

GRADUATE CAPSTONE PROJECT

Pro-Beijing Propaganda in Taiwanese Media

Implications for the Future of Taiwan-China-U.S. Relations

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Trilateral relations between the U.S., China, and Taiwan are very fragile at the moment. Taiwan and China have been at a steady stalemate for a while now regarding the status of Taiwan. This is how the current status-quo is being maintained. This has, however, spurred China to take alternative courses of action in their attempts to reunify with Taiwan. One such recourse is their propaganda campaign taking place within Taiwan's own media. If this campaign is successful, China may yet see success in reunifying Taiwan. If not, it may in fact have the exact opposite effect, driving Taiwan closer to declaring independence. This situation is likely to send China and Taiwan into a violent struggle which the U.S. may very well be pulled into given its relation to Taiwan. This research seeks to answer the question of how effective the Chinese propaganda apparatus is in Taiwan and what that answer means for future trilateral relations.

Introduction

In recent years, Taiwanese sovereignty has become an increasingly important security question in the field of international affairs. China, currently the most significant power in the Asia Pacific, repeatedly emphasizes the strategic importance of Taiwan through its constant insistence of Taiwanese unification with the mainland. It has been well documented in academic writings that China demands reunification with Taiwan and refuses to renounce the use of force to prevent Taiwanese independence.¹ It is also well known that should China attempt to use force to coerce Taiwanese unification, the United States will almost certainly intervene given its obligation within the Taiwan Relations Act (1979) which states that the U.S. is, “to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or the social or economic system, of the people on Taiwan.”² Given the consequences of taking Taiwan by force, China has been exploring a number of other options for unification. One option in particular is the use of information to adjust the public opinion of the Taiwanese people regarding unification. In order to achieve this goal, China has turned to its propaganda apparatus to exert its influence over the Taiwanese media. China believes that by secretly seeping its message directly into Taiwan through its own local media, changes can take place from within giving more strength and credibility to the notion of unification. But is China’s strategy running according to plan? Recent trends in the national identity of the Taiwanese population might suggest otherwise. The purpose of this research paper is to analyze the patterns of the relationship between the pro-Beijing message of unification within the Taiwanese media and the trends of Taiwanese national

¹ Phillip C. Saunders and Scott L. Kastner, “Bridge over Troubled Water? Envisioning a China-Taiwan Peace Agreement,” *International Security* 33, no. 4 (2009): 88.

² *Taiwan Relations Act*, 1979, Pub. L. No. 96-8, 96th Cong., 1st Session (February 15, 1979), American Institute in Taiwan.

identity in order to determine the efficacy of the propaganda's influence, as well as illustrate the possible implications of the findings.

Background

After the President Lee Teng-hui became the first democratically elected president of Taiwan in 1996, the difficulty of Taiwanese reunification with mainland China reached a new level of intensity on account of the new political system being implemented. During his presidency, Lee's government "actively promoted Taiwanese dialects and initiated a new junior high school curriculum called Knowing Taiwan in 1997 to resuscitate Taiwan's colonial past, which served as a symbolic rallying call for Taiwanese identity."³ At this point, the prospect of a Taiwanese identity independent from that of China was stronger than ever. Though, even with the new political system, the power remained in the hands of the long-time governing, pro-unification Kuomintang (KMT) party. The following presidential election, however, elevated the difficulty of unification even further. "The shift in political power in Taiwan's domestic politics after the 2000 presidential election... created greater uncertainties for China over Taiwan's official policy on the matter."⁴ Not only had Taiwan shifted to a more democratic system of government, in the year 2000, governing power also shifted to the anti-unification opposition, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) under President Chen Shui-bian, and the idea of Taiwanese independence became real. "This shift from the KMT to the DPP set a benchmark for identity politics in Taiwan because the issue of independence started to enter the political agenda."⁵ This shift represented the completion of the trifecta of the make-up of national identity: nationality –

³ Rou-Lan Chen, "Beyond National Identity in Taiwan: A Multidimensional and Evolutionary Conceptualization," *Asian Survey* 52, no. 5 (2012): 853.

⁴ Emerson M. S. Niou, "Understanding Taiwan Independence and Its Policy Implications," *Asian Survey* 44, no. 4 (2004): 555.

