HANGZHOU, THE ORIGINS OF THE WORLD PRESS AND JOURNALISM?

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Western historians locate the origins of the newspaper in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This article demonstrates that newspaper-like periodicals known as chao-pao and xiao-pao emerged much earlier in Hangzhou, China during the Southern Song Dynasty. Journalistic activities in Hangzhou at this time were not only the most well developed in China but also considerably more advanced than those of any city in Western Europe. Contrary to the idea that the modern printing press and modern styles of journalism originated in Western Europe, this article argues that Hangzhou holds an important place in journalism history for its journalistic activities nearly nine centuries ago.

KEYWORDS Hangzhou; journalism history; journalistic activities; journalists; modern journalism; modern press

Introduction

Although periodicals of government news appeared regularly in Venice in the sixteenth century (Aliaksandrau 2013), it is now commonly believed that the first modern newspapers appeared in the early seventeenth century. Johannes Weber argues that the first newspaper was the German-language Relation aller Führnemmen und edenkührden Historien, printed in Strassburg in 1605 (Weber 2006). Mass media historian Paul Alfred Pratte, writing in a popular text for college-level American journalism history courses, asserts that the "prototype of the modern newspaper was born in Holland in the early seventeenth century" (Pratte 2008, 12). Edwin Emery's works also trace the modern newspaper to the "corantos," or proto-newspapers, in England and continental Europe in the early 1600s (Emery and Smith 1954, 3). German philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas (2000, 16, 20) added, the regular supply of news to the general public occurred only at the end of the seventeenth century; and the first journals called political journals appeared weekly at first, and daily as early as the middle of the seventeenth century. Western historians have typically relegated the Chinese contribution to the modern newspaper to the creation of paper 2000 years ago and the development of movable blocks of wooden type in the ninth century, but have not explored evidence that China produced early precursors to the modern newspaper long before their European counterparts. Possible Chinese antecedents to the modern newspaper receive only a few sentences in standard journalism histories in the United States. Without giving a date for its origin, Emery and Smith (1954, 5) noted, "The court gazette at Peiping [Beijing] is said to have been the oldest continuing newspaper in history, although it disappeared after the upheavals of the early twentieth century." Pratte (2008, 5) added that official, handwritten newspapers, which he called “ti pao,” appeared in the Tang Dynasty (618–907), spreading news to government officials via a postal network, and that this news circulated more widely during the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries. As for printing,
German sociologist Max Weber claimed that there was printing in China, but a printed literature, designed only for print and only possible through the press and periodicals, had previously been reported only in the Occident (Weber 2007, 6–8). Nearly all the scholars of journalism history agreed that the first printed newsheet or periodical, especially the first printed daily newspapers, originated in Germany.

This Eurocentric view has dominated Chinese academia as well as Western scholarship. There has been a strong inclination for Chinese journalism scholars to follow this dominant view and consequently nearly all Chinese journalism texts have identified Western Europe as the source of newspapers. In sharp contrast with this Eurocentric view, this article argues that journalism was practiced in China almost nine centuries ago, at least four centuries earlier than the first appearance of journalism in the Western world.

In Chinese history, the Song Dynasty (960–1279) is divided into two distinct periods: the Northern Song Dynasty (NSD, 960–1127) and the Southern Song Dynasty (SSD, 1127–1279). Hangzhou, now the capital of Zhejiang Province in China, was chosen as the capital city of China in the SSD. During the SSD, Hangzhou is believed to have been the largest city in the world with a population of more than 2 million (Abu-Lughod 1991, 337).

The author's evidence is based on classical Chinese literature. The article examines two kinds of precursors to modern newspapers: chao-pao (朝报) and xiao-pao (小报), both of which flourished during the SSD of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Chao-pao is from the words chao, for "court," and pao, for "paper." Xiao means "illegal," and xiao-pao were illegally produced, paid for, and circulated compilations of news, printed on paper and sold for profit, that summarized and commented on government events. Copies of these papers no longer exist, but this article argues that based on secondary literatures' descriptions of chao-pao and xiao-pao, they were early examples of the modern newspaper. In particular, the xiao-pao, which were first mentioned in Chinese literature in the year 1031, met several of the requirements of journalism, set out below.

What Were the Journalistic Activities in Hangzhou?

Media historian Mitchell Stephens (2000, 100) noted that the field of journalism history has been explored too narrowly through nationalistic narratives, which "obscure crucial connections and lineages and ignore telling comparisons, [and thus] they leave us unable to approach fundamental questions." This article attempts to explore fundamental questions about the origins of newspapers by first giving an overview of Hangzhou, chao-pao and xiao-pao, and then discussing whether there was journalism in Hangzhou.

After being chosen to be the capital of the SSD by the Song Empire in 1138, Hangzhou became a political, economic, cultural, and educational center. As a capital city, Hangzhou was a hub of important information, much of which could serve as the basis of news. Hangzhou was also characterized by a variety of activities, many of which appeared journalistic.

