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China's influence on Taiwan's media and politics

Abstract: Taiwan's democracy and freedom of the press provide the Chinese authorities with an opportunity to use Taiwanese businessmen to influence Taiwan's media outlets and politics. China uses three inter-related strategies to influence Taiwan's media in this way: persuading businessmen with pro-China views to purchase Taiwanese media outlets, pressuring existing media owners, and placing advertisements in Taiwan's media in order to purchase political influence. In addition, the Chinese government also employs cyber-propaganda strategy to attack Taiwanese political parties and politicians.

Key words: Taiwan, self-censorship, freedom of the press, cross-strait, cyber-propaganda

In the early 1990s Taiwan began to democratize under President Lee Teng-hui, a process that included gaining freedom of the press. President Chen Shui-bian further promoted a policy of "Regulation to Remove Political Parties, the Government and the Military from the Media" (*Dangzhengjun tuichu meiti tiaokuan* 黨政軍退出媒體), which his government implemented in 2003. Consequently, Taiwan's media became more diverse and competitive. However, Taiwan's freedom of the press and capital markets provided the People's Republic of China (PRC) an opportunity to influence Taiwan's free-wheeling media and politics. From the early 2000s, the PRC employed clandestine media warfare against Taiwan. China first used Hong Kong and other overseas media to attempt to influence public opinion in Taiwan (Tao Sheng-ping 陶聖屏, Lin I-chin 林宜瑾, 2007, pp. 31–52). Later, the PRC employed Vladimir Lenin's idea, "The easiest way to capture a fortress is from within." They also practiced "using businessmen to surround the government" (*yishang weizheng* 以商圍政), in an effort to unify Taiwan with the Chinese mainland (Tao Sheng-ping 陶聖屏, Lin I-chin 林宜瑾, 2007, p. 40).

Since 2008, after Ma Ying-jeou's victory in the presidential election, Ma's policy of closer economic integration with China, as well as Tsai Eng-meng's 蔡衍明 takeover of the China Times Group in 2008, China has deeply influenced Taiwan's media. The PRC urged the unification of Taiwan with China, and the PRC regarded propaganda as an important tactic in its United Front strategy against Taiwan. The PRC's media strategy against Taiwan has three inter-related approaches. First, the PRC uses tycoons with pro-China views to purchase Taiwan's media. Second, the PRC pressures media proprietors who have invested or intend to invest in China. Third, the PRC uses embedded advertising/advertorials in Taiwan's media to influence the media's outlets and public opinion. These approaches by China have had some success in influencing Taiwan's media, and they have worried many in Taiwan. The controversy over the proposed sale of the pro-democratic Taiwan Next Media became a trigger for many Taiwanese to oppose China's "black hand" in Taiwan's media. Many domestic and overseas Taiwanese

students launched an "Anti-Media Monopoly" movement against Tsai Eng-meng and China's "black hand."

The pro-China views of Tsai Eng-mend and the *Want Want China Times Group*

The owner of the *Want Want China Times Group*, Tsai Eng-meng, is a Taiwanese businessman who started to invest in China in 1989 when most countries boycotted China because of the Tiananmen Square Massacre. In an interview with the *Washington Post* in January 2012, Tsai Eng-meng denied that there had been a massacre in Tiananmen Square during June 3–4 1989. This interview clearly disclosed Tsai's pro-Beijing views. In addition, many stories published in the *China Times* (*Zhongguo shibao* 中國時報) also showed the Chinese authorities' deep influence on the Want Want China Times Group.

The China Times Group of Yu Chi-chung 余紀忠 included the *China Times*, the *China Times Express* (*Zhongshi wanbao* 中時晚報), and the *Commercial Times* (*Gongshang shibao* 工商時報). In 2002, the *China Times* merged with CTi TV (*Zhongtian dianshi* 中天電視). In 2005 it further merged with China TV (*Zhongshi* 中視), and the Broadcasting Corporation of China (*Zhongguang* 中廣; BCC) (which the KMT had owned), to become a media conglomerate with newspaper, TV and radio holdings.[1] After the Tsai Eng-meng 2008 takeover of the *China Times Group*, the group began to publish the *Want Daily* (*Wangbao* 旺報) in 2009 and the online English *Want China Times* in 2010.

After Tsai Eng-meng, tycoon of the *Want Want Group* took over the *China Times Group* in November 2008 and re-named it the *Want Want China Times Group*; there was controversy over the unusual relationship between the Chinese government, Tsai Eng-meng, and the *Want Want China Times Group*. According to Poe Ta-chung 卜大中,[2] a venture of Next Media which publishes the *Apple Daily*, had intended to purchase the China Times Group for approximately ten billion Taiwan dollars (more than US$300 million). Next Media spent several months calculating the value of the *China Times Group* and examining its financial statements. However, just before the deal was to go ahead, Tsai Eng-meng suddenly called the owner of the *China Times Group*, Yu Chien-hsin 余建新, the son of the late Yu Chi-chung, offering to purchase the *China Times Group* for double the price offered by Next Media (Poe Ta-chung 卜大中, 2012). Tsai Eng-meng obtained ownership of the *China Times Group* for 20.4 billion Taiwan dollars on November 3, 2008 (Chao Chih-ling 趙芷菱, 2009).

Many have questioned whether the Chinese government was involved in financing Tsai Eng-meng's purchase of the *China Times Group*. Several sources have indicated that the Chinese government has repeatedly tried to purchase Taiwanese media to influence the Taiwanese people. According to Tung Li-wen a huge amount of capital from the Taiwan Affairs Office of the Chinese State Council, totaling US$300 million, was transferred to Taiwan and Hong Kong from China in 2007 with the goal of purchasing Taiwanese media (Tung Li-wen 董立文, 2011). Thus, Tsai Eng-meng's purchase of the

[1] In December 2006, the China Times Group sold BCC to former Chinese New Party Secretary-General Jaw Shao-kong 趙少康.

