

CRAZY RICH,
HOLLYWOOD'S ASIA

*Chinese sci-fi and
the space race*

THE FALL OF HONG
KONG'S FREE PRESS

*Google tools for
journalists*

N3

The official magazine for
NEW • NOW • NEXT

N3Con 2019
MAY 30-JUNE 2 ISSUE 4

COVERING
ASIA'S NEW ORDER:

*The growing media
market and
challenges*

EMOJIS:

*The little
ideogram
that could*

RETHINKING
FORMATS:

*Podcasting, video,
social media*

MARIA
RESSA:
*Arrested
editor*



STARTUPS

NEW WAYS TO MAKE IT IN MEDIA

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Contents

4. Conference schedule

6. Venue map

7. President's letter

**8-17. PANELS,
WORKSHOPS
AND EVENTS**

18. COVER STORY

Startups: Innovation, entrepreneurship, and new ways to make it in media

22-53. PERSPECTIVE

22. Startup experience, grad school, and opening up new opportunities

24. Maria Ressa, Rappler, and government assault on media

28. The demise of Hong Kong's free press

30. Jennifer 8. Lee on how emoji are changing 21st-century communication

33. Crazy Rich Asians and the cultural reactions that follow it

36. China joins film industry's space race to project its scientific advancements

38. Nas Daily: A message of connectivity and 12 million followers



Emoji as communication **p. 30**

39. Trump, Kim, and scrambling to cover a non-news story

40. Singapore's P.N. Balji discusses his new book "Reluctant Editor"

43. James Crabtree discusses "The Billionaire Raj" and India's media landscape

46. The Google News Initiative

49. Mentor Match: Helping young journalists to succeed

50. Podcasting's resurgence

52. Student work: The Hong Hong 360 project

54-61. FOCUS

54. Press freedom index

55. Covering Asia's New Order: China, authoritarian governments, broken business models

58. Singapore: Government to decide what is fake news

60. Malaysia: Press freedom gets a breath of fresh air

- Plenary Sessions
- Breakout Sessions
- Skills Track
- Career Track
- N3ConU and Student Events
- Pre-registration Required

DAY 0 | THURSDAY, MAY 30

9:00 AM - 5:00 PM	N3ConU Tour	9:00 AM - 5:00 PM	Executive Newsroom Tour
7:00 PM - 9:00 PM	Welcome Pizza Reception at Google Google Hong Kong		

DAY 1 | FRIDAY, MAY 31

8:00 AM - 8:30 AM	Registration Meng Wah Ground Floor		
8:30 AM - 11:00 AM	Investigative Data Reporting Workshop Meng Wah T2	9:30 AM - 5:30 PM	Career Fair Chong Yuet Ming Cultural Centre, 5th floor
10:00 AM - 11:00 AM	Resume Doctor Shum Reading Room, Eliot Hall		11:00 AM - 12:30 PM Cafe 330, Chong Yuet Ming Cultural Centre
11:10 AM - 12:20 PM	N3ConU: How to Get the Most Out of N3Con Meng Wah T7		
11:10 AM - 12:20 PM	Lunch Career Conversations Salon A: Anjali Kapoor Meng Wah T2	11:10 AM - 12:20 PM	Lunch Career Conversations Salon B: Chow Chung-yan Shum Reading Room, Eliot Hall
12:45 PM - 1:00 PM	Welcome and Opening Remarks Meng Wah T2		
1:00 PM - 2:00 PM	Covering Asia's New Order Meng Wah T2		
2:00 PM - 2:10 PM	Break		
2:10 PM - 3:30 PM	News Leaders Roundtable Meng Wah T2		
3:30 PM - 4:00 PM	Break & Networking		
4:00 PM - 5:00 PM	How I Got THAT Story Meng Wah T2	4:00 PM - 5:00 PM	Digital Tools for Journalism Day 1 Meng Wah T3
5:30 PM - 6:30 PM	Journalism Start-ups: How They Made It Meng Wah T2	5:30 PM - 6:30 PM	Career Work-shop on Salary Negotiation Meng Wah T3
7:00 PM - 9:00 PM	VIP Reception Bloomberg, Cheung Kong Centre, 25th Floor *Pre-registration & Photo ID required		

- Plenary Sessions
- Breakout Sessions
- Skills Track
- Career Track
- N3ConU and Student Events
- Pre-registration Required

DAY 2 | SATURDAY, JUNE 1

8:30 AM - 9:30 AM	Registration / Coffee Breakfast / Networking Meng Wah Ground Floor		
9:30 AM - 10:30 AM	China on the Rise Meng Wah T2		
10:30 AM - 11:00 AM	Break & Networking		
11:00 AM - 12:00 PM	The New Order in Business and the Economy Meng Wah T2	11:00 AM - 12:00 PM	Voice Is Power Meng Wah T3
12:00 PM - 1:30 PM	Lunch	12:00 PM - 1:30 PM	Launching Your Media Career Meng Wah T2
		12:00 PM - 1:10 PM	Lunch Career Conversations Shum Reading Room, Eliot Hall
1:30 PM - 2:30 PM	The State of Press Freedom in Asia Meng Wah T2		
2:30 PM - 3:00 PM	Break		
3:00 PM - 4:00 PM	Mining China's Social Media for Stories Meng Wah T2	3:00 PM - 4:00 PM	Making Voice Visual (Advanced) Meng Wah T3
4:00 PM - 4:30 PM	Break & Networking	4:00 PM - 5:30 PM	Digital Tools for Journalism Day 2 Meng Wah T3
4:30 PM - 5:30 PM	Secrets to Compelling Videos Meng Wah T2		
7:00 PM - 9:00 PM	Gala Dinner #StorySlam: Your Journey Behind the Scenes Foreign Correspondents' Club Silent Auction		

DAY 3 | SUNDAY, JUNE 2

9:00 AM - 3:30 PM	Empathy and Ethics in Crisis Reporting Bloomberg Hong Kong
9:00 AM - 2:00 PM	Investigative Data Reporting: Finding the Story in Data (Advanced) Bloomberg Hong Kong
9:00 AM - 5:00 PM	AAJA - Asia Training Network Powered by Google News Initiative Bloomberg Hong Kong

VENUE MAP



TRANSPORTATION TO HKU

BY BUS

Take either No. 23, 40, 40M from Admiralty outside Pacific Place or No. 4, 7, 91 from Exchange Square at Central. Get off in front of the East Gate on Bonham Road or the West Gate in front of Haking Wong Building on Pokfulam Road.

BY MTR

Walk from HKU Station (Exit A2) and take the elevator to the Upper Level of University Street.

BY TAXI

From Admiralty or Central to Cotton Tree Drive to Robinson Road to Kotewall Road. Turn right onto University Drive.



K. Oanh Ha

**Across Asia Pacific,
the status quo is being upended.**

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Authoritarianism is on the rise, alliances are shifting -- and the press is fighting for its independence. Economies are being reshaped by the rise of China, and the influence of the United States is being challenged.

As we gather for the 9th annual New.Now.Next Media Conference, journalists are being tasked with chronicling these changes -- and doing it with more speed, clarity and analysis than ever in an increasingly competitive media landscape.

N3Con 2019 also coincides with the 30th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square protests, a watershed moment for China and the region that still reverberates today. N3Con is a forum for reporters and editors to share ideas about how to rise to the challenge in "Covering Asia's New Order" -- this year's theme.

At N3Con and in the pages of this magazine, we'll look at how today's news is being shaped by the echoes of the past, and how we can better inform readers about what's ahead.

As ever, AAJA-Asia remains dedicated to empowering today's journalists and the next generation of storytellers

with the latest reporting tools to bring the truth to light and hold those in power accountable. To support in this endeavor, the chapter will offer training in the latest digital tools throughout the next year, powered by the AAJA-Asia Training Network. N3Con will also feature workshops on investigative and data journalism, and how to dig deeper to bring compelling, hidden stories to our audiences.

AAJA-Asia is committed to supporting diversity in media and focused on helping journalists in the region develop leadership skills. With the help of many volunteer leaders and members, we're building a diverse and inclusive community to support quality journalism in the region. We hope you'll join us.

In AAJA spirit,

K. Oanh Ha
AAJA-Asia President



N3Con is organized by the Asia chapter of the Asian American Journalists Association



AAJA President

K. Oanh Ha

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Gavin Huang
Mark Zastrow
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Joon-Nie Lau
Kari Lindberg
Mike Raomanachai
Holly Chik
Rebecca Isjwara
Selina Cheng
Soo Min Oh
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Youkyung Lee
Zela Chin

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Rebecca Isjwara, Mark Zastrow, website co-chair
Tom Benner, magazine chair

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Joe Pan, chair
Soo Min Oh

Logistics and Volunteer Committee

Holly Chik, chair
Kari Lindberg

N3ConU & Resume Doctor

Joon-Nie Lau, Grace Lee, co-chairs
Holly Chik, student ambassador

Newsroom Tour

Joon-Nie Lau, chair
Holly Chik, coordinator

Event Management

STIR Public Relations

PANELS

THURSDAY, MAY 30

- Plenary Sessions
- Breakout Sessions
- Skills Track
- Career Track
- N3ConU and Student Events
- Pre-registration Required

Subject to change. Go to n3con.com for full schedule.

9:00 AM - 5:00 PM TOUR

N3ConU Newsroom Tour

Designed especially for students - and welcome to all media professionals - the tour day kickstarts with a visit to an independent Hong Kong media startup that aims to provide a platform immune to commercial and political pressures. Then chat over lunch with a veteran editor about the tricky tightrope editors here face when reporting on local and Mainland issues. After lunch, head north to either an English- or Chinese-language publication for a rare glimpse into how they produce the news for their target audiences.

Whether you are a local student from Hong Kong or the Chinese mainland, or a foreign student attending N3Con for the first time, you'll be surprised by just how much goes into the production of daily news and marvel at the various editorial innovations spearheaded by these newsrooms.

Participating newsrooms: CNN, Hong Kong Free Press, South China Morning Post

7:00 PM - 9:00 PM NETWORKING

Welcome Pizza Reception at Google

Registration begins at 6:30 PM, all N3 attendees welcome!

Location: Google Hong Kong, Times Square, Tower 2, 21st Floor
1 Matheson Street, Causeway Bay

9:00 AM - 5:00 PM TOUR

Executive Newsroom Tours

This tour designed for media professionals brings you behind the closed doors of world-leading news organizations. Get a rare glimpse into how they put out the news day by day, hour by hour, on news cycles that are getting impossibly shorter and shorter. Find out what drives their coverage and unravel the mysteries of how editorial decisions are made. This is your chance to ask top editors and journalists the questions you've always wanted to ask!

Participating newsrooms: Bloomberg, Reuters, South China Morning Post

N3ConU events brought to you by



PANELS

FRIDAY, MAY 31

- Plenary Sessions
- Breakout Sessions
- Skills Track
- Career Track
- N3ConU and Student Events
- Pre-registration Required

Subject to change. Go to n3con.com for full schedule.

8:30 AM - 11:00 AM WORKSHOP

Investigative Data Reporting Workshop

Data analysis has become an essential tool for all journalists, whether you cover a daily beat or want to conduct deep enterprise stories. In this session, we start at the very beginning with Excel and learn how spreadsheets can be used to pull meaning from data. No prior experience is necessary. Bring a laptop with Excel or other spreadsheet software.

Location: Meng Wah T2

with



Mark Horvit
Associate Professor, University of Missouri School of Journalism

9:30 AM - 5:30 PM NETWORKING

Career Fair

For the first time at N3Con, we're hosting a career fair running all day Friday. Come and meet with media outlets and employers around the region—and bring your resume and clips. Your next job could start here! The companies who will be there include Thomson Reuters, The Wall Street Journal, Blackpeak, Acuris, Telum Media, Risk Advisory, Bloomberg, S&P Global, and NBC News.

Location: Chong Yuet Ming Cultural Centre

10:00 AM - 12:30 PM MENTORING

Resume Doctor

In speed-consulting rounds, mentors will review mentees' resumes and other materials such as website or reel and help them understand how to target their next career goal. Applications open until May 15; drop-ins accepted if spots remain. Bring your resume.

Location:

10:00 AM - 11:00 AM:

Shum Reading Room, Eliot Hall

11:00 AM - 12:30 PM:

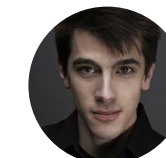
Chong Yuet Ming Cultural Centre, 5th floor

11:10 AM - 12:20 PM NETWORKING

N3ConU: How to get the most out of N3Con

First time to N3Con? Don't know anyone? Have no fear. N3ConU fuses programming, tours, socials and mentoring for the ultimate student experience. All undergraduate and graduate students — and any first-time participants — are invited to an interactive ice-breaker orientation that highlights key programming, networking tips and practice, and other advice on how to get the most out of N3Con. **Location:** Meng Wah T7

with



Brolley Genster
Culture Editor, Korea JoongAng Daily

PANELS

FRIDAY, MAY 31

- Plenary Sessions
- Breakout Sessions
- Skills Track
- Career Track
- N3ConU and Student Events
- Pre-registration Required

Subject to change. Go to n3con.com for full schedule.

1:00 PM - 2:00 PM

PLENARY

Covering Asia's New Order

Asia's undergoing transformative changes with shifts from the traditional bases of influence and power. Strongmen and authoritarianism seem to dominate politics, while China is gaining economic and political clout with its Belt and Road initiative. How are these shifts playing out, and what are the compelling stories to connect it all?

Location: Meng Wah T2

Speakers



Shibani Mahtani
Southeast Asia correspondent,
Washington Post



Motoko Rich
Tokyo Bureau Chief, The New York
Times

Richard C. Paddock
Southeast Asia Reporter,
New York Times



Bhavan Jaipragas
Asia correspondent, SCMP



2:10 PM - 3:10 PM

PLENARY

News Leaders Roundtable

News leaders from international and regional outlets give us their take on how they are rising to the challenges newsrooms are facing, coverage priorities, diversity efforts and the state of play on digital strategies.

Location: Meng Wah T2

Speakers



Adrienne Mong
Vice President of International
Newsgathering, NBC News



Roger Clark
Vice President and Hong Kong
Bureau Chief, CNN International

Anne Marie Roantree
Hong Kong Bureau Chief, Reuters



Joey Chung
The News Lens founder



Otis Bilodeau
Senior Executive Editor,
Bloomberg



PANELS

FRIDAY, MAY 31

- Plenary Sessions
- Breakout Sessions
- Skills Track
- Career Track
- N3ConU and Student Events
- Pre-registration Required

Subject to change. Go to n3con.com for full schedule.

4:00 PM - 5:00 PM

BREAKOUT PANEL

How I Got That Story

A scoop uncovering abuses of power and social injustice could be the result of diligent record searches, a trusted source, an unfamiliar tipster. How do reporters first dive into a lead to an exclusive investigation?

Location: Meng Wah T2

Speakers



Regina Lay
Freelance Journalist/Host



Wenxin Fan
Reporter, The Wall Street Journal



Chan Yun Nam
Senior Reporter, HK01

4:00 PM - 5:00 PM

WORKSHOP

Digital Tools for Journalists (Google)

From research to visualization, learn how to use practical tools that can save you time and bring your stories to life.

Location: Meng Wah T7

with



Eoghan Sweeney
Consultant and Trainer,
Google News Initiative

4:00 PM - 5:00 PM

BREAKOUT PANEL

Rethinking Formats

Radio, video, print — how do we rethink these formats to reach today's readers? Heads of video, podcasts, and newsrooms share their ideas on how innovate old formats for today's media landscape.

Location: Meng Wah T3

Speakers



Lisa Yuriko Thomas
Producer, TICTOC by Bloomberg



Jarrod Watt
Podcast Producer, SCMP



Victor Pena
Director of Video, Goldthread

Yuzuha Oka
Reporter/Editor, NewsPicks



5:30 PM - 6:30 PM

WORKSHOP

Instagram for News

Learn best practices on using Instagram to report your story, how to get larger audience, ways to engage with them, and what the news should look like on Instagram.

Location: Meng Wah T3

Chiman Ng
Strategic Partner Manager, News
Partnerships, Facebook



FRIDAY, MAY 31

 Plenary Sessions
  Career Track
 Breakout Sessions
  N3ConU and Student Events
 Skills Track
  Pre-registration Required
Subject to change. Go to n3con.com for full schedule.

5:30 PM - 6:30 PM

BREAKOUT PANEL

Journalism Startups: How They Made It

Startups share new models for journalism, how they decided on their audience, what content they produce, and how they make it work in today's diverse media landscape.

Location: Meng Wah T2

Speakers



Ross Settles
Administer, JMSC Media-X fund



Mike Raomanachai
Bangkok Bureau Chief, Tech360.tv



Joey Chung
The News Lens founder



Angie Lau
Journalist, Forkast.News

5:30 PM - 6:30 PM

WORKSHOP

Career Workshop on Salary Negotiation

Startups share new models for journalism, how they decided on their audience, what content they produce, and how they make it work in today's diverse media landscape.

