

Interpreting the City

Portrayals of Place in a Toronto-area Ethnic Newspaper

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the sense of place portrayed in *Ming Pao*, a Chinese-language daily newspaper published in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Mapping and content analysis of local news stories and photographs show that while the newspaper provides more coverage of the Chinese community than the mainstream media, there is an overwhelming emphasis on homeland news and a relatively limited range and amount of local news coverage. These findings, combined with the newspaper's preoccupation with crime and lack of representation of other ethnic groups in a metropolitan area of unparalleled diversity, result in a portrait of the GTA that is incomplete and potentially misleading.

INTRODUCTION

WALKING ALONG TORONTO'S BLOOR STREET is like taking a mini world tour. Traveling west from the intersection of Bloor and Yonge Street in the heart of the city, you pass a half-dozen Korean greengrocers, nail salons staffed by aestheticians from Vietnam, numerous sushi bars, a Hungarian deli, butcher shops run by Portuguese and Italian families, private clubs where elderly Greek men play cards and drink espresso, a smattering of Indian, Ethiopian and Thai restaurants, a Salvadoran taco joint and a Peruvian store that sells nopales (pickled cactus), corn tortillas and other Mexican favorites. And that's just in the first 25 short blocks.

The Greater Toronto Area (GTA) is home to more than 200 different ethnic groups, making it one of the world's most ethnically diverse metropolitan areas (City of Toronto 2008). Between 2001 and 2006 nearly 450,000 new immigrants settled in the GTA (Statistics Canada 2007) including many who looked to ethnic newspapers—publications that target readers from a particular group in their own language—for

help in making sense of their new home. Ten ethnic newspapers (Diversity Institute 2010) publish daily while more than 200 other ethnocultural publications appear less frequently (DiversiPro 2007) and are distributed free, often in stores and restaurants like the establishments along Bloor Street.

Scholars have identified gaps in our understanding of how these newspapers and other ethnic media represent the ethnic voice, the content generated by these outlets and when immigrants turn to them for information (Mahtani 2008). This study investigates how one of the GTA's largest-circulation ethnic newspapers, the Chinese-language daily *Ming Pao*, represents the metropolitan area in its local news coverage. What sense of the place is conveyed by the newspaper? And what are the potential consequences of this portrayal? A research methodology that combines computer-aided mapping of the newspaper's geographic patterns of local news coverage with content analysis of photographs and stories is used to answer these questions.

SENSE OF PLACE AND THE ROLE OF NEWSPAPERS

Ideas about place have evolved over time from a focus on location, distance and spatial patterns, to an approach that acknowledges the human tendency to endow places with meaning (Cresswell 1996, 2004, 2009; Relph 1976; Tuan 1977). Sense of place, for the purposes of this study, refers to the feelings and emotions evoked by a place as a result of both individual experiences and a shared sense of meaning of a place cultivated through the consumption of images, information and ideas. Cresswell (2009) illustrates how place can be interpreted when he observes that a city such as Baghdad has a physical presence that consists of everything from markets, mosques and homes to businesses and, in recent years, military checkpoints. The sense of place associated with the city, however, varies according to whether you are an American soldier, a local merchant, a traveler who visited the country in more peaceful times, or a newspaper reader sitting comfortably in Toronto.

A similar analysis can be applied to the Greater Toronto Area. Located in southern Ontario, it is an agglomeration of high-rise towers, shopping malls, urban retail hubs, museums, religious institutions, newer suburban housing developments and an older, high-density downtown. Yet individuals forge a different sense of the place based on first-hand experiences and messages conveyed by the media. Visitors who get trapped in rush-hour traffic between the airport and downtown, spend all their time in the concrete jungle of the central financial district, and experience the wider city only by watching television news in their hotel rooms, might leave thinking of the place as unfriendly, congested and chaotic. Young artists who follow blogs about city culture and are caught up in the creative energy of their down-at-the-heels neighborhoods might see the GTA as a vibrant place of opportunity. Affluent boomers from the city's older, downtown neighborhoods who listen to the morning traffic reports about commuter hell, might see themselves as residents of a hip, sustainable oasis surrounded by car-dependent,

sprawling, characterless communities. New immigrants who rely on the ethnic news media to gain an understanding of their adopted home might see the GTA as...as what? Recognizing that newspapers are key players in conveying experiences of place, this study seeks to answer that question.

Benedict Anderson (1991) pointed to the role of newspapers in the formation of a nation, which he described as “an imagined political community...imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (p. 6). Paek, Yoon and Shah (2005) argue that this concept is applicable at the regional or city level in that readers come to understand community norms and issues through “the simultaneous consumption or ‘imagining’ of the stories in local newspapers” (p. 590). As cities expanded, newspapers began providing newcomers with information, news and images that allowed them to vicariously experience places and become “acquainted” with people they would never personally encounter (Kaniss 1991; Park 1923). Newspapers, in other words, do more than just transmit facts – they construct a reality.

The symbolic representation of a metropolitan area such as the GTA in an ethnic publication matters for a number of reasons. In the first instance, as Zhou and Cai (2002) observe, ethnic news outlets provide immigrants with roadmaps that help them “navigate unknown and foreign territories” (p. 435). In cultural geography terms, Cresswell (1996, 2009) argues that the news media communicates information about the rules as well as commonly accepted norms and ideas about what should—and shouldn’t—happen in a place.

Experiencing a place through the pages of an ethnic newspaper can also strengthen newcomers’ bonds with their adopted communities: “What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value,” Yi-Fu Tuan wrote in *Space and Place* (1977, p. 6.). In their study of ethnic media serving Latin and Asian neighborhoods in Los Angeles, Lin and Song (2006) explicitly linked news media and attachment to place, observing that “ethnic media can also connect people to events and issues of community life that may engender feelings of allegiance and ties to the community” (p. 366).