⁵ Chen, "Beyond National Identity," 870.

whether someone believes they are Taiwanese, Chinese, or both; status orientation, or state identification – one’s preference for the status of Taiwan (independence vs. unification); and the final piece, party identification – which political party they identify with or prefer.⁶

These events served to solidify the existing cross-strait stalemate between Taiwan and China. This means that currently, whatever actions are taken by either China or Taiwan that concern the other, need to have a subtly nuanced approach that will not disturb the delicate balance that currently dominates cross-strait relations. In other words, Taiwan cannot reach directly for independence, and China cannot reach directly for unification lest the balance unravel into a full blown conflict. This situation does not mean that either choice is completely unattainable though. Both sides of the strait are using their own indirect methods to try and attain their goals. In particular, China is attempting to influence the Taiwanese people toward unification through the use of pro-Beijing unification propaganda.

Propaganda, as used in this research, is defined as an instrument through which public opinion is organized and focused.⁷ In other words, it is the information that is taken in everyday by a selected body of people in a given location in order to have them think or feel a certain way about certain issues. Propaganda usually has a negative connotation, often being equated with blatant lies; however, by using this specific definition, it is not necessarily inherently negative. This is very important because in this analysis, the focus is centered on the rhetoric of specific information, rather than on how much truth it holds. In modern media, credibility is an important factor when attempting to gain influence over an audience, therefore it is important that

⁶ Frank C.S. Liu, “When Taiwan Identifiers Embrace the ROC: The Complexity of State Identification in Taiwan,” *Issues and Studies* 48, no. 2 (2012): 29.

⁷ Edward L. Bernays, *Propaganda* (New York: Ig, 1928), 12.

propaganda maintains such credibility. This is especially true in the case of China who seeks to gain influence in places where pro-China sentiments are often strongly resisted.

In the early 2000s, China embarked on a campaign of pro-unification propaganda that was centered on public opinion about Taiwan using overseas –not Taiwanese– media.⁸ However, in 2008, when the KMT recovered political rule from the DPP, President Ma Ying-jeou’s policy of closer economic integration with China opened up new avenues for Mainland influence. Closer economic integration made Taiwan more dependent on China’s economy, giving China more and more influence over Taiwan. “Given Taiwan’s growing trade dependence on the Chinese mainland and the attractiveness of China’s enormous market for Taiwanese entrepreneurs and investors, the PRC government is often purported to ‘use business to steer politics’ (yishang weizheng) or to ‘use economics to promote unification’ (yijing cutong). That is, the PRC is said to seek political leverage over Taiwan by making full use of the mainland’s economic clout.”⁹ This would not be the first time that China used its economic clout to infiltrate a country’s media and fill it with a pro-China message. Before the year 2000, China exercised a similar initiative within Hong Kong media, and it worked all too well.

In 1984, the Sino-British Joint Declaration was reached between Great Britain and The People’s Republic of China which effectively gave China sovereignty over Hong Kong, though it would not take effect until 1997.¹⁰ The declaration specifically stated, “The current social and economic systems in Hong Kong will remain unchanged, and so will the life-style. Rights and

⁸ Chien-Jung Hsu, “China’s Influence on Taiwan’s Media,” *Asian Survey* 54, no. 3 (2014): 516.

⁹ Shu Keng and Gunter Schubert, “Agents of Taiwan-China Unification? The Political Roles of Taiwanese Business People in the Process of Cross-Strait Integration,” *Asian Survey* 50, no. 2 (2010): 289.

¹⁰ National Legislative Bodies / National Authorities, *Joint Declaration of the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the People's Republic of China on the Question of Hong Kong*, 19 December 1984, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b525c.html> [accessed 25 June 2015].

freedoms, including those of the person, of speech, of the press...”¹¹ Despite these specific rulings of the declaration, the Hong Kong media suffered great losses of freedom under Chinese sovereignty during the transitional period between 1984 and 1997. This was mostly due to certain propaganda schemes exercised by China in order to subtly ‘guide’ the media toward China-approved reporting. China understands that pressure, when applied in the right places, could transform a working media channel into their own propaganda apparatus, and they applied that pressure to Hong Kong’s media.