Location: Meng Wah T7

with



Ron Brown
Founder & President, Banks Brown

7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

NETWORKING

Bloomberg VIP Reception

Bloomberg is proud to host the VIP reception at AAJA-Asia's 8th annual New.Now.Next Media Conference. Come mingle with news leaders, conference speakers, attendees and sponsors. Refreshments and appetizers will be served. RSVP for free when you buy your N3Con tickets.

Location: Bloomberg Hong Kong, 25th Floor Cheung Kong Centre, 2 Queens Rd. Central

SATURDAY, JUNE 1

 Plenary Sessions
  Career Track
 Breakout Sessions
  N3ConU and Student Events
 Skills Track
  Pre-registration Required
Subject to change. Go to n3con.com for full schedule.

9:30 AM - 10:30 PM

PLENARY

China on the Rise

China's influence resonates throughout the Asia Pacific as it becomes a leading actor in the region's trade and economy. It's also playing a leading role in the region's politics, sometimes a driver in the heart of a dispute and at other times, a critical political power broker. Thirty years after the Tiananmen Square protests, what does China's rise tell us about the region's economy, democracy and politics?

Location: Meng Wah T2

Speakers



Doris Dumlao-Abadilla
Writing Editor, Philippine Daily Inquirer



Y. Joseph Lian
Professor, Yamanashi Gakuin University



Philip Pan
Asia Editor, The New York Times



John Carter
Economics Editor, SCMP

11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

WORKSHOP

Voice is Power

Participants can develop their 'Presentational Persona' and enhance their broadcast performance or public-speaking skills.

Location: Meng Wah T3

with

Arthur Samuel Joseph
Founder & Chairman, Vocal Awareness Institute



11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

BREAKOUT PANEL

The New Order in Business and Trade

Asia is quickly becoming the center of global economic power. The region is home to some of the fastest-growing economies in the world and some of the world's biggest and most promising corporations. This panel will allow attendees to share ideas in small groups with the region's top reporters and editors on story angles you pursue now to reflect this dynamism and how to tell compelling business stories.

Location: Meng Wah T2

Speakers



Enda Curran
Senior Reporter, Bloomberg News



Jenn Hughes
Asia Finance Editor, Reuters



Yuri Nagano
Freelance reporter



Elaine Kurtenbach
Asia Business Editor, Associated Press

4:00 PM - 5:30 PM

WORKSHOP

Digital Tools for Journalists (Google) PART TWO

Location: Meng Wah T3

with

Eoghan Sweeney
Consultant and Trainer, Google News Initiative



PANELS

SATURDAY, JUNE 1

- Plenary Sessions
- Breakout Sessions
- Skills Track
- Career Track
- N3ConU and Student Events
- Pre-registration Required

Subject to change. Go to n3con.com for full schedule.

12:00 PM - 1:30 PM

BREAKOUT PANEL

Launching Your Media Career

Kick-starting your media career, whether in a traditional newsroom or new media outlet, can be daunting, especially in an evolving media landscape. What are the skills (and knowledge) that you need to navigate in this landscape and be successful? Hear from two veterans in the news business and one of the world's foremost career coaches as you chow down your lunch!

Location: Meng Wah T2

Speakers



Ron Brown
Founder & President, Banks Brown



Angie Lau
Journalist, Forkast.News



Peter Wong
Journalist, Portland Tribune

1:30 PM - 2:30 PM

PLENARY

The State of Press Freedom in Asia

This panel takes a hard look at the issues that undermine press freedom today, with journalists sharing how they stand up to authoritarian regimes.

Location: Meng Wah T2

Speakers



Fernando Garcia Sepe Jr.
Deputy Editor for Multimedia, ABS-CBN News



Mark Zastrow
AAJA Seoul Co-Vice President



Shirley Yam
Vice Chairperson, HK Journalist Association



Tom Grundy
Editor-in-Chief and Co-Founder, Hong Kong Free Press

3:00 PM - 4:00 PM

WORKSHOP

Visceral Language: Making Voice Visual

An advanced Voice workshop on professional and effective vocal delivery. **Mandatory:** Prior attendance of **Voice is Power** workshop. Attendees need to come prepared by bringing two scripts and have tape ready to roll on your own devices.

Location: Meng Wah T3

with

Arthur Samuel Joseph
Founder & Chairman, Vocal Awareness Institute



PANELS

SATURDAY, JUNE 1

- Plenary Sessions
- Breakout Sessions
- Skills Track
- Career Track
- N3ConU and Student Events
- Pre-registration Required

Subject to change. Go to n3con.com for full schedule.

3:00 PM - 4:00 PM

BREAKOUT PANEL

Using Social Media to Mine for Stories in China

Chinese citizens live and breathe online, even though China's Internet feels like a parallel universe to the rest of the world. How can reporters mine Chinese social media for compelling characters and stories relevant to audiences globally?

Location: Meng Wah T2

Speakers



Michael Anti
CEO, Globus



Sophia Qian Xu
Journalist, Video Editor, and Social Media Trainer



Ching-Ching Ni
Editor In Chief, New York Times Chinese Website

4:30 PM - 5:30 PM

WORKSHOP

Secrets to Compelling Videos for News

Intimidated by video? Want to be better at multimedia? This workshop-style panel is aimed at helping you think more like a video-journalist, whether you're a text correspondent in need of the basics or a broadcaster interested shifting towards digital.

Location: Meng Wah T2

Speakers



Mantai Chow
Senior Video Producer, South China Morning Post



Laurel Chor
Freelance Producer and Photographer

N3Con food and drink sponsored by



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CEDER'S

PANELS

SATURDAY, JUNE 1

- Plenary Sessions
 - Breakout Sessions
 - Skills Track
 - Career Track
 - N3ConU and Student Events
 - Pre-registration Required
- Subject to change. Go to n3con.com for full schedule.*

7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

NETWORKING

Gala Dinner

Awards Night & Silent Auction

After two days of thought-provoking discussions at N3Con 2019, the conversation continues at the Gala Awards Night and Silent Auction on Saturday, June 1, at 7:00 PM.

AAJA-Asia will be giving thousands of dollars' worth of awards to the winners of the Columbia Journalism School fellowship, Google Digital Award, leadership fellowships and travel stipends. The dress code is smart casual. Guests can bid on the many silent auction items ranging from hotel stays to Coffee Bean subscriptions. All proceeds go to helping AAJA-Asia continue to provide scholarships, fellowships, and fantastic programming throughout the year including our student journalism programs, such as JCamp and VOICES, as well as professional programs such as the Executive Leadership Program.

at 7:30 PM: we welcome N3Con's second year of **#StorySlam**, an opportunity to take the stage to share an impactful story about their journey in journalism. Five finalists will present their stories during the Gala Awards night to compete for the US\$500 prize!

Location: Foreign Correspondents' Club Hong Kong, North Block
2 Lower Albert Road, Central

N3Con Silent Auction sponsored by

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TOKYO

CAFÉ GRAY
DELUXE
HONG KONG



page 148

ESTÉE
LAUDER
COMPANIES

PANELS

SUNDAY, JUNE 2

Pre-register for advanced workshops and find more details online at n3con.com

9:00 AM - 5:00 PM

WORKSHOP

AAJA-Asia Training Network Academy

Become a Google News Initiative trainer! The full-day workshop will equip you to use Google tools more effectively to research stories, track sources and break news. You will become a Google News Initiative-certified trainer, able to conduct similar training workshops for your newsrooms.

9:00 AM - 3:30 PM

WORKSHOP

Empathy and Ethics in Crisis Reporting

Gain insight into seeing the world through the eyes of those caught in conflict in this unique masterclass. In collaboration with the International Committee of the Red Cross, explore where the work of journalists and humanitarians can overlap.

9:00 AM - 2:00 PM

WORKSHOP

Investigative Reporting: Finding the Story in Data (Advanced Workshop)

Dig into data using Excel, looking for investigative stories in data. This session will show you not only how to use the software, but how to approach data when looking for story ideas.

Location: All advanced workshops at Bloomberg Hong Kong, 25th Floor Cheung Kong Centre



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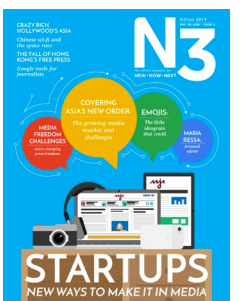
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AND JOSHUA
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STARTUPS

Innovation, entrepreneurship, and new ways to make it in media

BY NILE BOWIE

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ERIC TOSTEVIN

If popular narratives around the current state of journalism are anything to go by, some might argue that there is a contradiction at the heart of the industry. There are reports of shrinking newsrooms, heightened job insecurity, falling revenues for media organizations, and eulogies for truth. Overall, much of the data available paints a disquieting picture.

Others claim we're living through a golden age for reporting – especially in-depth reporting. In the United States, outlets such as the New York Times and the Washington Post are reporting record numbers of digital subscribers, while readership for digital native platforms like BuzzFeed, Vox Media and Politico are in the tens of

“It all comes back to putting your reader or user or audience or viewer first.”

millions and growing.

Even with competition from social media feeds and on-demand streaming entertainment, record readership suggests the public appetite for news – be it long-form, video or podcast – continues to rise with vigor. It follows, then, that problems faced by journalism today don't pertain to any lack of relevance, but with technology's impact on business models.

The dominance of tech companies such as Google and Facebook have, in part, devastated the American local newspaper industry with their platforms becoming the front page for millions in the digital age. Their services have absorbed a huge share of advertising spending and many upstart outlets now set aside a budget to pay them to grow their audience.

While digital disruption has helped to instantly satiate questioning minds by making news and information vastly more accessible, the twin specters of authoritarianism and viral falsehoods are putting new strains on journalism. Some of the places most arguably impacted by the consequences of these developments are countries in Southeast Asia.

The region boasts some of the world's highest internet penetration rates. Its media space has traditionally been dominated by legacy media companies that are either government-owned, party-owned or are part of a non-media conglomerate. Governments there are also tightening civic space by championing sweeping laws aimed at combating “fake news.”

To get a better sense of how journalism can meet the challenges of our era, a look at how the region's startups are facing adversity, innovating their operations, and staying in the black can be instructive.

Ping Tjin Thum and Kirsten Han, the founders of New Naratif, a member-funded multimedia website for

Southeast Asian journalism, art and research, are prominent critics of legislation to combat online disinformation recently proposed by the government of Singapore, which they say enables the city-state's government ministers to become de facto arbiters of truth.

“New Naratif basically is a movement for democracy, freedom of information, freedom of enquiring in Southeast Asia,” Thum told N3 Magazine. Though he

and Han are Singaporeans who reside in and

work from the city-state, the pair was unable to register New Naratif as a legal entity in Singapore, complicating their work as a young media startup.

“They just shut us down entirely from the beginning by not allowing us to register,” said Thum, a historian and former national swimmer. “We are under no illusions that we have any leeway to operate. We know that the government definitely does not like us and has already accused us of being ‘contrary to Singapore's national interest’.”

Launched in 2017, New Naratif is registered in the United Kingdom and employs 16 total staff across the region, from Malaysia and Indonesia to Cambodia and Vietnam. “We don't just do research articles and long-form journalism. We do comics, videos, podcasts, and photo essays. Everything goes out in the Southeast Asian language,” he said.

“The goal is to have Southeast Asian

voices, local voices telling stories that are important and meaningful to them. We are not a news organization,” Thum says. “We are a movement, not a profit-making organization, and producing news, producing information is one of the ways in which we promote democracy.”

About half of New Naratif's running costs are met by paid membership subscriptions that start at US\$52 per year, though 10 percent choose to pay above that figure to show their support. Singaporeans make up the largest contingent of the site's nearly 700 subscribers, though the most read articles on the site are actually those published in Bahasa Indonesia.

“This idea of a paywall and paying for news isn't a habit for Southeast Asia in general,” Han told N3 Magazine. “The way our paywall works is that, if you go to the site directly, there is a hard paywall, but members have unique URL that they can share that will allow non-members to click through it and read. We share these URLs ourselves.

“It is our way of compromising between reminding people that this sort of work costs money, but not wanting to block access to anyone because if we want to be a movement for freedom of information we can't have a hard paywall,” she said.

New Naratif is one of several startups in the region pushing a reader-revenue model.

“We're seeing models being built around crowdfunding, subscriptions, memberships, events – stuff to address demand-side needs. It couldn't be more exciting,” said Rishad Patel, co-founder of Splice, a newsroom transformation consultancy whose mission is to drive radical transformational change by

supporting bold, forward-looking media startups in Asia.

“Subscription models are beginning to work well. The carnage we’re seeing is with large organizations that are trying to support infrastructure and teams to move inventory that was created to serve advertising dollars that don’t exist any longer,” Patel said. He points to “design-thinking” as an exercise media firms can use to make an impact on their operations.

“Some of the best work that media organizations can do is when they put their audiences first. More often than not, when a media startup identifies a community, sees a specific need, and tests a media product to address that need, they are able to create real value — and a media product that an audience is willing to pay for,” he said.

“Identifying a user group, assessing needs, prototyping a media product to test assumptions, and refining it iteratively with continuous feedback loops can create operational efficiencies that involve small cost structures and, if done well, high-value product lines that create actual communities.

The Scoop, a digital native media startup in Brunei, is a firm that straddles old and new models at once. As the tiny sultanate’s first digital-only English news outlet, it also positions itself as Brunei’s first media brand for millennials. It was founded by four female reporters who worked together as staff for the now-defunct broadsheet, the Brunei Times.

Once a competitor to the Borneo Bulletin, the country’s oldest print publication and currently the only English language newspaper in circulation, the Brunei Times folded after its publishing license was re-

voked, a move widely linked to a controversial story it published on visa policies for Muslim pilgrims that garnered complaints from the Saudi embassy.

“It wasn’t our intention to start a new publication, it was more out of frustration that there wasn’t anything worthwhile coming up in the space,” said Ain Bandial, one of the Scoop’s co-founders. “As small as it is, our organization wanted to create that culture where reporters felt they had the freedom to pursue the kind of stories they wanted to do.”

The Scoop was established as a news website in September 2017, but has since branched into doing weekly internet radio segments, YouTube videos, as well as a recent foray into physical publishing with a colorful print magazine. “Print revenue can still be incredibly lucrative in Brunei, where old mind-sets tend to dominate,” she told N3 Magazine.

Apart from dealing with editorial constraints and a press freedom deficit, Ain said the main challenge is perfecting the right business model to achieve financial sustainability. The young startup employs 6 full time editorial staff and has managed to stay in the black by funding its operations entirely through advertising and sponsored content.

“A subscription-based model is really difficult in a market the size

of Brunei, especially when people aren’t used to paying for news. We have an advertorial section and a staff that runs that and (it is) our most profitable side of the business at the moment and a very successful revenue stream in a sense that people see the value in those kinds of write-ups,” she said.

“Usually, we work with companies that want to promote events or products launching soon, and corporate entities. Traditional web-banner advertising is not as popular.

“I think everyone knows that media in Brunei practices self-censorship and we have to act within the constraints of the law, but we always want to try to push the envelope to give voice to issues that are under-represented or not represented in mainstream media,” she said. “Our mission really is to inform our community and empower citizens to be engaged.”

The number of unique visitors to the Scoop as already surpassed the population of Brunei and most of their traffic comes from Instagram. 60 percent of its audience is between 18 to 34. Though these figures speak for audience behaviour in one of region’s smallest countries, the takeaway is they look fairly consistent with others in the region and beyond.

Rising digital reader engagement, says Angie Lau, founder and editor-in-chief at Forkast.News, underscores new opportunities for “ap-

plying technology to the practice of journalism and creating value for each and every user,” which – if done right – she says “allows media startups to scale almost immediately.”

“Technology is not only a distribution opportunity, but a structural one for media. Content will drive engagement, and increasingly will be the basis of the relationship between you and your audience. The vision is in thinking how do we as journalists evolve this journey we’ve all been a part of,” said Lau, a former president of the AAJA Asia Chapter.

Like their counterparts in the West, audiences in Southeast Asia – especially the millennial demographic – are making use of journalism and are growing more willing to speak with their wallets to support it. While business models are bound to local contexts, the tactics and tenacity of the region’s startups hint at remedies to the current media industry malaise.

“This is truly the golden age of media,” Patel believes. “The gatekeepers are gone, the capital investment structures don’t necessarily matter any longer, and advertising isn’t the only game in town. Massive tracts of mediocre content for faceless, nameless McConsumers aren’t the answer any longer.

“It all comes back to putting your reader or user or audience or viewer first.” ●

Nile Bowie is an American journalist and correspondent for Asia Times, an all-digital outlet dedicated to Asian political, economic and security news. He is based in Singapore and reports on current affairs in Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, as well as international relations, trade and diplomacy across Southeast Asia.

MEDIA STARTUPS TO WATCH IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

ASIA TIMES

Founded as a Bangkok broadsheet newspaper in 1995, Asia Times came under new management and relaunched as an all-digital pan-continental news site in 2016. It publishes country-specific geopolitical and business news in English and numerous Asian languages from three newsrooms across Asia.