Other researchers have established a relationship between newspaper readership and political participation (McLeod et al. 1996; McLeod, Scheufele and Moy 1999; Friedland 2001; Paek, Yoon and Shah 2005; Mahrt 2008). In their investigation of the role that multi-level storytelling (by city-wide media, community media, including ethnic media, and among individual residents) plays in residents’ sense of belonging and community engagement, Ball-Rokeach, Kim and Matei (2001) examined neighborhood “storytelling” in seven ethnic neighborhoods in Los Angeles. Story telling on all levels, they concluded, is an essential part of the process whereby people go from “being occupants of a house to being members of a neighborhood” (p. 394). Immigrant neighborhoods with a high proportion of recently arrived residents (Chinese and Koreans), they noted,

tended to have local media that focused on reporting news from the home country and experienced lower levels of belonging than the more established African-American and Latino neighborhoods.

THE “LOCAL” SENSE OF PLACE IN NEWSPAPERS

A variety of indicators can be used to assess the role a newspaper plays in shaping a local (defined here as stories and photographs that deal primarily with events, people, issues and places in the GTA) sense of place. Buchanan (2009) argues that the number of local news items a newspaper carries relative to stories about other geographic locations is a key indicator of the publication’s contribution to establishing a sense of place in readers’ minds. Mentions of specific place names—streets, intersections, neighborhoods, institutions—further denote proximity and create a sense of familiarity (Cheng 2005; Cresswell 2004; Hallin 1986). Photographs also play a significant role in constructing a sense of place in that they introduce newspaper readers to both strangers and unknown locales, adding new layers to residents’ imagined community.

The location of a news item in a newspaper is another way to gauge its contribution to shaping perceptions of place. Placement of a local story on page one of a publication tells readers the topic and the story deserve attention; if a news item appears in the back pages, this indicates that, in the editors’ judgment, the item is less significant (Barnhurst and Nerone 2003; Buchanan 2009; Cheng 2005).

The subjects dealt with in local news coverage also send a variety of messages about both the physical place and the people in it. To the extent that ethnic media outlets are “cultural interpreters,” as Ojo (2006) put it, extensive coverage of the local professional hockey team, for instance, tells newcomers that hockey is a local obsession – indeed, the Toronto Maple Leafs’ decades-long losing streak brings people together for bouts of mutual commiseration. Local news coverage of political events conveys messages to readers about who wields power and how political decisions are made. The entertainment section “acquaints” readers with local celebrities, clubs and restaurants. The attention devoted to crime communicates messages about safety and insecurity in neighborhoods and the city as a whole.

METHODOLOGY

Why Ming Pao?

Ming Pao is the second-largest Chinese-language daily newspaper in the Greater Toronto Area (consisting of the City of Toronto and the regions of York, Peel, Durham and Halton) and one of the largest ethnic newspapers in the country with a daily circulation of 51,000, weekly readership of 227,000 and 500,000 visits per month to the online site Mingpaoto.ca (Chan 2010).

The Hong Kong-based transnational company Media Chinese International Limited launched both the Toronto and Vancouver editions of *Ming Pao* in 1993. The

company publishes five newspapers in 14 editions in North America, Southeast Asia and China (*Ming Pao Daily News* 2010). The Toronto-area broadsheet is printed seven days a week, sold by subscription and on newsstands, and typically contains about 80 pages of editorial content and advertisements.

At the time of this study, the newspaper was produced by an editorial staff of 35 people consisting of 14 editors, 10 reporters, three photographers, five translators, two graphic designers and one library staff member who all work out of a newsroom in suburban northeast Toronto. GTA content was the responsibility of a 15-member team - two senior editors, nine general news reporters, one local business and finance reporter and three photographers (Lam 2010).

Ming Pao serves the second largest visible minority group in the GTA after South Asians. Residents of Chinese background make up 9.6 per cent (486,300) of the more than five million people in the Toronto census metropolitan area (Statistics Canada 2006a). Although the Toronto CMA is slightly smaller in area than the Greater Toronto Area, it captures all but about 6,000 of the GTA's population of Chinese-origin (City of Toronto 2008; Statistics Canada 2006a). One fifth of the Chinese population arrived between 2001 and 2006 and 74.7 per cent are foreign born (Statistics Canada 2006a).

While earlier waves of immigrants settled in Chinatowns located in the downtown area, more recent arrivals have established themselves in the GTA's suburban northeast. The City of Toronto's Scarborough area and the municipalities of Markham and Richmond Hill now include thriving suburbs that are home to many Chinese-Canadians, hundreds of businesses run by entrepreneurs of Chinese origin and some of the largest Chinese-themed shopping malls in North America (Wong 2009).

Residents of Chinese origin make up 25 per cent and 50 per cent of the population in some census tracts in these suburban communities. This population concentration, combined with the existence of thriving ethnic businesses, services, institutions and associations, has led researchers to identify these areas as ethnic enclaves (Qadeer, Agrawal and Lovell 2009). Residents of these enclaves, like all Canadians, have access to English and French-language news produced by a wide range of media organizations (Keown 2006), but many Chinese-Canadians still embrace ethnic news sources. One survey of first-generation Chinese Canadians older than 18 in the GTA and the Greater Vancouver area found that while 30 per cent of respondents read both English and Chinese-language newspapers and magazines, 52 per cent read Chinese-language publications exclusively (Ipsos Reid 2007). A newspaper such as *Ming Pao* would also be an essential resource for the 77,000 Toronto-area residents who list a Chinese language as their mother tongue but speak neither of Canada's official languages (Statistics Canada 2006b).

Coding procedure

Chinese immigrants do not share a single language, but most can read the single unified written Chinese language in its traditional or simplified version. Two coders fluent in

Chinese coded *Ming Pao*, which is published in traditional form.

Although research on content analysis suggests that two constructed weeks are adequate to produce reliable data that is representative of a full year (Riffe, Aust and Lacy 1993), this study examined 28 issues of the newspaper published between Jan. 7, 2008, and Aug. 23, 2008. The coders counted local news items (stories and photographs); news items about Canadian provincial or national news; China-related news items; and international (non-Canadian, non-China) news items.