First, evidence indicates that in 981 or 983 the NSD central government, whose capital was Kaifeng, had formed an important agency known as the "information department," whose first supervisors were Zhang Wencan and Wang Li. The department gathered information about people of interest to the central government. The NSD's information department was responsible for communicating among all the departments of the central government, and between the central government and all local governments (Xu 1957, “The Official Position,” vol. 2, chap. 51). In the SSD, the information department...
The SSD central government made a series of laws and regulations to oversee the information department regarding collection, preparation, and distribution of information. According to the laws and regulations, staff members of the department were not allowed to collect information on their own initiative outside the department without permission. This collection and distribution of information would provide the basis for the early news media. Habermas (2000, 21) wrote about the role of the press in the seventeenth century communicating between government and audience, simultaneously serving the interests of the state administration and contributing to the creation of the public, "Inasmuch as they made use of this instrument to promulgate instructions and ordinances, the addressees of the authorities' announcements genuinely became 'the public' in the proper sense." The department's main responsibility was to deliver government information to serve the purpose of ruling the nation.

Second, Hangzhou did produce some designated print media circulating in the SSD to distribute official information to the people, on behalf of the information department. The way the department distributed information was to publish periodicals. These were the chao-pao, the official publications. Meanwhile, some staff of the information department privately worked with civilians—non-government employees—to compile information that failed to meet the editing deadline or failed to obtain permission to be disclosed to the public, to create a type of illegal periodical, the xiao-pao. Based on the evidence about the wide distribution of xiao-pao and large number of "reporters" described below, this article suggests that there was probably more than one regularly published xiao-pao in Hangzhou, and therefore, xiao-pao should be considered a broad genre. No Chinese newspaper had an official title before the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), so chao-pao and xiao-pao are only nonofficial names given by the public then. Chao-pao was a designated medium by which the information department organized journalistic activities to deliver government news to the public. Xiao-pao were designated media by which some officials and civilians performed journalistic activities on their own, mainly for profit. Chao-pao and xiao-pao are very important and will be discussed further.

Third, newsmen, or journalists, did exist in Hangzhou during the SSD. The knowledge about newsmen or journalists in both China and the world in ancient times is scarce in literature. Fortunately, some historical fragments about the newsmen or journalists in Hangzhou have been discovered. These fragments tell us that newsmen or journalists existed in considerable numbers in Hangzhou during the SSD, as will be discussed below.

The Tang Dynasty (618–906) preceded the Song Dynasty. Both during and before the Tang Dynasty, local government officials or local warlords appointed and supervised officials in their information departments to distribute information. During the Song Dynasty, the central government was the one to nominate and supervise the officials in the information department. Therefore, the information officials were essentially staff employees of the central government. Doing jobs such as gathering, compiling, and distributing information, the information department officials were similar to today's reporters or editors, because even though they served the government, they also reported and distributed news that did not meet government approval. In the early period of the SSD there were 81 information officials in Hangzhou. In the years around 1158, the number decreased to 60 or so (Xu 1957, "The Official Position," vol. 2, chap. 51). Compared with the number in the prior dynasties, the number of information officials in the SSD
decreased, as the territory of this dynasty became much smaller because of warfare. However, there were hundreds of unofficial clerks who had once been information officials and were ready to take the position of formal information officials if given the chance.

Unlike their former counterparts, the information officials in the Song Dynasty had neither strong power nor senior positions, because no unauthorized information collection was permitted to be made in public. But they still played important roles in information distribution. They were not only responsible for the publication of information but also for the selection of information. They were popular in society, but they faced serious penalties if they made mistakes or violated the rules or laws. In 1170, the information department received severe punishment because of its bold reporting in *chao-pao* about secret documents concerning the appointment and removal of some officials. The incident was reported to the emperor, and as a result two information officials named Liu Zi and Feng Shi who were in charge of information distribution were sentenced to 100 stick-floggings (Xu 1957, “The Official Position,” chap. 51, vol. 2). No details could be found about the two, but this was the first time that information officials were mentioned and identified as negative figures in officially documented historical records in China.

Contributors to *chao-pao* were more than just passive recipients of information. While compiling *chao-pao*, information officials were also interested in news that happened in courts and tried to collect as much relevant data as possible. For instance, they often visited important departments that were full of confidential information and pried into court affairs. Information officials could not gather any news or information without permission according to protocols and laws, but they had ulterior motives to dig into court affairs and other public matters. As a matter of fact, information officials often disseminated some information stealthily that was banned from disclosure to the general public, and which they could not print in *chao-pao* in time, by routing it to the reporters for the *xiao-pao* and other illegal periodicals. Of course, they were probably paid for the information they obtained illegally from the producers of the *xiao-pao*. While no evidence could be found that the information officials were paid for providing news to *xiao-pao* publishers, such financial transactions would be in keeping with Chinese tradition and also support the definition of news as commodity: “The traffic in news developed not only in connection with the needs of commerce; the news itself became a commodity” (Habermas 2000, 21).

