



Young journalists and old news: remembering mass protests in Hong Kong

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Abstract

In this study, 20 journalists who had worked on news about the anniversaries of mass protests in Hong Kong were interviewed. Given that most had been born after the historical events being commemorated, this paper aims to understand how young journalists comprehend and cover such old news. It also uncovers the journalistic processes behind the related anniversary journalism and discusses the role of journalism in constructing collective memory. The study traced how journalists normally do their research and what they consider in the production process. We found that journalists, as with other assignments, generally lack the time to conduct thorough research. Instead of venturing into hard facts or heated debates, most opted to focus on the personal and the emotional. For the personal, they relied on stories told by living witnesses and participants. For the emotional, they tapped into the cultural environment as well as their peers to determine appropriate feelings and moral tones. Professional norms compelled them to find new angles for old news and package the stories in ways that would engage and attract their audience. All of these factors shape how journalists tell the stories about the past; these stories in turn become new resources in the ‘inventory’ of collective memories.

Keywords

Anniversary journalism, collective memory, cultural authority, Hong Kong, journalism (profession), mnemonic socialisation

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Introduction

In this study, 20 journalists who worked on news about the anniversaries of mass protests in Hong Kong were interviewed. Given that most had been born after the historical events being commemorated, this paper aims to understand how young journalists comprehend old news of this type. It also uncovers the journalistic processes behind anniversary journalism and discusses the role of journalism in constructing collective memory.

While individual remembering is clearly a psychological phenomenon, this study focuses on the sociological dimensions of memory. Zerubavel (1996: 283) has argued that the 'impersonal, conventional, collective, and normative aspects of the process of remembering' matter in 'the politics of remembrance'. Indeed, the collective memory is the social framework to which individuals refer when they talk about the past. Like personal memory, collective memory is concerned with the retention or loss of information regarding past events (Schwartz, 1991), but it is also the product of a particular social group (Halbwachs, 1980). Zelizer (1995) has noted that collective memory is both processual and unpredictable. It is often in the process of formation, and the way it grows or fades is not necessarily logical. In other words, 'collective memory reflects a groups' codified knowledge over time about what is important, preferred and appropriate' (Zelizer, 1992: 3). This paper is specifically about how a group of young journalists acquired this type of 'codified knowledge' and how they determined what information is 'important, preferred and appropriate' in the process. Their selection has implications both for the transmission of collective memory and the cultural authority of journalism.

Collective memory and mnemonic socialisation

Collective memory is about history, but it is not the same as history. Rather, collective memory reveals much about how memory is selected, constructed and contested in a particular society (Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2013). It is typically recalled during anniversaries (Keith, 2012). The fact that not all historical events will be recalled suggests that certain collective memories are deemed more important to the community in question. When recalled, this type of memory inevitably invokes new rounds of meaning making, which are often tied to collective identity, a sense of community and societal values (Lee and Chan, 2018; Li and Lee, 2013). As Brockmeier (2002) has argued, collective memory is not only about knowledge and experience, but also says much about the community's underlying moral and aesthetic values.

Memory construction and contestation are often based on the changing needs of the present (Lee and Chan, 2016). Collective memory can also influence the future, however, by providing a template for future actions. Memory is mobilized because certain historical injustices await correction (Verberg and Davis, 2011). Collective memory is thus a dynamic process that is both retrospective and prospective, and it is useful because it sheds light on the common values and goals a community continues to hold in the past, present and future.

How collective memory is transmitted across generations remains a key point of interest. According to Brockmeier (2002), people grow into a social community and acquire its frames and memory practices spontaneously. To account for individual differences in

remembering, Brockmeier believes that family, schools and media have different roles in mnemonic socialisation. Kansteiner (2002), meanwhile, saw the process as an interaction of three factors. First, intellectual and cultural traditions in framing the representations of the past should exist. Second, there are memory makers who selectively adopt and manipulate these traditions. Third, there are memory consumers who use, ignore or transform these memories according to their interests. The interaction of these three factors results in both conscious manipulation and unconscious absorption of collective memory, which is, by necessity, mediated (Kansteiner, 2002: 180).

Schudson (1997) has asked how the past lives on in the present even when no one actively commemorates it. He has discussed the kinds of residues the past leaves with us and in us, including in our lives, laws and language. Witnesses bear personal memories and carry those memories with them through time. This could also explain why people born after certain historical events usually have feelings that are much weaker than first-hand witnesses (Lee and Chan, 2013). Certain laws and particular references made in the language also pass on memories to future generations, as shown in the case of the Watergate scandal (Schudson, 1997).