They then coded each local item by subject (police/crime, education, transit/gridlock/sprawl/traffic, fire/accident, business, sports or religious-cultural diversity/multiculturalism/immigration etc.) Local articles and photographs were further classified according to a more detailed subject category so that police/crime items, for instance, could be categorized as violent crime, white-collar crime or traffic-related criminal offences. Data were also collected on the location of the item in the newspaper and on references to racial or ethnic groups.

References to places in articles and photographs and sources' addresses where sources were explicitly associated with a residence, business or organization were also identified. After entering the geographic locations into the database, Arc-GIS—an information system that uses hardware and software to store, retrieve, map and analyze geographic data—was used to translate the spatial references into a news map for each local news item. The software assigned dots or points to specific map locations and used polygons to represent areas such as neighborhoods, entire cities or the GTA as a whole when they were referenced in news items. These individual news maps were then combined to generate a dot density map that shows all spatial references to locations contained in local news items.

Following coder training, a full intercoder reliability test was conducted based on the standards and guidelines outlined by Lombard, Snyder-Duch and Campanella Bracken (2002).

Finally, for the purposes of analysis, the results of the *Ming Pao* content analysis and mapping are compared with the results of an earlier study that looked at the *Toronto Star's* local news coverage over the same period (Lindgren, 2009). Tak Yin Lam, deputy editor in chief of *Ming Pao*, noted in an interview that it would be unfair to compare the amount of local news in his newspaper with local news coverage by Canada's largest-circulation daily newspaper with its legions of reporters (Lam 2010). Inclusion of the *Star* data, however, highlights variations in the content of newspapers that serve different markets and are subject to different editorial, economic and competitive pressures. Additional details of the coding instruments, procedures and instructions are available from the author.

RESULTS

Local news

Eight per cent or 1,157 photographs and stories published in *Ming Pao* during the study

period were determined to be local. By comparison, 39 per cent of news items published in the *Toronto Star* on the same days dealt with local issues (Figure 1).

More than half of all photographs and news items published in *Ming Pao* dealt with issues, events and people in China (Figure 2).

Figure 1.
Local vs. non-local news in *Ming Pao* and the *Toronto Star*.

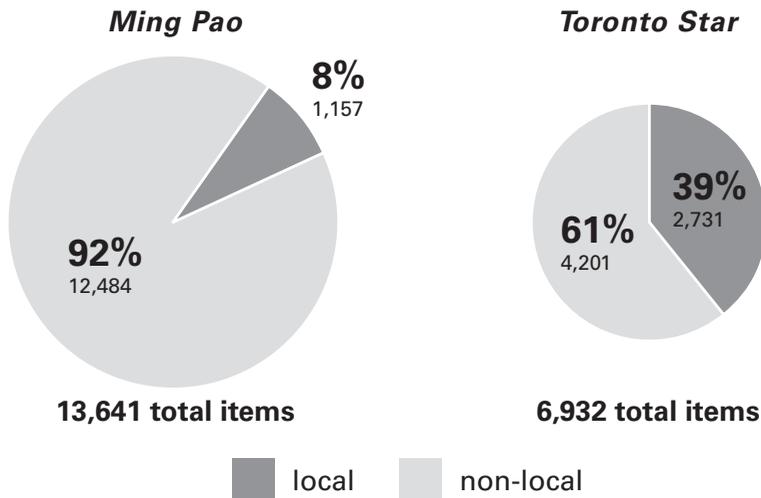
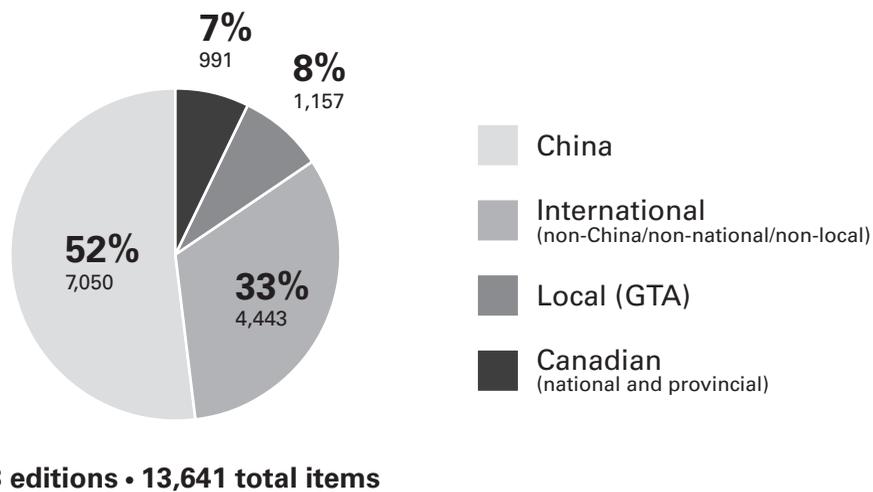


Figure 2.
Geographic breakdown of *Ming Pao* content.



Geography of local news

The 1,157 local news items in *Ming Pao* contained 1,699 geographic references compared with 5,697 geographic references in the *Toronto Star*. Subsequent mapping of these geographic references from the two daily newspapers revealed very different spatial patterns of news coverage. While the *Toronto Star's* coverage clearly focused on the downtown area of the City of Toronto (Lindgren 2009), the dot density map for *Ming Pao* reveals a cluster in Toronto's downtown area near the largest of the original Chinatowns and another cluster to the northeast where more recent immigrants have settled (Figure 3).

Ming Pao's news coverage is particularly concentrated in the relatively few census tracts where residents of Chinese origin make up 25 per cent or more of the population.