The information officials were full-time producers of *chao-pao*, and some of them were also part-time producers of or contributors to *xiao-pao*. *Xiao-pao* also had their own professionals, both full time and part time, to cover news or offer clues to the meaning behind some incidents or happenings. These newsmen could also be found everywhere either inside the central government or inside the Hangzhou local government. As early as 1066 in Kaifeng, the capital of the NSD, *xiao-pao* were owned by those persons who could compose, create, and sell the periodicals (Xu 1957, “The Criminal Law,” vol. 2, chap. 34). Among them, some were information officials of the government and some were the professionals working solely for profit by producing the periodicals. As far as we know, these professionals were the earliest managers of nongovernment periodicals in China. It is said that hundreds of years later, the American penny press of the 1830s inaugurated their democratic attitude toward world events: but any event, no matter how apparently trivial, might qualify for publication in a newspaper. At the time, people also praised the *New York Herald* as the first of American papers and the first journal in the world, to
understand the truth that the collection of news at any price was the first duty of journalism (Schudson 1978, 28, 51).

Having professional dedication, xiao-pao workers endeavored to gather and distribute news in Hangzhou. In 1925, Robert Park in his essay, “The Natural History of the Newspaper,” argued that “the work of the newspaper, as a gatherer and interpreter of the news, was but an extension of the function which was otherwise performed spontaneously by the community itself through the medium of personal contact and gossip” (Schudson 1978, 41). It is arguable. But, the way xiao-pao workers looked for news or news clues is similar to Park’s observation. For example, in 1193, the emperor received reports that xiao-pao were very popular as information sources among branches of the central government. The emperor was told that xiao-pao workers gathered news from the heads and the servants, both of which were responsible for the daily lives of the emperor. They gleaned information from government branches. They searched for information by hanging around the streets and markets, and they bought news from information officials, too (Xu 1957, “The Criminal Law,” vol. 2, chap. 125). In 1236, those reporters of xiao-pao became better known to the public. They were active in the royal palace and central government. They haunted every corner of the court where the emperor lived and worked. They also haunted various departments of the central government, as well as provincial or lower-level governments (Yong and Ji, comp. 1986, vol. 854, 129). Compare this with the American penny press in 1830s. When news became the mainstay of the daily paper, the penny papers did not depend on the usual trickle of stale news that arrived in the mail through periodical exchanges, but rather sought out the news. They took pride in their activity, as the New York Transcript, June 23, 1834, quoted in Schudson, Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers, p.23:

There are eleven large and regularly established daily papers in this city, and with the exception of the Courier and Enquirer, and perhaps the Times, not one employs a news reporter, or takes any other pains to obtain accurate and correct local information—on the other hand there are two small daily NEWS papers, (ourselves and our cotemporary,) and those two employ four reporters, exclusively to obtain the earliest, fullest, and most correct intelligence on every local incident; and two of these latter arise at 3 in the morning, at which hour they attend the police courts, and are there employed, with short intermissions, till the close of the office at 8 in the evening, while others are obtaining correct information about the city.

For this, the American penny press newspapers were considered to be not only novel but also, to some, shocking (Schudson 1978, 24).

The historical descriptions mentioned above are the most detailed ones about the ancient managers of nongovernment periodicals that can be found in the world. Based on the description, we can say that an independent, journalistic career appeared along with the periodicals. Anyone could buy these periodicals in the market, since xiao-pao were produced for money. We can also see that a new occupation, independent news reporters who dared to do their reportage openly or somewhat openly, came into being in China.

It is worth mentioning that besides the information officials and the xiao-pao managers, many civilians were also engaging in information distribution. They were referred to as “the well-informed” or “the idlers” in ancient books and records (Sishui Qianfu 1981, 103–104; Zhu 1983, 92–115; Wu 1980, vol. 19, 182). The well-informed were talented individuals. They had a large circle of acquaintances, and used them as
information sources. They provided the gathered information to people who needed it, such as businessmen, government officials, and so forth. The ancient book *Old Things in Wulin* \(^2\) (Sishui Qianfu 1981) lists the outstanding individuals of all industries from the SSN period, among whom Lu Yanzi and Gao Dao were particularly named in the trade of information (Sishui Qianfu 1981, 114). According to the description, the two men were either the outstanding figures or the leaders in information trading in the late period of the SSD. It may have been the first time for two people to be identified as independent information distributors in history. The phrase “the idlers” meant something different and complicated, because idlers could be of all kinds and operate at various levels. It is recorded in the ancient book *The Events and Happenings in the Capital* that two kinds of idlers were closely related to information distribution: one was people who could read and write—the first-class idlers—and the other was people whose job was to deliver messages (Wu 1980, vol. 19, 182). These two kinds of idlers were educated people at that time who knew the rudiments of writing. They were eloquent and good at handwriting, but could not land jobs in the government or even jobs in the market. They had to live on writing or delivering messages. This occurred many years later in Europe. In Venice, they were called *sríttori d'avisi*, in Rome *gazettani*, in Paris *nouvellistes*, in London *writers of letters*, and in Germany *Zeitunger* of *Novellisten*. In the course of the sixteenth century they became suppliers of formal weekly reports, the newsletters, of which the so-called *Fuggerzeitungen* were typical in Germany (Habermas 2000, 253). They sold the news to make a living.