Studies have found generational differences in remembering national and global events (Corning et al., 2013; Schuman and Scott, 1989). People from different age cohorts remember and rank historical events differently. The critical age hypothesis, for example, has argued that memories formed between the ages of 17 to 25 have a more lasting impact (Mannheim, 1972).

Roles of journalism in memory construction

More attention has been directed to the centrality of journalism in developing collective memory. Edy (1999) has discussed how journalism is closely related to collective memory through news stories about commemoration, historical analogy and references to historical contexts. Zelizer (2008) has further posited that journalism is a key agent of memory work. She asserted that more efforts should be invested in learning how and why journalism remembers so we can achieve greater understanding about the mechanisms of collective memory (Zelizer, 2014).

In the case of commemorative journalism, anniversary news coverage constructs coherent narratives out of the contradictory and messy facts of the past and thus provides readers with tacit knowledge and a point of reference (Meyers, 2019). Zandberg (2010) has traced how facts are selected and constructed into cultural-interpretive frames. Journalists are here accorded a special role, as they are in a position to provide narratives that order the past (Watson and Chen, 2016). In this process of (re)constructing the past, journalists are seen to exercise a form of cultural authority. Zelizer (1992: 8) has conceptualized this cultural authority as 'the ability of journalists to promote themselves as authoritative and credible spokespersons of 'real-life' events. . .by which journalists determine their right to present authoritative versions of the world'. For critics like Roeh (1989), however, the linguistic transparency in the Western tradition may conceal the role of journalists as storytellers. The authoritative versions of the past might therefore be taken for granted, which would make journalists even more authoritative in the construction of collective memory.

Despite this seemingly strong cultural authority, journalists are influenced by various factors in the news production process. Zandberg (2010), for example, found that journalists used different news sources with varying emphasis. They relied heavily on biographical, official and academic sources, but not so much on professional journalistic sources. Zandberg saw this as a reflection of the weak autonomy of the journalistic field. However, as shown in earlier studies, the autonomy of journalists has long been controlled through news routines and workflow organisation (Tuchman, 1973). Professional norms emphasising newsworthiness and visuals also shape news stories (Hoskins, 2011; Zelizer, 2008). As members of an interpretive community, journalists have to observe shared discourses and the collective interpretation of key public events among their professional peers (Zelizer, 1993). Technology has also enabled the emergence of a great number of memory silos. As new ways of knowing and remembering arise (Elwood and Mitchell, 2015), they pose new challenges to the cultural authority of journalists.

Journalists are, after all, in the same ‘memory soup’ as other members of their community. Through this metaphor of memory soup, Kitch (2008) draws attention to the fact that the ingredients of collective memory are not limited to journalism. In considering the relationships between journalism and collective memory, it is therefore important to examine journalism as a process rather than a product.

Mass protests and their commemoration in Hong Kong

The present study discusses the roles and cultural authority of journalism in memory construction through the commemoration of two mass protests in Hong Kong. The first mass protests were commonly known as the ‘1967 Riots’ – or ‘67’ in colloquial terms. This refers to a large-scale protest by Hong Kong leftists against the colonial government, who emphasized that it was an ‘anti-British and anti-violence campaign’ (*fanying kangbao*). Begun in May 1967, the riots lasted for about 6 months. During those turbulent times, 51 people were killed, including a famous radio commentator, and 4500 people were arrested in waves of demonstrations, strikes and bomb attacks. The colonial government reactivated Emergency Regulations in its effort to restore order. It was believed that the intense confrontations prompted the colonial government to take proactive measures in governance thereafter and was thus seen as a turning point in Hong Kong history (Carroll, 2009; Cheung, 2009; Scott, 1989). Bickers and Yep (2009) have argued that the 1967 riots have been understudied. Despite this lack of academic attention, the public memory of the event is alive, but they noted that the public representation of the conflicts is muted, as reflected in the lack of mention in the Hong Kong Museum of History (Bickers and Yep, 2009: 1).

The second mass protests happened in the summer of 1989. The death of Hu Yaobang, a leader in the Chinese Communist Party, on 15 April 1989, led to waves of protests in Beijing and other cities. The student movement in Tiananmen Square was televised around the clock in Hong Kong. Three mass rallies were organized to show support for the students in Hong Kong between 20 May and 4 June. For the first time in the history of Hong Kong, nearly a million people took to the streets to protest (Cheung, 2019). The events were commonly referred to as ‘89’, ‘8964’ or ‘64’, which marked the crackdown on 4 June. Lee (2019) has asserted that the colonial government shifted its policy, from

one of accommodation to confrontation, towards Beijing over the democratic development in Hong Kong. It was considered another turning point, similar to the 1966–1967 riots, as the 1989 event ‘ushered in an era of unprecedented democratisation of Hong Kong’s political structure under Chris Patten, the last colonial governor’ (Lee, 2019: 20).