Photographs

Ming Pao published 546 local photos during the period studied, but only 58 or 10.6 per cent could be associated with a location. The rest featured individuals or groups of people but did not include any explicit indication as to where the photograph was taken. Mapping of the photo locations revealed only sparse representations of different places in the Greater Toronto Area, including even in the enclaves.

The front page

Ming Pao published 222 news items on its front page including 16 per cent or 35 that told readers about people, places and events in the GTA. By comparison, 59 per cent of the *Toronto Star's* front page news during the same period dealt with local matters.

Crime news dominated *Ming Pao's* front-page local news content, accounting for 12 stories and photographs or 34 per cent of local page one coverage (Figure 4). The second largest news category dealt with local efforts and activities related to international events/security (NS) – in this case mostly news about the local Chinese community's response to the May 12, 2008, earthquake in China's Sichuan province.

Local news content

Police and crime news emerged as the most common topic in *Ming Pao's* local news coverage overall (Figure 5), accounting for 209 items or 18 per cent of all local news.

Stories and photographs dealing with religious or cultural diversity, multiculturalism or immigration matters (RI) were the second most common topic (14 per cent), closely followed by business news (13 per cent).

By comparison, the top three local news subjects in the *Toronto Star* were sports (19 per cent), followed by arts and entertainment coverage (18 per cent). Crime coverage ranked third, accounting for 13 per cent of all local news content.

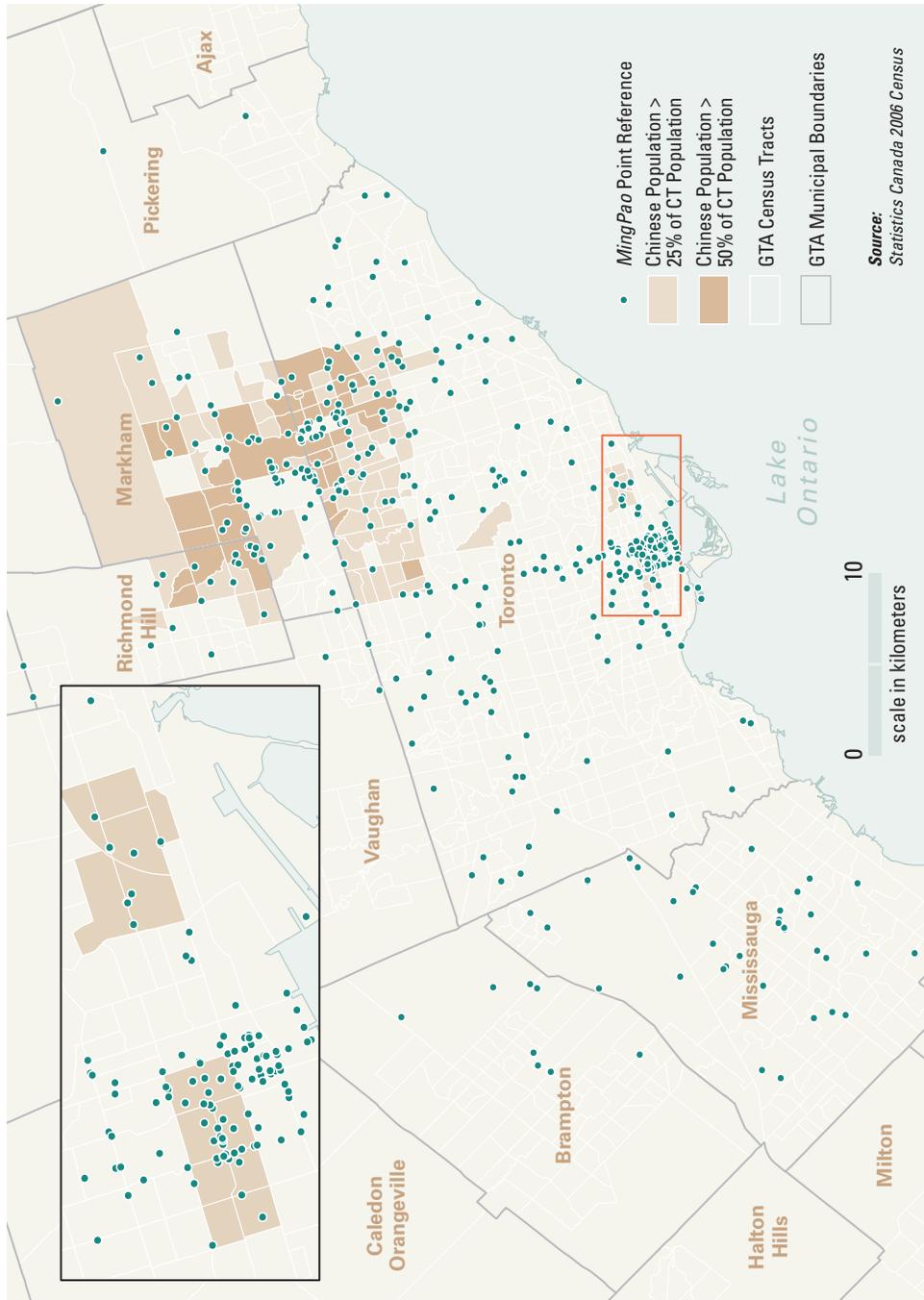


Figure 3. Concentrations of Chinese-origin population and distribution of *Ming Pao* 2008 news-item place references in the Greater Toronto Area.

Figure 4.
Breakdown by subject of local front-page news items in *Ming Pao*.