To sum up, this article makes the following argument: dealing with news, Hangzhou had an important information agency, some designated print media, and a group of people whose job was to spread news; and all this well before European cities could claim the same elements in the seventeenth century. If the Chinese literature is correct, we should recognize that there was a business dealing with organized activities in gathering and disseminating the news in Hangzhou in the SSD. We should recognize this business as news-related, and thus, in consideration of the evidence offered below, we should reconsider the historical arguments about the date of the emergence of newspapers in the world.

**Were There Newspapers in Hangzhou?**

It is academically agreed that the rise of the periodically issued newspaper marked the birth of journalism. So, what is the definition of a newspaper? According to Michael Emery (2000, 8), “Under twentieth-century standards a true newspaper must meet the following qualifications: it must be published regularly, on a daily or weekly basis; it must appeal to all general-interest audience rather than a specialized one; and it must offer timely news.” There are many other criteria for a newspaper, some different, even at issue. But for simplicity, this article’s judgment about the existence of newspapers in Hangzhou in the SSD is based on these criteria.

It was mentioned before that in Hangzhou there were *chao-pao* issued by the information department and *xiao-pao* compiled by nongovernmental managers with some information officials. When the SSD’s territory was conquered by Mongols and finally led to the termination of the SSD in 1279, *chao-pao*, like many other businesses, disappeared. *Xiao-pao* lingered for several more years. Although *chao-pao* and *xiao-pao* disappeared, it is worth discussing if they could be defined as newspapers by today’s standards.
Chao-pao had a close relationship with Hangzhou. Chao-pao were born in Kaifeng, but they were scarcely called chao-pao during that time. The name of chao-pao became popular in Hangzhou. In 1127, a negative report about a man named Sun-Di appeared in the chao-pao. According to Sun Di’s narration which appeared in the chao-pao and was quoted by later secondary sources, he was banned from the court and sent to Suzhou, which was then near the frontier and is now in Anhui Province. In Suzhou, Sun Di saw chao-pao in which there was a report saying that he, as someone who had recanted of earlier errors, accepted a puppet position. He knew the reason why he was sent to Suzhou and tried to defend himself against the accusation. He appealed to the emperor, “When I was in Suzhou, I read an article in chao-pao, saying I accepted a puppet position. The report also said that the removal of these officials and me had been discussed and these persons had stepped down in some positions following the emperor’s directions” (Xu 1987, 776). Sun Di complained to the emperor saying that the information officials made an inaccurate report about him based on rumors, and it was unfair for him to be punished by the government because of an inaccurate report in previous chao-pao. Sun Di said that he was wrongly accused and pleaded for himself as well as complained against chao-pao. Sun Di asked the emperor to investigate the truth (Xu 1987, 776). It is not known what became of his case.

Being delivered all over the country, chao-pao carried such newly published information as imperial edicts, government orders, government rewards and punishments, government appointments and removals, memorials to the throne, government annotations, etc. (Xu 1957, “The Official Position,” vol. 2, chap. 51; “The Criminal Law,” vol. 2, chap. 125). In 1134, an official named Mei Kong advised the emperor to strictly follow the established system of personnel changes. He said that according to the rule set by the founders of Dynasty, both the alternate officials and the to-be-appointed officials should be announced in chao-pao. The appointment would then have been known to the whole nation, even in remote regions (Li 1956, 1310). These contents were useful, important, and interesting to the audience, and the official Sun Di’s narration was a typical case. Similar contents also appeared in early Western newspapers in modern times. “From the very beginning, the political journals had reported on the journeys and returns of the princes, on the arrival of foreign dignitaries, on balls, ‘special events’ (Solennitäten) at court, appointments, and the like; in the context of this news from the Court, which can be thought of as a kind of transposition of the publicity of representation into the new form of public sphere, there also appeared ‘sovereign ordinances in the subjects’ best interest” (Habermas 2000, 21–22). Besides, the typical news in the American penny press was also often the verbatim report, whether it be of a presidential address, a murder trial, or the annual statement of the United States Treasury (Schudson 1978, 23).

Actually, the contents of chao-pao were broad; it was available to a general audience rather than a limited group. Besides the contents mentioned above, there was also current news, social news, items about natural disasters, even something akin to obituaries (Xu 1957, “The Criminal Law,” vol. 2, chap. 29). There is a record of the late SSD in a famous scholar Chou Mi’s book, which says, in the east of Zhejiang province, two words “wang” and “wuang” are pronounced nearly same. There was a Mr. Wang in the east of the province, whose house unfortunately burned down. Another person, Mr. Wuang, an official, was mistaken as Mr. Wang. People swore at Mr. Wuang that he deserved the punishment of his house burning down owing to his evildoing. Mr. Li, Mr. Wuang’s nearby neighbor, knew the disturbing rumor about the fire from reading chao-pao. Far away from
his hometown, Mr. Li felt worried that his house, next to Mr. Wuang’s also suffered from the fire. Getting a leave from his supervisor, Mr. Li hurried to his hometown and found it was only a stupid mistake (Li 2013, 15–32). This story shows that at least in the late SSD chao-pao began to carry social news to attract its audience.