FORKAST.NEWS

A digital media platform whose mandate is to provide definitive coverage on all things blockchain, DLT, and cryptocurrency in a way that anyone can understand. The Forkast. News editorial team, based in Hong Kong, is made up of both veteran award-winning journalists and blockchain industry experts.

MALAYSIAKINI

A pioneering online news portal covering Malaysian news and politics seen by many as laying the template for digital news in Asia. Founded in 1999, the subscription-based news outlet has won numerous journalism awards and set itself apart in the Malaysian media landscape with its independent reportage.

MEKONG REVIEW

A quarterly magazine founded in 2015 which covers the Mekong countries of Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, Laos and Myanmar. The Phnom Penh-based literary publication carries essays, poetry, reviews,

fictional stories and sketches alongside more traditional journalistic features and analysis.

NEW NARATIF

Described by its founder as a “vertically integrated democracy movement,” this Singapore-based member-funded regional media startup publishes long-form journalism, comics, videos, and podcasts in English and in a variety of Southeast Asian languages. Founded in September 2017, it aims to build a community of readers across the region.

SAIGONEER

Operating in one of the region’s most restrictive media environments, English-language news site Saigoneer covers happenings in Saigon, or Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam’s largest city. Blending lighthearted content with hard news, the outlet launched a weekly podcast last year offering in-depth discussions on Vietnamese society and culture.

THE SCOOP

For Southeast Asia watchers, self-funded English language news website the Scoop is a window into Brunei, one of the region’s least reported-on countries. Since its establishment in September 2017, the Scoop has branched out into doing weekly internet radio segments and YouTube videos. They published their first print magazine in February.

Startup experience, grad school, and opening up new opportunities in media entrepreneurship

BY ELAINE RAMIREZ



As soon as I obtained my undergraduate journalism degree, I knew my career path would stray from the beaten trail. The desire to experience the world overpowered any need to find a conventional entry-level reporting job in the dying U.S. media industry, which at the time was badly hit by the Great Recession. So I did the most reasonable thing: I fled the country, first to Chile, then to South Korea.

Because I took an unconventional path, I was thrust into roles I didn't believe I deserved. I went from starting an indie culture website in Chile to editing an English-language newspaper in South Korea and running an expat print magazine on the side. Through my experience leading these publications, I found that I contributed the most value not in the stories I wrote, but in the editorial vision I helped others achieve.

It was not until I was forced to reckon with the financial turmoil of a print magazine that I realized I was still ill-prepared for the leadership roles I sought. AAJA's Executive Leadership Program in 2018 pushed me come to terms with who I was, what I valued and what I wanted, and as soon as I walked out the door of that five-day workshop, I began searching for new paths toward my goals.

While I was comfortable covering technology and entrepreneurship as a freelancer in South Korea, I needed more, and a pivot would require drastic action. Medill School of Journalism's media innovation and entrepreneurship degree at Northwestern University in the U.S. attracted me with its lessons in the fundamentals of business and technology through the lens of content innovation.

Compared to other reputable programs at Berkeley and Missouri, the program was relatively short -- four quarters -- and gave me exactly what I wanted: a comprehensive experience exploring the gears working behind the scenes, considering innovative business models, and thinking about content from the perspective of the reader rather than the editor. Medill also prides itself on its unique alumni network, through which I've connected with inspiring journalists from reporters to engagement editors and CEOs at all types of publications.

Best of all, I was able to apply and enroll within months thanks to coincidental timing. Through my program's activities in Chicago, San Francisco and New York, I've been able to connect with like-minded people who care about making journalism sustainable and exploring ways to do it, expand my storytelling toolkit, and take part in entrepreneur-

ial projects barely related to journalism but that push me to see innovation in media through product development.

Of course, there were costs to consider, and many aspects of the experience did not live up to my expectations. The diversity pipeline problem is fully exposed in the faculty at Medill, where I did not take a single class by a tenured professor who was female or a person of color. Although our interim dean is a black man, diverse faculty members are few and far between.

Compared to Northwestern University as a whole, Medill has the whitest tenured faculty at 82 percent, according to the university's 2017 diversity report. Some cohorts such as sports have mostly white male students, while others like mine are international Asian and female, and there is minimal integration of students from different specializations. Moreover, no diversity scholarships are offered to graduate students, and I can list by memory every black, Hispanic and Asian American student in a class of 140. My own scholarship covered about one-third of the estimated cost of \$100,000; the rest was doled out in loans. International students are expected to pay the entirety on their own.

My program was created specifically for journalists who don't want to pursue the path of reporter to editor to whatever comes next as defined by the traditional trajectory. My classmates with at least five years of work experience had the most to gain from this perspective. Does a master's degree give me the answers to solve dying news? Certainly not, but it has shown me frameworks like user-centered design and agile development that help me consider how content businesses can be more responsive to audiences and changing market conditions.

Few people, if any, in this program

will go off to start media businesses. But if they enter the newsroom, they will have a fresh perspective for studying a media outlet's audience, tailoring the content and distribution channels to them, and working with teams from tech developers and audience analysts to the editors and reporters to realize the best ways to reach their consumers. Having more people knowledgeable about the product and business sides of journalism brings more minds to the table to use creative approaches to address the systemic problems of faltering media companies.

I don't know if or how this degree will pay off, but it has given me new opportunities to challenge my leadership skills and to network with inspiring entrepreneurs in the field. Now I'm less bound to my past and have new tools to choose my future. Grad school isn't for everyone, but those who are considering it should evaluate what they want from the experience, where they hope it will land them, the added value of each particular school such as alumni network or location, and what they must leave behind to take this step. For me it was the opportunity, if I chose it, for a fresh start. ●

Elaine Ramirez is a journalist and founding editor of N3 Magazine.



Maria Ressa, Rappler, and Government Assault on Media

BY CARLA SAPSFORD NEWMAN
ILLUSTRATION BY EDMUND IP

Press freedom is under attack worldwide. In Asia, some worrying strains of social media weaponization by heads of state have reached new levels of sophistication.

Trolling of prominent journalists by state proxies has become commonplace and increasingly threatening. In the Philippines, “astroturfing” -- state agents or proxies pretending to be grassroots advocates -- has been increasingly effective in attacking

media figures critical of the Rodrigo Duterte government.

When Duterte was sworn in as president in 2016, he threw down the gauntlet: “Just because you’re a journalist, you are not exempted from assassination, if you’re a son of a bitch. Freedom of expression cannot help you if you have done something wrong.”

Three Philippine journalists were assassinated this year, “most likely by agents working for local politicians, who can have reporters silenced with complete impunity,” Reporters Without Borders says. Politicians attacking journalists and journalism has become commonplace.

At the center of this storm stands Rappler, whose editor Maria Ressa was recently arrested on sedition charges -- allegedly for using foreign money to attempt a coup against the Duterte regime. “This is a critical juncture,” Ressa says, “the weaponization of social media and abuse of power and use of the law against us.”

“The Philippines government is weaponizing every aspect of law it can find to attack Maria Ressa and Rappler,” says Phil Robertson of Human Rights Watch. “They want to harass and retaliate against her, shut down her investigative team and silence the website’s independent journalist voice.” All because Rappler dares call out the egregious rights abuses in Duterte’s so-called “war on drugs,” he says.

“Let no one doubt that this a sustained assault against freedom of the press in the Philippines,” Robertson says, “and Maria and her team are on the barricades fighting for the rights of an independent press.”

Ressa points to the level of harassment against her and her organization as a clear indication of the government’s intentions: 11 cases filed against Rappler and Ressa in 14 months.

“I was forced to post bail eight times in two months. I was arrested two times in five weeks,” she says. “I was targeted and harassed. But it isn’t just me. There have been consistent and sustained attacks against independent media.”

When journalists are labeled terrorists or enemies of the state, or charged with sedition or other trumped-up charges, the war on the press has entered a new dangerous phase. Rights can be suspended, and in the name of national security, trials are less than fair and imprisonment lengthy.

“Just because you’re a journalist, you are not exempted from assassination, if you’re a son of a bitch. Freedom of expression cannot help you if you have done something wrong.”

This is a most dangerous time to be a journalist, Ressa says. Journalists elsewhere who think they won’t be affected should think again.

Initially Ressa and fellow journalists laughed at a recent government “Oust Duterte Matrix” when a government spokesman that alleged they were plotting to oust the president.

“We all poo poed it. But a week later, they arrest this guy and he’s charged with inciting sedition for sharing a video,” Ressa says. “There is the possibility for more arrests.”

Fellow journalist and professor at Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism Sheila Coronel recently wrote that mainstream Filipino journalists have called attacks on Rappler and others “tools to advance U.S. hegemony over Filipino consciousness.”

The Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) is another independent organization under investigation, says Coronel.

“As an independent, donor-funded nonprofit, PCIJ is freed from both commercial pressures and the business interests of media proprietors,” Coronel says. “(However) raising funds from local foundations or business groups could be fraught because they are all tied to local political or business groups.”

Emboldened by a lack of response from traditional external human rights critics such as the United States, leaders across Asia are cracking down on media and arresting their biggest critics. Similar government efforts to bring down “opposition” media use the foreign funding charge with increas-

ing success in places such as Malaysia.

In the Philippines throughout the region, foreign-funded media outlets are increasingly branded as mouthpieces of foreign powers or purveyors of “fake news.” Social media conspiracy theories and examples of astroturfing abound, and governments have become more sophisticated in their war on the free press.

The Philippine law against sedition is not unique in Asia -- many governments across the region have similar laws on the books. In times of significant criticism against the power structure, these laws are invoked to arrest and silence journalists and their outlets.

In Singapore, a government move to criminalize ‘fake news’ has garnered international attention. The Singaporean ‘Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation’ bill, introduced in Parliament on April 1, 2019, was widely criticized as a threat to free expression.

The United Nations Human Rights Committee described the criminal prosecution of libel in the Philippines as “excessive” and in violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, of which the Philippines is a signatory. The country ranks 134 globally in terms of press freedom, down one spot from last year.

“The international community must stand firm against this assault,” says Robertson of Human Rights Watch. “If Duterte has his way, the Philippines media will be reduced to drug war cheerleaders and his remaining critics will be relegated to remote corners of social media where they can monitored and attacked by troll armies that many believe are beholden to the government.”

Carla Sapsford Newman is a member of the Asian American Journalists Association.

The demise of Hong Kong’s free press

2018-2019 TIMELINE

1 JULY 2018

The Hong Kong-China Liaison Office was reported to have met with local media chiefs requesting that their publications refrain from quoting commentators who were “anti-China.”

5 JULY 2018

A management-level editorial staffmember at RTHK, Hong Kong’s public broadcaster, was reported to have asked a reporter not to quote comments by veteran HK-China affairs commentator Lau Yui Siu because he was “anti-China.”

3 AUGUST 2018

Beijing officials in Hong Kong attempted to block pro-independence activist Andy Chan from speaking at Hong Kong’s Foreign Correspondents’ Club.

23 AUGUST 2018

Former Hong Kong chief executive Chun Ying Leung publicly criticized the Hong Kong Foreign Correspondents’ Club for hosting a talk by Andy Chan, and called for termination of the Club’s land lease.

4 OCTOBER 2018

Hong Kong denied a visa renewal for Financial Times journalist and Hong Kong Foreign Correspondents’ Club Vice President Victor Mallet.

17 OCTOBER 2018

Singtao CEO and Publisher Siu Sai Wo quoted the Communist Party’s Propaganda Department chief Huang Kunming for saying, “Beijing hopes Hong Kong media will not become a political basecamp for interfering with mainland politics”

during a meeting with Hong Kong media chiefs. Muainstream media outlets removed the quote from their coverage shortly after without explanation. It was reported that the Hong Kong-China Liaison Office had requested news outlets make the amendment.

2 NOVEMBER 2018

Self-exiled Chinese artist Badiucao’s exhibition, organized by independent non-profit news outlet Hong Kong Free Press, was canceled. Organizers said it was the result of threats that Chinese authorities made to the artist.

8 NOVEMBER 2018

Public art space Tai Kwun canceled an invitation to Chinese author Ma Jian, who was scheduled to speak during the Hong Kong Literary Festival. It rescinded the decision following public outcry.

21 FEBRUARY 2019

The funeral of Li Rui, veteran Chinese reformist and personal secretary to Mao Zedong, was conspicuously absent from the prime-time evening newscast of Hong Kong’s largest public broadcaster TVB. Management allegedly ordered the funeral to be excluded at the request of Hong Kong-China Liaison Office because Li had been critical of Xi Jinping.

22 MARCH 2019

Former Hong Kong chief executive Chun Ying Leung publishes daily Facebook posts to highlight full-page ads on Apple Daily. He publicly urged advertisers not to advertise on Hong Kong’s most circulated, anti-establishment daily.

The demise of Hong Kong's free press at the hands of Beijing, its government, and its own publishers

BY SELINA CHENG



For the first time in Hong Kong's history, the government has denied both a work and a tourist visa to veteran journalist Victor Mallet, who was also the Hong Kong Foreign Correspondents' Club's (FCC) vice president.

An escalating series of events caused the Financial Times' Asia editor's effective expulsion: Shortly after the Hong Kong government officially banned the Hong Kong National Party in late September 2018, the Club announced that it would invite Andy Chan to speak at a Club luncheon. Chan founded the city's first political party advocating for independence from China. The party was virtually unknown among the local community prior to the ban. Indeed, it was unclear whether it had any members apart from Chan.

A week later, Hong Kong Free Press, a crowd-funded non-profit news site, broke the story that the Hong Kong office of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs tried to block the Club from hosting Chan. The club stood its ground and faced intense backlash. The city's former top official Chun Ying Leung claimed that hosting the event would be illegal, and even called on the government to terminate the Club's below-market-rate lease.

Within days, Victor Mallet, who hosted the event as acting president of the Club, found that his work visa had not been renewed. Mallet doesn't believe the threat was personal but "a form of punishment," noting that the government had never

claimed that the Club event was illegal.

Mallet says he was set to move to Paris this year, so the visa denial only expedited his relocation. He believes that worse thing could happen to a journalist, but nevertheless worried, "It is the first time this has happened in Hong Kong," he says. "It would not be surprising in China's context, but it is in Hong Kong."

Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam issued a statement that immigration matters are decided autonomously within Hong Kong and as a rule, the government does not comment on individual immigration cases. "I think that's nonsense," Mallet says.

"This has been bad for Hong Kong's reputation," he says, "because it suggests Hong Kong is not as autonomous as it claims."

While Beijing may interfere with freedom of expression in Hong Kong, it has long been known that local media chiefs meet with Beijing officials, sometimes directly relaying their message for the media.

In October 2018, publishers from Hong Kong's mainstream press traveled to Beijing for a meeting with Communist Party Propaganda Department Chief Huang Kunming. During an interview afterward, Siu Sai Wo, the head of one of Hong Kong's largest media groups, Singtao News Corps, re-

ported that Huang had said he hoped Hong Kong media would not become a base for interfering with mainland politics.

Several publications later removed the quote from their coverage, without explanation. Hong Kong's Cable TV deleted the original live video from its Facebook page.

Hong Kong news publishers have long had a working relationship with Beijing officials, if not a compliant one. But the Hong Kong government's latest push for a fugitive transfer bill with the Mainland and Taiwan maybe the death knell to what used to be a free press.

Once passed, the government will allow the transfer of fugitives for trial and detention in mainland China on a case-by-case basis.

Shirley Yam, vice president of the Hong Kong Journalists Association, says the Chinese government has a history of harassing journalists with criminal charges irrelevant to their work, such as drug possession or smuggling, to stop them reporting or detaining and interrogating them about their sources. Such charges will be covered by the amendment.

Under the new bill, "Sources and their contacts will hesitate to pass any sensitive information to journalists in Hong Kong," says Yam. This will effectively stifle critical or politically sensitive stories on China.

In the past year, the Hong Kong government has aggressively pushed for laws to restrict freedom of expression, including the national anthem law, which prohibits insulting the anthem or using it for parody or commercial purposes, and the fugitive transfer bill. On the other hand, Yam says, the government has barely engaged with advocates who have long campaigned for the archives law and the access to information law, which protect freedom of expression and of the press.

Lam Wing Kee, one of the five Hong Kong book-sellers kidnapped and detained in the Mainland for publishing books critical of China's top leadership.

Lam was taken across the border by Chinese security agents, but after he returned to Hong Kong for a short stay, he defied orders to return to the Mainland. As of this writing, Lam has fled to Taiwan in self-imposed exile.

"If I am the bureau head of an international medium in Hong Kong," says Yam, "I will certainly be seriously thinking about if Hong Kong a good place for the Asia bureau." They will consider whether journalists safe to report on China from Hong Kong, he says, and whether editors may lose their working visa at any time.

Although the Journalists Association has called the bill "a sword hanging over the head of journalists," Yam says that it's worrying that the industry doesn't seem to be bothered by what's going on. "The management and the editors (of Hong Kong media) are silent," she says. "This really bothers me." ●

Selina Cheng is a journalist based in Hong Kong.