[2] Poe Ta-chung is the former Deputy Editor-in-Chief of the *China Times*.

China Times Group created many doubts in Taiwan about the role of China in his purchase. In 2009 Tsai Eng-meng also acknowledged that he knew the Taiwan Affairs Office had commissioned agents to purchase the *China Times Group*, but Tsai denied he was the agent (Tien Shih-hao 田世昊, 2009).

Despite Tsai’s denial, some sources pointed to the close relationship between Tsai Eng-meng and the Chinese authorities. According to an interview with a senior Taiwanese government official, the Publicity Department of Central Committee of the Communist Party of China became involved in Tsai’s purchase of the *China Times Group*.[3] This senior government official further said in an interview that, according to an unidentified source, the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee did not want to see Next Media take over the *China Times Group*. Therefore, the publicity department ordered the Taiwan Affairs Office to intervene. The Taiwan Affairs Office cooperated with a senior KMT leader, to convince Tsai Eng-meng to purchase the *China Times Group*.

Some other accounts demonstrate Tsai’s close relationship with the Chinese authorities. Some two weeks after Tsai’s purchase of the *China Times Group*, on November 16, 2008 Tsai Eng-meng gave orders to the senior managers of the *China Times Group* to: strongly support the Ma Ying-jeou administration, to clear up misunderstanding between Taiwan and China, and to avoid discussing unification and independence in media of the *China Times Group*. However, these senior managers interpreted Tsai Eng-meng as having said that the *China Times Group* must suppress Taiwanese Independence (Chen Mien 陳免, 2008, p. 8). One month after Tsai Eng-meng’s purchase of the *China Times Group*, on December 5, 2008, Tsai visited the Director of the PRC’s Taiwan Affairs Office, Wang Yi, in Beijing. Tsai reported his success in buying the *China Times Group*, and relayed his intention to improve the development of Cross-Strait relations (Lin Hsing-fei 林幸妃, 2009, pp. 35–38). According to an interview with a former senior editor from the *China Times*, in early 2009 Tsai Eng-meng said at an editorial meeting that “suppressing” the Tiananmen Square Protests of 1989 was necessary and that even the Americans would have done so. Tsai further said that the Tiananmen Square “Massacre” was just the propaganda of Western countries.[4] The informant argued that Tsai’s point of view on the Tiananmen Square Massacre was the same as the Chinese authorities. Later, the informant indicated that Tsai had also implied that the *China Times* could not discuss the issues of Tibet and Xinjiang (East Turkistan). During the negotiation of the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA), Tsai gave an order that the *China Times* could not report or publish any news or comment against either ECFA or the 1992 Consensus.[5] According to this informant, in early 2009 Dr. Honigmann Hong 洪財隆 published an article in the *China Times* to criticize the ECFA (Honigmann Hong 洪財隆, 2009). As this article dissatisfied Tsai Eng-meng, the *China Times* did not allow Hong to publish any further articles on the ECFA. The informant concluded that the *China Times* editors self-censored, with regard to China-related issues.

Some other indicators also illustrate the unusual relationship between Want Want and the Chinese authorities. Firstly, despite *Want China Times*’ announcement of being

[3] The author conducted this interview in Taipei on 9 January 2012.

[4] The author conducted this interview in Taipei on 14 August 2012.

[5] The initial term for ECFA was the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA). The Ma Ying-jeou government re-named it ECFA in late February 2009.

based on "Taiwanese spirit," a remarkable amount of their news items were drawn from the English edition of the official Chinese *Xinhua News Agency*, according to the same interviewee above. The *Want China Times* seems to be a representative of the *Xinhua News Agency* in Taiwan. Secondly, another anecdote about the *Want Daily* also indicates the influence of China on the *China Times Group*. The *Want Daily* published a daily feature, "Today's History Across the Strait." On June 4, 2010. This feature discussed a story of June 4, 1983 on Taiwan, and a story of June 4, 1985 from China, but no mention was made of the Tiananmen Square Massacre of June 4, 1989. This edition of the *Want Daily* aroused many Internet users to condemn the *Want Daily* for concealing the Tiananmen Square Massacre in China. Finally, the Chinese government's industrial subsidies for *Want Want China*, demonstrated *Want Want's* close relationship with the PRC. In 2011, *Want Want China* received a subsidy of US$47 million dollars, accounting for 11.3% of its annual net profit, from the Chinese government (The Economist, 2013).

Many criticisms were made in Taiwan condemning the *China Times* for pandering to China. For example, in January 2010 the *China Times* unexpectedly discharged Hsia Chen 夏珍 from his position as Editor-in-Chief because of a headline on December 26, 2009. The headline quoted a Taiwanese official's remark that the PRC's Chairman of the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait, Chen Yunlin 陳雲林, was unimportant in China. President Ma Ying-jeou expressed his disagreement with this characterization of Chen and the Chairman of the Straits Exchange Foundation of Taiwan, Chiang Pin-kun 江丙坤, also apologized for this statement. Evidently, this report infuriated the Chinese authorities. According to the *Apple Daily* both Tsai Eng-meng and the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council of the PRC were enraged by the article and, as a result, the *China Times* dismissed Editor-in-Chief Hsia Chen (Hsu Pei-chun 徐佩君, et al., 2010). This incident demonstrated China's influence over the *China Times*, but this was not an isolated case. According to an interview with a senior journalist, a *China Times* journalist finished a travelogue about China and sent it to the editor for approval. However, the editor asked the journalist to obtain approval from the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council of the PRC instead.[6]

On January 20, 2012 the *Washington Post* published an interview with Tsai Eng-meng conducted by its Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, Andrew Higgins. In this interview, Tsai Eng-meng said that when he saw the famous picture of the Tiananmen Square Massacre "tank man," "I realized that not that many people could really have died." Tsai also responded to a question about the discharge of Editor-in-Chief Hsia Chen, saying the reason was that he "hurt me by offending people, not just mainlanders." Tsai also believed that China "is very democratic in lots of places (Higgins, 2012)." Tsai's statements, however, infuriated many academics in Taiwan. Consequently, more than 17 societies, dozens of academics, and more than 600 activists, called for a boycott of the *Want Want China Times Group* (Luo Wei-chih 羅暐智, Su Sheng-yi 蘇聖怡, 2012).[7] In addition, Tsai Eng-meng told the *Washington Post*, "whether you like it or not, unification is going to happen sooner or later," and "I really hope that I can see that." Thus, Tsai has displayed his strong identification with the PRC.