Chao-pao had a close relationship with readers, especially with those from the upper class. Ancient Chinese scholars and officials were inclined to write poems to express their feelings. In the SSD, countless poems were written relating to chao-pao. For example, when traveling or residing in a place far from home, the scholar Gao Zhou in his poem said, “Sending letters to my distant home to cure my homesickness, while reading the official gazette [chao-pao] frequently to think of people I know” (Gao 1987, 139). Another scholar, Fang Hui, said in his poem that he and other scholars, having read the chao-pao, knew well the happenings and arguments in the court and government; they were often very angry, disappointed, and depressed by them (Li 2013, 263). Again this closely connects to Habermas’ claims that,

The authorities addressed their promulgations to “the” public, that is, in principle to all subjects. Usually they did not reach the “common man” in this way, but at best the “educated classes.” Along with the apparatus of the modern state, a new stratum of “bourgeois” people arose which occupied a central position within the “public.” The officials of the rulers’ administrations were its core—mostly jurists … Added to them were doctors, pastors, officers, professors, and “scholars”, who were at the top of a hierarchy reaching down through schoolteachers and scribes to the “people”. (Habermas 2000, 22, 23)

He also stresses, “This stratum of ‘bourgeois’ was the real carrier of the public, which from the outset was a reading public.”

Chao-pao were published regularly in Hangzhou, though the exact time that chao-pao started to appear in Kaifeng is not clear. According to the records in ancient books, the information department was responsible for preparing the documents and materials ready to be censored by the supervisors every five days. Documents and materials would be published once they were approved by censors (Xu 1957, “The Official Position,” vol. 2, chap. 51; Tuo 1985, 10389). The information department was also responsible for circulating chao-pao throughout the nation at regular intervals, e.g. every 10 days (Xu 1957, “The Official Position,” vol. 2, chap. 29). So it is clear that chao-pao began appearing at least at regular intervals and achieved a considerable circulation among scholars and officials. This is very important to understand chao-pao; “there existed a press in the strict sense only once the regular supply of news became public, that is, again, accessible to the general public” (Habermas 2000, 16).

Great changes took place in Hangzhou during the SSD. As the capital of the SSD since 1138, Hangzhou was active in politics, thriving in economic affairs, and prosperous in culture. Zhao Sheng is the author of a famous book about the law in essentials to the government and the public. He went to Hangzhou when he was a child. He settled in Hangzhou and became an owner of a special bookstore. His most productive years were 1195–1224. In his later years he wrote a type of literature consisting mainly of cultures and customs at that time. In the book Zhao Sheng says that chao-pao were issued not only openly but also daily: chao-pao were compiled every day by the affiliated office of the premier, examined every day by the superior of the office, and sent to all departments and all parts of the nation every day by the information department; chao-pao reported about
court circulars or government issues; edited by the information department in the central government, *chao-pao* were submitted to the supervisor of the organization; after being approved, *chao-pao* from Hangzhou were then circulated to every corner of the nation (Yong and ji, comp 1986, vol. 854, 129).

*Chao-pao* were sold to the public. Emery (2000, 7) says, “To produce a newspaper, there has to be some incentive for gathering and processing information of interest to the general public—news. News thereupon became a commodity, like food or merchandise, produced for profit to meet a demand.” *Chao-pao* were useful and welcomed in markets as well. Therefore, a new trade to deliver and sell *chao-pao* appeared in Hangzhou. A record in 1235 says that there were 414 kinds of professions in Hangzhou, such as selling the name lists of public officials, ironing clothes, repairing fans, washing clothes, writing for illiterate persons, selling copybooks for calligraphy, selling information, selling medicines, selling used examination papers, singing, dancing, playing chess, selling the “pictures of official positions selection” (a popular parlor game), etc. Distributing *chao-pao* was included in the list of professions (Zhu 1983, 115). This is not the sole extant datum. Chou Mi, who lived at the turn of the SSD and the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368), which was established by Mongolians after they conquered the SSD in 1271, compiled a book about occurrences in Hangzhou, namely *Old Things in Wulin*, covering virtually every aspect of Hangzhou in detail, including the city’s businesses, occupations, and trades. Chou Mi told readers there were 183 different trades unique to the city, of which the distribution of *chao-pao* was named the second most common, along with selling the lists of courtiers, distributing *chao-pao*, selling the pictures of official positions selections, selling the lists of the subjects of imperial examinations, writing horizontal inscribed boards, selling chessmen and chessboards, selling sorts of classics, etc. (Sishui Qianfu 1981, 102). According to his description, these trades existed nowhere else but Hangzhou, and dozens of people took each trade as their profession (Sishui Qianfu 1981, 105). Therefore, we infer that some dozens of people were engaged in the trade of distributing *chao-pao*. Because Chou Mi once resided in a busy and populated street in Hangzhou, the reports of what he saw and heard are plausible (Yong and ji, comp 1986, vol. 2, 523). The trade of distributing *chao-pao* indicates that journalistic activities were broad in scale, and *chao-pao* had a close relationship with citizens’ daily life in the SSD. The evidence indicates that a group of people lived in Hangzhou who earned their bread by distributing *chao-pao*. There also lived in Hangzhou a mass of loyal, everyday readers of *chao-pao*. Meanwhile, many collectors of *chao-pao* emerged in Hangzhou. For example, it was recorded that a rich and influential family owned a closet full of copies of *chao-pao* from the years 1224 to 1264, and another family named Zhang owned a complete collection of *chao-pao*, but the master of the family was reluctant to loan his *chao-pao* to others (Compilation Committee of the Collection of the Lists of the Imperial Collection of Four 1995, vol. 101, 342). Since there were lots of temporary bazaars in Hangzhou during holidays, collections of *chao-pao* were sold at fairs and shops in these bazaars (Zheng 2000, 221). There is an inference that there were some people who used to buy and keep these *chao-pao* as their personal collection.