Beijing pulls no punches in their fight for media control. They go after big and small targets alike. Scholar James E. Sciutto explains, “China uses a wide variety of means to bridle the Hong Kong press. Beijing targets the entire media hierarchy, from beat reporter to publisher. For each target, there is an appropriate weapon.”¹² They use methods such as open criticism or flat out threats toward individual reporters whose stories have negative overtones regarding Beijing. Letters would be written and sent directly to such journalists in some cases threatening arrest or punishment for publishing such stories; in other cases, publication editors would be called directly by Chinese officials and asked to handle their reporters or their stories accordingly.¹³ This was the typical treatment for journalists who had been blacklisted by the Chinese government. For other reporters who were either pro-China or on the fence, different strategies were used to gain or maintain influence. Usually if a journalist is pro-China, or can possibly be swayed toward that faction, China will employ its agents to use tactics such as bribery, free food and travel, the promise of inside news tips, or recurring invitations to extravagant parties and events in order to woo those journalists and make them feel as though

¹¹ National Legislative Bodies, *Joint Declaration*.

¹² James E. Sciutto, “China’s Muffling of the Hong Kong Media,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 547, *The Future of Hong Kong* (1996): 139.

¹³ *Ibid*, 135.

they are members of an elite social group as a reward for continued loyalty to their media wishes.¹⁴ China also takes additional measures to ensure compliance from all journalists in the form of visa restrictions as punishment for non-compliance. One such visa policy requires journalists to disclose the specifics of what they will report upon entering China, and they are not allowed to report on anything else; this could be extremely problematic for a journalist if a big story breaks and they are not allowed to report on it. Another such policy is simply the voiding or rejection of a visa altogether.¹⁵ Some of these micro-level approaches were somewhat complex and expensive in many cases because they required a certain amount of finesse to execute successfully. China could not use blatant coercion, nor could they implement a system of outright censorship to achieve their ends in Hong Kong if they were to keep their vow to allow freedom of the press.¹⁶ All of these tactics together allowed China to indirectly implement censorship by promoting self-censorship with individuals. This plan proved itself to be effective as it tended to keep Hong Kong's media relatively pro-China.

At the macro-level, acquiring influence was much easier for China. In simplest terms, business drives the media and money drives business, whether in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, or anywhere else in the world. When dealing with the big picture of Hong Kong media, China needed only to turn to its economic clout in order to exert its influence. Sciutto, rather bluntly, states, "China uses scare tactics against individual journalists, but it hits publications in their wallets."¹⁷ By pulling Chinese funded advertisements out of publications, removing or refusing Chinese business opportunities to media owners, or even right-out purchasing ownership of

¹⁴ Sciutto, "China's Muffling," 137.

¹⁵ Ibid, 136.

¹⁶ Chi-Chuan Lee, "Press Self-Censorship and Political Transition in Hong Kong," *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 3, no. 2 (1998): 56.

¹⁷ Sciutto, "China's Muffling," 139.

entire media companies, China was able to quickly and easily twist the arms of the Hong Kong media to work in its favor, emitting pro-Chinese propaganda through their own channels. A number of Hong Kong media outlets, including the top three newspapers in circulation during Hong Kong's transition period – *Ming Pao*, *Tin Tin Daily News*, and the *South China Morning Post* – fell into the hands of China's Xinhua News Agency, China's Sino United Publishing Holdings, and a number pro-China business men.^{18 19} Again, in the absence of outright media censorship or coercion, China uses its economic strength as a subtle means to achieve political consequences.²⁰

Toward the end of the transition period in 1997, China maintained a heavy influence, if not owned and operated, a good portion of Hong Kong's media. It had become a dependable channel for its pro-Chinese message. This message had a profound effect on the national identity of the citizens of Hong Kong. It projected upon the people the notion of an identity in which love for the country was conflated with support of the Chinese Communist Party, and by the end of the transition period in 1997 they generally accepted the PRC as their sovereign ruler.²¹ Just as was done with Hong Kong, China believes that creating common economic interests can foster a common national identity with Taiwan as well.²² It is not unfounded to suggest that China is attempting to exert similar influence over Taiwan's business and media; after all they do already have a working blueprint.

¹⁸ Anthony Y.H. Fung and Chin-Chuan Lee, "Hong Kong's changing media ownership: Uncertainty and dilemma," *International Communication Gazette* 53, no. 1-2 (1994): 128-132.

¹⁹ Scitutto, "China's Muffling," 139.

²⁰ Fung and Lee, "Uncertainty and dilemma," 132.