Although both events were each regarded as a ‘turning point’ in the history of Hong Kong, they have been treated rather differently in local memory. Since 1990, Hong Kong has held a candlelight vigil in Victoria Park on 4 June every year. Organized by the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China (hereafter, the Alliance), it has become the most important commemorative activity in Hong Kong and is considered an indicator of whether the ‘One Country, Two Systems’ policy is still in place. Lee and Chan (2013, 2015, 2016, 2018) have tried to understand why Hong Kong has not forgotten the 1989 incident throughout the years. In a survey they conducted during the vigil, they found that 47.6% of respondents learned about it through family, 41.5% through friends, 74.8% through schools, 75.8% through the internet, 70.2% through TV and radio and 65.1% through print media (Lee and Chan, 2013). Their studies also suggest that the vigil has become an event of memory mobilisation. Young people come to a ‘gradual discovery’ of the events of 1989 through schools, family and media. News media, for example, continue to cover the vigil as major news every year (Chu, 2021), and to produce in-depth reports and features during major anniversaries. Different institutions have contributed to keeping the memory of 1989 alive. For the younger generations, their understanding tends to be simplified and essentialized, but is still characterized by a deep emotional imprint and high moral clarity (Lee and Chan, 2013).

Unlike the 4 June incident, there have been far fewer ‘commemorative’ activities related to the 1967 riots. A more systematic review of the protests came only shortly before 1997 (Cheung, personal communication, 17/12/2019). As a young journalist, Cheung came across the subject and wondered why there was not much information about it. He has since embarked on a journey to reconstruct narratives about the riots. Twenty years on, he has authored a few books about the 1967 riots (Cheung, 2000, 2009, 2012a, 2012b), and there have been a few scholarly publications to date (Bickers and Yep, 2009; Yep, 2012, 2019). Overall, however, the 1967 riots have received far less public attention. A keyword search for ‘67 riots’ in the news database Wisenews showed there was scant media coverage, even on major anniversaries. Commemorative news reports were absent until the 40th anniversary, when 12 articles were found from four newspapers. In 2012, the 45th anniversary, one newspaper produced 12 articles over 3 days of coverage. It was not until 2017, on the 50th anniversary, that there was more commemorative coverage, when four news outlets produced a total of 43 news articles. There were also more activities and discussion, along with the release of related documentaries and films (Ching, 2018; Chiu, 2018; Lau, 2017; Lo, 2018).

Journalism is related to collective memory not only in the form of anniversary journalism but also in its use of historical analogy and references to historical contexts (Edy, 1999). It is thus not unusual to come across mentions of 67 riots in various news media. Another keyword search reveals that 1967 was often recalled during new controversies. In 2001, for example, the government awarded the Grand Bauhinia Medal to Yeung Kwong, who was the leader of the All Circles Anti-Persecution Struggle Committee. The

organisation was in charge of all left-wing activities during that period, so there were debates about the bestowal of such honour to its leader. More than 200 news articles appeared around this particular incident. In 2017, the release of the documentary 'Vanished Archive' started a new round of debates about the causes and events of the riots in 1967. In particular, a group of then-young prisoners demanded justice for their cases, which led some to question whether it would lead to 'rewriting' of history (Chung, 2018; Yang, 2018). The strong, and often negative, public sentiments suggest a rather different public perception of 1967 than of 1989.

In a survey about memories of major historical events in Hong Kong, the 4 June 1989 incident was the second most recalled event, while only 2.7% of respondents recalled the 1967 riots (Lee and Chan, 2018). Borrowing the lens of 'eventful sociology' (Lee, 2019), this study argues that although the most recalled event was the handover in 1997, the events in 1967 and 1989 represented 'concentrated moments of political and cultural creativity when the logic of historical development is reconfigured by human action' (Lee, 2019: 7). These rare and unexpected events created disruptive potential and transformed existing structures. The handover, on the contrary, had been planned for more than two decades before it finally took place in 1997. In view of the suddenness, magnitude and impact, the events in 1967 and 1989 are more comparable. The many unresolved issues and controversies centring on the two cases also suggest the ways that collective memory is prone to contestation in the construction and transmission process.