*Xiao-pao* possibly first appeared in Kaifeng in the tenth century shortly after the NSD was founded. However, as far as it can be traced in literature, *xiao-pao* were first recorded in a book in 1031. The emperor said,

It is said that there are other papers besides the papers edited by the information officials.3 It is also said that in Kaifeng, there are many “reporters” (探报) who were
employed by the central department, or Kaifeng government, who were disseminating illicit information and misleading people domestic and abroad. We should have these reporters and their activities warned, found guilty and stopped. Those who warn against these reporters should be encouraged and rewarded. (Xu 1957, “The Criminal Law,” vol. 2, chap. 17)

Despite the emperor’s warnings, xiao-pao began to prevail in Kaifeng and other cities, and had an appeal to their audiences. By the end of the NSD, an occupation running xiao-pao had been created, though it did not go by the name of xiao-pao.

Xiao-pao also began developing and flourishing in Hangzhou. After Hangzhou became the capital of the SSD in the twelfth century, the conditions for xiao-pao to survive became favorable. The public gave particular versions of these periodicals unofficial names such as xiao-pao, the Southern Song Dynasty xiao-pao, news, etc. There are several reasons for xiao-pao to develop and flourish in Hangzhou, with a key reason being war. During the SSD, there were wars in northern China, and people fled to Hangzhou and other southern China regions. Though people lived in Hangzhou, they still paid close attention to the wars and political arguments, and even debated between the hawks and the doves. But chao-pao, strictly controlled by the authorities, were inclined to report positive news of the empire, and did not always tell the truth about the wars, let alone the political arguments and debates in the courts. To a monarch or an elite group, “there is no need for the people to receive information and ideas pertaining to political or social matters. Indeed, providing the public with intelligence (news) may actually constitute a threat to national security and stability” (Emery 2000, 15). For this reason, chao-pao lost their appeal for readers because of their increasingly dull and unbalanced contents. More and more people switched to xiap-pao for their broad and colorful contents, especially during the unquiet period. In 1138, an imperial official petitioned the emperor, asking to kill the dovish premier. This memorial was published in xiao-pao and attracted people’s attention (Xu 1987, 1372). Having good prospect of gain, some information officials and some civilians naturally dared to cover news and published xiao-pao. The press policies of the government helped xiao-pao to survive and develop.

The contents of xiao-pao were both abundant and timely. We do not know much about what the xiao-pao were like in Kaifeng, but there are records about the contents of xiao-pao in Hangzhou. According to these records, xiao-pao gathered fresh, odd, and funny hearsay in society, as well as news of political, economic, and military occurrences (Yong and ji, comp. 1986, vol. 1142, 19). In other words, the contents of xiao-pao were a mixture of truth and falsehood, including leaks of state secrets, rumors on the streets of the downtown areas, and even from fabrications by xiao-pao editors. In order to confuse the government and public, and to avoid being arrested, the editors of xiao-pao called these contents “news” instead of something that would imply official information. In Hangzhou, “news” meant strange, fantastic stories. Hence, “news” became jargon for xiao-pao (Niu 1998). Note the similarities to the West and the idea of news as recent intelligence. “Up to about 1500, the word Tydings usually described reports of current events. The word newes was coined to differentiate between the casual dissemination of information and the deliberate attempt to gather and process the latest intelligence” (Emery 2000, 8). Xiao-pao dared to report disturbances so as to express their editors’ desire for personnel changes of premiers, ministers, and other officials of the court (Xu 1957, “The Criminal Law,” vol. 2, chap. 126). Xiao-pao even fabricated government orders and imperial orders, too. In 1155, there was a faked imperial order published in xiao-pao, saying the
emperor was ready to appoint a hawk as a senior official. The appointment indicated that the emperor was preparing for war. Due to the widespread circulation of *xiao-pao*, the faked news shocked internal and external society. The emperor was angry and worried about the feigned order. Later he made a formal statement to clarify it (Bi 1957, 3471).