Code	Description	Number of News Items	% of Total News Items
PO	Police/crime/legal/courts/ local public safety	12	34
NS	Local impact of national security/terrorism/ foreign policy/foreign disasters/human rights/ Canadian soldiers/casualties	6	17
ED	Education	5	14
RI	Religious-cultural diversity/ multiculturalism/immigration	4	11
TR	Transit/gridlock/sprawl/traffic	3	9
BU	Business	2	6
HE	Health/ health protection/medical	2	6
MU	Municipal politics/ services/budget	1	3

Spatial patterns of local news topics

The mapping by subject of local news items in *Ming Pao* revealed two distinct patterns. The news map for local stories and photographs dealing with religious or cultural diversity, multiculturalism or immigration stories illustrates the pattern that prevailed for most news topics (Figure 6). Most obviously, the dot density maps illustrate that news coverage of these topics was confined mostly within the Chinese enclaves. Furthermore, news items on these topics tended to reference the Chinese community as illustrated by the light-colored dots.

This pattern—a spatial focus on the enclaves and an emphasis on news involving the Chinese community—did not apply in three instances (environment/weather; social supports/affordable housing/poverty/social justice; transit/gridlock/sprawl), where there were too few news items to analyze. And in two categories the maps were substantially different.

The two exceptions were police/crime coverage and fire/accident coverage. In these cases, (Figure 7), news coverage was much less concentrated in the enclaves and much less focused on the Chinese community.

Figure 5.
All local news in *Ming Pao* broken down by subject.

Code	Description	Number of News Items	% of Total News Items
PO	Police/crime/legal/courts/ local public safety	209	18
RI	Religious-cultural diversity/ multiculturalism/immigration	164	14
BU	Business	145	13
AE	Arts/entertainment/ local attractions	121	10
NS	Local impact of national security/terrorism/ foreign policy/foreign disasters/human rights/ Canadian soldiers/casualties	102	9
ED	Education	72	6
SP	Sports	69	6
HE	Health/ health protection/medical	66	6
FA	Fire/ accident	48	4
MU	Municipal politics/ services/budget	36	3
FP	Federal or provincial politics/ initiatives/local angle	27	2
TR	Transit/gridlock/sprawl/traffic	26	2
OT	Other/pets/travel/human interest	23	2
EW	Environment/weather	21	2
SO	Social supports/affordable housing/ poverty/social justice	21	2
LU	Land use/urban design/development /redevelopment	7	1

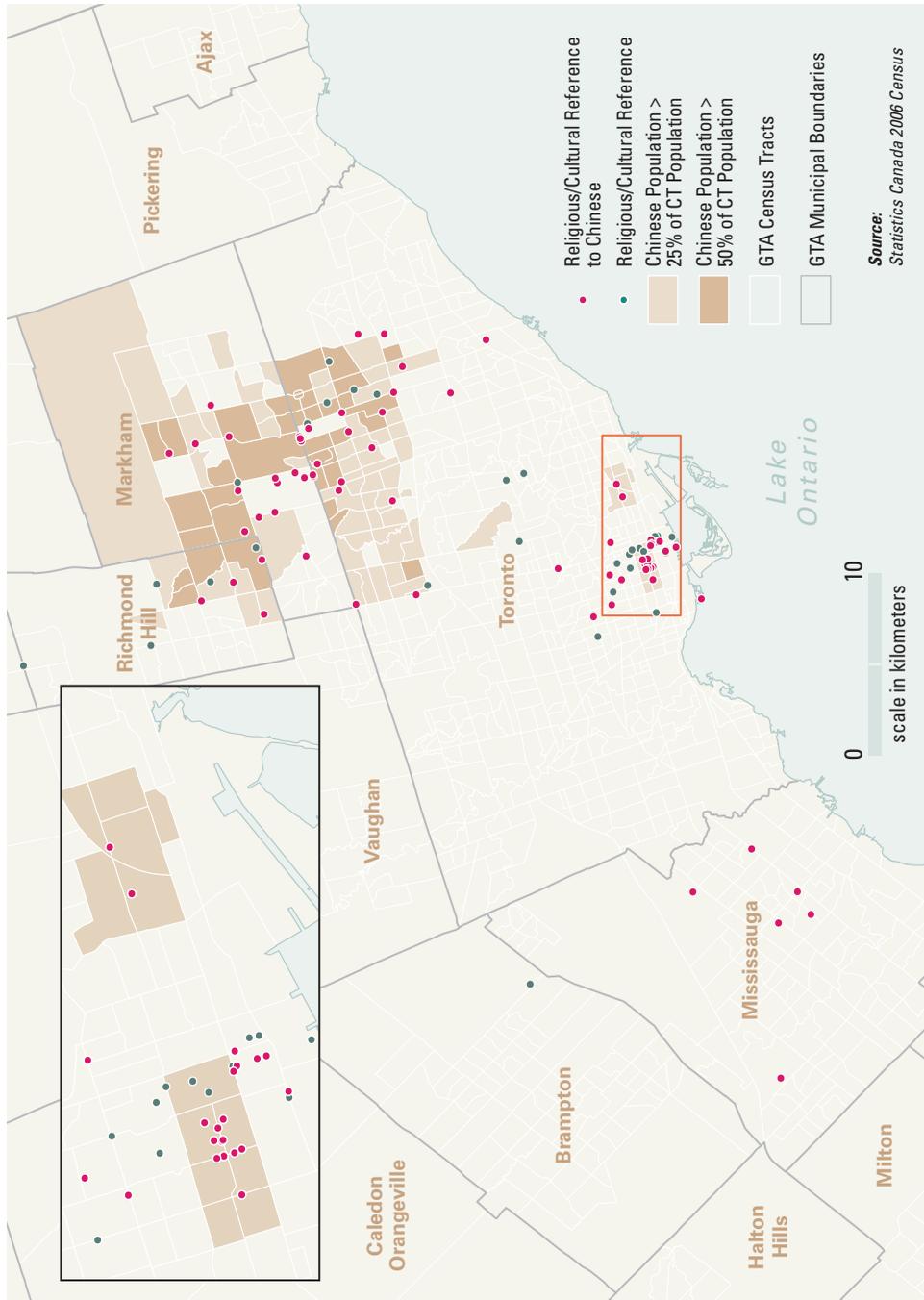


Figure 6. Concentrations of Chinese-origin population and distribution of geographic references in *Ming Pao* 2008 religious/cultural news items in the Greater Toronto Area.