Two key questions

Given that journalism exists within memory, and memory is (re)constructed and (re)mediated whenever it is selectively recalled in news stories, this raises questions about how memory and journalism shape each other and how the interactions and interrelations influence the content and transmission of collective memory. This study addresses two key questions.

Mnemonic socialisation

The first question aims to understand how young journalists have been socialized into remembering particular historical episodes. The existing literature suggests that family, school and media have different roles, and we are here interested in how young journalists first came to learn about the two mass protests through these institutions and how these institutions shaped the young journalists' memory. This study will shed light on the kinds of memory that journalists bring into the news production process.

Journalistic processes

The second question focuses on news production processes. Journalists in this study had all participated in the production of anniversary editions regarding at least one of the two events. Regardless of their own memory, they were obliged to come up with news stories that could be published or broadcast. This study traces how they researched these topics,

how they decided the news angles and the journalists' different focuses of concern during the process.

Methods

This study focuses on the cultural authority of journalism. Unlike journalists who are live witnesses to historical events, the young journalists considered here could only rely on secondary research in the production process. This emphasis on young journalists allows us to focus on how mnemonic socialisation and journalistic processes shape collective memory, and thus the implications for changing cultural authority.

We conducted in-depth interviews with 20 Hong Kong journalists. Of these, 12 were born after 1990 and five were born between 1984 and 1989, while three interviewees were born in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The senior journalists had either witnessed the events of 1989 or participated in anniversary journalism and were involved in the planning of related news series. Their experience provided important insights that complement the views of the younger journalists. While the views of the older journalists are discussed, the findings section focuses on statements from the young journalists.

Informants were identified in two stages. First, news databases were searched using the relevant keywords. Articles published around the time of anniversaries were selected. Similar actions were repeated for digital news and broadcast media. This initial search revealed which local news outlets produced anniversary editions for the 1989 and 1967 incidents. Second, we reached out to these news organisations, both formally and through referrals, and asked to interview the journalists involved, with a specific request to speak to journalists who were either born after the events or were still in their childhood at the time when the events occurred. Eventually, we interviewed 17 journalists who were broadly defined as 'young' in this study. The youngest was born in 1996 and the eldest was born in 1984.

Of the young journalists interviewed, six worked for newspapers, six for digital news media and five for television news. On average, they have been working in the field for 5 years, although the youngest had just joined the news media 2 months prior to the interview. The most experienced had been in the field for 8 years and was 32 years old when interviewed. Almost all had received journalism training at the university level. Four grew up in Mainland China and one grew up in Macau; all of the others were born and educated in Hong Kong.

Each interview lasted for 1 to 2 hours. All interviews were semi-structured and conducted between September 2018 and March 2019. Audio-recordings were transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were read and re-read to determine major categories. They were further grouped and analysed for recurring themes, as well as key differences. The news stories produced by these journalists were watched and read. While the content was used in the interviews, this paper focuses on the findings from the interviews due to space limitations.

Most interviewees preferred to stay anonymous. To ensure their anonymity, the media organisations they worked for are presented in an unidentifiable way. For clarity of presentation, pseudonyms are assigned in the following format: interviewees working for newspaper referred to as N (number), those working in digital news media as D (number) and those working for broadcast news as T (number). Table 1 provides an overview of the backgrounds of the participating journalists.

Table 1. Background of journalists studied.

No.	Name	Gender	Year of Birth	Education	News organisation and years of work	Production of anniversary stories	Remarks
1	N1	M	1990	Journalism major	6 years at a mass newspaper	1989	
2	N2	F	1990	Journalism major	6 years, first at a mass newspaper, then at an elite paper	1989 1967	
3	N3	F	1990	Journalism major	5 years, first at an elite newspaper, then a digital news media site	1989	
4	N4	F	1992	Journalism major	4 years, first at an elite newspaper, then in radio	1967	
5	N5	F	1992	Journalism major	3 years, first year at a pro-establishment newspaper, followed by 2 years at an elite paper	1989	Born and educated in Mainland China until undergraduate study in Hong Kong
6	N6)	F	1991	English major	3 years at a pro-establishment newspaper	1967	
7	N7	F	1970s	Journalism major	20 years, mainly in a mass newspaper	1967	Senior journalist
8	D1	F	1996	Journalism major	2 months, digital native news media site	1989	
9	D2	F	1991	Journalism master's	1 year, 2 digital native news media sites	1989	Born and educated in Mainland China until postgraduate study in Hong Kong
10	D3	F	1991	Journalism major	5 years, first at a finance newspaper, then a mass magazine, now a digital native media site	1989	