*Xiao-pao* were published every day in Hangzhou. They were sold to ordinary people, but it is not clear whether they were published regularly in Kaifeng. However, the conditions in Hangzhou for *xiao-pao* to flourish were naturally more favorable than that in Kaifeng. In 1193, when an official accused *xiao-pao* of publishing illicit reports, he mentioned that *xiao-pao* were edited and published every day (Xu 1957, “The Criminal Law,” vol. 2, chap. 125). Thus, in Hangzhou, *xiao-pao* became not only a daily-issued newspaper but also a daily newspaper run by the local residents. The appearance of daily newspapers is considered a great contribution to the development of journalism. Being published daily, *chao-pao* and *xiao-pao* especially became important milestones in China and world journalism history.

In short, evidence from a range of sources indicate that *xiao-pao* possessed many features of a medium of mass communication. They were nongovernmental and independent, and thus dared to report any news. They were professional as they had their own reporters, editors, and publishers. They appeared every day and circulated widely, both nearby and throughout China. They attached importance to timeliness and tried to obtain, report, and send news as quickly as possible. They were capable of molding and leading public opinion (Xu 1957, “The Criminal Law,” vol. 2, chap. 126). With their original and interesting contents, they survived for the duration of the SSD (Xu 1957, “The Criminal Law,” vol. 2, chap. 125).

Because *xiao-pao* were ubiquitous and sometimes resorted to demagoguery, the government of the Song Dynasty never hesitated to try to suppress them. If caught and arrested, the producers of *xiao-pao* in the Song Dynasty were fined, beaten, or exiled to remote regions. In 1066 in Kaifeng, a supervisor named Zhang Jian complained to the emperor that some bold and crafty villains intentionally vilified government affairs at that time, shook morale, and misled the public. The official said they were so bold that they even fabricated edicts, printing and selling the fabricated edicts in the markets. The official persuaded the emperor to order the Kaifeng government to ban *xiao-pao* for its harming and endangering the government and dynasty (Xu 1957, “The Criminal Law,” vol. 2, chap. 34). The government of the SSD also hated and forbade *xiao-pao* and took action on its own to ban them as the quantity and impact of *xiao-pao* kept increasing. There is much historical data on these attempts to ban *xiao-pao*. For instance, in 1188, the emperor said,

I hear that recently some persons are fabricating some papers without grounds. These papers, so-called *xiao-pao*, circulating both in China and abroad, are very appalling and sensational. From now on, excepting the information and activities sent by the information department, anyone who dares to publish *xiao-pao* will be seriously punished. Those officials who read *xiao-pao* will also be punished if reported to the emperor.

The emperor also ordered the Hangzhou government to keep an eye on *xiao-pao*, and the supervisory department was ordered to prepare to impeach those officials who did not obey the rules (Xu 1957, “The Criminal Law,” vol. 2, chap. 123). In any event, the suppression of *xiao-pao* was not as extreme as the Vatican and the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912) implemented hundreds of years later when many tabloid producers were executed.
This is one of the reasons why xiao-pao existed and flourished in the SSD though they were against the laws and regulations.

In summary, both chao-pao and xiao-pao meet today’s requirements for a newspaper (e.g. Emery’s definition of newspaper), which the early European precursors of newspapers did not meet because they were relatively primitive or simple. This article would like to propose an innovative idea: namely that based on the definition of a newspaper, we should consider xiao-pao, and possibly chao-pao, as newspapers—even consider them as the first daily newspapers; and Western precursors to the newspapers, such as the Italian gazzetta hundreds of years later, are modest by comparison. If the proposal that chao-pao and xiao-pao belong to the first daily newspapers is accepted by academia, modern newspapers and journalism would be traced back to the twelfth century, even as early as the eleventh century. Since the origination of the daily newspaper makes a great contribution to modern newspapers and journalism, Hangzhou is superior to several European commercial cities in its claim to be the birthplace of the modern newspaper and journalism.

What Position did Hangzhou Hold in Journalism History?

Thinking that the scale of ancient journalistic activities was small, and cannot be called journalism, scholars can agree on neither the time when the ancient Chinese press appeared nor the character of the ancient Chinese press, as Emery says,

The longest continuing information program on record was in China, where, beginning about AD. 750, the imperial court published semi-annual reports on the condition of the people, in addition to monthly bulletins and calendars. Known as Tching-pao, these bulletins were printed weekly beginning around 1360; by 1830 they had become daily publications. Known later as the Peking Gazette, the reports lasted until the end of the empire in 1911. Another publication for provincial governors appeared in about 950 and also lasted until 1911. Emery (2000, 4)

They believe the ancient Chinese press did not include newspapers, and that the press appealed to a specialized audience rather than a general-interest audience (Emery 2000, 4, 8).

Of course, it is still hasty to conclude that Hangzhou was the center of journalism in the medieval world. Many journalistic agencies were assembled in Hangzhou, and all kinds of news and information was compiled and distributed. But we still lack the evidence to show if news in Hangzhou had been spread to the world outside, and if the news from the outside world had reached Hangzhou, though the international exchange or communication was frequent and busy at that time.