[6] The author conducted this interview in Taipei on 19 April 2011.

[7] Wang Dan, a leader of the Chinese democratic movement in the Tiananmen Square in 1989, was the first to urge for a boycott of the Want China Times Group on his Facebook page on 23 January 2012.

Tsai Eng-meng’s interview with the *Washington Post*, the self-censorship of the *China Times*, the question of Chinese capital in Tsai’s purchase of the *China Times*, and Tsai’s report to Wang Yi, have aroused considerable criticism in Taiwan. The *Apple Daily* reflected this widespread sentiment and accused Want Want of brainwashing the Taiwanese people, propagandizing the CCP’s political ideology, and serving as an agent for Beijing to “unify” Taiwan (Apple Daily, 2012). As outlined above, this critique accords with the evidence, and the *Apple Daily’s* criticisms that the *China Times* has become part of the Chinese propaganda effort in Taiwan are persuasive.

China’s Pressure on Taiwannese Media’s Owners

Since the early 1990s, hundreds of thousands of Taiwanese businessmen have invested in China, and this situation has enabled the CCP to influence Taiwanese politics and elections (Lin, 2004). Some believe that Taiwanese business tycoons’ vocal support of the “1992 consensus,” under the CCP’s pressure, contributed to the DPP’s defeat in the 2012 presidential campaign.[8] Similarly the CCP has employed the same strategy of applying pressure on many other businessmen, particularly on media owners. Taiwan has six 24-hour news channels and I take both pro-DPP FTV and pro-DPP SET, as well as ERA, as main examples to discuss CCP’s media strategy in Taiwan.

FTV

The birth of the free-to-air Formosan Television Incorporated (民視 *Minshi*; FTV) in 1997, broke the monopoly of KMT’s control over free-to-air TV. Because the funds of FTV were raised from Taiwan identity people in the early 1990s, FTV announced itself as a Taiwanese TV station, which clearly identified China as a different country from Taiwan.

The founder of FTV, Chai Trong-rong 蔡同榮 (1935–2014), announced that the purpose of FTV was to protect Taiwan against China and to spread awareness of Taiwanese history, geography, culture, customs and languages. He stated that the principal goal of FTV was to construct Taiwanese nationalism (Chen Shu-chen 陳淑貞, 2010, p. 35). In order to defend the Taiwanese identity, and establish Taiwanese nationalism, FTV utilized many means to integrate the Taiwanese identity into its programs.

Under Chen Shui-bian’s media reform policy, the Legislative Yuan enacted the so-called “Regulation to Remove Political Parties, the Government and the Military from the Media” in 2003. Many critics focused on the relationship between FTV and its founder Chai Trong-rong, who was a legislator and a member of the *Democratic Progressive Party* (DPP) Central Standing Committee (CSC) at the time. Despite Chai’s claim that he had withdrawn from FTV and stepped down as chairman,[9] Chai still had an office at

[8] The author conducted this interview with Poe Ta-chung in Taipei on 4 November 2012.

[9] In December 2003, the Legislative Yuan amended three acts-the Cable Radio Act, the Radio and Television Act and the Satellite Broadcasting Act to restrict political power in influencing media.

the station and went to FTV every day. According to Lim It-hong 林一方,[10] he often slept in his FTV office suite while the chairman of FTV, Tien Tsai-ting 田再庭, only went to the office one day per week.[11] Many sources indicated that Chai Trong-rong was the real boss of FTV, and Chai Trong-rong also used FTV as a bargaining chip to negotiate with DPP politicians. For example, when Chai wanted to renew his term as the DPP caucus leader of the Legislative Yuan in June 2010, causing his rivals in the DPP to criticize him. Chai had hinted that the DPP needed FTV in the 2010 campaign for the mayors of the five special municipalities (Lin Ho-ming 林河名, Chao Ta-chih 趙大智, 2010).

In July 2009 the Melbourne International Film Festival's invitation to the film "The Ten Conditions of Love," a documentary about the Uyghur East Turkistan independence movement spiritual leader Rebiya Kadeer, angered China. China thus boycotted this film festival and withdrew both Chinese and Hong Kong movies from it. Additionally, a Chinese hacker hacked into the official website of the Melbourne International Film Festival (Hsu Chien-jung 許建榮, 2009). The DPP decided to support Rebiya Kadeer and to launch the showing of this film around Taiwan from August 2009. In the DPP CSC, Luo Wen-jia 羅文嘉 suggested that the FTV broadcast this documentary, but Chai Trong-rong declined to purchase it. Chai indicated his powerlessness within FTV to the DPP CSC, claiming he had no position in FTV.[12]

According to some articles about FTV, Chai Trong-rong only influenced the News Department and could not sway other departments. Despite all Taiwan identity media opposing ECFA, the Business Department of FTV won its bid for an ECFA advertisement project from the Ma Ying-jeou government. It was alleged that the News Department fought with the Business Department about this. Some people in FTV argued that FTV should not have entered a bid for this project, owing to its stance on Taiwan identity (Yen Chen-kai 顏振凱, Chang Che-ming 張哲鳴, 2009). Furthermore, the Business Department asked the News Department to restrain its coverage of the DPP's criticism of ECFA (Lin Cho-shui 林濁水, 2009).