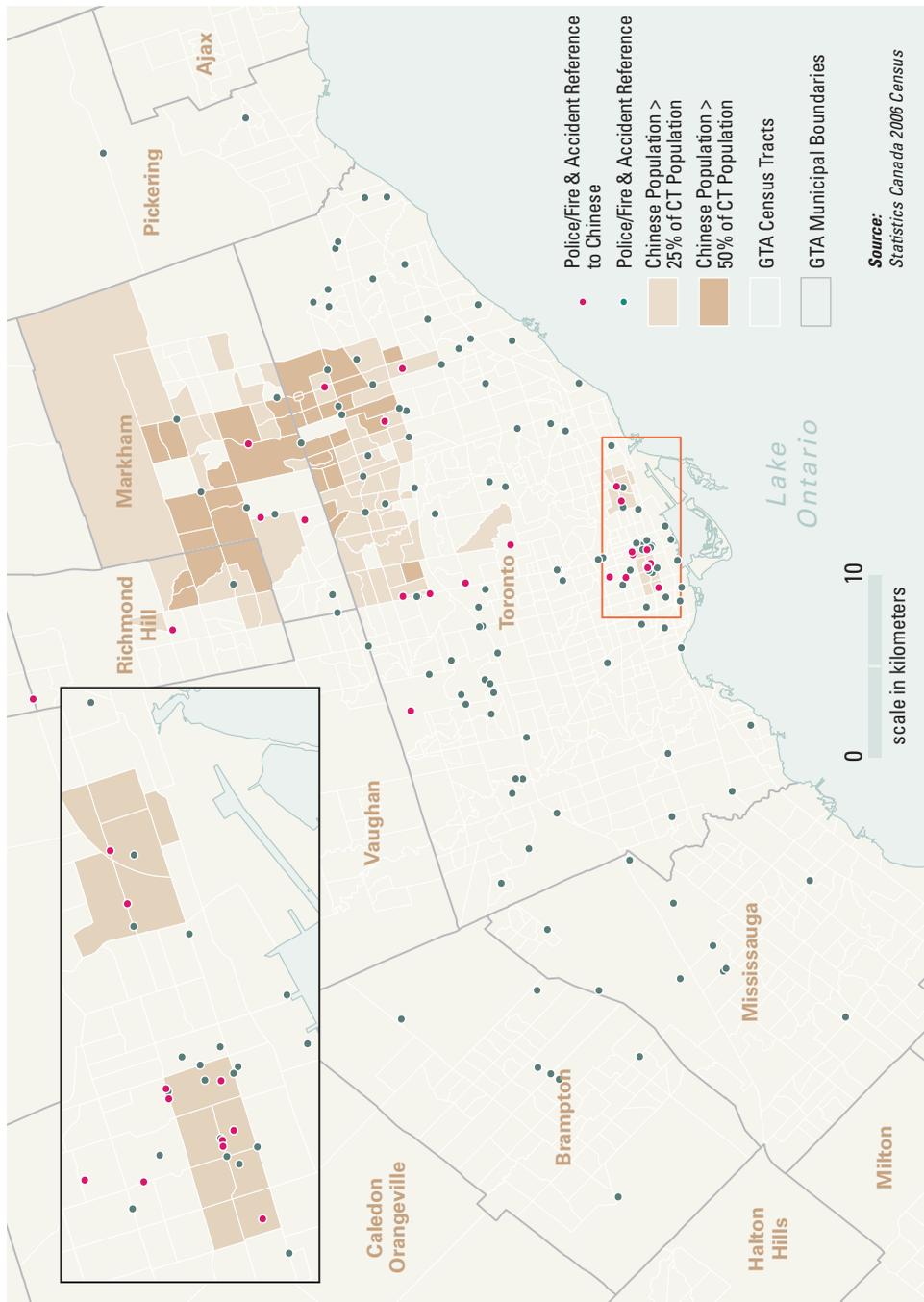


Figure 7. Concentrations of Chinese-origin population and distribution of geographic references in *Ming Pao* 2008 police/fire & accident news items in the Greater Toronto Area.

Diversity representation

References to ethnic or racial groups appeared in 613 or 53 per cent of local news items in *Ming Pao*. Chinese community references appeared most frequently, appearing in 329 news items or 28 per cent of all local stories and photographs. The remaining 284 news items mentioned a total of 22 different racial or ethnic groups or regional groupings. After Chinese, the group most often referenced in the newspaper were members of the white community, who appeared 174 times exclusively in photographs. The black community appeared in 34 times in photographs and 11 times in news stories. References to different racial or ethnic groups declined precipitously after that, however, with 11 of the 22 groups mentioned in the newspaper making only a single appearance.

DISCUSSION

Sreberny (2005) argues that a new sense of belonging does not have to erase and replace older affiliations. Cheng (2005), meanwhile, concluded that ethnic news outlets cultivate a dual sense of local through news that portrays the adopted community in terms of place, and home-country news that is told in terms of stories about people. Similarly, sense of place does not have to be an either-or proposition: the sense of place newcomers import from home and the mental map they develop to make sense of their host community can co-exist. It's important to acknowledge, however, that the two places do not start out on an equal footing in the imagination of most newcomers. *Ming Pao*, through the publication of homeland news, helps people maintain the images and ideas central to the imagined community they left behind. When it comes to a sense of their adopted place, however, most immigrants begin with a blank canvas. Journalists working for ethnic news outlets such as *Ming Pao* are like painters who apply layers of color to that canvas.

The publication of content that consists of 52 per cent China-related news and eight per cent local news points to a significant disparity in the attention and resources the newspaper allocates to the development, maintenance and nurturing of each sense of place. Indeed, *Ming Pao's* news coverage sends powerful messages to readers about the places that are important and deserving of readers' time and attention – and the GTA isn't top of the list.

