

Authoritarian governments in seeking of media management politics essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Authoritarian regimes or governments have always been considered by western scholars or politicians as standing on the opposite side of democracy. In those states within which media are controlled, the freedom of speech, human rights and democracy remain big concerns of those democrats. Asia, the largest continent in the world, boasts its diversified politic forms, be it democratic regimes, like Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korean and quasi-democratic ones like Thailand, as well as authoritarian ones like Mainland China, North Korean and Burma. The role of media in Asia varies with the political style, from free to control. This essay, then, mainly focuses on exploring the reason why authoritarian regime expects to take control of media from the political, cultural, technological and economic perspectives.

Authoritarian government refers to the government that concentrates power in the hands of a leader or a small group of elites unelected by the people; and is opposed to individualism and democracy. Although authoritarian governments always claim that their existence is 'to protect the country and to provide discipline and order to its way of life' and that 'the traditional culture should be aggressively maintained against encroaching external or contemporary culture' (Robert McKenzie, 2006 73-74), the reality is in the opposite side that those basic components of a civil society like human rights, free information, free speech, social justice, etc. are almost eliminated or constrained in the so called order and traditional culture.

As what Myung-Jin Park, James Curran(1999) point out, authoritarian regimes can be divided into three major forms: single-party regime, military regime and religious regime. In Asia, countries can be entitled as authoritarian are <https://assignbuster.com/authoritarian-governments-in-seeking-of-media-management-politics-essay/>

Brunei (the executive authority lies with the unelected sultan), China (state under communist single party rule), Laos (a communist single party state), Burma (military rule), North Korea (one-party rule), Oman (ruled by a hereditary sultan, and no political parties are legal and no opposition movement), Qatar (ruled by hereditary emirates), Saudi Arabia Syria United Arab Emirates (ruled by hereditary emirates), Vietnam (communist single-party state).

Media in these authoritarian regimes can be either privately or publicly owned but must resort to the control of the state. Such control means that the media are never allowed to expose the information that opposes the will of ruling class or interest groups strictly related to the government. Media can criticize the government, but not the supreme level which takes the hold of the highest power. They have certain degree of freedom, but it is only restricted to the reports and programs unrelated to political areas, such as entertainment, sports, travel, etc.

In authoritarian rule, Robert McKenzie (2006) points out two procedures that are commonly implemented: censorship and punishment. In terms of the censorship of the media content, it involves two steps: state censorship and self-censorship. State censorship is applied when speech and communication are contrary to state objectives, then the content is banned for dissemination. Self-censorship is the act of intently censoring one's own publications, blogs, films, news scripts, TV programs or other means of expression without direct pressure from the authority, in order not to disseminate the content against the government objectives. So after

finishing one's work, he or she may remove inappropriate material for fear of <https://assignbuster.com/authoritarian-governments-in-seeking-of-media-management-politics-essay/>

sanction by the government. With the above two kinds of censorship, media only speak the voice of the government or ruling class instead of the people.

With the regard to the punishment, the consequence is always conditioned by the seriousness of the ' illegal' content. In the authoritarian rule, " the state has the right to penalize individuals and media organizations for seditious libel" (Robert McKenzie, 2006). Since the authoritarian societies are under the rule of men instead of law, the punishment can be various types according to the leaders' will, such as confiscating private facilities, incarceration of media professionals, expiration, long-term prison, or even death.

The content of media in different countries may vary, but one common feature of the authoritarian states in Asia is that media are controlled or owned by the state. Therefore, the information the audience received in the media reflect not the interest of the people but the ruling class, no matter how capable or how hard-working the leaders are, because it is the system of a state that decides the role of the media.

â...;Reasons for the authoritarian seeking to control the media

According to Denis Mcquail(2005), there are four types of control over media: control of content for political reasons; control of content for cultural and/or moral reasons; control of infrastructures for technical reasons; and control infrastructures for economic reasons. These reasons can serve as a guideline for the author to explore further.

1. Control for political reasons

The influence of media in political societies is immense and should never be underestimated. As what Katrin Voltmer and Gary Rawnsley (2010) point out, the function of media in democratic society is to (a) provide a forum where all voices can be heard and engage in a dialogue with each other, and (b) to act as a watchdog of the government. However, the effect of these above two functions are what the authoritarian ruling elites want to decrease, because they are not only the functions, but inherent nature of media, and if without control, the innate force will bring the media to the people's side. Then the pluralistic opinions and voices will appear that are unlikely all to conform to the political will proposed by the ruling elites.

