

Sin Chew debate: Who is the hypocrite?

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By Tay Tian Yan

Josh Hong's article entitled 'Hypocrisy of Sin Chew at its best' was not unexpected. It is another salvo in the long war of attrition he has been conducting against Sin Chew.

His bag of tricks contains such ruses as taking matters out of context, and repackaging and reassembling entire issues, in order to mislead readers into believing that the Sin Chew Daily of his imagination is the real Sin Chew Daily.

As advocates of free speech, we respect his right to criticise. But this particular attack contains falsehoods that demand clarification.

Hong accuses us of "a cozy relationship" with the ruling elite. As a newspaper, Sin Chew Daily maintains "relationships" with all political groups, regardless of whether they are in power or in opposition. Such "relationships" are purely professional and purely to facilitate access to information, and to allow general communication. There is no exchange of interests or benefits within these "relationships".

When praise is due, we praise. When criticism is in order, we criticise.

In fact, Sin Chew and the three other newspapers under Media Chinese International Ltd - Guangming, Nanyang Siang Pau and China Press – have been penalised repeatedly in the last few years for their reports and comments on various issues.

But of course we could not expect Hong to mention this.

As for the Nanyang Press Holdings takeover, Sin Chew undertook it as part of its global media strategy.

Nanyang Press was facing decline in readership and profitability.

And with the Internet, Malaysians had access to Chinese papers and news sources from all over the world.

To compete against the global publishers, we needed to consolidate and pool our resources and become global players ourselves.

The ultimate test is: has this consolidation compromised the individual newspapers' independence and editorial integrity?

Any objective investigation or analysis will show that the four papers have maintained their independence, retaining their own editorial policies and their own distinctive styles for their own distinct readers, and competing vigorously against each other.

The flow of information is beyond anyone's control. If any media organisation tries to control and dictate the news, their readers would ditch them for other newspapers.

Hong has also attacked me in his article. He quoted my past writings and lifted them out of their contexts in an attempt to make my articles look pathetic and unconvincing, he specially referred to my two articles, one on the abolishment of the ISA, and the other on the prosecution of Mat Sabu.

As a journalist and columnist, I am not inclined towards the ruling party or the opposition party.

Therefore, when Prime Minister Najib Razak announced the abolishment of the Internal Security Act, I gave my support. Conversely, when the government prosecuted Mat Sabu, I protested. In both cases, the writings were driven by my commitment to the principle of democracy and justice.

And perhaps Hong should start with political science 101, democracy covers various aspects, it does not stop at ISA or defamation charge.

Hong claimed that in my article 'Back to the coffee house' (Sin Chew, July 18), I distorted the contents of The Economist.

The special report in the July 9-15 issue of The Economist was entitled 'Back to the coffee house'. The report noted how the Internet era today is similar to the coffee house era in Britain 300 years ago.

It said, among other things: "Nowadays, individuals can spread their messages and express their opinions through the internet with virtually no limitation. This situation is reminiscent of the old coffee house where free conversation abounded."

This is my take on the matter:

The problem with the coffee house was that no one, including the speakers and the listeners, could be sure about the authenticity of the content being spread. Also, no one would care about objectivity and fairness.

Everyone could be a reporter, editor and commentator in the coffee house but there was neither professionalism nor ethical standard.

Therefore, such methods of information transmission were unable to cultivate accountability, which is essential in journalism.

This is my personal opinion, formed after reading The Economist, which I shared with my readers.

Where is the distortion?

Lastly, there is one area where I cannot comment. This is Hong's attack on CC Liew, which is based on falsehoods and errors.

CC insists he will not respond, as Hong is entitled to his opinions, no matter how misguided. CC's decisions are guided by his principles and his conscience, and he will only answer to his shareholders and to his readers.

Hong is an articulate writer, with debating skills worthy of a litigation lawyer. If only he would apply his eloquence to facts and the truth, I am sure we would all be the better for it.

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