(Continued)

Table I. (Continued)

No.	Name	Gender	Year of Birth	Education	News organisation and years of work	Production of anniversary stories	Remarks
I1	D4	M	1987	Journalism master's	8 years, first in a finance newspaper, then a pro-establishment newspaper, now a digital native news media site	1989	Born and educated in Mainland China until postgraduate study in Hong Kong
I2	D5	F	1991	Journalism major	5 years, first at two newspapers, then a digital native news media site	1989	Mainly in a supervisory role
I3	D6	M	1987	Social science master's	6 years, first at 2 newspapers, then a digital native news media site		
I5	B2	F	1990	Communication major	6 years in 2 television news stations	1967	
I6	B3	M	1986	Journalism major	6 years, in both radio and television news	1989	Born in Hong Kong, educated in Mainland China until junior secondary school
I7	B4	F	1984	Journalism master's	4 years in television feature news	1989	1967
I8	B5	F	1989	Journalism major	7 years in television news	1989	Born and educated in Macau before undergraduate study in Hong Kong
I9	B6	M	1960s	Journalism major	Over 20 years in television news	1989	Now working as a journalism educator
20	B7	M	1960s	Journalism major	Over 20 years in television features	1989	Now working as a journalism educator

Findings and discussion

Mnemonic socialisation

Residues from the past: Memory in keywords. When the young informants were asked how they first came to know about the events of 1967 and 1989, none could come up with a definite answer. Regarding the 4 June incident, they just ‘know’ that they know. N6 was probably the only interviewee who could firmly recall when she first heard about the protests in 1967. When she was assigned to work on a story about ‘67’ in May 2017, she first thought it was an event on 7 June, as in the case of ‘64’ for 4 June. When she discussed this with her supervisor, who realized that N6 had mistaken ‘67’ as a date, the latter was surprised (N6, personal communication, 02/02/2019). For those who also worked on 50th anniversary stories, the scenario might be less dramatic, but they admitted that they knew almost nothing but a few keywords that circulated throughout the years about 67, such as fake homemade bombs, leftist rioters and Lam Bun. Memory passes on in through the use of language, which keeps particular episodes alive in words despite the lack of substantial details (e.g. Schudson, 1997).

Memory institutions: School, family and media

School assemblies and passionate teachers. Our findings suggest that among family, schools and media, schools played a notable role in memory transmission about 1989. This was not because of related textbooks or official curriculum about this historical episode; indeed, as B2 jokingly remarked, ‘much more is said about the Qing Dynasty than 8964’ (B2, personal communication, 20/11/2018). Half of our informants recalled that their schools mentioned 1989 in assemblies on or before 4 June. Four respondents specifically mentioned that passionate teachers influenced their perception of the event. N3 remembered serious discussion about what happened in 1989 in her national education classes in secondary school:

Back then, someone in my school asked why one had to commemorate 8964 every year. Even asking this question made everyone angry. I don’t know why, but then commemoration has been considered a must from then to now. (N3, personal communication, 12/11/2018)

This echoes the views of how teachers could pass on an ‘emotional imprint’ to their students (Lee and Chan, 2013). For D5, the impact was life altering:

I was the head of the student union. My teacher asked me to give a short speech about 8964 on the anniversary date. So I did research and came to know about the events. I decided that I should do something about it, so I tried to distribute leaflets about the history in school. But I was barred from doing this. Since then, I was more determined that I should help to uphold and pass on this memory. It was why I decided to become a journalist. (D5, personal communication, 28/01/2019)

D4 grew up in Mainland China and went to a liberal school. He remembered that teachers would answer related questions when someone asked. He later found out that

some teachers were present at Tiananmen Square in 1989. Although these were not his personal memories, interaction with people who had lived through the events shaped his own memory (D4, personal communication, 11/01/2019).

Family culture. Family is generally a key player in mnemonic socialisation. In this study, however, most interviewees said their families rarely, if ever, discussed political matters. This could be due to divergent political views (N4, personal communication, 01/10/2018), but it could also be due to a kind of family culture, as a few journalists noted, 'We just don't talk about it at home'. B2 recalled that she was surprised by the fact that her uncles had been policemen during the 1967 riots. She had never heard about it until she mentioned she was working on the 50th anniversary story (B2, personal communication, 20/11/2018).

In Mainland China, where the 1989 incident remains a political taboo, parents tend not to talk about it. However, when their children, who went to Hong Kong to study and worked as journalists, brought up the subject, they would share what they knew and cautioned their children not to discuss it with others publicly (N5, personal communication, 13/12/2018; D4, personal communication, 11/01/2019).