The ECFA incident was not the only case of conflict between business and identity. FTV also cooperated with the official Chinese TV station *China Central Television* (CCTV) in business, with CCTV broadcasting some Taiwanese-speaking soap dramas obtained from FTV and dubbed in Mandarin Chinese.[13] Since doing business with CCTV probably violated Taiwanese law, Lin Cho-shui criticized FTV for illegally cooperating with the official Chinese TV station to produce the drama "Dr. Dadaogong" (神醫大道公 *Shenyi dadaogong*).[14] As well as producing the ECFA advertisement, in collaboration with the KMT, so as to smear Taiwan identity Taiwanese (Lin Cho-shui 林濁水, 2009).[15]

[10] The author conducted this interview with Lim It-hong in Taipei on 17 August 2010. Lim It-hong is a Taiwan Independence activist, who was the producer of "feichang guangdie" [Very VCD], a video which attacked the KMT Taoyuan County Magistrate candidate, Eric Chu, in the 2005 election campaign.

[11] Tien Tsai-ting lives in Taichung, but the FTV office is located in Taipei.

[12] The author conducted this interview with Luo Wen-jia in Taipei on 1 October 2009.

[13] The author conducted this interview with Sylvia Feng in Taipei on 9 November 2009.

[14] This drama was also supervised by the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council of China and some other organizations of the "United Front Work" in China.

[15] For this advertisement, FTV contrived a "non-standard Mandarin Chinese" speaking comic Taiwanese character who opposed ECFA. The character was poorly educated and short-sighted. This ethnic discrimination in the ECFA advertisement drew much criticism.

The above anecdotes point out that FTV put business with China ahead of politics and national identity. However, FTV was not the only so-called pro-DPP or Taiwan identity medium that contradicted its own political stance. SET was another important instance of China’s influence on Taiwan’s media.

SET

As SET (*Sanli dianshitai* 三立電視台; Sanlih E-Television), FTV, and the *Liberty Times* (*Ziyou shibao* 自由時報) often attacked President Ma Ying-jeou’s China-friendly policies; President Ma called this media trio the “*sanmingzhi*” [sandwich], which sounds similar to san-min-zi-an abbreviation of SET, FTV and the *Liberty Times*-to express his unhappiness with their criticism of him. This suggests SET is a pro-DPP and a Taiwan identity TV station. Its firmly pro-DPP and pro-Taiwan stance began in 2005 when SET Chairman Lin Kun-hai’s good friend, Frank Hsieh, became Premier. SET’s famous talk show program, “Big Talk News” (*Dahua xinwen* 大話新聞) demonstrated SET’s political and national identity. “Big Talk News” started in 2002, and began to reveal DPP and Taiwan identity from 2005.[16]

Due to the high TV rating of “Big Talk News,” the Ma Ying-jeou government monitored the program, and many officers of the Ma government often called in to the program during its on-air discussions of Ma’s policies and administration. In addition, the popularity and influence of “Big Talk News” also prompted Beijing to monitor it (Chung Nien-huang 鍾年晃, 2012, p. 78).

However, SET began to self-censor after Ma’s election in 2008. A senior producer contended that “Big Talk News” was troublesome for SET because the KMT held power, and SET wanted to do business with China to produce dramas after 2008.[17] For the purpose of expanding the market in China, the former Executive Vice-President of SET, 蘇麗媚 Su Li-mei, served in 2010 as Advisor-in-Chief to the leading Chinese online video enterprise Beijing-based “Tudou.com” (*Tudouwang* 土豆網)[18] to produce TV dramas. Despite the fact that Taiwanese dramas had been popular outside of Taiwan, especially in China, SET created a new term “Chinese drama” (*huaju* 華劇) in December 2011 to replace the traditional term “Taiwanese drama” (*taiju* 台劇).[19] SET intended to use “Chinese drama” in order to open the overseas market. SET President 張榮華 Chang Jung-hua expected the “Chinese drama” to lead a “Chinese Wave” (*hualiu* 華流), similar to the Korean Wave of popular soap-operas (Cheng Chiu-shuang 鄭秋霜, 2012).

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[16] “Big Talk News” remained neutral during the 2004 presidential campaign. President Chen Shui-bian attended “Big Talk News,” but the other programs of SET also invited the Pan-Blue candidates and politicians.

[17] The author conducted this interview in Taipei on 4 May 2011.

[18] Tudou.com was the first and leading online video platform in China before the challenge of Youku.com. Su Li-mei served as the Advisor-in-Chief of Tudou.com from May 2010. In March 2012, Youku.com merged with Tudou.com.

[19] The first “Chinese drama” was “*Zhen’ai zhao mafan* 真愛找麻煩” (Inborn Pair) which began broadcasting on SET on 13 December 2011.

Because of SET's business in China and under pressure from the SET leadership, "Big Talk News" was not permitted to discuss the Tiananmen Massacre, the Dalai Lama, or Rebiya Kadeer, nor could it criticize China (Chung Nien-huang 鍾年晃, 2012, p. 39). In addition, SET even decided not to invite pro-Tibetan independence activist Freddy Lim,[20] the Chairman of Amnesty International Taiwan, to "Big Talk News" under pressure from the PRC (Chung Nien-huang 鍾年晃, 2012, p. 140). A senior anchorperson of SET also verified this, saying that SET restricted the coverage of the Dalai Lama, the Tiananmen Square Massacre, and the Falun Gong.[21] On July 27, 2011 "Big Talk News" criticized China's high speed railway accident using such titles as "Neglecting human rights, suppressing freedom of press, who wants unification?" and "What kind of country? China destroys evidence in high speed railway accident," to criticize China. SET President Chang Jung-hua phoned the staff of the show and told them not to use such strong phrases to criticize China. An informant from SET argued that Chinese Internet users could strongly condemn the Chinese government on this tragedy, but "Big Talk News" in Taiwan must keep silent.[22] Additionally, according to another source, while many other media outlets attacked the Want Want China Times Group for Tsai Eng-meng's denial of the Tiananmen Square Massacre in an interview with the *Washington Post* in January 2012, SET ordered its talk show programs, including "Big Talk News" and "Go New Taiwan" (*Xin Taiwan jiayou* 新台灣加油) not to discuss the matter.[23]

During the 2012 presidential campaign, SET sent representatives to negotiate with the Chinese authorities to broadcast their TV dramas in China. However, the Chinese authorities implied that if SET did not axe "Big Talk News," they would prevent SET from making money in China (Chung Nien-huang 鍾年晃, 2012, p. 78). After Ma Ying-jeou won re-election in 2012, rumors circulated that SET would axe the program. According to the same source on June 6, 2012, right after the 2012 election, SET management had suggested "Big Talk News" should alter its political identity.