The little ideogram that could: how emoji are changing the face of 21st-century communication

BY GLENN VAN ZUTPHEN

Jennifer 8. Lee, champion of more inclusive and representative emoji, discusses the long journey from idea to 🍌.

Emoji. The little representations of everything from our current state of mind to common objects, places, weather, animals, what we ate today, and even what our relationships look like. Originally meaning pictograph, the word emoji comes from Japanese and translates into “picture” plus “character.”

The first set of emoji was released by J-Phone in 1997. It included 90 of them, but the phone was expensive and not widely adopted. Two years later Japanese artist Shigetaka Kurita created the first widely used set of 176 emoji while working on NTT DoCoMo’s i-mode mobile Internet platform. It is said he was inspired by several things: symbols used in weather forecasts, Chinese characters, street signs, and stock symbols used in manga comic books. Kurita’s original set is now part of the permanent collection at New York’s Museum of Modern Art.

It’s hard to imagine our current texting lives without these little giants of visual communication. Even the acclaimed Oxford Dictionaries came

onboard in 2015 when it named the ‘Face with Tears of Joy’ emoji as the Word of the Year. Its president Casper Grathwohl said at the time, “Traditional alphabet scripts have been struggling to meet the rapid-fire, visually focused demands of 21st Century communication. It’s not surprising that a pictographic script like emoji has stepped in to fill those gaps -- it’s flexible, immediate, and infuses tone beautifully.” Now a simple surf to emojiopedia.org unfolds the universe of ideograms.

At the March 2019 Google Newsgeist Un-Conference in Singapore, Jennifer 8. Lee talked about these little friends. The American journalist, author, and producer is also a vice-chair of the Unicode Emoji Subcommittee. The subcommittee meets every week to consider all manner of emoji challenges and to recommend new ones. Lee helped to get the dumpling and hijab emoji passed, for example. The subcommittee then makes recommendations to the Unicode Consortium Technical Committee, which maintains text standards across comput-

ers, for final approval.

AAJA: What are the challenges and the goals around representation.

J8L: There’s debate about whether emoji are actually counted as a language. Let’s look at why. What are emoji good at? They are good at nouns which are objects. They are good at verbs which involve nouns and objects. So, to sing you have a microphone, to skateboard there is a skateboard. But verbs are little bit tricky; how would you say the word ‘to cheat’ in emoji? How would you say the noun ‘growth’?

Emoji also are very good at emotional states. Happy, sad-type adjectives that are descriptive of emotional states. They’re also good at very interesting subsets of adjectives and colors, for example. One of the really interesting things about adjectives is that you see people being creative: small becomes mouse, big is elephant, slow is a snail or turtle. It can become more complex as you analyze what emoji combinations

mean. For example, ‘tapas’ might be mouse and plate: so mouse plate, small plate is tapas.

AAJA: What about more personal descriptors?

J8L: The major missing emoji is that there’s no word for ‘I,’ and no word for ‘you.’ That’s actually a problem in terms of linguistics; sometimes there’s a sort of up arrow and down arrow, to represent I and you, or they will do finger point left, finger point right. But what seems to be emerging is that people are using the human figures to represent themselves. I used the pale girl with the dark hair to represent me. What you’re seeing is a lot of demand. The people trying to say the word ‘I’ and the way they’re trying to pursue skin color.



Hair is another big thing: redheads so passionate and so angry that there were no redheads, or curly hair, or beards. It is part of this very organic demand of saying ‘I.’ Chromatically, it becomes very interesting.

AAJA: Can’t you just use the eye emoji?

J8L: It doesn’t always work in languages that are not English.

AAJA: The use of and creativity around emoji must certainly be generational?

J8L: Yes. We have a generation of kids who are going to read and write emoji, before they can read or write their native language. Their first

ability to communicate in a written form is through what they can pick and choose on the emoji keyboard. It gets really interesting because the universe of what you know to exist is in the context of this emoji keyboard: whether you see certain food, whether you see women’s flat shoes, any kind of clothes, are very micro representative of the universe that you know to exist. I care very much about this.

AAJA: What about the ability to choose the color of your ‘thumbs up,’ for example. It’s getting tricky to know what exact color to use.

J8L: Originally emoji were supposed to have no skin color. Different systems chose different generic colors to be in neutrals. Apple choose yellow, Microsoft choose grey -- which is really creepy, like if you really look at the old Microsoft emoji, they look like the monsters that hid underneath your bed! First of all, they’re grey and they also have pointy ears. They look like aliens, and that went against being neutral. But in America, yellow is the Simpsons (cartoon) which is actually kind of white. People do complain about skin color, but this is the kind of the beauty of Unicode, where anyone can propose changes.

There was a black mother in Texas, Katrina Parrott, whose daughter was 14 years old and came home one day and said, “You know, I really like to see myself represented in emoji.” So she learned what emoji were and she did this big proposal that basically ended up introducing skin tones.

I think what’s interesting is America is probably the most obsessed about race. The Americans said, “No it’s really, really important to users. So, you have to add six (color) characters for every one character and really now 12 characters, because we

have male and female. That’s why they added it, in part because Americans care about race so much.



AAJA: I think it’s kind of cool though. My wife is fair-skinned African-American, so our kids are cappuccino. The different skin tones really work for our family. People should feel like they can relate to emoji, right?

J8L: Now interracial couples are coming to emoji. People love this topic. We have to add many new characters to cover all of the combinations and it gets complicated as we add characters for male-male or female-female in order to be non-gender binary. And as society evolves, we see non-gendered older adults, non-gendered children so the number of characters keeps growing. In terms of a single Unicode decision triggering the most number of characters, gender neutrality has been huge.

AAJA: What about the blended families?

J8L: We really want skin tones applied to families because right now you can only be a yellow family, and black families and other families are agitated about that because they don’t see themselves represented in the keyboard. But the combinatoric explosion around families across all the skin tones is really a challenge. I’ve seen different calculations. But it’s something like 4,500 and 50 plus change-combinations if you have all the family combinations: two parents, one kid; two parents, two

kids; one parent, one kid; one parent, two kids; five skin tones across everything and genders across everything. It's complicated.

The reason why there were no skin tones to begin with is that they started in Japan where everyone is basically kind of the same color. So Westerners are conveyed by the blonde person; there is also a character which is called blonde meaning kind of like Gaijin or Western and that is a hard coded character because that was the original Japanese emoji set. Then there is a man in a turban who is supposed to represent an Indian person. And then there is a man with a little kind of hat and he is supposed to represent a Chinese person.

And that was how you conveyed what was the Japanese notion of identity and race back in those days. You have blonde people which are Western. You have Indian people in a very kind of stereotypical way, and you have Chinese people. There were no black people in that version but that is their world divided into like four little pockets.

We decided the skin tones on the Fitzpatrick skin system which is a dermatological system based on how likely you are to get skin cancer. They took that and they applied it to emoji.

AAJA: Does it really matter that we might have hundreds of color combinations? I mean, who really cares ... just give people options.

J8L: It doesn't matter on our fancy iOS or Android phones. It does matter on the \$50 entryphone in Uganda because those the emoji characters are a heavy load — from font size to their memory size. It really matters to them and it's hard to find a standard UX fix across devices.

AAJA: Tell us about the mosquito.

J8L: The mosquito was really important to us and the Gates Foundation from a public health perspective. Like if you're a public health official and you are trying to communicate with people who speak indigenous minority languages in the regions where malaria is definitely an issue. One of the other areas that we are focusing on is from a healthcare perspective. Oftentimes you have doctors who can't communicate with their patients in a spoken language in a critical situation. We're trying to figure out the set of emoji that is most helpful from a healthcare perspective.

AAJA: Who joins the emoji committee?

J8L: Companies pay \$18,000 a year to have full voting privileges on Unicode Consortium, though it's about to go up. But anyone can join the Unicode Consortium as a non-voting individual. You pay \$75 and you're on the email list and can show up on the meetings. To get on the subcommittee involves some level of doing work and being willing to do an hour and a half phone call every weekend 8 am Pacific Standard Time. It is through persistence and doing work you can get on the subcommittee; it helps if you bring a diverse viewpoint, whether through profession or a region of the world. We need more designers. We need more linguists. It's cool because you can do something that impacts billions of keyboards. ●

Glenn van Zutphen is an AAJA-Asia member and a journalist based in Singapore.

EVOLUTION OF EMOJI

1999

Emoji are born! The original set includes icons for the weather, traffic, technology, and time.

2010

Unicode officially adopts emoji, adding hundreds more—like cat faces emoting happiness, anger, and tears.

2015

Emoji get a diversity update with five new skin tones and a set of same-sex couples.

2016

Updates give rise to the single dad, pride flag, and weightlifting woman emoji.

2017

New emoji proposals suggest characters to convey information across language and culture, like a mosquito to represent illnesses like malaria and Zika.

(Source: Wired Magazine)



Crazy Rich Asians and the cultural reactions that follow it

BY BENNETT MARCUS

I read *Crazy Rich Asians*, the first novel in Kevin Kwan's best-selling trilogy, in January 2016 while visiting Hong Kong.

It was my first time in Asia; my husband had accepted a job in Hong Kong, and we'd soon be moving from our home in New York. The book had been on my list; now I really should read it, I thought, and see if it showed what people are like here.

Kwan has a genius for humorous storytelling; the book is a comic tour-de-force, and despite my jet lag, I devoured it in a couple of days. (Now that I live here, of course, I haven't met anyone remotely like those wildly rich characters, but if any are reading this, I'm game for a ride on your private jet.)

When I was tasked with writing this piece about the cultural significance of the 2018 movie version, Asian representation in Hollywood, the

portrayal of Asians in Western pop culture, diversity, and the bashing of stereotypes, I didn't know where to start. I adored the movie, and the books, because they are great entertainment, and could go on at length about that. However, I'm not Asian.

My first thought was to gather comments from Asian-American culture journalists, but as I conducted research, I found that there had already been quite a bit written on this topic. That alone tells me how important this mainstream Hollywood romcom with its all-Asian cast was to Asian-Americans.

In *Variety*, Audrey Cleo Yap wrote that she found herself tearing up partway through *Crazy Rich Asians*. It was an emotional experience, she explained, "not just because of how funny Ken Jeong and Awkwafina are every time either is on-screen. Or because I could hear Michelle Yeoh's subtle Malaysian accent juxtaposed with Constance Wu's distinctly American one punctuated

by Henry Golding's polished British intonations. Instead, it was the singular portrayal of a very real issue many Asian-Americans encounter. I was overwhelmed at the sight of an Asian-American-centric story on the big screen for the first time in a generation."

"For me, the true star of *Crazy Rich Asians* is its inversion of racial expectation," Jiayang Fan wrote in *The New Yorker*, adding that when she was a child, Asians would tune in to TV shows like "Dynasty" or "Dallas" to see the world of America's superrich. "The reversal, in *Crazy Rich Asians*, in which the audience is made to feel like an interloper vying for a glimpse of Asia's glittering class, is what makes the movie, as many critics have deemed it, a landmark." She wondered what it would have been like to watch this movie at the age of 12 or 18.

The movie "subverts our expectations of the traditional West-East power dynamic, as the fantastical

wealth of Asia's elite families makes searching for an 'American Dream' seem almost provincial in comparison," said Suyin Haynes in Time.

Mark Tseng-Putterman put it succinctly in The Atlantic: **"The extravagance of Crazy Rich Asians reflects a self-conscious announcement of the Asian-American arrival on the Hollywood stage."**

Even the cast members got emotional. "We've all been 'that Asian' on set at one point. That dynamic didn't exist here," Awkwafina, the Korean/Chinese-American who played Rachel's best friend, told the Hollywood Reporter. She teared up while watching dailies, saying, "I've never seen myself as a character in a movie."

"I'm so used to being the token that I forgot how much it meant to have your people around you," said Filipino-American Nico Santos, who plays a cousin. "I didn't have an Asian crew I rolled with until I found *Crazy Rich Asians*."

"It's moving; it's really hard to describe if you're not Asian-American," Ken Jeong told Variety. "I always cry at that wedding scene. The characters that I care about... you realize they all look like me and something comes over me where it's not a plot point anymore."

All of this was intentional on the part of CRA's Chinese-American director Jon Chu, who had been looking for a project that would take on Asian underrepresentation on the big screen. Chu brought to the movie's producers a vision for "a way we haven't ever seen Asians before,

contemporary, stylish, at the top of art and fashion, emotional, funny, sarcastic and unapologetic. Confident."

The CRA team realized that there was a lot riding on the success of the movie. "We can sugarcoat it all we want, but the moment you bring up an Asian-led movie, there's one example to point to, and that'll be us," said Chu. "To be on the biggest stage with the biggest stakes, that's what we asked for."

And already this breakout hit has boosted the careers of some of the lesser-known cast members. Sure, Ken Jeong, Michelle Yeoh and Constance Wu have had plenty of work, but Henry Golding, who was plucked from obscurity to play CRA's leading man Nick Young, has since shot movies alongside Western stars like Anna Kendrick, Blake Lively, Emma Thompson, Matthew McConaughey and Michelle Dockery.

When Awkwafina hosted Saturday Night Live in October, she recalled camping outside the NBC Studios as a kid 18 years ago, when Lucy Liu, her idol, hosted. **"I remember how important that episode was for me, and how it totally changed what I thought was possible for an Asian-American woman,"** Awkwafina said on the show. **"Standing here tonight is a dream I never thought would come true."**

It remains to be seen whether the success of this film portends a new "Asian wave" in Hollywood. Two sequels are in the works, and Kwan is developing two TV series, an unnamed drama for Amazon about

Hong Kong's most powerful family, and "The Emperor of Malibu," a CBS comedy about a newly-rich family from Shanghai and an old-money US family forced to co-exist when their children marry.

An article in the South China Morning Post pointed out that despite earlier successful all-Asian productions like "The Joy Luck Club" (1993) and "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" (2000), such an 'Asian wave' has never materialized in Hollywood cinema.

Yet the hit ABC sitcom "Fresh Off the Boat," about a Taiwanese-American family living in Florida, is now in its fifth season. Adapted from Eddie Huang's memoir of the same name and starring Constance Wu and Randall Park, the show is popular, I'd guess, because it's funny.

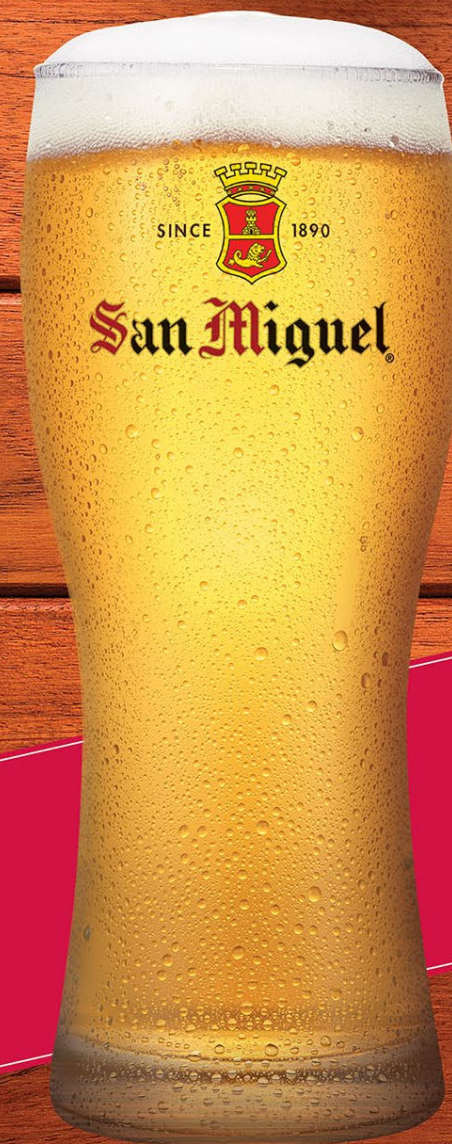
Like Kwan, Huang is brilliant, a multi-hyphenate writer, television personality, restaurateur and lawyer with a gift for telling stories that people want to hear. Despite lip service and movements like #MeToo and #OscarsSoWhite, it's not race, religion, gender, sexual orientation or nationality that hold sway in Hollywood, it's money. The entertainment industry is not looking for "Asian stories" per se, but stories that sell. CRA has grossed \$238 million worldwide, with 73% of that coming from the US box office. Costing only \$30 million to produce, it has proven quite lucrative for Warner Bros. Studios.

So all of you attending this conference, keep telling your stories. ●

Bennett Marcus is a freelance journalist based in Hong Kong.



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China joins film industry's space race to project its scientific advancements

BY WENDY TANG



China has deployed the playbook of producing a sci-fi blockbuster — extravagant special effects with dystopia and humans scramble to save a planet facing obliteration — in a recent space disaster film, which became the second-highest grossing movie in China's history.