Fragments of memory in media. Interviewees agreed that media had a role to play, but none could recall anything specifically impressive. News items about 1989 are far more noticeable, because they appear in the news around the same time every year. Over time, as in the case of keywords, familiar names and stories are widely circulated as 'common sense'. Slogans like the 'Rehabilitation of 4 June' are commonly heard. It is difficult not to come across related news items and discussions on different media platforms. D2, N5 and D4 – all growing up in Mainland China – recalled how they randomly encountered articles and videos on the internet. There was an ambient awareness that it was a very important historical event.

For the 1967 riots, it was even harder to recall what was learned from the media. B1 could vaguely recall mentions of the riots in television dramas, and whenever there was news about Yeung Kwong – a prominent leader of the 1967 riots – there would be brief references to the events. It was how B1 picked up bits and pieces of information about the incident (B1, personal communication, 17/11/2018).

In sum, these collective memories were both ambient and fragmentary. Young journalists heard the keywords and major names, but rarely knew the details. They had a 'feel' for the general sentiments based on the reactions and attitudes of teachers and family members. For quite a few interviewees, attending the candlelight vigil in Victoria Park also provided them a first-hand experience and 'emotional connection' with 1989 (e.g. personal communication with D1, D2, N4, B3, B4, D4, D5 and B5). These 'materials' provided a very basic understanding about the past events and a general sense regarding what is at stake in terms of 'what is right and what is wrong'. This general sense formed the prior knowledge and initial input journalists relied on when they started working on the anniversary stories.

Journalistic processes

Getting started: Doing research. As mentioned earlier, D5 chose to become a journalist because she firmly believed in the necessity to pass on the memory of 8964. She has

actively participated in the production of anniversary editions every June since she entered the profession. Her case is a clear exception in this study. For all of the other young journalists, it was not a personal choice to work on the anniversary stories, but just another assignment. The supervisors of B1 and B4 did ask if they would like to participate in the news features about 1967 before they were assigned the task. Considering that they barely knew anything about it, they thought it would be a good chance to learn something new about Hong Kong history. Not everyone was keen about history, however; when asked about his knowledge about 1989 and 1967, N1 sighed and admitted that he always dreaded being asked such questions. Dreadful or not, the young journalists still had to turn in the assignments and present them to a general audience when the time came.

Although most informants were aware of their limited knowledge and hence the importance of research, they were under immense time pressure. The turnaround time for news assignments varied. For newspapers, the time for journalists to finish the work would be from 2 weeks to a month. For digital media, schedules could be quite tight. D1 produced 11 news stories in 8 weeks when she was an intern reporter. For television, B3 and B5 ran daily news, so it was typically short, but for others who worked on news features and documentaries, it could range from 5 weeks for B4 to 4 months for B1.

The time available clearly had implications for how they got things started. B1, for example, had far more time to study the events and major debates of 1967. He started by reading a book by Cheung (2012a) for a week or so. After grasping the big picture, he spent another week in the government archive and looked up original documents using different keywords in his searches. During that week, he researched from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. He attended public forums and talked to other attendees. He also went to a university library to review old news on microfilm because he wanted to get a 'feel' of the atmosphere by reading old newspapers, which took another week. After doing all this, he was able to come up with his own timeline about what actually happened (B1, personal communication, 17/11/2018).

This was a rare case. Other respondents relied heavily on the internet in the research process; ask Google: that was how everyone started, including B1. No one had any special search techniques. They just typed keywords such as '8964', '1967 riots' and 'Tiananmen Square'. Depending on the time available for research, some used Google as a starting point, while others had to use it as a major reference throughout the process.

Wisenews, a digital news database archive of Hong Kong news since 1998, was also used by many respondents. They searched similar keywords, but the purpose was primarily to scan for published news articles on the same subjects. Because the database does not contain news items older than 1998, it contains no original articles from either 1967 or 1989. In her extensive review of Wisenews, B2 said she was surprised to see that similar news material about the two protests was repeated again and again over the years (B2, personal communication, 20/11/2018).

Seven interviewees mentioned books as an important reference. N2 felt that books could provide better context and background knowledge. D2 read a book authored by one of her interviewees to prepare for the interview. D3 preferred books because they provide clues for finding relevant people for further interviews. Not everyone could afford the time, however; N3 confessed that she would not read books for the sake of an

assignment because it would be 'too demanding' (N3, personal communication, 12/11/2018).