The primacy of news from China is reinforced by the publication of relatively few photographs of actual places in the Greater Toronto Area and even within the Chinese community enclaves. The limited amount of local news published on the front page also suggests that relative to China-related news, it is the lesser priority. Agenda-setting theory suggests this has consequences because although news organizations play only a limited role in terms of shaping how readers think about issues, they play a major role in defining what readers think about (McCombs and Shaw 1972; Iyengar and Kinder 1987). Viewed in this light, the overwhelming dominance of homeland news on *Ming Pao's* front page encourages readers to deliberate China-related issues more so than local matters such as the latest scandal at city hall or property-tax hikes.

The news mapping of *Ming Pao's* reporting shows local news coverage is concentrated in the Chinese-Canadian enclaves of the GTA, an approach the deputy editor confirmed is a deliberate strategy (Lam 2010). This geographic focus makes sense from the newspaper's perspective in that it defines a coverage area that is more manageable for a 15-member local news team. Concentrating news coverage in the enclaves also attracts readers from those areas for delivery to *Ming Pao's* advertisers who operate businesses in the same neighborhoods.

The emphasis on enclave-focused news items and on news that specifically mentions the Chinese community ensures the group's stories are being told, something that does not happen in mainstream news organizations (Mahtani 2001). *Ming Pao*, for instance, published more than 300 local news items that explicitly mentioned (news articles) or depicted (in photographs) Chinese-Canadians. Over the same period, the *Toronto Star* carried only 21 news items (nine articles and 12 photographs) dealing exclusively with the Chinese community.

This focus on enclave and Chinese-community coverage partially explains the lack of recognition of other ethnic groups in the GTA: There are only so many reporting resources available on any given day. *Ming Pao* did publish a number of news items about a campaign by some members of the black community to establish an Africentric school in the City of Toronto, but the data indicate this focus on another ethnic community was a rarity.

Murray (2008) also found little inter-ethnic coverage in her examination of British Columbia's ethnic media, prompting her to worry that Canada "has traded twin solitudes for multiple solitudes" (p. 64). Ojo (2006) expressed concerns about the ethnic media's inward focus following his analysis of an English-language newspaper serving Montreal's black community, noting that it risks creating a situation where "cultures only talk to themselves instead of one another" (p.356).

The limited representation of other ethnic communities in *Ming Pao* suggests the paper is not portraying the human diversity that is a defining characteristic of daily life in the GTA, where 44 per cent of residents were born outside of Canada, where 40 per cent are visible minorities (Statistics Canada 2008) and where visible minorities are expected to be the majority by 2031 (Statistics Canada 2010).

It is obviously impossible for *Ming Pao* to extensively cover the events and concerns of all 200 ethnic groups in the GTA. But issues that other groups are grappling with—whether it is negative attitudes toward mental illness that deter people from seeking treatment or tensions that arise when immigration forces family members to live apart—could be the genesis of stories that explore the matter from a Chinese perspective using sources and examples from within the Chinese community. Stories that point to the challenges faced by other groups and then explore the issue in a Chinese context transcend the geographic confines of the enclaves and introduce ethnic communities to one another through the identification of common problems and challenges.

Journalistic storytelling on that level, however, requires sophisticated reporting and editing skills. The number of local news items published in *Ming Pao* relative to the size of its local news staff, however, suggests reporters have little time to produce much beyond basic accounts of daily events. The 13 frontline local news reporters and photographers generate 41 local news items per day for handling by two editors.

Scholarly research suggests that the training of reporters who work in ethnic media can also be a factor in the amount and quality of local news coverage (Husband 2005; Murray, Yu and Ahadi 2007; Zhou and Cai 2002). One survey, for instance, found that 41 per cent of the people producing ethnic news had no business or journalism training (Miller 2006). Researchers in British Columbia identified the belief in some ethnic communities that some publishers are in the business more for the money than to provide a voice for the community (Ahadi and Murray 2009).

While most of the journalists at *Ming Pao* did not study journalism in North America, the majority did receive formal training in mainland China or Hong Kong, and almost all had journalism experience prior to joining the paper (Lam 2010). The deputy editor-in-chief interviewed for this study said his staff is comfortable working in English and have from two to 10 years of experience (Lam 2010). He nonetheless welcomed the idea of additional training opportunities for reporters, noting that writing and reporting tips (even if they were provided in English) and sessions on Canadian law and human-rights issues would be of particular use.

The range of topics dealt with in *Ming Pao's* local coverage raises other concerns about the newspaper's portrayal of life in the GTA. The eight per cent of *Ming Pao's* content dealing with local matters does represent 1,157 news items, but closer examination of what initially appears to be a significant effort to acquaint readers with the Greater Toronto Area reveals that the range of subject matter covered is relatively limited. News about murder, mayhem, fires, accidents and injury, for instance, accounts for one in five local news items. These news items only infrequently mention the Chinese-Canadian community and, unlike most other news topics, they are covered on a GTA-wide basis. As a result, the mediated sense of place conveyed about geography beyond the enclaves is less than positive.

Shields(1992) argues that media coverage and other portrayals of space can result in the labeling of places in the same way individuals are labeled. To the extent that a place is labeled dangerous, it can lead to tangible consequences, such as decisions by individuals not to go there, and the adoption and justification of public policies and actions. Research also suggests there is a link between media reports on crime and peoples' fear of crime (Ditton, Chadee, Farrall, Gilchrist and Bannister 2004; Smolej and Kivivuori 2006).

This study did not attempt to measure an association between *Ming Pao's* news coverage and its readers' sense of safety or security. *Ming Pao's* deputy editor in chief, however, suggested the paper's crime coverage helps readers make judgments about their

personal security. “We want to tell the reader(s) what kind of crime is around them, so that they know which area is (more) safer, which area they have to keep an eye on their safety...that’s some information we think they need” (Lam 2010).