²¹ Frank C. S. Liu and Francis L. F. Lee, "Country, National, and Pan-national Identification in Taiwan and Hong Kong: Standing Together as Chinese?" *Asian Survey* 53, no. 6 (2013): 1119-1120.

²² Nien-chung Chang Liao, "Comparing Inter-Korean and Cross-Taiwan Strait Trust-Building: The Limits of Reassurance," *Asian Survey* 54, no. 6 (2014): 1049.

The year 2008 brought with it the beginnings of increased economic integration between China and Taiwan. In that year, the *China Times Group*, a Taiwanese media company, was purchased by intensely pro-Chinese Taiwanese billionaire and owner of the Want Want Group food company, Tsai Eng-meng.²³ After his purchase of the media group, the rhetoric of the media it put out went from relatively moderate to intensely pro-China. The new *Want China Times* soon became the fourth most read newspaper in Taiwan.²⁴ This effectively makes it the most influential pro-China news outlet available to the Taiwanese people. Despite Tsai's deeply pro-China sentiments, there is yet speculation that the PRC may have had a hand in his purchase of the *China Times Group*.²⁵ In total, Tsai owns and controls three newspapers, a TV station, a number of magazines, and a cable network, all based in Taiwan.²⁶ In addition to Tsai's ownership, a number of other news outlets and businesses are owned or influenced by Beijing and its business tycoons.

Even some of the opposition media outlets have fallen victim to the Chinese propaganda apparatus. For example, two television stations well known for their support of the Taiwanese Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), FTV and SET, were both targets of sway tactics. FTV, founded in 1997, had a clearly stated purpose: "to protect Taiwan against China and to spread awareness of Taiwanese history, geography, culture, customs, and languages..." as well as, "to construct Taiwanese nationalism."²⁷ Even with its strong stance against China, FTV eventually tilted toward China due to desirable business prospects. The station's business department entered bids to advertise the controversial Cross-Strait Economic Cooperation Framework

²³ Hsu, "China's Influence," 517-519.

²⁴ Ibid, 516.

²⁵ Ibid, 520.

²⁶ Andrew Higgins, "Tycoon Prods Taiwan Closer to China," *The Washington Post*, January 21, 2012.

²⁷ Hsu, "China's Influence," 524.

Agreement, which they won, and they cooperated with China Central Television (CCTV) to air Taiwanese-language soap operas dubbed into Mandarin despite fierce resistance from FTV's other departments.²⁸ The relationship between the news and business departments gradually eroded, finally reaching a point where the business department actually insisted that the news department restrain its coverage of DPP pro-China criticism, thus signaling that FTV had put business with China ahead of Taiwanese national identity.²⁹

The other pro-DPP television station, SET, once had a show called 'Big Talk News' which fostered a pro-Taiwanese identity. The show received high ratings on the island which raised some red flags for China, who soon began to closely monitor the show.³⁰ This was problematic for the SET leadership as they were trying to expand their business into the prosperous Chinese market. They soon began to enforce censorship on 'Big Talk News.' "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."³¹ Things continued this way through the 2012 Taiwanese presidential election. In that year, more negotiations took place regarding increasing business with China. During these negotiations, it was implied by the Chinese side that if SET did not get rid of 'Big Talk News' their business prospects within China would disappear.³² Once again, just as was done with FTV, irresistible business offers allowed China to apply enough pressure to sway the TV station. China used SET's desire to break into the Chinese market as leverage for

²⁸ Hsu, "China's Influence," 526.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid, 527.

³¹ Ibid, 528.

³² Ibid.

getting them to pull ‘Big Talk News’ off the air, and in May 2012 the show was officially “axed.”³³

These situations and examples insinuate that the pro-Beijing propaganda message has a potentially large impact on the mechanism that guides Taiwanese public opinion. There are a number of striking similarities between the Hong Kong and Taiwanese circumstances regarding China’s influence of their media suggesting that China is following the same path as it did in Hong Kong. But will the same strategy yield the same result? Will the Taiwanese people accept China’s claims to sovereignty over the island and submit to reunification? Despite the numerous similarities between Hong Kong and Taiwan, there is one key difference that makes it difficult to answer those questions. In Taiwan, the issue on most people’s minds is the choice between independence and reunification. Hong Kong, on the other hand, never really had such a choice. For them, “independence was never considered a realistic or legitimate option...”³⁴ This difference alone is reason enough to presume that Chinese propaganda apparatus might possibly fail in Taiwan. Will it fail, or does it have enough momentum to succeed in shaping Taiwanese public opinion toward reunification? In order to provide an answer to that question, it is important to look at the progress of the propaganda so far. By looking at the progress, one can estimate its trajectory and evaluate the possible outcomes. The following section will explain how this can be done.