The Wandering Earth, China's first science fiction blockbuster, draws from the 1951 film *When World Collides*, Ishiro Honda's 1962 Japanese hit *Gorath* and Michael Bay's 1998 doomsday flick *Armageddon*. *The Wandering*

Earth was released over the Chinese New Year holiday period, a peak time for the Chinese box office. The movie has been extended the cinema release until May and it has grossed \$684 million at the Chinese box office as of April.

The box office success attracted Netflix to purchase the streaming rights and translated the film into 28 languages for its international release. The movie is a milestone for China's film industry. With a budget estimated at around \$50 million, critics said the production values and special effects are praised for a mid-budget Hollywood blockbuster.

The film is seen as the emergence of Chinese sci-fi, as the genre has long been dominated by Hollywood spreading American values and ideologies in pop culture. As science fiction films often showcase a nation's scientific advancement, China has effectively used the blockbuster to project the country's global space power, joining the film industry's space race.

The movie is set in a near future where the sun is dying, turning Earth inhabitable with a frozen atmosphere.

The collective governments on Earth joint force to build rocket thrusters to propel the planet away from the solar system and find a new home on a 2,500-year journey. China along with France, US, Japan, and Russia's space agency navigated the journey at an intergovernmental space station.

In reality, China is a growing presence in space exploration with long-term deep-space ambitions.

The country earned a "world's first" space credential in January by landing a space probe on the far side of the moon. The aerospace science community hailed China's technical breakthrough to automate a spacecraft's final descent landing on a rugged and riskier terrain without ground control interference. Earth's radio frequency is shielded on the moon's far side.

Although America first put humans on the moon in 1969 and still remains as the only nation conducted crewed missions to Moon, China is the first country to explore the moon's far side in search for lunar resources. The country has a long-term goal to build a research base

operated by robots and establish a permanent human presence on the moon.

China is the third country after the United States and Russia to deploy a spacecraft on the moon in 2013. Chinese researchers discovered a new type of basaltic rock on the lunar surface two years after the space probe landed and the rover surveyed.

With America moved on to explore Mars, China plans to send a rover to study Mar's surface by 2020 and bring samples back to Earth by 2028, according to Chinese state media. Other ambitions include deploy a reusable rocket by 2035 and produce nuclear-powered space shuttles by 2040.

The Chinese government has viewed China's military-run space program as a vehicle to enhance national prestige. China commemorated the 60th anniversary of the country's space program in 2016, where President Xi Jinping emphasized advancing aerospace science is an indicator of a mighty nation, according to Chinese state media Xinhua news agency.

"China's world-class scientists and technicians in the aerospace industry demonstrated the nation's self-assurance," Xi said.

The nationalism and pride in space science have carried into the film industry, although Chinese consumers are used to Hollywood productions and the expectations of Chinese sci-fi films were low. Frant Gwo,

the director of *The Wandering Earth*, had repeatedly said that it is beyond the Chinese film industry's technical and financial capability to make a satisfactory sci-fi film.

But the idea of producing a special-effects-heavy space odyssey film flourished when a homegrown Chinese science fiction writer, Liu Cixin, became the first Asian author to win a prestigious industry recognition, the Hugo Award in 2015.

The Wandering Earth is an adaption of a same-titled short story by Liu. Gwo, the movie director, said in an interview with state broadcaster that Chinese sci-fi movies allow viewers to understand Chinese culture.

The movie portrayed collectivism as various governments united on a global mission to save humanity from planetary disaster. When the protagonist faced the ultimate challenge of planet destruction, China mobilized other nations to help with the last ditch effort to save the earth. It is in contrast with individualism often depict in American sci-fi with heroes saving the world or taking a vessel to abandon Earth.

"Taking the planet with us on the interstellar journey is a plot different from the Hollywood model of 'escaping from earth,' Wang Yichuan, dean of the School of Arts of Peking University, told Xinhua news. "It manifests the deeply-rooted attachment to the family and homeland in Chinese culture."

As President Xi Jinping called on professionals in the arts, cultural and

media industry to tell a positive story that reflects the advancement of modern China, this movie has succeeded to convince an audience that China has caught up with the superpowers in space exploration.

The Wandering Earth imbued China with cultural confidence in its film industry and space science program. The movie kicked off 2019 as the year of Chinese science fiction cinema taking notice, especially stories embody with Chinese cultural characteristics. More domestic sci-fi films are scheduled to be released later in the year. It remains uncertain if the momentum of Chinese science fiction cinema will persist. ●

Wendy Tang is a freelance writer for hire. She specializes in technology and science in China. She has written for *The Times of London*, *the Telegraph* and *STAT*, a US life science news site.



Nas Daily: A message of connectivity and 12 million followers

BY HARRISON LINDER

Many people fantasize quitting their day job to travel the world, but few go through with it. Nus-seir Yassin, an Arab Israeli Harvard graduate, is one of the few who has acted on this impulse.

In 2016, Yassin left his job as a software engineer at Venmo and began to travel the world on \$60,000 in savings. Along the way, he created minute-long daily videos to share with family and friends through his Facebook page, Nas Daily.

Nas Daily quickly gained a viewership beyond Yassin's immediate circle. Today, the Nas Daily Facebook show has over 12 million followers.

Many aspects of the Nas Daily programming has changed since its inception: The production value of the videos has significantly increased. It no longer sticks to a strict daily publishing schedule, and most videos are closer to five minutes than one.

Despite these changes, Nas Daily has maintained its essential ethos. It has always been about exploring places and people around the world to

foster connectivity and understanding across regions and cultures. In a world that seems to be becoming more and more divided, Nas Daily's message of connectivity is a refreshing change of pace.

Beyond its ethos, Nas Daily's engaging cinematography, short and simple messages, and the distinctive goofiness that Yassin brings to every video have contributed to Nas Daily's success.

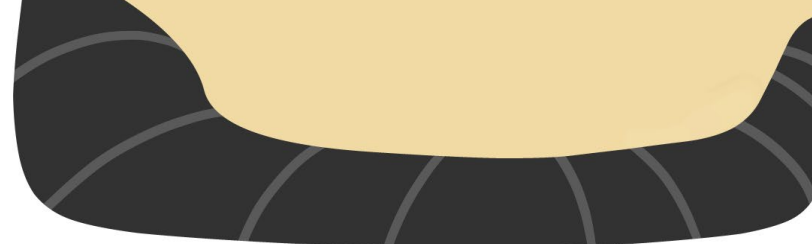
At first glance, Yassin and his videos may seem pretty uncontroversial, but some of his videos have been criticized for their lack of nuance. In a video about Singapore that featured Prime Minister Lee Hsien Long, Yassin called Singapore an "almost perfect country." A Singaporean internet activist group, The Alternative View, challenged Yassin to spend a day living like an average Singaporean before declaring it an almost perfect country. Yassin responded in a Facebook post that those who complain about living Singapore should go the Middle East to gain some perspective on how privileged they are.

Yassin and his team are in the process of moving to Singapore to set up the Nas Daily Media Company. They plan to use Singapore as a home base from which to travel around Southeast Asia and produce content.

On April 20, soon after arriving in Singapore, the Nas Daily team hosted a meet-and-greet in the Singapore Botanic gardens. People's Action Party critic Kirsten Han criticized the event, saying that Nas Daily's favorable views of the Singaporean government appeared to be getting it special treatment to set up a large-scale public event.

At the meet-and-greet, fans received free "swag" and given a chance to ask questions. Yassin said that, as a tourist, he typically does not feel comfortable criticizing the places he visits. However, now that he lives in Singapore, he will consider being more critical of his new home. ●

Harrison Linder is a student member of the AAJA and attends Yale-NUS College in Singapore.



Covering Trump and Kim

Scrambling to cover a non-news story

BY GRACE LEE

A Trump-Kim summit is every planning producer's nightmare. When news of a second meeting broke -- to be held in Hanoi, after last June's Singapore summit -- many of my colleagues and fellow journalists resorted to buying multiple plane tickets to different cities and different dates, due to the uncertainty and secrecy surrounding where and when the summit would take place.

Up until mere hours before the actually two-day summit happened, the venue was shrouded in mystery, and contingency plans were put in place just in case. Details like that encapsulate just how bizarre it has been for reporters like myself, covering the meetings between North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and U.S. President Donald Trump. They're unlike any other news event that I've reported on in the past.

I arrived in Hanoi on Saturday, February 23, less than a week before the summit dates. I packed light; no heavy DSLR cameras or big tripods -- just a multimedia kit that would allow me to turn around and immediately record if breaking news were to happen.

I had a list of prospective story ideas and an

extensive shotlist of file footage, but was prepared to throw all of that out the window depending on the flow of the news in the next few days. It wasn't until the day before my flight that I was notified that my Vietnamese visa had been approved, and even then the process of physically obtaining the visa was chaotic and confusing at the Hanoi airport.

My colleagues had told me the application approvals were taking so long because Vietnamese officials were literally faxing the documents one by one. The sudden influx of media and journalists had clogged their system.

At the Reuters bureau in Hanoi, many of my colleagues had already arrived from Singapore, Seoul, Tokyo and elsewhere. We had been planning for weeks, but even so, there was a nervous air of uncertainty as we sketched out the next couple of days. What would the two leaders possibly talk about? What happens if they don't reach a deal?

There was also pressure to find new and interesting ways to cover this summit in a way that wouldn't be repetitive to Singapore. But it felt for me like many of the questions we were asking this time around were the same as the last; there hadn't really been much notable progress between the two sides since June 2018.

Our task this time was to try and look past the pageantry and see if Kim and Trump make tangible agreements beyond just sweeping statements about denuclearization. But of course, that wouldn't happen.

On its second day, the summit fell apart. Both leaders rushed away without comment, and at the media center there was a frenzy to find out what happened or more specifically -- what went wrong.

Hours later, at his press conference, Trump said one of his most memorable quotes from Hanoi: "Sometimes you have to walk, and this was just one of those times."

The day had taken a turn that we hadn't expected, and analysts from around the globe were trying to figure out what this would mean for the relationship between North Korea and the U.S. But in the chaos, we still managed to report on some of our best stories from the summit -- including the dismantling of the Metropole hotel venue moments after the meeting was called off. The lunch the two leaders were supposed to share was left cold and decorations were swiftly taken down.

Covering the Trump-Kim summits have made for long and unpredictable days at work, but if I were to take a time machine and tell my past-self in journalism school that I'd be reporting on meetings between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un, grad-school me would probably say 'stop smoking whatever it is you're smoking.' ●

So, at least my job is interesting.

Grace Lee covers Asia for Reuters.





BY SCOTT DUKE HARRIS

A talk with P.N. Balji, author of *“Reluctant Editor: The Singa- pore Media As Seen Through The Eyes Of A Veteran Journalist”*

“Journalism,” George Orwell once said, “is printing what someone else does not want printed. Everything else is public relations.”

The peril grows whenever that “someone else” possesses great power.

Today, amid rising authoritarianism around the globe, two Pulitzer Prize-winners incarcerated in Myanmar for 511 days, while on the opposite side of the world, the White House press corps fends off hard questioning as coming from “the enemy of the people.” The danger is often lethal, even far from war zones. Journalists are keenly attuned to efforts to stifle their work.

But the struggle is not new, as P.N. Balji attests in *Reluctant Editor*. His new memoir spans his 40-plus years of journalism, starting as a rookie reporter at the Malay Mail to principal editing and leadership roles at the Singapore Times, The New Paper and

TODAY. Balji’s work sometimes rankled the powerful Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, regarded as the nation’s “founding father.”

After leaving the profession in 2003, Balji worked as media consultant and in crisis communications. He helped start the Media Studies Unit in Singapore’s Ministry of Home Affairs and was the inaugural director of the Asia Journalism Fellowship, which brought in about 15 foreign journalists to familiarize them with Singapore and assist on projects of interest.

Recently, Balji discussed his experiences in journalism with N3 Magazine.

Q: Why did you decide to write your memoirs, and what do you hope to accomplish in sharing your experiences and perspective?

A: *Reluctant Editor* has been inside me since I retired from journalism in 2003. Journalists of my generation have gone through hell and high water, especially with the government’s efforts to control media. And many of that generation had tried to do a responsible and professional job, sometimes going against Lee Kuan Yew’s edicts at a time when he brooked no nonsense with those, including

journalists, who questioned his narrative. Some survived, some paid a heavy price.

I wanted to tell the story of this brand of journalism. Sixteen years later, the story is out in *Reluctant Editor*.

Singapore journalists are a reticent lot; they carry their stories to their graves. The former editor in chief of ST, Cheong Yip Seng, broke that self-imposed taboo with his book, *OB Markers My Straits Times Story*, in 2012. For the first time, a senior editor broke that taboo by relating in vivid detail what went on between government and media, even the times when ST pushed back against LKY’s orders. That gave me the added impetus to write *Reluctant Editor*.

Q: Your chapter titles suggest that, initially, you did not want to be a writer and perhaps did not anticipate the career you had. Yet your long and varied career perhaps suggests that you came to regard journalism as a calling. Is that a fair statement?

A: I do say in *Reluctant Editor* that journalism was my interest in school days. My father was a poet. Watching him write poems with a lighted cigarette in one hand and a pen in the other late into the night sparked my interest. From an early age, I started reading *The Straits Times*. I was a hopeless introvert, so interviewing people for stories was a torture. A couple of years later, I was charged with bribing a group of firemen. I wanted the scoops from them and they were reluctant to give us tip-offs. So I paid them. I was caught in the act in a coffeeshop and had to pay a fine of \$1,000 exclusives. That was a dark period of my early years as a journalist. But it was also a blessing. I asked to be made a sub-editor. My editor agreed and I found the space in the newsroom that fitted my introverted personality.

Q: One chapter emphasizes the practice of “Western-style journalism.” Can you elaborate on the evolution of journalistic values and prac-

tices in Malaysia and Singapore under their cultures and governments?

A: My generation was very influenced by Fleet Street journalism. From *The Sun* to *The Times*, we read those papers religiously. The language, the headlines and the investigative spirit appealed to many of us. Over time, we also got somewhat disappointed with what the western press was doing to chase circulation figures. So many of us felt that Singapore needed to develop its own brand of journalism. We wanted to be professional yet responsible. *Reluctant Editor* has many examples of how we did that, sometimes successfully many times unsuccessfully.

Q: Many veteran journalists who have witnessed the technological revolution —especially the impact of the internet and social media—bemoan the impact on the public’s trust in the journalism profession, and even the value placed on knowledge and truth. What is your perspective?

A: I believe this kind of disruption cannot be stopped. I also believe that well-researched and well-written articles with the right balance have a place in our society. My generation will have to learn to embrace technology to get across this form of journalism.

Q: The term “fake news” has become a cudgel used by critics of the media. Now many civil libertarians are concerned about Singapore’s plans to implement a law that would impose penalties on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter for the distribution of falsehoods. What is your perspective on these efforts?

A: No responsible and sensible person can support fake news. But the devil, as always, is in the details. Singapore has just introduced a bill on this. Some, including academics, are uncomfortable with its sweeping powers. Like the power to be given to ANY minister to issue take-down orders to online websites and the definition of fake news and public

interest. The final and ideal solution is to get society to separate the wheat from the chaff and identify and call out fake news. That is the long-term goal that should be taken seriously.

Q: The blurb of your book recalls the dangers that journalists faced in the 1970s, '80s and '90s: "Some lost their jobs, some had to leave the country, and some decided to give in and live to fight another day." You had your own dealings with a dominant national leader in the late Lee Kuan Yew. Are there lessons from your experience that might help embattled journalists today?

A: Lee was a master politician. He oppressed the opposition or anyone who was against his narrative. At the same time, he made sure that population saw the benefits of a controlled society. The material signs are all over the place. Also, he had laws that controlled media. A strict application of the libel laws made the media second guess its boundaries all the time. As though that was not enough, former top civil servants were made CEOs and Chairmen of Singapore Press Holdings. But the technological disruption in the form of the internet is putting the pressure on such forms of control. The lesson, if there is one, is to fight the internet stories with the government's narrative. Let the people decide which is the version they want to believe. A bit idealistic, perhaps. But it is something that needs to be done.

Q: What are your own habits regarding Facebook, Twitter and other platforms? What is your advice for journalists who have come of age with the internet. What advantages and pitfalls do you see?

A: I get most of my information from the Net. I use it to access the world media. I read articles that my friends share. This is an uplifting exercise. At the same time we have to have a skeptical attitude. Can this be true? There seems to be contradictions in this report. Should I check it out? To the newer journalists, I say check and double check your

facts. They owe their society a huge responsibility to try and get across the truth or at least some of the truths.