On May 15, 2012, "Big Talk News" interviewed former President Lee Teng-hui. The same source pointed out however, on the same day, Vice General-Manager of the SET News Department Kao Ming-hui talked with "Big Talk News" host Cheng Hung-yi 鄭弘儀. He advised that SET had decided to stop the show in June. Subsequently, SET axed "Big Talk News" at the end of May 2012. Many sources have discussed the potential motivations for SET canceling "Big Talk News," the most plausible being pressure from Beijing as SET attempts to break into the Chinese TV market (Wu Chih-wei 吳志偉, 2012). Ma Wei-ming 馬維敏, the Editor-in-Chief of the pro-democratic *Apple Daily*, responded to this incident. Wei-ming said that the "China factor" could determine the content of a Taiwanese TV program, as well as a program's host, and asked what would be next. Ma Wei-min argues that Taiwan's media and journalists have to be aware of the return of the "Taiwan Garrison Command (Ma Wei-min 馬維敏, 2012)." In summary, the "China factor" has deeply impacted SET, causing it to self-censor and even terminate a popular program.

[20] Freddy Lim became a Legislator in 2016.

[21] The author conducted this interview in Taipei on 4 May 2011.

[22] The author conducted this interview in Taipei on 17 August 2011.

[23] The author conducted this interview via email on 6 June 2012. The interviewee is a senior staff member of SET.

ERA

SET serves as a good example of how the Chinese successfully put pressure on a medium, which intended to do business in China. Narratives from ERA Communications (*Niandai dianshitai* 年代電視台; ERA) show how the Taiwan Affairs Office of the Chinese State Council, intervened in Taiwan’s TV programs. During the 2012 presidential election ERA tended to support James Soong and its famous talk show program “Facing News” (*Xinwen mian dui mian* 新聞面對面), often criticized Ma Ying-jeou. This political stance angered the CCP. According to an interview, because the Chairman of ERA Lien Tai-sheng 練台生, had some business in China, the Taiwan Affairs Office officials ordered the ERA officials to file a report with them. Lien Tai-sheng sent Executive Vice-President Yen Chih-ching to visit Beijing three times, but the Chinese authorities were unhappy until Lien Tai-sheng personally visited Beijing himself to “make a report.”[24]

In fact, the *Liberty Times* has also revealed some similar stories. The Taiwan Affairs Office of the Chinese State Council often interfered in Taiwanese media’s comments and coverage on China. Some media received “complaints” from the Taiwan Affairs Office and some media officials also visited Beijing to be educated by such Chinese officials as the spokesman for the Taiwan Affairs Office, Yang Yi 陳毅 (Tzou Jing-wen 鄒景雯, 2011).

Of course, China’s pressure did not only happen to the three media outlets above. For instance, *The Journalist* became more critical of China in mid-2012; causing one of main shareholders of *The Journalist*, who intended to conduct business in China, some trouble. Consequently, Editor-in-Chief Ku Pi-ling 古碧玲, who published some special issues on Chinese affairs in order to criticize China, stepped down in January 2013 (Citizen Journalism, 2013).

In short, stories in FTV, SET and ERA show different aspects of China’s influence on Taiwan’s media. For FTV, although it maintained its firmly pro-DPP and Taiwan independence position, it conceded its political stance to China when negotiating business in relation to China. SET’s story also demonstrated how China’s pressure impacted its programs when SET dealt with business in China. What happened with ERA indicated that the Chinese authorities could directly influence Taiwan’s media, particularly if they had business in China.

China’s Embedded Advertising/Advertorials in Taiwan’s Media

Another important source of Chinese influence on Taiwan’s media is the placement of advertisements, in the form of apparent news coverage (*zhiruxing xinwen* 置入性新聞; embedded advertising or advertorials), in Taiwanese media. The *Want Want China Times Group* played an important role in this through helping the Chinese authorities place these items in Taiwan’s media.

[24] The author conducted this interview in Taipei on 15 August 2012. The interviewee is a senior journalist.

The Control Yuan member Frank Wu 吳豐山, in November 2010, made an investigation that confirmed China's advertorials in the *China Times* were in violation of Taiwan's legal regulations. In fact, examples of such advertorials could be found in both the *China Times* and the *United Daily News* (*Lianhebao* 聯合報) (Shih, 2010). According to the Foundation for the Advancement of Media Excellence (*Xinwen gonghai fangzhi jijinhui* 新聞公害防治基金會), illegal Chinese advertising in Taiwan's media had reached 269 instances within two years. For instance, 25 Chinese advertisements were embedded in the *United Daily News* and the *United Evening News* (*Lianhe wanbao* 聯合晚報) in November 2012 (Huang Yi-ching 黃以敬, 2013). Informants indicated that Want Want was actually the agent helping the Chinese authorities to place embedded advertising in Taiwan's media.[25]

In March 2012 the Governor of China's Fujian Province, Su Shulin 蘇樹林, visited Taiwan and the *China Times* reported details of Su Shulin's visit. New Talk (Xintouke) revealed a *China Times* document entitled "The 2012 Propaganda Plan of the Governor of Fujian Province's Visit to Taiwan" (*Erlingyi'er Fujian sheng shengzheng fantai xuanchuan jihua* 2012福建省省長訪台宣傳計畫), and made a detailed report about this propaganda plan and the coverage of the *China Times*, but the *China Times* still denied this. The Fujian Province authorities, however, admitted that this was a matter between the Fujian Province authorities and the Want China Times Group (Lin Chau-yi 林朝億, 2012). Finally, the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) Chairwoman Lai Shin-yuan 賴幸媛 confirmed New Talk's coverage in the Legislative Yuan, and the *China Times* was fined NT$400,000 by the Ministry of Economic Affairs (Chen Hung-chin 陳虹瑾, 2012).

