

Case 3 – Television Programme “News Roundup” (晚間新聞) broadcast from 11:00pm to 11:30pm on 12 August 2019 on the Jade Channel of Television Broadcasts Limited (“TVB”)

403 complaints were received against the captioned programme. The substance of the complaints was that when an anchor reported on the arrests of protesters made by covert police officers, she pronounced “警員” (“police officers”) as “警犬” (“police dogs”) or the police operation concerned as “警犬行動” (“police dogs’ operation”) while the corresponding on-screen subtitles for police officers were “警員”. The complainants alleged that the references concerned insulted and incited hatred against the Police; were partial and inaccurate and that no correction of error was made. Some complainants complained about the anchor’s attitude and alleged that she violated the professional ethics for journalists, intensified polarisation and dissension within society.

The CA’s Findings

In line with established practice, the CA considered the complaint case and the representations of TVB in detail. The CA took into account the relevant aspects of the case, including –

Details of the Case

- (a) in the news programme under complaint, there were several news items regarding the demonstrations and clashes happening on the previous day (i.e. 11 August 2019), including a report that police officers were disguising as protesters during the arrest operation in Causeway Bay. In the lead-in, the anchor read a phrase which, to some, could have sounded like “警犬行動裡面” (“police dogs in the operation”) while the corresponding on-screen subtitles showed “警員在行動中” (“police officers in the operation”); and
- (b) TVB submitted, among others, that the anchor in question inadvertently mispronounced the word “員” as “遠(jyun5)” due to a slip of the tongue, which was misheard by some viewers as “犬(hyun2)”; and that neither the anchor concerned nor TVB’s news staff had any intention to refer to police officers or their operation with the term “警犬”.

Relevant Provisions in the Generic Code of Practice on Television Programme Standards

- (a) paragraph 2(b) of Chapter 3 – a licensee should not include in its programmes any material which is likely to encourage hatred against or fear of, and/or

considered to be denigrating or insulting to any person(s) or group(s) on the basis of, among others, social status;

- (b) paragraph 1 of Chapter 9 – news programmes should offer viewers an intelligent and informed account of issues that enables them to form their own views. The licensees should ensure that news is presented with accuracy and due impartiality;
- (c) paragraph 1A of Chapter 9 – the licensees shall make reasonable efforts to ensure that the factual contents of news are accurate;
- (d) paragraph 2 of Chapter 9 – the licensees must ensure that due impartiality is preserved in news programmes; and
- (e) paragraph 7(e) of Chapter 9 – correction of factual errors should be made as soon as practicable after the original error.

The CA's Considerations

The CA, having regard to the relevant facts of the case including the information submitted by TVB, considered that –

- (a) the news item under concern gave a factual account of the police operation in the evening of 11 August 2019, including the footage of a police officer responding to media enquiries in the press conference held on the following day. With the exception of the utterance in question in the lead-in which was swift and not very clear, the term “警員” or “警方” was accurately presented throughout the report, accompanied by correct subtitles;
- (b) there was insufficient evidence to treat the utterance in question as intentional, and that it was unlikely that the pronunciation concerned would affect viewers' comprehension of the news as a whole, or render the news partial, insulting to or inciting hatred against the Police; and
- (c) other allegations such as the attitude and professional ethics of the anchor were outside the jurisdiction of the CA.

Decision

In view of the above, the CA considered the complaints **unsubstantiated** and decided that **no further action** should be taken against TVB.