But if we stand at the point of the authoritarian government, the control seems to be necessary, because the media have 'too much potential power that could be used to unseat the state or destabilize the country' (Robert McKenzie, 2006 73-74). What the authoritarian governments most badly need is stability, for in chaos the power of the people will release and it is uneasy to be taken control again. Take China as an example. The government makes every effort to forbid the expressions related to Tiananmen event in 1989, for fear of arousing another wave of opponents that might shake the foundation of the superstructure. Although the information is blocked in mainland China, related videos, books, magazines and reports from abroad still remain hard evidence, which can be a great threat against the authority of communist party. Only if those media become inaccessible to people can the central government avoid losing support from

the public. Therefore, the authoritarian media can also be a watchdog, but to watch people instead of the government.

Beside, given that the president or premier or the elite ruling group has the high morality, responsibility, wisdom and really concern the people, it is unlikely for them to make sure that every official they appoint or appointed by their appointers other than through the election from the people obey the principles of the constitution. Holding great power and backed by the superior, bureaucratism, red-tapism and corruption will generate, which means that only by controlling the media can they cover their bad deeds, without knowing from the above and the public. But if even the supreme rulers or elites group have ulterior or scandal of their own, degree of control will be much stricter and the free of media is far from possible.

In addition, since the media belong to the government, they can be used as a powerful agency to propagate, reinforce and sublimate the value and merits of the ruling concept, thus win more trust and understanding over disagreement. The news from the state-owned media is always the wise decisions and favorable policies which give the people hope and better future, but seldom is there any voice that directly criticizes the state leaders or central government.

2. Control for cultural reasons

Almost all authoritarian countries in Asia have their unique as well as dominating traditional or political culture. These cultures not only determine the patterns of thought of the people, but also provide a well constructed harbor for the elite ruling groups to prevent their regime from the impact of

the outside world. Media, therefore, can serve as a useful tool to further strengthen the preexisted culture on the one hand, and to broadcast and spread the domestic culture to the world on the other. In this sense, to control the media is to some extent to control the mind of the mass people. The following analysis will focus on the analysis from several powerful cultures.

The most distinguished culture in Asia may be Islamism, a belief that Islam is a political ideology, as well as a faith. For this culture, to control the media is to maintain the purity of the people's thought and enhance the loyalty to the god.

“ It is a modernist claim that political sovereignty belongs to God, that the Sharia should be used as state law, that Muslims form a political rather than a religious bloc around the world and that it is a religious duty for all Muslims to create a political entity that is governed as such.”(<http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/faqs.html>)

Based on the above definition, religious belief becomes legitimate tool and people's behaviors are judged by the Qur'an. They believe in one God and resist other religions. Then the Islamic content is dominant in media. The western thought, belief, values as well as culture are severely censored and are considered conflict to Islam. For them, the religion and politic are tied extremely close to each other. So if the religion or culture is affected by outside or different impact, the political rule will also be impaired.

Another powerful culture is communist culture. In this culture, to control the media is to prevent the attack and cultural impact from the outside world. In <https://assignbuster.com/authoritarian-governments-in-seeking-of-media-management-politics-essay/>

present China, North Korea, Laos, Vietnam, the culture is shaped by communist party rather than Confucianism, even though some parts of the behaviors and thoughts still follow the principles proposed by Confucius. Communist culture is relatively young but very influential. At the very beginning of the communist party, those vanguards did set up educational and honorable examples that inspire the fellow country men and women to fight against outside invasion. They did win people's trust that the communist party will bring them freedom, democracy and equality. But communism is based on the philosophy proposed by Karl Marx that it is possible to create an egalitarian or classless society by means of working as a collective whole. Besides, there is a huge difference of the definition of democracy. While western world regard democracy as characterized by free speech, two or multiparty and mass election, the communism believe that the democracy is to liberate people and let people become the sovereign master. Ever since the Marxism was applied by the developing countries, the capitalism has become their enemy. The western thought and value as well as ways of running economy are all considered as against the communist belief. Therefore, everything from the western world is banned or defined as evil. In extreme case like North Korea, the image of the party is always the representative of justice, while those western capitalist societies are shown as the lack enlightenment of communist thought. In this environment, the people are deprived of the idea to fight against free speech, liberty and democracy, because as what media show, there are in this process.