Chang Chin-hwa 張錦華, a professor at National Taiwan University, said that "the *China Times* accepted embedded advertising from the Chinese government and has a reputation for always publishing good news about China and leaving out the bad (Jang Show-ling 鄭秀玲, 2011)." Chang Chin-hwa thus argued, "It was the darkest moment for freedom of speech in Taiwan (Tai Chih-chuan 戴智權, 2011)." The *Want Want China Times Group* even sued the media academics that had criticized the *Want Want China Times Group*. In an interview with the *Liberty Times* Chang Chin-hwa said that the *China Times* presented advertorials paid for by the Chinese government as "news," and also served as an agency for the Chinese authorities to help China to buy "news" in the *United Daily News*, illegal activities according to Taiwan's regulations. Chang Chin-hwa was also concerned that the purchasing of "news" by the Chinese authorities would make Taiwanese media a megaphone for China, so as to propagandize Chinese official ideology and to control news coverage in Taiwan. Chang Chin-hwa further connected these Chinese embedded advertisings to Hu Jintao's idea of media warfare against Taiwan, which involved "Entering the Island [of Taiwan], Entering the Household, and Entering the Mind" (rudao ruhu ru'nao 入島 入戶 入腦) (Tzou Jing-wen 鄒景雯, 2011). Hu Jintao's idea was a unification strategy against Taiwan, through Chinese propaganda in Taiwan's media. In light of the revelations about *Want Want* it is entirely possible that the *China Times* is one means through which Hu's idea of propaganda permeating through Taiwan, has been put into practice.

[25] The author conducted these interviews in Taiwan on 14 April, 19 April and 26 July, 2011.

The Controversy on the Sale of pro-Democratic *Taiwan Next Media* and Anti-Media Monopoly Movement

In 2012, despite pro-democratic *Taiwan Next Media’s* popularity among Taiwanese, the owner, Jimmy Lai decided to sell the media. There were many reasons for Lai selling Taiwan Next Media, the main motivation being the huge losses of Next TV (*Yi dianshi* 壹電視).[26] Jimmy Lai established Next TV in July 2009, but did not receive a broadcasting license until July 2011. Lai believed the Ma Ying-jeou government was tightening controls on Taiwan’s press and intentionally obstructing Next TV’s license application (Lai, 2010). In addition, more than a quarter of Taiwan’s cable systems, which were under the influence of Tsai Eng-meng’s *Want Want China Times Group*, such as the China Network Systems, blocked Next TV after it received the license. This further contributed to Next Media’s losses.[27] Spokesman of Next TV Chang Hsiu-che 張修哲 said that Next TV had actually reached a deal with CNS, to broadcast Next TV’s programs on CNS’s channels. However, the CCP received this information and requested that Tsai Eng-meng block Next TV (Chung Nien-huang 鍾年晃, 2012, pp. 94–95). In fact, another main cable TV system, Kbor (*Kaibo* 凱擘), which owns 12 cable TV systems and has more than 1.1 million subscribers (by households), also blocked Next TV. Kbor belonged to the Fubon Group (Fubang jituan), and Fubon operated many banks in both Hong Kong and China. This business probably explains why Kbro also blocked pro-democratic Next TV.[28]

In an interview, Columnist of the *Apple Daily* Antonio Chiang suggested three factors involved in Jimmy Lai’s decision to sell Next Media. The first is the huge losses mentioned above. The second is that Lai had grown tired of fighting the pro-China Ma Ying-jeou government and the *Want Want China Times Group*. The third, Jimmy Lai was disappointed with Taiwan’s democracy, which happened to be the reason for Lai coming to Taiwan in 2001. Chiang further added that the KMT actively suppresses Next Media while the DPP does not offer any support, and thus such a political environment may also have been a factor in Lai stepping away.[29] Additionally, the editorial writer of the *Apple Daily*, Poe Ta-chung; believed the sale of Next Media would result from a conspiracy of the KMT and the CCP. Poe added that the KMT first intentionally delayed Next TV’s broadcast license and the cable TV systems; while owners who have much business in China blocked Next TV, after it received a license.[30]

The main parties in the purchase of *Next Media* included *China Trust Charity Foundation* Chairman Jeffrey Koo Jr. 辜仲諒, Formosa Plastics Group Chairman William Wong 王文淵, and *Want Want China Times* Group Chairman Tsai Eng-meng among others. Poe Ta-chung believed that Tsai Eng-meng’s becoming closer to the Chinese au-

[26] Jimmy Lai founded Next Media in Hong Kong in 1990, where Next Media first published the *Next Magazine* and the *Apple Daily*. The Taiwan Next Media started to publish the Taiwan *Next Magazine* (Yizhoukan) in 2001, the Taiwan *Apple Daily* in 2003 and to establish Next TV in 2009.

[27] CNS owns 11 cable TV systems with more than 1 million subscribers (by household). The Want Want China Times Group also owns 3 other cable TV systems with more than 200 thousand subscribers (by household).

[28] In the beginning, Fubon was one of the potential buyers in the sale of Taiwan Next Media.

[29] The author conducted this interview with Antonio Chiang in Taipei on 4 November 2012.

