examinations in Guangzhou, and the Commissioner of Examination had just arrived in that city to adjudicate the results. The author, signing himself Le Shan Xuan (lit. Room of Happiness in Charity) pointed to a rumour that six persons, whose surnames he mentioned, were planning to gain literary distinction by deceit. He therefore warned that, in case the Commissioner did give the awards to persons with those surnames, he should be prepared to explain his judgement to avoid being charged with corruption.

Le Shan Xuan's letter was noted by another reader who translated it into English and then submitted it to the *China Mail*. This reader also added comments, in English, condemning Le Shan Xuan's interference with the examination procedure. He pointed out that there was 'no occasion to bring forth the alleged malpractices of the students prematurely'; if malpractice was discovered afterwards, any distinctions obtained by fraud could be recalled. 'The publication of the communication resembles the prejudgement of a case by telling the judge before the trial comes on that some witnesses are suspected of having perjured themselves,' he added.<sup>99</sup> In fact, the matter of examination fraud involved more than honour or principle. It also involved a lottery, commonly known in English as the 'Literary Derby' and in Chinese as *weixing*, which was based on guessing the surnames of winning candidates. Consequently, any interference in the examination results would affect the outcome of the lottery, and the interest of many punters.

This started a war of words. Such wars of words were common enough between the *Daily Press* and the *China Mail*—in fact open recrimination among English newspapers had been a hallmark of the Hong Kong press since the earliest days.<sup>100</sup> But what distinguished this particular verbal conflict was that it straddled the English and Chinese newspapers. In response to the above article, Le Shan Xuan wrote another letter in the *Zhongwai xinbao* defending himself and scolding his critic for his harshness. In turn, the translator/critic wrote a long letter, this time in Chinese for the *Qiribao*, using the pseudonym Jian Hengzi (lit. person who distinguishes between right and wrong), repeating his attack on Le Shan Xuan for his underhan-

<sup>99</sup> CM 19 Aug. 1871.

<sup>100</sup> Clarke, *passim*.

dedness. Interestingly, whereas he had written in idiomatic English in the *China Mail*, now that he was writing in a Chinese newspaper, he conformed to the Chinese idiomatic style, filling his letter with Chinese classical and historical allusions. This letter throws important light on the pattern of newspaper readership in Hong Kong. It highlights how some readers, being bilingual, brought news items and opinions back and forth between the Chinese and English newspapers. We see this small elite, educated, well-informed, purposeful and aggressive, maximizing the opportunities offered them, as readers and as expressers of opinion, by both English and Chinese newspapers. The ease with which they moved between the different worlds of words, ideas, imageries and values, enabled a fluidity in cultural experience as they expanded the scope of their intellectual activities into new domains.

### Conclusion

The last issue of the *Qiribao* appeared on 6 April 1872. On 17th April, the *China Mail* began publication of the *Huazi ribao*, a daily, also edited by Chen Aiting.<sup>101</sup> We may safely conclude that its expansion from a weekly to a daily was an indication of the *Qiribao*'s success.

The *Shenbao*, the most important Chinese newspaper in nineteenth century Shanghai started publication on 30 April of that year. The first Chinese-owned newspaper, the *Xunhuan ribao*, edited by Wang Tao, followed on 4 February 1874. The *Xunhuan ribao* was owned by the Chinese Printing and Publishing Company, which Chen Aiting, Wong Shing and Wang Tao organized in 1872 and which Chen managed.<sup>102</sup> By this time, the Chinese newspaper had largely undergone the formative stage of its evolution as a literary form and as a forum

<sup>101</sup> See CM 2 and 19 April 1872. Actually, it was issued every other day, with an extra or supplement on intervening days. See also Lin Youlan, 'Chen Aiting yu Xianggang Huazi ribao'. After Chen Aiting left the *Huazi ribao*, his sons continued to work for the paper. In 1919, it became financially independent of the *China Mail* and was incorporated.

<sup>102</sup> Su Jing, 'Cong Ying Hua shuyuan dao Zhonghua yinwu zongju: jindai zhongwen yinshua chuban de xin jumian' (From Ying Wah College to the Chinese Printing and Publishing Company: New Phase in Modern Chinese Language Printing and Publication) Paper presented at the 'International Conference on Wong Tao and the Modern World', Hong Kong Baptist University, 17–20 December 1997, pp. 5–6.

for public opinion. By this time too, this medium had become a familiar part of the life of readers in Shanghai and Hong Kong, shaping and reshaping their mental landscapes.<sup>103</sup>

The *Qiribao* testifies to the formative stage of the history of the Chinese press as the Chinese editor attempted to create his own space distinct from that of its English mentor and employer. It struggled to maintain editorial independence, selecting its own contents, adapting its own tone and writing style, and ultimately, taking different positions regarding a whole range of issues. While fulfilling its promise to inform and educate, it also discovered along the way the need to entertain, thus exploring the newspaper's potential range of functions and creatively testing its marketability. Most importantly, it developed into a forum of Chinese public opinion, challenging not only the scholar-gentry's monopoly to wisdom and access to authority, but also bucking the Chinese government's prohibition against public debate on matters of state.

The *Qiribao* was a voice marking a special point in time and space.

It was the voice of colonial Hong Kong, where the English press taught Chinese the profitability and potential power of newspapers. Beyond Chinese jurisdiction, Chinese journalists could speak more freely than on the Mainland and carve out for themselves and their readers space for public debate. As the newspaper experimented with its watchdog role, it bucked the old social and political barriers. Ideas and rhetoric about the rule of law and equality before the law, constitutional rights and justice, so loudly propagated by the British, soon became basic assumptions of educated Chinese.

It was the voice of commercial Hong Kong, where people openly propounded the virtue of wealth. Chinese merchants made money under a legal system that protected property. The entrepreneurial spirit that advocated new and daring ways to create wealth challenged orthodox Confucian principles of economic conservatism. Having acquired wealth and moral legitimacy through providing cultural security and material welfare for the less privileged, Chinese

<sup>103</sup> See James L. Huffman, *Creating a Public. People and Press in Meiji Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii press, 1997), p. 7: 'often the press influence results in the reinforcement of existing values; at other times, it nudges readers toward new values and options. But it never stops shaping our way of looking at the world, whether we are conscious of that fact or not.' The impact of print culture in early 20th century China is examined by Joan Judge in *Print and Politics: 'Shibao' and the Culture of Reform in Late Qing China* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1996).

merchants were emboldened to engage the Chinese government in dialogue, a function once preserved for the scholar-gentry.

It was the voice of cosmopolitan Hong Kong. The world was brought closer to the Chinese in a place that was a hub of international shipping, trade and information, the centre of multi-level transnational networks and gateway for hundreds of thousands of Chinese and foreigners. Here the belief in the uniqueness of Chinese civilization was eroded by the reality of the universality of human experience. Here the awareness of the need for China's diplomatic presence overseas challenged the self-imposed isolation of the Chinese Empire. As men learnt to move with ease from one language to another and make sense of the world through others' eyes, a new kind of intellectual and cultural fluidity emerged.

The *Qiribao* was an arena for a variety of uneven processes, juxtaposing the new and old—ideas, knowledge, values—while enabling social groups to interface with each other in unprecedented ways, even if only in the imagination. In the hands of pioneer journalists, the newspaper evolved as an instrument for social, political, economic and cultural change, heralding the arrival of modern China.

And, with it, the Chinese newspaper came of age.