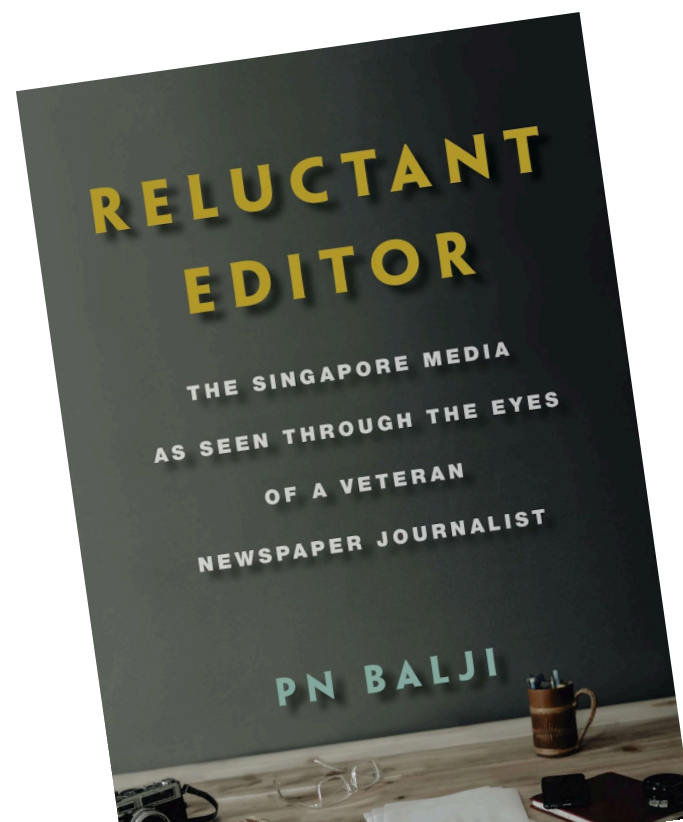
Q: Was it difficult to leave journalism and take on the role of a media consultant? What was it like to be on the other side of the story?

A: I joined journalism in 1970. I edited two newspapers, The New Paper and TODAY. Both did well. It was time to go. So I quit in 2003. I went to do PR. I didn't find the transition difficult as I realized there was a need for those in the business to get a clearer understanding of media. I realized I could do that.

Q: When you look back on your career, do you have any regrets that you wish to share?

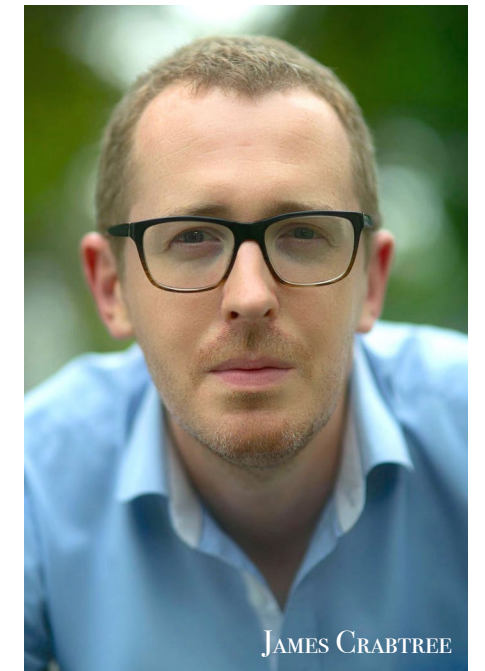
A: Hardly any. Some mistakes have been made. The profession of journalism has made me a better person. It was my university of life. It taught be communication skills and to sift out the truth from the false, to detect the con man. And it helped me to break out of my cocoon. ●

Scott Duke Harris is a Hong Kong-based journalist.



The challenges facing India's media landscape: Shouting on TV news, a social media cesspit, and broken business models

BY TOM BENNER



India's media market remains strong, at least when compared to many other countries in Asia.

Yet James Crabtree, a former Financial Times journalist previously based in Mumbai, sees three large shifts affecting India's vast media landscape — worrisome trends that will continue to have a coarsening effect on the state of the media in the world's largest democracy.

The rising popularity of raucous television news, which comes at the expense of more civil discourse and public interest programming, combined with a lack of gatekeeping policies to prevent the spread of misinformation on social media has contributed to a rise in nationalistic and anti-minority rhetoric in India. Similarly, the country's shift from print to digital advertising signals a decline in print media's influence upon the general population.

"The number of educated people with access to the Internet, to print media, to television, is rising very quickly," says Crabtree, who now works as an Associate Professor in Practice at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy in Singapore. "The size of the advertising market, although small, is getting bigger. You've had an enormous amount of inno-

vations, particularly because of social media. And print media is still expanding, as opposed to everywhere else in the world. The number of subscribers and readers is going up, and old print advertising hasn't started to decline yet."

However, the winds of change are beginning to blow.

The rightward drift of television news

Several decades ago, news in India was dominated by a small handful of print newspapers and one government-owned television station. In the 1990s and early 2000s, television was liberalized, and India's TV news adopted a format that was heavily influenced by the BBC and other types of public interest television journalism. In the latter part of the 2000s, however, a new kind of television journalism began to emerge.

Enter Arnab Goswami, a prominent news anchor who started his career on a show called "The Newshour." In Crabtree's critically acclaimed 2018 book *The Billionaire Raj: A Journey Through India's New Gilded Age*, Goswami is held up as a prominent example of a shift toward right-wing

commentary in Indian news, with Crabtree going so far as to compare Goswami to Fox News' Sean Hannity.

"[Goswami] pioneered this much more aggressive, over the top kind of television news — which is even more partisan than something like Fox in the U.S.," Crabtree says. The format of "The News-Hour," according to Crabtree, generally involved "Eight or 10 guests, everybody yelling at each other at the same time in this cacophonous din in which the aim is to shock and to entertain...If you watch it, it's incredibly difficult to work out what is actually going on. If your aim, after watching an hour of television news, is to have a perspective on what's happened that day and to learn something about it, it's pretty hopeless."



In the beginning, Goswami made anti-corruption a central issue in his journalism, and he made India's previous administration his primary target. He has since sided with current Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Hindu nationalist right, reflecting a more jingoistic and strident tone that is reflected in other television news, Crabtree says.

"That turn in the way that television news operates has had a coarsening effect on public discourse in India," he says. "It means ratings are pretty good, but it means public interest journalism on television is much harder to find now. Arnab's approach has been so successful at winning ratings, others have copied him — not just in the English language media, but in the local media as well."

Social media, rabble-rousing, and divisive politics

The rapid increase in high-speed Internet access

across India has elevated the role of social media outlets, such as Facebook and YouTube, throughout the country, particularly with younger audiences. Facebook, for example, boasts 300 million users in India, significantly more than the number of U.S.-based users — and that number continues to grow.

"In countries where, suddenly, social media has arrived with [a] huge force, and there aren't really these traditions of well-funded independent fact-checking media, this has become enormously problematic," says Crabtree. "The speed with which social media has arrived in India is really stunning."

While the rise of social media is a boon to personal communication across the Indian subcontinent, Crabtree says it has also given way to an online media environment that is rife with misinformation and fake news, as well as communal disharmony and unrest.

"In general, the Indian online social media sphere — particularly Twitter — is a fairly nasty place," he says. "If you think Twitter is bad in the U.S., Twitter in India is a complete cesspit, particularly because it has become a medium where the right — they call them the 'Modi Trolls,' young passionate supporters of the Prime Minister — will engage in online mob violence. Not literal violence, but well-coordinated trolling of opponents."

India's social media woes aren't just limited to Twitter, either. The popular free communication platform WhatsApp has been used to encourage mob violence against minorities, coordinate lynchings, and is responsible for stoking tensions between Hindus and Muslims, Crabtree says.

"It's pretty clear the political parties know how to spread divisive viral content around these networks," he explains. "This has been true in other countries all around the region — in Myanmar, in Sri Lanka, in Thailand — but India is larger. It's population of users is bigger. It now has better Internet connections. So, there's a whole host of problems that regulators are only beginning to learn how to cope with."

With the effective absence of gatekeepers working in traditional print media, social media has yet to catch up — and India's spring elections, which began April 11, will prove to be a test for the social media giants. It is reported there are some 87,000 election-related WhatsApp groups alone in India.

"[Social media companies] claim that they have learned the lessons of what has happened in the US, and during the Brexit campaign and in Brazil," says Crabtree, referencing recent issues involving online political discourse in other parts of the world. "But my suspicion is they're not really remotely able to cope with the volume of information that is going to be flurrying about the [Indian] election."

Although social media companies have made efforts to control the proliferation of fake news and other forms of harmful viral content, such as WhatsApp's recent implementation of a ban on message forwarding, Crabtree believes there's still more work to be done.

"It's hard to see how the social media companies are going to voluntarily take steps to fix these problems," he says. "They partly don't know how to respond — and they partly don't want to, because their...business models are based on the spreading of content. So, they have a kind of tension that is hard for them to resolve."

Broken business models

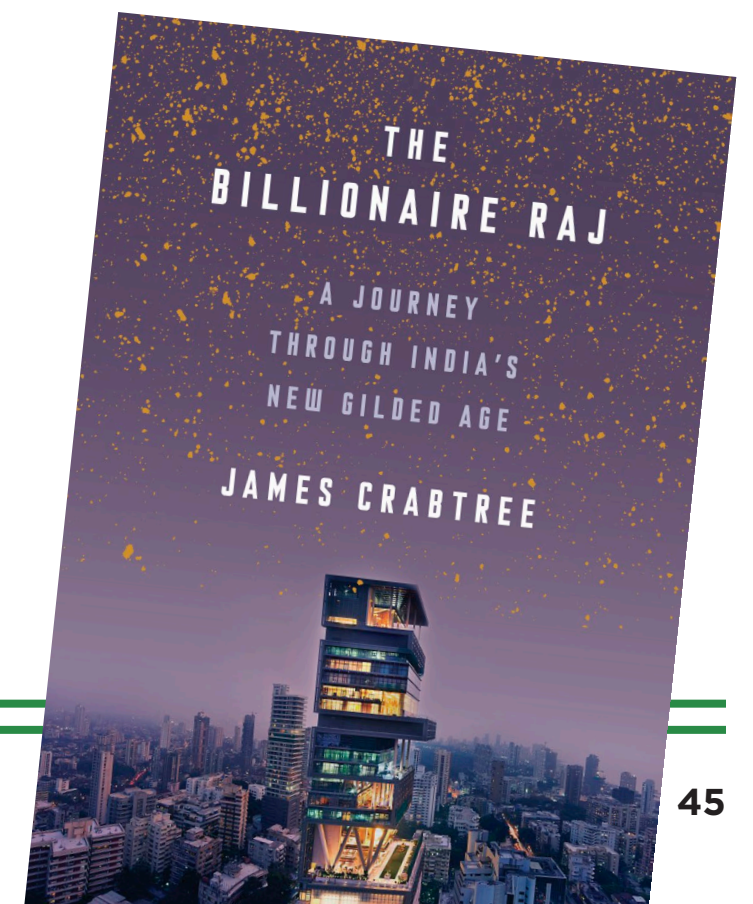
While media in India is relatively free compared to other countries in Asia, with spirited and often rambunctious coverage of political news, and as the country's growing middle class demonstrates a larger interest in media consumption, Crabtree predicts newspaper circulation will fast become eclipsed by digital digital media.

"On the surface, all seems well," he says. "But underneath, the same tsunami is about to hit the heritage Indian media industry that hit in the West — and in many ways it's going to hit harder and faster."

"So few people are going to want to access print publications, given the speed with which the younger generation is shifting to phones."

In the end, who do advertisers want to reach? They want to reach young aspirational consumers — and those aspirational consumers are only going to be reached on digital platforms." ●

Tom Benner is a Singapore-based journalist and editor of N3 Magazine.



GNI APAC Innovation Challenge

215
Applicants

23
Selected

Recipients



Australia

Crikey
Community Broadcasting
Association of Australia
Women's Agenda
Guardian News & Media Australia
Mamamia



Hong Kong

Hong Kong Free Press



India

Turkbox
To be announced



Indonesia

Tempo.co
Asumi.co



South Korea

Maeil Business Newspaper
Dotface



Myanmar

Frontier Myanmar



Mongolia

Zasgiyn Gazriin Medee Daily
Newspaper
National News Corporation LLC



Malaysia

Malaysiakini
R.AGE, Star Media Group



New Zealand

PressPatron



Pakistan

Jang Media Group



Singapore

Singapore Press Holdings



Taiwan

Common Wealth Magazine



Japan

Iwate Nippo
The Asahi Shimbun Company



Nepal

The Record

Supporting reader revenue projects in Asia Pacific newsrooms

by Ludovic Blecher, head of GNI Innovation

The Google News Initiative represents our efforts to work with the news industry to help journalism thrive in the digital age. One of the most powerful things we do is support media organizations come up with new business models.

We did that in Europe with the DNI Fund. Since its launch in 2015, we have supported more than 600 projects in 30 European countries, ranging from an open source toolkit for subscriptions in Slovakia to a consortium of over 70 websites in Portugal with a data management platform that allows users to log on to one site and be recognised across all the others.

We wanted to take the lessons we learnt in Europe and launch a similar program globally. We put the word out internally and my colleagues in APAC were quick to volunteer to be the first region to give it a try. As a result, in November we launched the Google News Initiative (GNI) Asia Pacific Innovation Challenge.

We chose reader revenue as the theme of the first challenge, and looked for applications from those who are pioneering approaches that involve everything from granting digital currency to subscription-based membership models.

We didn't know what to expect from such a diverse region. We were thrilled that within two months, we received 215 applica-

tions from 18 countries. We heard from news startups in Indonesia, web publishers in Mongolia and Nepal, and video and audio broadcasters in Australia. After a rigorous review, a round of interviews and a thorough jury selection process, we ended up providing support to 23 projects in 14 countries—amounting to a total of \$3.2 million.

Several themes emerged from the applications we reviewed, including:

Building or renovating membership models:

For startups, this may just mean building membership model. For established players, this can include creating group subscriptions, more responsive platforms and better targeted newsletters. Crikey, an independent news organization based in Australia, has over 90 percent of its total revenue coming from individual subscribers. With the GNI funding, they plan to build a new subscription offering that can be tailored to organizations, businesses and groups of all sizes.

Using machine learning and AI to surface more engaging content:

A handful of organizations used trends emerging from big data to surface relevant and engaging content to potential subscribers. CommonWealth Magazine, a Taiwanese news organization,

built a paywall in 2017 and enjoyed early success. It will now make this model more dynamic, leveraging AI and machine learning to develop personalized content—including a customized newsletter—to increase and improve reader engagement.

Gamification to create community-wide sharing:

We also saw news organizations experimenting with rewarding especially engaged readers with badges or tokens that can be used to pay for access to events. Asahi Shimbun, a national news publisher in Japan, will be issuing points to subscribers in order for them to "tip" stories and helping expand the market to non-subscribers so that they can do the same.

All of the successful applicants have committed to sharing best practices from their projects so that the broader APAC news ecosystem can benefit from their experiences. Stay tuned for updates as these projects get off the ground.

Finally, I'm pleased to inform AAJA members that there will be a second round of the challenge in APAC in fall. Please, subscribe to the GNI Newsletter to stay tuned and contact apac-gnichallenge@google.com if you have any questions. ●



Bringing digital power to journalists: AAJA-Asia Training Network partners with Google

by Sean Lim



Everybody loves the word 'free' whether it's the critical portion in 'freedom' or a 'free' gift. At AAJA-Asia, we have built the AAJA-Asia Training Network to bring free digital tools and techniques to journalists in the Asia region to empower their storytelling.

It comes out of a partnership we've strengthened over the years with Google News Initiative to support journalism's evolution in the 21st century.

Though it's a service particularly for our members, our training workshops are also open to all journalists and media professionals regardless of AAJA affiliation as part of our outreach efforts. Every year, we select a distinct group of AAJA members to become trainers in the latest tools including: advanced web search, translation, data extraction, mapping, AI, machine learning and image verification.

You can expect to learn how to quickly access data or information through deep search without having to go through information requests. Images that are suspect can be verified as real or fake before getting into your story. And

you can easily show where stories happen by building interactive maps. These are just some of the tools that our training network allows to bring more accurate and compelling stories in a faster amount of time.

Moreover, in our region where journalists are often under-resourced and face oppressive opposition, technology can level out the playing field.

"The AAJA-Asia community is important as ever," says AAJA Asia Chapter President Oanh Ha, "at a time when some journalists around the region risk their lives daily to tell the area's most important stories under challenging and sometimes repressive conditions."

Training sessions are often three hours long held at Google campuses across the Asia region or at individual newsrooms based on special request. Our AAJA trainer Selina Cheng recently instructed a group of about 20 staffers of CNN Digital at their offices in Hong Kong.

"I hoped people could come out of the sessions knowing a little bit more about maximizing the tools they may already use everyday for

reporting. I'm glad organizations like AAJA are partnering with companies like Google to train reporters and editors, combining global expertise with local context," Selina said.

At the Bloomberg Tokyo office, a weekend session in its newsroom provided a hands-on environment with a high level of engagement between the trainer and the participants. AAJA-Asia Tokyo leader Marika Katanuma, who is also a reporter at Bloomberg, said: "The session was a great opportunity for the participants to get their hands on tools that will be valuable for their careers such as fact check tools. One reporter commented that he liked the real-life examples and another media professional said it was very informative and practical."

For more information about the AAJA-Asia Training Network and to learn how to attend a session or become a trainer, please visit www.ajja-asia.org.