[30] The author conducted this interview with Poe Ta-chung in Taipei on 4 November 2012.

thorities after purchasing the *China Times Group*, had encouraged both Koo and Wang to buy Next Media.[31] In the beginning, many suspected capital supposedly from Singapore was actually from Tsai Eng-meng. President of the Apple Daily Union Tsai Jih-yun 蔡日雲 also suspected it, but both Jeffery Koo and Jimmy Lai denied it. No evidence showed that the Chinese authorities got directly involved with the purchase of Taiwan *Next Media*, but both the *Formosa Plastics Group* and *China Trust* have significant corporate interests in China. Poe Ta-chung believed that *Next Media* would not maintain a pro-democratic position after a takeover by any tycoon.[32]

Still, the sale of the pro-democratic Taiwan Next Media deeply shocked many in Taiwan. Because pro-CCP Tsai Eng-meng was involved, many Taiwanese students launched a campaign opposing the sale. Actually, before the sale of Taiwan *Next Media*, students had already launched some protests against the *Want Want China Times Group*. In July 2012 the National Communications Commission (NCC) gave conditional approval to *Want Want China Times Group’s* acquisition, of the cable TV services owned by the *China Network Systems* (*Zhongjia wangle* 中嘉網路; CNS). In response to this trade, Ketty Chen, a political scientist at National Taiwan University, said, “People are extremely uncomfortable to the point of being angry at him, knowing that he has a pro-China stance and that he has publicly advocated that Taiwan be part of China.” Ketty Chen added that “That’s the main reason why people don’t want him to become the Rupert Murdoch of Taiwan (Mishkin, 2012).”

On July 31, 2012 hundreds of students protested against this trade because they believed that it would make *Want Want* a media “monster,” which would monopolize Taiwan’s media market and limit Taiwan’s freedom of the press. On the same day some academics, including Dr. Huang Kuo-chang, hosted a press conference with more than ten TV stations in attendance to support the students. However, only Next TV broadcast this press conference. All other TV stations self-censored the press conference as well as the student protest, because their media owners would not displease Tsai Eng-meng and risk their right to broadcast their programs on CNS (Chung Nien-huang 鍾年晃, 2012, pp. 81–85).

In addition, *Want Want* intentionally tried to discredit Dr. Huang Kuo-chang 黃國昌 by contriving fake news to attack him.[33] *Want Want* accused Dr. Huang of paying students to attend a protest against *Want Want*. This incident angered students and netizens, with numerous netizens blaming *Want Want* for the scandal (Loa, 2012a). One month later the group apologized to Dr. Huang, saying it had no proof he had done so (Shan, 2012). On September 1, 2012, Journalists’ Day, thousands of students, journalists, academics, and social activists took to the streets in Taipei. They protested against *Want Want’s* monopolisation of the media, and demand that the NCC help break monopolization of the media (Loa, 2012b).

As a measure to protest *Want Want’s* acquisition of *Next Media*, Taiwanese students launched a campaign entitled “Anti-Media Monopoly,” declaring “Oppose media monopoly, reject the black hand of China, uphold freedom of the press” around the world. Not only did thousands of overseas Taiwanese students and young people join the cam-

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Huang Kuo-chang became a Legislator in 2016.

paign, but so did some foreign academics such as; Massachusetts Institute of Technology Professor Noam Chomsky, New York University Professor Ned Block, Monash University Professor Bruce Jacobs and Hamline University Professor Richard Kagan.

According to Freedom House’s *Freedom in the World 2013*; both deals, *Want Want’s* acquisition of CNS, and the sale of Next Media to a consortium comprised of some individuals who had substantial business interests in China, could negatively affect diversity and press freedom in Taiwan (Tsao, Hsu, 2013). For the students the sale of Next Media chiefly raised concerns about Tsai’s intention to monopolize Taiwan’s media, and his relationship with the Chinese authorities.

Consequently, Tsai Eng-meng’s *Want Want China Times Group’s* actions were the main drive behind the students’ launch of a campaign to safeguard Taiwan’s freedom of the press and to oppose media monopoly. However, because some famous and important international scholars supported this movement, the *Want Want China Times Group* attacked those students and claimed that Noam Chomsky, along with Ned Block, were “misled” by not having the full content of the Chinese message on the placard explained to them (Cole, 2013). The controversy centered on the part of the text that read in Mandarin: “Say no to China’s black hands,” a reference to Chinese influence in Taiwanese media (Cole, 2013). A few days later, Noam Chomsky denied he was misled and reiterated his support for the anti-monopoly movement. Chomsky said that he was under the impression that the poster called for freedom of press and opposed media monopolization, and said nothing about China. He assumed it was simply a misunderstanding, resulting from the fact that he could not read (Cole, 2013; Rawnsley, 2013).

Yet, after several months, this controversial media deal collapsed as Tsai Eng-meng decided to withdraw. There were rumors around this collapse, with one source indicating that the CCP had lost patience with Tsai and his inability to take over the media in Taiwan.[34] Mark Simon, the spokesman for Jimmy Lai’s Next Media in Hong Kong, said, “Beijing didn’t want a cashed up Jimmy Lai.” Simon also suggested that perhaps “mainland China sent a message out that this is not a necessary fight to have” (Mullany, 2013). Consequently, Next Media Group Chairman Jimmy Lai promised that he would not attempt to sell his print businesses in Taiwan, because the businesses were profitable (Wang, Kao, 2013). However, Jimmy Lai did sell Next TV to ERA Chairman Lien Tai-sheng on June 1, 2013. No matter what was the real factor in the collapse of this sale, this result can be viewed as a victory for those who oppose a media monopoly in Taiwan and those who counter China’s intention to influence Taiwan’s media.

But, right after the end of the anti-media monopoly movement, the Cross-Strait Agreement on Trade in Services signed between Cross-Strait representatives on 21 June 2013 has resulted in many new concerns for a vast number of Taiwanese.[35] Critics argue that the agreement will threaten Taiwan’s freedom of the press, freedom of speech and freedom on the Internet (Chen, Chun, 2013; Lin, 2013).

Professor Jang Show-ling 鄭秀玲 at National Taiwan University believes that allowing Chinese investment in printing poses risks to freedom of speech (Chen, Chun,

[34] The author obtained this source from a Google Group discussion on 26 March 2013. The informant is a foreign journalist in Taiwan.