Some respondents opted to consult experts directly. B4 was in a great hurry because she had to produce a feature about 1967 in 5 weeks. Without knowing anything, she got in touch with Cheung and asked for immediate advice and case referrals. In writing about 1967, N6 also looked for help from other journalists when she became increasingly uncertain about specific viewpoints.

Coping with stress: Knowledgeable old participants. Anniversary stories are different from other daily assignments. When covering breaking news or more routine stories, journalists do not necessarily feel that they need to know all of the details. One can fairly assume that everyone knows as little or as much as they do, and it is exactly their work to find out more on the spot. In covering anniversaries of historical events, however, journalists feel the pressure to know at least something beforehand. Time is always limited, though, and it often seems that they never know enough. A few informants remembered how stressful they found it to interview people who had participated in those events.

I felt so nervous about interviewing Reverend Chu. He was there in 1989 and throughout the years, he has been interviewed numerous times. I felt I knew nothing compared to him. (D3, personal communication, 24/11/2018)

D2 had similar feelings when she had to interview a veteran politician. Growing up in Mainland China, she felt she did not have sufficient tacit local knowledge and she worried that she would antagonize the interviewee for her ignorance. She tried to learn as much as possible before the interview (D2, personal communication, 30/09/2018). To B4, the experience of interviewing a 90-year-old man about 1967 (about which she knew very little) was dreadful. 'Every time he talked about something that I didn't know, I felt like I was being questioned. But I really know so little. It is hard' (B4, personal communication, 17/12/2018). N6 followed a group of 1967 participants to a lunch event. She knew so little that she could only listen to and record what others told her, and at one point, she was frightened 'because they were so keen to push their stories on me, and I had no knowledge to judge whether these stories were true or not. Their enthusiasm made me very uneasy' (N6, personal communication, 02/02/2019).

Finding the angle: New, personal and emotional. A major issue with covering old news is finding a new angle. All of the young journalists emphasized the need for 'newness'. One common practice is to relate the old news to some current event or to compare and discuss the lessons the past can teach the present. Despite conscious effort, most admitted that, in reality, it was very difficult to come up with new angles. D6 believed that this would only become more difficult over time as familiar stories are retold many times and the same few participants are repeatedly interviewed. All angles will be exhausted unless there are new breaking stories. 'But it has been 30 years. If someone wanted to disclose something, he or she would have done a long time ago. Why wait till now?' (D6, personal communication, 26/02/2019).

Despite the difficulty of presenting something fresh and new, the young journalists countered that this was what journalism was essentially about: it is not only about history. While aware they were not writing history, they were nonetheless concerned about the accuracy of their stories. Journalism as a profession has long emphasized verification to avoid factual mistakes. Typically, verification can be done by interviewing more people or checking references. In anniversary journalism, however, people from the same generation age and die over time. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find interviewees each year. One also needs to have the background knowledge to identify and access useful resources for crosschecking, which is exactly what young journalists substantially lack in the first place. To solve this problem of verification, B1 did not include any information that he had doubts about: 'For example, if someone says, 'many people died' but then there is no way to confirm how many, we would not use that particular sound bite' (B1, personal communication, 17/11/2018).

Another common strategy to keep the anniversary stories fresh is focusing on the personal and emotional. This means that stories are told from personal memories and experiences, and the focus rests on how individuals interpreted and felt about the past. For such stories, young journalists felt less burdened by the need to verify what their interviewees said. The following account made by B2 aptly summarizes this general approach:

To be honest after I had done some research and gained an initial understanding, I realized that, given the production time, and my connections, I would not be able to talk about finding the truth. I simply didn't have the time. . . so I decided to take a step back. I asked who remembers 1967? The whole point is to ask why some people cannot forget 1967. I used this angle because it was less risky for me. I didn't need to discuss if something was true or false. I didn't have the time and methods to prove anything. I had read old newspapers, for example, but we know that different newspapers have different political stances. When I read about a controversial incident, there were conflicting reports even back then. Now after all these years have passed, I had to consider different viewpoints. People choose to believe in different things. I would rather take a more conservative approach and let people say what they believe. (B2, personal communication, 20/11/2018)

Setting the tone: Newsroom culture. As discussed earlier, the public perceptions about the protests in 1967 and 1989 were rather different. The commemoration of the latter is often about correcting injustices in the past and is characterized by a strong moral clarity. Young journalists felt that they knew what the appropriate tone should be. Yet the lack of understanding and public discussion about 1967 present greater difficulties. N6, for example, was sent to cover activities initiated by former young prisoners (YP) of 1967 in 2017. The YP had been campaigning for rehabilitation of their criminal records. Some questioned whether the YP were trying to 'rewrite' a favourable version of history. N6 knew nothing about the past events and the present debates. She was simply assigned to follow the group for the day. During the process, she felt increasingly anxious when she realized that she could not make any judgements about what her interviewees said. When she asked her supervisor how she could write a more balanced story, the supervisor replied that there was no need to be balanced. Before finishing her stories, she searched the news database and reviewed how other news media covered 1967. She ultimately

managed to secure an interview with a key informant to provide counter opinions in the end (N6, personal communication, 02/02/2019).