Besides Hangzhou, only a few cities such as Venice occupied an important place in journalism history in medieval times. From the existing records, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Venice produced Notizie Scritte or Venice Gazzetta for a limited time. They were issued by both local residents and local government. An agency was in charge of information collection and dissemination. However, compared with the activities described in Hangzhou, Venice was undoubtedly less developed in journalism, e.g. Hangzhou not only developed newspapers but also had a special trade to handle the publication and distribution of chao-pao.
Besides being the capital of the SSD, Hangzhou enjoyed other advantages above other cities supporting the development of journalism. The economy of the SSD had advanced to a state surpassing most, if not all, of the outside world, and the economy of Hangzhou led the nation at that time. The education system in Hangzhou was highly developed, and the number and quality of schools at all levels was incomparable. Hangzhou was an international metropolis with the largest population in the world. There were many libraries in Hangzhou, which had collections of books larger than that of any other city in the world. More importantly, Hangzhou was the center of printing technology in China.

Hangzhou was already established as one of the three printing centers in China during the NSD; Bi Sheng, a craftsman in Hangzhou, invented movable-type printing in 1041–1048. This specific printing method was further developed in the SSD, e.g. movable printing of tin blocks was invented. The art of engraving (the technique required for printing) in Hangzhou was also the most advanced in the nation; the invention of movable printing was applied to practice no later than the period of 1174–1194. Though it is uncertain if the newspapers of Hangzhou were printed by movable type, it is certain that newspapers were printed by engraving. By 1066 when xiao-pao had been printed in Kaifeng, the printing industry was not well developed yet, nor was there any large demand for xiao-pao because they were a new medium. However, later in Hangzhou, things had changed and xiao-pao must have been printed since in 1193, for example, a government official in Hangzhou asked the emperor to take action to ban the printing of assorted information and secrets of the court and government in shops (Xu 1957, “The Criminal Law,” vol. 2, chap. 125). Therefore, it can be inferred that it was very common to print anything in Hangzhou. As for chao-pao, it was very easy for them to be printed, because the information department, and many other departments and agencies of the central and local government, were equipped with printing sections, and they had budgets to resource printing. Most of the texts in the information department were printed. Probably, people then and there became so familiar with the printing of newspapers that they turned a blind eye to it. Given the fact that it requires a lot of copies to meet public demand, only mass printing techniques can satisfy this demand. Even if chao-pao were sent to the departments and agencies of the central and local governments, the numbers required were too great for people to copy by hand.

Observing the conditions in which the newspaper was circulated in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Germany, which at that time was divided into a patchwork of small principalities, and in the Low Countries, Western scholars come to the conclusion that newspapers first flourished in areas where central authority was weak, or where rulers were more tolerant (Emery 2000, 8). This idea is broadly correct. Hangzhou was the hub for the governance in the SSD, but the rulers were tolerant on the whole and people enjoyed considerable freedom, including the freedom of expression. Governed by the literati, the Song Dynasty, especially the SSD, is widely considered as the best in Chinese history and called the Chinese Renaissance in Chinese history. Was the publication of newspapers one of the major reasons why the Song Dynasty, especially the SSD, is so highly appreciated? Perhaps, “the more secure a government is, the less it fears undermining, and the more freedom it accords its press” (Emery 2000, 15).

In the later Middle Ages, Chinese printing technology was introduced to Europe and was put into use, printing legal and illegal publications and newsheets. But in the early sixteenth century, newsheets distributed in Venice and other developed cities in Europe
were still handwritten. It was not until 1562 in Venice that a printed news sheet, the monthly *Notizie Scritte*, appeared. Being produced by mechanical means or printing is one of the major standards for modern newspapers. For this reason, we can see that journalistic activities in Venice and other European cities were not large, plentiful, and complicated before the seventeenth century.

In summary, modern journalism, which is a product of a well-developed society, is closely related to the development of politics, a flourishing economy, and other activities. As a part of the world's journalism, journalism in Hangzhou matched naturally its leading position in China and in the world. It is not strange that journalism in Hangzhou ranked first in China, and first in the world, during the Middle Ages. The world has been changing. Journalism in ancient China needs to be discussed further amid any discussion of the origin of journalism in the world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank Professor Michael S. Sweeny and his Master’s student Lu Wu at Ohio University for their assistance with this article. The author is grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their insightful advice and comments.

NOTES

1. The information department can be traced to the liaison at the early stage of the Han Dynasty (206 BC to AD220). At that time, local governments or tributaries began to set up offices called liaisons in Chang’ an, the capital. There were two functions for the liaisons: board-and-lodging provision and information collection. In 777 in the Tang Dynasty (618–907), the liaison was renamed as the information department. Before the Song Dynasty, there were simultaneously innumerable liaisons or information departments. In the Song Dynasty, there was only one liaison, and it was controlled and supervised by the central government (He 2008).

2. Wulin is another historical name for Hangzhou.

3. In the early period of the NSD, the information departments in Kaifeng were still set by local governments, and the information officials still belonged to local governments.

4. Bi Sheng (970–1051) is a famous ancient Chinese inventor. His birthplace may be Hangzhou. He was once a workman in a printing workshop, specializing in manual printing. During 1041–1048, He invented movable printing of clay. His invention is considered to be the earliest movable printing technique. His movable printing technique is recorded in “The Sketches and Notes in the Garden of Mengxi” by Shen Kuo, a famous scholar in NSD.

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