[35] Due to its controversy, the Legislative Yuan has of December 2013 not yet approved the agreement, which is necessary before it comes into force.

2013). Professor Chang Chin-hwa considers that the agreement in printing shows China’s intention to influence Taiwan’s press (Peng Hsien-chun 彭顯鈞, Chen Hui-ping 陳慧萍, 2013). Senior journalist Chung Nien-huang 鍾年晃 said that Chinese-run print services in Taiwan will potentially restrict Taiwan’s freedom of speech at crucial moments such as during elections and in Cross-Strait issues.[36] However, President of *Business Today* (*Jin zhoukan* 今周刊), Liang Yung-haung 梁永煌, and CEO of Taiwan’s biggest publishing group, Cite Media Holding Group, Ho Fei-peng 何飛鵬, believe that the service pact will not influence Taiwan’s press because of Taiwan’s democracy and free market.[37] They added if Chinese-run printing services intend to influence Taiwan’s press, Taiwanese publishers could choose other printing services. Still, Liang believes that China’s flat advertising in Taiwan will restrict Taiwan’s freedom of speech in the press, though the agreement does not include flat advertising.

The service pacts also cover communications services, including the Internet, which has become one of Taiwan’s major concerns with regards to national security and freedom of speech. Professor Lin Ying-dar 林盈達 at National Chiao Tung University thinks that category-2 telecommunications services will not only threaten Taiwan’s national security and privacy, but also freedom of speech.[38] Owing to the pact’s inclusion of Internet service providers (ISP), Lin believes that Chinese-run ISPs may censor “sensitive issues” or block news websites just as Beijing does in Chinese cyberspace. To conclude, the Cross-Strait Agreement on Trade in Services is also considered a threat to Taiwan’s media, especially on the Internet.

* * *

Chinese influence on Taiwan’s media has been steadily expanding since Ma Ying-jeou came to power in 2008. First, the PRC could use economic affiliation as a means to co-opt some Taiwanese media, manage the coverage and criticism of China in Taiwan’s media by means of media acquisition by pro-China capitalists. Therefore the PRC uses pro-Beijing tycoons, to control Taiwan’s media. The *Want Want China Times Group* presented itself to be a typical example in this respect. Second, as the political orientation of tycoons or businessmen is generally linked with their business, the PRC cunningly put pressure on those Taiwanese media owners who have invested or intend to invest in China. Thus those Taiwanese media outlets will side with China, or self-sensor, in any issue related to China. Evidently, the cases of the *Want Want China Times Group*, FTV, SET and ERA indicate China’s success in this strategy. Although FTV and SET sided with the DPP and Taiwan identity, following China’s subtle tactics, both had to surrender their political identity to China in consideration of their business with China. Third, the Chinese authorities have published certain types of advertisements in the form of news coverage in Taiwanese media. The PRC’s placing advertising and advertorials in Taiwan’s media facilitates influence by being

[36] The author conducted this interview in Taipei on 3 December 2013.

[37] The author conducted the interview with Liang Yung-huang in Taipei on 19 November 2013 and Ho Fei-peng in Taipei on 20 November 2013.

[38] The author conducted this interview with Lin Ying-dar through email on 12 December 2013.

a source of advertising revenue, thereby making Taiwan’s media a propaganda agent of the Chinese authorities. Finally, the sale of the pro-democratic *Apple Daily* worried Taiwanese students and academics about Taiwan’s freedom of press even though this media deal was to end in a controversial collapse.

Above all, increasing and closer Cross-Strait economic ties has put China in a dominant position in respect to some Taiwanese media. For these media, Chinese marketing consideration of Taiwan media industry had combined with pressure to move away from criticism of China. For those media proprietors, particularly tycoons, the market is king and Taiwan’s freedom of the press and political self-determination is not much of a consideration.

Taiwan’s democracy and freedom of the press, its free capital markets, and the increasing and closer economic integration between Taiwan and China, provide Chinese authorities with an opportunity to use Taiwanese businessmen to influence Taiwan’s media outlets. China uses three inter-related strategies to influence Taiwan’s media in this way: persuading businessmen with pro-China views to purchase Taiwanese media outlets, pressuring existing media owners, and placing advertisements in Taiwan’s media in order to purchase influence. There is increasing concern in Taiwan that these strategies are eroding freedom of the press.

Actually, the Internet has currently become another new strategy to influence Taiwan’s media outlet and politics after Tsai Ing-wen came to power in 2016. It is believed that the Chinese government relies on “news content farms (内容農場 neirong nong chang)” outlets in mainland China, that generate and distribute fake news/disinformation that attack Taiwanese political parties and politicians (Chen Liang-yen 陳諒言, 2016, pp. 22–27). In the absence of systematic filtering, these fake news and disinformation could easily shape people’s political views and influence Taiwan’s politics. Therefore, we should pay attention to China’s new and ongoing cyber-propaganda strategy.

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Wpływ Chińskiej Republiki Ludowej na media i politykę republiki chińskiej na Tajwanie

Streszczenie

Tajwańska demokracja oraz wolność prasy stwarzają możliwości dla władz Chińskiej Republiki Ludowej, aby poprzez tajwańskich biznesmenów, wpływać na treści prezentowane w mediach i konsekwentnie na politykę Tajwanu. Władze ChRL używają trzech powiązanych ze sobą strategii wywierania wpływu na tajwańskie media: nakłaniając pro-chińskich biznesmenów to zakupu tajwańskich mediów, naciskając na istniejących właścicieli mediów oraz umieszczając reklamy w tajwańskich mediach w celu uzyskania wpływu politycznego w zamian za przychody z tytułu publikowania ów reklam. Dodatkowo rząd ChRL używa specjalistów od cyberpropagandy, w celu atakowania konkretnych partii politycznych oraz polityków na Tajwanie.

Słowa kluczowe: Tajwan, autocenzura, wolność prasy, cyber-propaganda

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