Sean Lim is the manager of the AAJA-Asia Training Network. He is a freelance writer based in Seoul, South Korea.

Mentor Match: Helping young journalists to succeed

BY ZELA CHIN



In the summer of 2015, a recent university graduate, Gavin Huang, moved to Korea for adventure. The Chinese American had received a fellowship as a copyeditor for the Korea Joon-Ang Daily, the local partner of the New York Times. Not too long, he was promoted to business editor, and then national desk editor.

A veteran AAJA member suggested that he apply for the inaugural Mentor Match program in 2018. The year long program pairs students and young journalists with seasoned veterans for career and professional advice.

The career coaches at the N3Con media conference in May 2018 taught Gavin that a mentor is a neutral party who listens to your problems when you don't want to speak with colleagues. Taking that advice to heart, Gavin reached out to his mentor when he was negotiating a job offer from Hong Kong's South China Morning Post last summer.

Through the Mentor Match program, Gavin had been paired with Joon-Nie Lau, a veteran of the Singapore news industry, who had about 10 years of experience mentoring young journalists.

"It took me 10 years to come to a conclusion, and if I can help someone reach that conclusion a lot faster... there's no point in reinventing the wheel," said Lau.

She advised Gavin that during salary negotiations, he should ask: what grade is he coming in at? What is the salary range? Because if a person gets the high end of a salary range then he must get a promotion to get a salary increase. She also advised him to ask about relocation packages and housing allowances.

A couple of months later, Gavin moved to Hong Kong. He works as a commissioning editor for Goldthread, a video-heavy culture publication from the SCMP. Gavin

and Joon-Nie were one of the 16 Mentor Match pairs in Asia last year.

In 2019, the Asia chapter joined the national organization to launch a bigger and better Mentor Match program. Mentors and mentees were matched based on geography, career interests, and gender. This year we have 92 pairs. The participants hail from across the U.S. and Asia, and even as far as Sweden and Lebanon. Asia members make up about 23% of the matches.

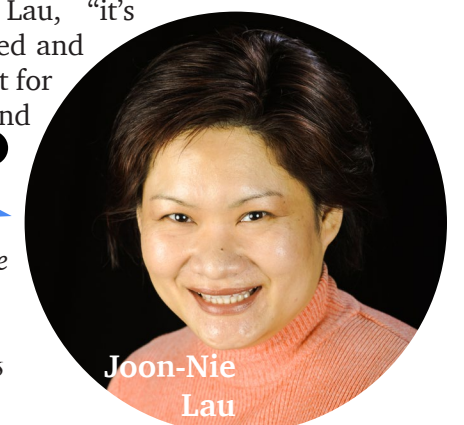
Ideally, the pairs maintain consistent contact throughout the year through phone calls, online interactions, and in-person meetings. And they have opportunities to meet at the AAJA media conferences: N3Con in Hong Kong, May 30 to June 2, and National Convention in Atlanta, July 31 to August 3.

The program is led by Zela Chin, Executive Vice President of the Asia chapter, Hannah Bae, former Vice President of the Seoul sub-chapter and current president of AAJA-NY, and Ruth Liao, of AAJA-Seattle.

The pairs are supported by monthly conference calls to provide troubleshooting and career counselling. The program is designed by Caroline Ceniza-Levine, a career coach and AAJA member.

"AAJA has the best structured mentoring program," said Lau, "it's highly managed and lots of support for mentees and mentors."

Zela Chin is executive vice president of the Asia chapter, Asian American Journalists Association.



Podcasting's

resurgence

BY SHEILA BERMAN

“We are seeing an intensive and intense interest and resurgence in podcasts again,”

says Glenn Van Zutphen, founder of VanMedia Group with over 25 years of experience as a journalist.

Statistics from the recent Edison Research showed that in the United States, 22 million adults were familiar with podcasting in 2006. That number grew to 64 million in 2018 and is projected to reach 197 million this year. In March 2018, Apple announced that its podcasts “passed 50 billion all-time episode downloads and streams”

Podcasting, a combination of the word “pod” from Apple’s iPod and the word “broadcast,” is not new. It was called audio blogging in the ‘80s, and since then has risen and fallen out of favour.

Recent interest could be attributed to the increasing digitisation of publications, short attention span of consumers, and convenience of mobile gadgets. With many traditional print publications shutting down, journalists being laid off, and the prevalence of fake news, consumers are actively looking for alternative sources of information and entertainment. Research had shown that podcast listeners, in the US, at least, are loyal, affluent, and educated.

Across the Asia Pacific, podcasting is still finding its feet, though countries like South Korea and Japan are ahead of the rest. As a journalism medium, news agencies have seen the value. The search for “news” in Stitcher results in over 34,000 podcasts from Fox News, CBS, NBC, Bloomberg, Asia Rising, even CNN. Individuals, not affiliated with any news agencies, have contributed to the number of available podcasts.

One of the notable podcasters in Asia is Steve Stine, whose Inside Asia Podcast is available on Stitcher and Apple iTunes. His guests have included Clay Chandler, Executive Editor, International for Time Inc, and Asia Editor for Fortune, Raja Samu Samu VI of Maluku, the current Secretary General of the Association of Indonesian Rajas and Sultans, Stephanie Dickson, Founder of Green is the New Black Asia, and Thomas Morgan, Financier turned Film Director.

According to Van Zutphen, there are two reasons for this resurgence in interest. From the producers’ side:

1. Podcasts are good for generating content. “Everybody is looking for a way to get their information and to get their viewpoint out front and center.”

2. Podcasts are cheaper to produce. Unlike videos, podcasting generally only requires a good audio recorder.

For consumers, the accessibility of podcast drives the interest. “Podcasts are actually easier for more people to access no matter where they are globally and they don’t have to worry about bandwidth,” said Van Zutphen.

However, podcasts while inexpensive still require good content, in addition to good audio equipment. With millions of podcasts available, listeners’ attention needs to be captured and sustained.

In the case of Stine’s podcast, loyal listeners have commented on the “unique perspective”, “insightful and intelligent knowledge” on Asia of his guests, and “excellent topics chosen by the host”. Stine’s tagline encapsulates his mantra, that is to converse with “Asia’s leading movers, shakers, thinkers, and provocateurs.” This has enabled him to have over 80 episodes and has earned him the reputation of being the go-to source for Asian insights.

Van Zutphen cites 3 factors required to have a successful podcast.

1. Focus. Audience identification is crucial. Podcasters can not be everything to everybody. It must cater to a specific niche.

2. Length. Find out the appropriate length for the audience. Investigative journalism will require nearly an hour due to the story. Normal podcast should not be more than 30 minutes.

3. Production value. Cheap doesn’t mean bad. The audience

should have a great experience. The guest must have a great story to tell, the audio should be good, music and sound effects should be unobtrusive but evocative.

Despite all the above, sustainability is the key. Van Zutphen predicts that within the next 18 months, half of the podcasts will fold. The lack of sponsorship or advertising revenue will be the main reason.

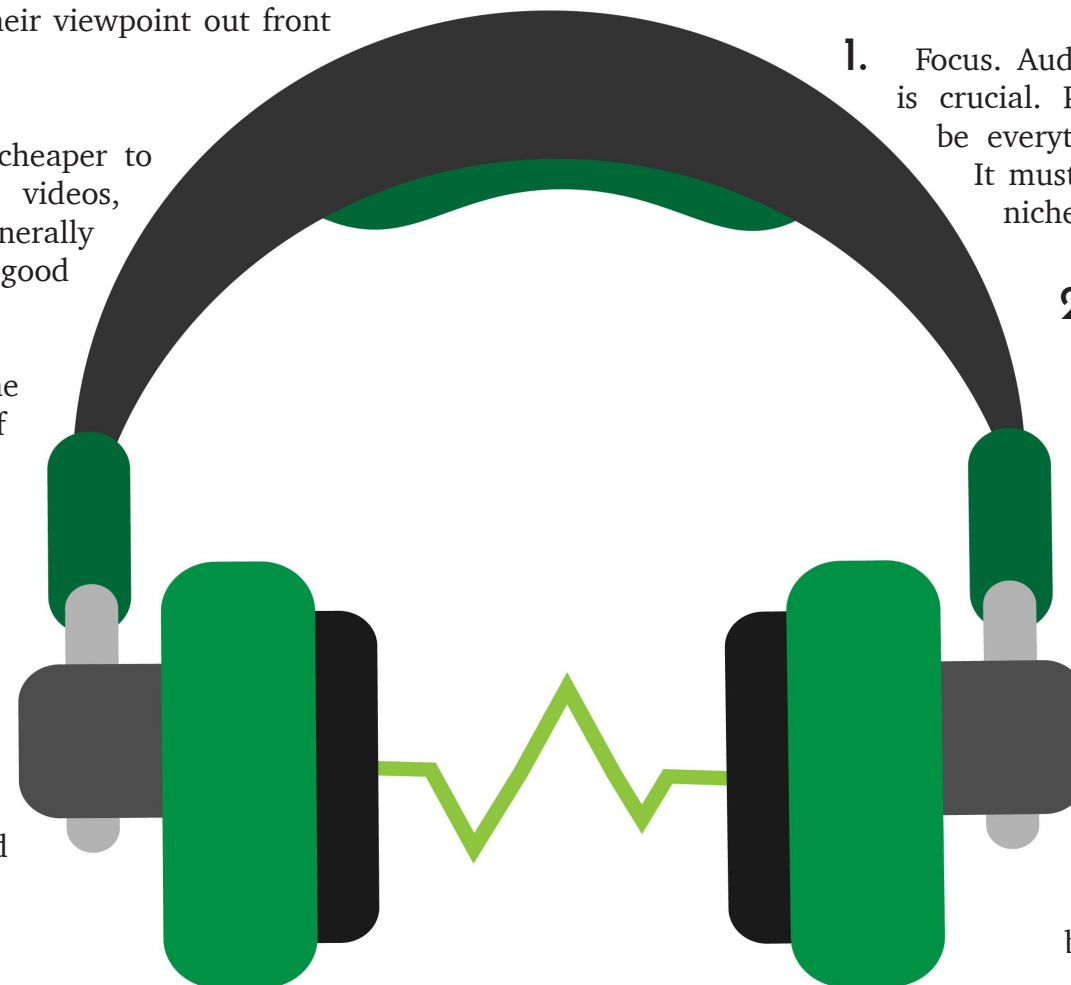
“People have to make money and with advertisers ... they want to see eyeballs or ears. They want to see how many people are connecting to your podcast. If you can’t show them that you’ve got five, ten, twenty fifty thousand listeners who are in their demographic of who they want to get to, they’re not going to give you money.”

Time will tell if Van Zutphen is correct in his prediction.

Sheila Berman is the PR and Marketing Director for All Black Ventures, and the content writer and producer for Shmi Shem

TOP 7 PODCASTERS (Asian-American Centric)

INSIDE ASIA by Steve Stine
ASIA GEOPOLITICS by The Diplomat
ASIA BRIEF by Asia News Weekly
ASIA TECH PODCAST by Graham Brown
THEY CALL US BRUCE by Jeff Yang and Phil Yu
88 CUPS OF TEA by Yin Chang
CHEWING THE FAT by Louisa Chu and Monica Eng



Reporting from overseas for the first time? When in doubt, get back to basics.

STUDENT WORK: THE HONG KONG 360 PROJECT

Last spring, the Ryerson School of Journalism in Toronto launched its first ever international summer course, sending 10 university students to Hong Kong to attend AA-JA-Asia's N3 Conference. We saw this as a unique opportunity to put our students' burgeoning skills to the test — they're used to reporting in Canada, but what kind of stories could they produce from spending two weeks in the other side of the world?

BY ADRIAN MA
PHOTOS BY DECLAN KEOGH



Most of the students didn't speak Cantonese or Mandarin or had ever been to Hong Kong before. We needed to be real with ourselves — we could never hope to learn everything required to report authoritatively and authentically on Hong Kong's incredibly complex political, economic and social issues in a few short few weeks. There are foreign correspondents and Asia-based reporters who have dedicated their entire careers to reporting on this region, so what were we going to realistically add to the conversation?

We decided the best approach was to get back to basics — be curious, be humble, be a listener more than a talker. Focus on telling stories about people.

We called our project "Hong Kong 360" for two reasons.

One, because wanted to fully capture the visual magic that is Hong Kong's cityscape in panoramic, 360 degree video.

Two, because we wanted to capture a range of experiences and perspectives of Hong Kong. We wanted to ask the people who lived there what they believed was important to know.

Our students saw Hong Kong in a completely different light after exploring stories about abandoned villages in the New Territories, fiercely proud craftspeople in dying trades, and same-sex couples fighting for acceptance, just to name a few.

The result of their efforts was an ambitious multimedia feature that was recently selected as runner-up for the Emerge Award, a national student journalism prize, for best Multimedia Production. You can view the project at project.journalism.ryerson.ca/hongkong360/ ●

Adrian Ma is an assistant professor at Ryerson School of Journalism in Toronto, Canada.

ASIA-PACIFIC PRESS FREEDOM

The 2019 World Press Freedom Index compiled by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) shows how hatred of journalists has degenerated into violence, contributing to an increase in fear. The number of countries regarded as safe, where journalists can work in complete security, continues to decline, while authoritarian regimes continue to tighten their grip on the media.

The RSF Index, which evaluates the state of journalism in 180 countries and territories every shows that an intense climate of fear has been triggered — one that is prejudicial to a safe reporting environment. The hostility towards journalists expressed by political leaders in many countries has incited increasingly serious and frequent acts of violence that have fuelled an unprecedented level of fear and danger for journalists. *(From Reporters Without Borders)*

RANK / COUNTRY / SCORE

7. NEW ZEALAND	10.75	80. BHUTAN	29.81	142. PAKISTAN	45.83
21. AUSTRALIA	16.55	84. TIMOR-LESTE	29.93	143. CAMBODIA	45.90
22. SAMOA	18.25	106. NEPAL	33.40	150. BANGLADESH	50.74
38. PAPUA NEW GUINEA	24.70	123. MALAYSIA	36.74	151. SINGAPORE	51.41
41. SOUTH KOREA	24.94	124. INDONESIA	36.77	152. BRUNEI	51.48
42. TAIWAN	24.98	126. SRI LANKA	39.61	171. LAOS	64.49
45. TONGA	25.41	134. PHILIPPINES	43.91	176. VIETNAM	74.93
52. FIJI	27.18	136. THAILAND	44.10	177. CHINA	78.92
67. JAPAN	29.36	138. MYANMAR	44.92	179. NORTH KOREA	83.40
73. HONG KONG	29.65	140. INDIA	45.67	Source: rsf.org/en/ranking/2019	

Covering Asia’s New Order: It’s Grim Out There, Folks

BY BILL POORMAN

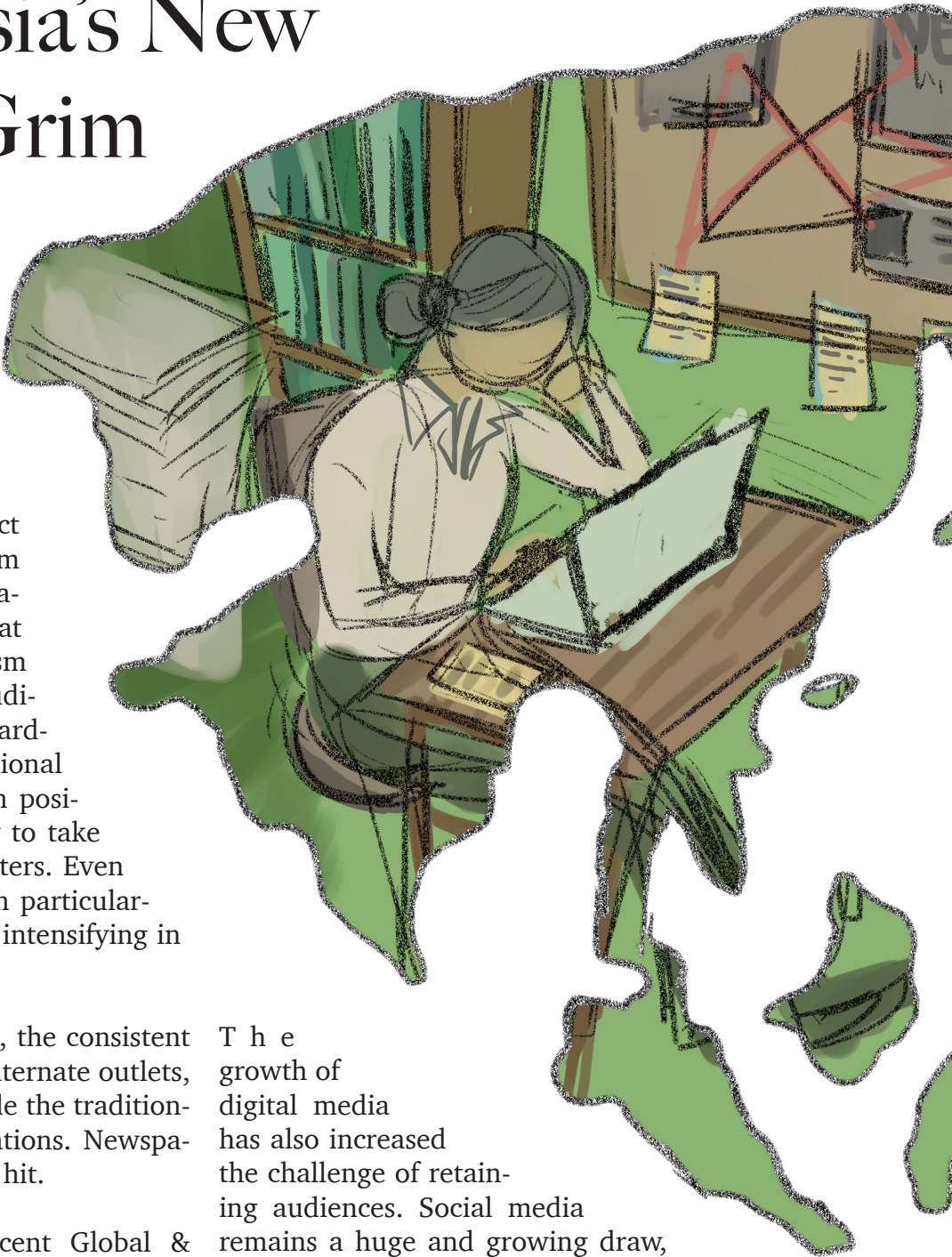
Can it even be called “news,” the fact that the news media and journalism are having a tough time? We’re familiar with the long-term trends that have made the practice of journalism an ever more difficult endeavor. Audiences and advertising dollars are harder to come by, at least in their traditional forms. Governments and people in positions of power always seem ready to take steps against journalists and reporters. Even so, the past year or two have been particularly tough in Asia, with these trends intensifying in worrying ways.