The preponderance of crime, fire and accident coverage—257 news items in all—also crowds out other types of news. Coverage of these topics, for instance, is almost as great as for nine other major news topics combined: The content analysis revealed there were only 299 news items related to education, health, municipal politics, local aspects of federal and provincial politics, transit issues, miscellaneous local matters, environmental and weather conditions, social supports and land-use debates. Yet news about these topics is central to the development of a sense of place and engagement and as Cresswell noted, plays a role in establishing, reinforcing and disseminating information about behavioral norms (Cresswell, 1996, 2009). The three per cent or 36 news items in the municipal politics subject category, for instance, dealt with matters such as a bylaw requiring City of Toronto residents to shovel the snow in front of their homes, red-light-running at intersections and fines for merchants whose shopping carts are abandoned on streets. Other municipal coverage highlighted garbage recycling and incineration issues, graffiti problems and new rules for lobbyists at city hall.

News coverage of local aspects of provincial and national issues was also scant, accounting for only two per cent of local news items. What there was of it—19 stories and 12 photos—covered topics ranging from the local impact of a provincial herbicide ban and cigarette sales regulations for convenience stores, to federal-election nominations in local ridings and provincial plans to build new nuclear plants on the eastern edge of the GTA.

The focus on crime, fire and accident coverage relative to political matters is of concern given the under-representation of the Chinese-Canadian community in active politics. Residents of Chinese background represented 11 per cent of the City of Toronto’s population in 2004, for instance, but held only two of the 90 municipal, provincial and federal seats (Siemiatycki 2008). By comparison, people of Italian background made up eight per cent of the population but held 17 seats. The absence of a liberal democratic tradition in China and the English-language challenges faced by recent Chinese immigrants may explain this stunted political and electoral participation (Siemiatycki 2008). Lack of information about local political issues and how the system works, however, cannot be ruled out as contributing factors.

Ming Pao’s business model helps explain the mix of stories it covers. The paper’s extensive China coverage is largely explained by the parent company’s daily distribution of stories and photos about mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan to its worldwide network of newspapers (Lam 2010). Access to this supply of news means *Ming Pao’s* news pages are filled regardless of its commitment to local coverage. New technologies further encourage the publication of homeland news in that *Ming Pao*, like a growing number of mainstream daily newspapers, takes delivery of publication-ready pages from a centralized newsroom that serves the whole chain. Editors in the Toronto newsroom

choose the China-related stories for the next day's paper and communicate their choices to a newsroom in China where the page making takes place. The centralized newsroom provides 30 to 40 of these ready-for-publication pages (including advertising pages) in every Toronto edition (Lam 2010).

Like other ethnic newspapers, *Ming Pao's* status as a relatively small-circulation daily also affects its news content (Husband 2005; Zhou and Cai 2002). Although the newsroom staff is large by the standards of most ethnocultural publications, the advertising base is still limited, making it financially difficult to hire more local journalists. Lam (2010), for instance, says the size of his reporting staff is his biggest challenge. "There (is) more news than we can cover," he observed.

The limited number of reporters available to satisfy the voracious news appetite of a daily publication also helps explain the high proportion of crime, fire and accident coverage in *Ming Pao*. The local news pages must be filled every day and crime stories are more readily available than other news because police forces run sophisticated media relations units that issue regular press releases and make officers available to brief journalists. One phone call to a police media relations officer can net a reporter numerous items; writing stories about other issues is more time consuming and less certain in terms of results.

Unlike many smaller ethnic publications, *Ming Pao* does purchase the Canadian Press wire service, which provides subscribers with extensive local, provincial and national news coverage. Translating these stories, however, is onerous and costly. The five translators in *Ming Pao's* Toronto newsroom supply the paper with 10 to 12 stories per day, most of them dealing with provincial and national issues, leaving the local news team to generate GTA-related stories (Lam 2010).

CONCLUSION

Newspapers convey powerful messages about the places they cover. At the most basic level, they communicate the importance of a place through the amount of local news that is published and the placement of local news in the paper. Through their work, journalists also have the power to foster readers' understanding of places and people through the choice of news topics presented. Local news coverage has the potential to label places and people in readers' minds, and it plays a role in convincing people to care about places so they actually become involved in trying to shape the future.

What portrait of the GTA does *Ming Pao* paint in the minds of its readers, particularly those readers who struggle with English and therefore have only limited access to other local news sources? In the starkest terms, the answer is a portrait that is incomplete and, in some ways, misleading.

Ming Pao's emphasis on news from home conveys a message about the importance of that place relative to readers' adopted place with implications for local engagement and understanding. The paper's preoccupation with crime, fire and accident stories

suggests newcomers have come to a place where personal safety is a potential concern. At the same time, it crowds out coverage of other issues that would help newcomers become acquainted with local norms and culture, including the diversity of the GTA's population.

Partnerships between ethnic media outlets and mainstream news organizations offer opportunities for content sharing that would bolster the amount of local news in ethnocultural publications (Diversity Institute 2010; Murray, Yu and Ahadi 2007). A multiethnic news service that translates local news generated by different ethnic media outlets and makes it available to all subscribers has also been proposed (Diversity Institute 2010; Karim, Eid and Ebanda de B'Berri 2007).

On the ground, at individual newspapers, providing more coverage that acquaints readers with the local place is possible assuming there is a willingness within ethnic news organizations to rethink news priorities and to redeploy at least some existing staff and resources. Simply putting more local news on the front page would be a cost-free start. A shift in emphasis from accident/fire/crime news to other topics, and a reallocation of at least some resources from homeland to local news coverage would be more challenging, but could be undertaken over time. Journalism schools and non-profit journalism organizations could encourage these shifts in emphasis by offering conferences and workshops designed to enhance reporting skills and encourage critical thinking about the role and news values of journalists working in ethnic news organizations.

The goal would be to generate better local news coverage. The winners would be the people who rely on that local news coverage to make sense of the place they now call home.

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