This particular instance says much about how a journalistic hunch together with 'intellectual and cultural traditions' (Kansteiner, 2002) determine the tone of a story. These traditions are most felt in newsrooms. It was particularly evident in news organisations which were not perceived as 'pro-government'. N1 and N5, for example, worked for two 'liberal' newspapers and admitted that they had questioned whether there could be less coverage about 8964, as some stories were not particularly newsworthy from their perspective. However, like all of the other informants, they agreed that the anniversary practices had to be kept up so that Hong Kong would continue to remember. These beliefs were not officially written down, but were felt in everyday conversations and exchanges in the newsrooms. The informants realized that their seniors who were most committed to such commemoration entered the profession around the year 1989, which echoes the 'critical age hypothesis' (Mannheim, 1972). While it may not explain why people from the same generation (who are now supervisors in other news media) do not do the same, it does suggest the presence of certain values, traditions, practices and emotions among journalists from different generations.

Cultural authority of journalism

Discounting or distilling collective memory. Most informants had heard of the saying that 'journalism is the first draft of history'. They are aware that what they do today would become reference material for future generations, just as they make use of previous anniversary stories. The findings suggest that these later drafts of history are likely to sink into the 'memory soup' and provide ambient yet fragmentary clues about the past.

Because both time and existing knowledge were limited, young journalists tended to avoid controversies and unverifiable facts. Instead, they preferred to tell personal and emotional stories so they would not make factual mistakes. These tactics might lead to discounted versions of collective memory as complex and contradictory details are eventually lost. Put it differently, the collective memory is being distilled such that the 'lessons learnt' are clear and coherent. In both instances, young journalists contribute to uphold, if not reinforce, certain ideologies in collective memory.

The politics of remembering. In Hong Kong, journalism exercises yet another kind of cultural authority. News media in Hong Kong have been facing mounting political and economic pressure since 1997 (Chan and Lee, 2007; Frisch et al., 2018; Lau and To, 2002; Luqiu, 2017). Broadly speaking, more news media are considered to be taking a more pro-Beijing and pro-government stance. As the 1989 incident remained a taboo in Mainland China, where collective amnesia is observed (Lim, 2014), related stories also became a sensitive topic in Hong Kong.

It is within this changing news ecology that anniversary journalism plays a distinctive role in Hong Kong. This study interviewed two veteran television journalists, B6 and B7, who both started their journalistic career around 1989 and participated in the production of anniversary stories. They were acutely aware of how anniversary journalism lends legitimacy to news media coverage of topics that would ordinarily be deemed too

sensitive. Anniversaries provide the best justification for reviewing important historical events and raising questions about their implications for the present and the future. Both B6 and B7 recalled how they negotiated with senior management months in advance to ensure that special features about 1989 were scheduled. The 1989 incident has been annually commemorated in Hong Kong for 30 years and it would be too obvious if the news media ignored it altogether.

B6 observed that, to reduce the risk of antagonising the power centre, the news outlet he worked for would schedule anniversary stories away from the prime-time newscast (B6, personal communication, 07/03/2019). Both B6 and B7 also realized that some supervisors assigned junior reporters to cover these stories because, lacking time, knowledge and experience, these reporters were unlikely to create problems for the news organisations.

Conclusion

This study discussed the roles of journalism in building collective memory. We found that the ‘codified knowledge’ about two mass protests has been, and is likely to remain, ambient and fragmentary. Young journalists relied on a few keywords to start their research. Instead of venturing into hard facts or heated debates, most opted to focus on the personal and the emotional, which require little or no fact checking. Professional norms compelled them to find new angles for old news and package them in ways that would engage and attract their audience. All of these factors shape how journalists tell discounted or distilled stories about the past. This study has certain limitations; as a consideration of a group of young journalists covering anniversary news in Hong Kong, it certainly cannot be generalized to other communities with different memory traditions. Nevertheless, it raises questions about the changing cultural authority of journalism, which is not only affected by the age or experience of individual journalists, but is also constrained by professional norms and differing social circumstances.


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