On the business side of journalism, the consistent growth of digital advertising and alternate outlets, like social media, continues to erode the traditional financial base of news organizations. Newspapers continue to be especially hard hit.

PricewaterhouseCooper’s most recent Global & Media Outlook anticipates that global circulation will essentially remain flat. In Asia, the number of news consumers is growing, but at the same time the competition for ad dollars is increasing. Companies’ efforts to diversify their revenue streams can produce strange results. Singapore Press Holdings -- publisher of the national daily, The Straits Times -- now earns two-thirds of its profits from properties that it owns and operates.

The growth of digital media has also increased the challenge of retaining audiences. Social media remains a huge and growing draw, especially in Asia. In a recent report, Global Digital 2019, We Are Social and Hootsuite record that tens of millions of new social media users are coming online in the region.

Chasing views and ad dollars is hard enough, but practising journalism also has been extremely difficult. Here are some examples of the difficulties journalists have faced while reporting in Asia:



1. China has been imposing a generalized crack-down on journalism. More particularly, the *Financial Times*' Victor Mallet in Hong Kong has been effectively ejected. Mallet, who was vice president of the Hong Kong Foreign Correspondents' Club, was denied renewal of his work visa after the club hosted a pro-independence speaker. This incident and the current anti-media climate led to a drop in the measure of Hong Kong Journalists Association press freedom to 45 on a 100-point scale -- the lowest since the survey started in 2013.

2. In the Philippines, the government of President Rodrigo Duterte has repeatedly arrested journalist Maria Ressa of the social media site *The Rappler*. The government says the site violates foreign ownership rules, but press advocates say the harassment is a response to critical reporting.

3. In South Korea, the ruling party posted a personal attack against a reporter in March for a story that they claimed criticized the ruling government's policy toward North Korea. The attack contained a derogatory term for a Korean who works for a foreign news outlet. The party later withdrew the post and apologized after pressure from some press groups, including the AAJA-Asia chapter and its Seoul subchapter.

4. So-called "fake news" laws are increasing. Malaysia passed such a law in 2018, though it may be repealed. The government of Singapore passed a similar law. These regulations are intended to criminalize online falsehoods, but press advocates are concerned that governments would use them to suppress information they dislike.

5. Two of Reuters' Myanmar reporters, Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, were sentenced to seven years imprisonment for their investigation into the killing of Rohingya, spending more than 500 days behind bars. The reporters were convicted of violating the

Official Secrets Act, although there have been claims that the police set them up.

Incidents such as these have had a chilling effect on the region's journalism and have prompted poor rankings for many Asian nations in the latest Reporter Without Borders World Press Freedoms Index. Even so, there are some hopeful indicators.

One example is the growing number of social media users. More potential news consumers are coming online, and growth in potential audience will precede solid audience growth.

Fine journalism continues to uncover information important to the public. Colleagues of the two imprisoned Reuters journalists in Myanmar completed their work and published the story last year. The Wall Street Journal played an important role in bringing to light the Malaysian 1MDB scandal, in which the then sitting prime minister, Najib Razak, was accused of funneling hundreds of millions of dollars of state money into personal accounts.

Ken Moritsugu was recently named the Associated Press news director for greater China. Even in today's environment, he says, the need for quality journalism remains, even if extra precautions are needed:

"In some cases, it may take more time to get what we need," he says. "We just have to stick with it and not give up."

Nonetheless, it's important to remain aware of the risks, he says.

"We want to tell the China story as accurately and completely as possible, but we don't want to take undue risks or endanger anyone we interview," Moritsugu says. "We probably have more conversations before a reporting trip than we would in

many other places, to make sure we understand those issues and talk through how to handle various scenarios."

Another positive sign is the burgeoning media start-up culture and community that is developing. A company called Splice - a Singapore start-up - is working to foster an entrepreneurial media culture. Asia encompasses many places and cultures so a host of media companies will be required to serve all of those readers, viewers, and listeners with their innumerable interests and languages. The trick is to find a business model that can sustain these operations.

And no matter what the state of the business side of journalism or the political climate, the need remains for high-quality, public-service reporting and analysis that helps people to participate in public life and make their lives better.

"I don't think that news consumers are different in Asia than elsewhere," says AP's Moritsugu. "Everyone is hungry for information. Where information is restricted, there are journalists able to seek out information from other sources, from foreign media to bloggers and social media."

The challenge is to separate fact from fiction. That's why news literacy -- the ability to be a discerning shopper -- is crucial in the digital era.

Asian journalists, however, may have to content themselves with a different perspective on that mission. Lee Kuan Yew, the former prime minister and "founding father" of Singapore spelled out his particular take on the press in 1971 at the International Press Institute in Helsinki.

"Freedom of the press, freedom of the news media, must be subordinated to the overriding needs of the integrity of Singapore, and to the primacy of

purpose of an elected government," Lee said. "The government has taken, and will from time to time have to take, firm measures to ensure that, despite divisive forces of different cultural values and lifestyles, there is enough unity of purpose to carry the people of Singapore forward to higher standards of life, without which the mass media cannot thrive."

In other words, nation-building and stability could override Western notions of what journalism is all about. That's a choice that Asia governments and peoples will be wrestling with for some time. ●

Bill Poorman is a freelance journalist, writer, podcast producer, and video producer, living in Singapore.





Singapore's answer to fake news: correction and takedown orders, fines and jail

BY TOM BENNER

Singapore passed a far-reaching new law on May 8 to combat the problem of online falsehoods.

Singaporean lawmakers voted to grant government ministers broad powers such as the ability to demand corrections, order the removal of content, or block websites deemed to be propagating falsehoods contrary to the public interest. Penalties for not complying with orders include steep fines and jail time.

While Germany has passed a law allowing for takedown orders on social media sites, that law is specifically focused on hate speech.

Singapore's law goes further, allowing government ministers to singlehandedly decide if an online post is factually incorrect and contrary to the public interest.

Journalists, academics, and global tech companies have grave concerns about the possible impact on free speech and abuse of power.

"Singapore's law is the most broadly scoped due to very broad definitions and criteria like 'public interest,' with both a correction order and take down order and severe penalties for non-com-

pliance. Singapore's is unique as well because any minister can issue the directive (corrective or take down) without judicial oversight. (An) appeal can be made after the fact but the order will remain in place during appeal process," said a spokesperson for the Asia Internet Coalition, an industry association whose members include Facebook, Google and Twitter.

Those tech giants and others have been under fire all over the world for not doing enough to police their platforms for misinformation. Some worry the Singapore legislation may be copied by other countries.

Phil Robertson, Deputy Asia Director, Human Rights Watch, said: "Singapore's leaders have crafted a law that will have a chilling affect on internet freedom throughout Southeast Asia, and likely start a new set of information wars as they try to impose their narrow version of 'truth' on the wider world."

Penalties for not obeying a correction or takedown order include up to 10 years' jail time and SGD\$1 million (USD \$735,080) in fines.

An individual or a web portal ordered to correct

or remove an item could apply to the ministers to challenge an order, and if denied, could turn to a court as the final arbiter. Critics worry the appeal process would be slow, intimidating, and costly.

Proponents say these fears are overblown. While the bill targets factually incorrect statements, it does not apply, they claim, to opinions, criticisms, satire or parody. Supporters of the bill say the country's small size makes it especially easy for online rumours to exacerbate existing tensions in the multi-religious, multi-racial society.

But government involvement in determining what's true and what's false has many saying the bill will set a dangerous precedent.

Critics of the bill say the legislation will give government officials unprecedented powers and will stifle free speech in an era when around the world, populist leaders label the media as the enemy of the people. Singapore, whose government regulates its large local media outlets, has a relatively low press freedom ranking of 151st in the world, below countries including Russia and Myanmar.

"In the wrong hands, legislation such as the one under discussion, can be misused for selfish gain. No government or minister – good or bad – should be allowed to wield such broad powers. The bill should be withdrawn pending a genuine and robust discussion on how best to combat 'fake news' ", a letter signed by journalists warned..

The bill empowers government ministers to act to protect national security, public health, public finance, public safety and tranquillity in the friendly relations between Singapore and other countries, and the weakening of public confi-

dence in the government.

That last provision worries Singaporean journalist P N Balji, who wrote: "The proposed law allows any minister, without any oversight and check, to act against those whom they believe are guilty of contravening the law. This is unprecedented in modern Singapore's legal history. Let us not forget that we are talking about human beings, not some supreme saints, and they are more than capable of erring".

For example, could the "public interest" be used as an excuse to issue a correction or takedown order for something that casts the government in a negative light? Would something that is critical of a current administration qualify as detrimental to public confidence in government?

During a marathon two-day debate in parliament, Law and Home Affairs Minister K Shanmugam took issue with claims the law will have a "chilling effect" on free speech, and said the new measures will affect "falsehood, bots, trolls and fake accounts."

Tom Benner is a freelance journalist based in Singapore and editor of N3Magazine.





Press freedom is receiving a breath of fresh air in Malaysia

BY KOI KYE LEE

Malaysia media are seeing a new dawn of hope following the 2018 general election and its surprising outcome. The Pakatan Harapan (PH) alliance led by veteran leader Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad ousted Barisan Nasional (BN). The BN, or known as the National Front, had ruled Malaysia for six decades since its independence in 1957.

Shortly after their historic win, Dr Mahathir, 93, was quoted as saying by various Malaysian media that the new government would not restrict press freedom or take action against any inaccurate news reports unless it is a threat to national security.

The new government's stand on press freedom has given Malaysia the chance to climb 22 places to rank 123rd out of 180 countries in Reporters Without Borders' (RSF) annual World Press Freedom Index this year.

This is a big shift in Dr Mahathir's approach, as in his previous stint as Prime Minister, the political maestro was not known for tolerance. Malaysia saw great development and economic growth during his 22-year reign between 1981 and 2003. But at the same time, he also restrained freedom of expression.

According to RSF, the improvement in the country's ranking was due to the PH's victory against BN. The RSF said: "Press freedom is receiving a breath of fresh air in Malaysia after Prime Minister

Najib Razak's ruling coalition suffered a surprising defeat in the May 2018 general elections — its first defeat in modern Malaysian history."

"Journalists and media outlets that had been black-listed, such as the cartoonist Zunar and the Sarawak Report investigative news website, have been able to resume working without fear of harassment," RSF also said in the statement.

It further added that the general environment for journalists is much more relaxed, self-censorship has declined dramatically, and the print media are now offering a fuller and more balanced range of viewpoints including the ability to print supporting articles across both sides of the political divide.

Zunar, whose real name is Zulkiflee Anwar Haque, was hit with nine sedition charges for allegedly insulting Malaysia's judiciary in a series of tweets on the handling of former opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim's trial of sodomy charges in 2015. He was also banned from leaving the country, but after the PH ousted Najib, his immigration blacklist was lifted.

Whistleblowing website The Sarawak Report was blocked after publishing exposes detailing allegations of financial management and bribery in Malaysia's sovereign fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) that were linked to Najib. The website is operated by British investigative journal-

ist Clare Rewcastle-Brown in London. She was also denied entry into Malaysia in 2013.

Despite recording a significant improvement as compared to 2018 (145), Malaysia was still categorised under the "difficult situation" together with its Southeast Asian neighbours. Timor Leste, however, performed better than others and was placed in the "problematic situation" group. It jumped 11 places and secured the 84th placing in the index.

Malaysia ranked the second after Timor Leste, while Indonesia came in third at 124th, Philippines (134th); Thailand (136th); Myanmar (138th); Cambodia (143rd); Singapore (151st); Brunei Darussalam (152nd); Laos (171st); and Vietnam (176th).

The repeal of the Anti-Fake News Act 2018 (AFNA) by the current government also contributed to Malaysia's improvement in the index. AFNA was introduced by the Najib administration and was fast-tracked in Parliament before the elections last year.

The Paris-based organisation also said Dr Mahathir had kept his promise to repeal the Orwellian provisions of the anti-fake news law. However, it added that the authorities still had draconian laws which suppresses media freedom. The laws included the Sedition Act 1948, the Official Secrets Act 1972 and the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998.

RSF said: "Under these laws, which need a complete overhaul, the authorities have strict control over publication licences, and journalists can be sentenced to 20 years in prison on sedition charges. These laws pose a constant threat to media personnel, who still cannot express themselves with complete freedom, despite all the progress."

Meanwhile, many have criticised the government

for taking too long to abolish these repressive laws, including the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam). On April 20, the Home Ministry issued a statement to deny that it was backtracking from its pledge to change the arsenal of draconian laws.

In a report by the New Straits Times, the ministry said various agencies and authorities involved in the task are in the midst of preparing and making the necessary changes to such laws. It further said: "As explained before this, KDN had formed the Special Legal Study Committee and the Technical Committee to peruse all the six laws which come under the ministry." KDN is the Malay acronym of the Home Ministry.

The six laws are looked into by the two committees are the Peaceful Assembly Act (APA), Security Offences (Special Measures) Act 2012 (Sosma), Prevention of Crime Act 1959 (Poca), Prevention of Terrorism Act 2015 (Pota), Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984 (AMCP) and the Sedition Act.

The committees are made up of representatives from the Attorney-General's Chambers, Malaysian Bar, Suhakam, legal practitioners, and academicians. ●

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AAJA-Asia and Google partner to award student digital journalism projects

AAJA-Asia and Google News Initiative partnered once again to honor excellence in digital student journalism. Two \$1,000 prizes went to the top two journalism projects that put “new ways of storytelling” into practice by utilizing digital technology to tell stories that matter in the region.

Undergraduate and graduate students of all disciplines were encouraged to exercise their creativity and showcase their talent in using multiple mediums including but not limited to text, audio, videos and social media such as blogs, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, SoundCloud, Twitter, WordPress, and YouTube.

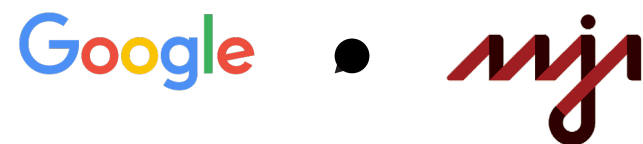


The first winning project was ‘Hong Kong 360,’ a collaborative effort by an undergraduate team from Ryerson University in Ontario, Canada. Last summer, a team led by Adrian Ma traveled to Hong Kong to document life from diverse viewpoints. Through 360/VR videos, written features, and photography, they told stories that ranged from the LGBTQ+ community in Hong Kong, to the tensions between the pro-democracy activists and pro-Beijing forces. The project took months of research, reporting, and assembly. It resulted in an interactive website that hosts all of the stories they produced.

The second winning project was ‘From the Wallflowers’ by University of Hong Kong undergraduate student Jasmine Leung. It was a daring podcast series that explored the issue of mental health in Asia. With a collection of 19 episodes in total, the series documented real first-hand experiences, eastern and western medical views and support groups in Hong Kong. It was sparked by the creator’s own journey with mental health and response to Hong Kong’s wave of student suicides in 2016.



AAJA-Asia is honored to support creative projects such as these that usher in the next generation of journalists and storytellers who are able to master new technologies to impact more lives.



We collaborate with the news industry to build a stronger future for journalism through products, partnerships and programs.

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