3. Control for technological reasons

With the development of high technology, especially the booming of the internet, the battle between media control and anti-control has been largely upgraded. " Modern communications technologies mean that authoritarian governments find it ever more difficult to hermetically seal their borders and prevent their people from receiving often uncomfortable news, information and opinion from overseas sources" (Katrin Voltmer and Gary Rawnsley, 2010). On the other hand, the ruling elites clearly know that to control the core technology is to hold the initiative advantage, so the high technology is not only widely applied by people, but also by the government as a fairly useful tool to exercise censorship, underground investigation as well as supervisory.

In other word, the authoritarian government plays the role of defense, while the dissidents and civil right fighters act as the role of offense, and the rest becomes the audience, looking on the development of the game. This means that even though people can create some software to get access to the blocked information, government then can renew the fire-wall and all kinds of software to block the sensitive expressions, detect the opinion initiators, or even control them. After all, the power of individuals is relatively small. They do not have enough economic income to keep them fighting longer. They are intelligent and are able to find the flaw of the censorship system, but seldom is there anyone daring to cross the bottom line of the ruling class. However, the government has sufficient financial support. It can establish well-equipped companies and hire a group of highly professional hackers or internet veterans to help the information control and monitoring.

New technology or the new media does provide the citizens with a platform to voice out their opinions and unfair experience with the government and the exposed officials will do meet their deserved consequence. Nevertheless, no government wants its system to be corrupted and then lose its efficiency. In this sense, new technology also helps the government to find a new method to govern the stuff and officials.

4. Control for economic reasons

When studying the media issues, economic respect should be considered, for mass media is not only a social institution, but also an industry. With the regard to the present essay, the reasons of media control from the economic perspective are mainly focused on the issue of ownership.

Altschull(1984) in his ' second law of journalism' says: ' the contents of media always reflect the interests of those who finance them.' That is to say, the economic structure of the state decides the structure of the media industry, thus determines the role of media. Specifically, in authoritarian regime, the state owns the media, and the main sources of income are advertising, consumer revenue as well as the state financial support. What should be noticed is that the most powerful enterprises in authoritarian states are commonly the state-owned or royal relates-owned industries, which contribute a lion share of the advertising investments. Those state-owned companies not only have continuously financial support from the central government, but also take control of the choices of the consumers, in other word, the market. The vulnerable private media companies, though exist, can seldom have the opportunities to set foot in the most influential

market like broadcasting industry and are faced with severe competition
<https://assignbuster.com/authoritarian-governments-in-seeking-of-media-management-politics-essay/>

from various aspects. Then the domination of powerful state-owned companies in communication industries remains as an impassable barrier for private sectors. Consequently, since the government controls the market, that media are controlled becomes a nature process.

â...ç Conclusion

The study of the relationship between government and the media involves a various range of research and analysis. The present essay at first introduces the situation of media in authoritarian regimes in Asia. When media are unable to perform as an agent of democratic transition and consolidation, they become the important means of enforcing the authoritarian or totalitarian rule. Serving as the lapdog and gatekeeper of the government and accompanied by the relevant law and policy, the position of media is fixed and can hardly be changed. Consequently, the people have to be careful with the serious censorship and take the risk of being punished if they seek to rebel the government will.

The purpose for government to control the media can be analyzed in four aspects. The first one is the political aspect that government takes the media as a useful tool to maintain the stability of ideology, reinforce the governance and to hide truth and dirt deeds of the rulers themselves. In terms of the cultural reasons, the author tries to find result from studying to distinctive cases of Islam culture and communist culture. A common feature of the both cultures is that the government seeks to manipulate media through keeping the purity of the culture, thus erecting a shield to resist the western democratic thought and culture. With the regard to the

technological sphere, the government does realize the potential threat from <https://assignbuster.com/authoritarian-governments-in-seeking-of-media-management-politics-essay/>

the booming internet communication, so they intently act as a powerful defender to defend the attack from the domestic and abroad on the one hand, and makes most use of the high technology to strengthen itself on the other. The last reason is from the economic sphere that since the authoritarian government has the huge influence on the market, it influences the media industry as well. Owned and financed by state-run enterprises, the media industry is unchallengeably controlled by the government.

All in all, the media independence is a long process, and the freedom of media and information follows the political reform, cultural transformation and globalization, technological advancement as well as economic development. Although media are controlled, they are still able to play a significant role in pushing forward the social progress of these authoritarian countries in Asia,