Research Method

Of course, even though the pro-Beijing influence is growing in Taiwan, there is still a fairly large number of other competing media sources, most of which appear to be rather

³³ Hsu, “China’s Influence,” 529.

³⁴ Liu and Lee, “Identification,” 1119.

objective, and many even tilting toward pro-independence. Given the amount of objective and pro-independence news media, as well as the recent trends in Taiwanese identity, the hypothesis put forth by this research is:

H₁: The more intense the pro-Beijing rhetoric is, the more independent the Taiwanese national identity will become.

In order to properly measure the influence of the pro-Beijing media, its rhetoric must first be looked at and compared to the opposing and the objective media to determine its level of deviation from the 'norm.' Using the *Want China Times* as the pro-China propaganda, given its heavy influence in Taiwanese media, its coverage of three specific politically charged events will be examined and compared to similar coverage from other major influential news outlets, such as the more independence driven *Liberty Times*, or its English language sister outlet, the *Taipei Times*. The selected events are as follows: the Cross-Strait Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) between 2010 and 2011, the Cross-strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA) in 2013, and the subsequent Sunflower movement in 2014. All three events are important news stories and have undeniable connections to the possible future of Taiwan. These events, therefore, make for appropriate ammunition for propagandists. If there is any specific pro-Beijing or unification style rhetoric within the coverage of these events, it should be easily identifiable and comparable with other less pro-China news outlets.

Based on the rhetoric of the competing coverage, the intensity of the news message will be measured on a +/- 2 point scale (+2 being extremely pro-Beijing, +1 having a discernable pro-Beijing message, 0 being neutral, -1 having a discernable pro-Taiwan/independence message, and -2 being extremely pro-Taiwan/independence). Once the measurements are taken, they will

be compared to existing statistical trends in Taiwanese national identity. Three specific categories will be examined with regard to Taiwanese national identity: nationality – whether someone believes they are Taiwanese, Chinese, or both; party identification – which political party they identify with or prefer; and status orientation – one’s preference for the status of Taiwan (independence vs. unification). It is very important when attempting to measure national identity to look at all three of the identification categories because, “party identification, national identification, and state identification in Taiwan are strongly related with each other, if not mutually embedded.”³⁵ If one is taken without the others then the information being used is slanted and incomplete and any conclusions drawn will likely be of little merit. Once all of the information has been collected and analyzed, any patterns within the data can be discerned, the overall influence of the pro-Beijing propaganda on the Taiwanese population can be measured, the hypothesis can be tested, and the research question answered. In the following sections, the data will be observed and analyzed.

The Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement

The Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) is a deal that was made between China and Taiwan in 2010 with the hopes of improving cross-strait relations through closer economic integration. One of the main functions of the ECFA was to help Taiwan break free from its economic isolation by opening up free trade opportunities with other nations.³⁶ Though many believed that ECFA was a positive move for Taiwan-China relations –that it would boost Taiwan’s GDP and create more jobs– there was still a hefty opposition to that

³⁵ Liu, “Taiwan Identifiers,” 17.

³⁶ Hung-Mao Tien and Chen-Yuan Tung, “Taiwan in 2010,” *Asian Survey* 51, no. 1 (2011): 81.

belief.³⁷ Many understood that this agreement would certainly increase Beijing's influence over Taiwan.³⁸ The idea was also floating around that it was setting Beijing up to push for unification in the near future.³⁹ The coverage of the ECFA is a special example that sets the tone of this research because it shows a clear delineation between pro-Chinese propaganda and more objective, albeit still slightly biased, news coverage.

Before the ECFA was officially signed and implemented in 2010, there was still a lot of speculation about its efficacy and its motives. Of course this sparked a lot of criticism toward it within the media. One such criticism in early 2009 actually came from a piece, by Dr. Honigmann Hong, published in the recently purchased *China Times* newspaper.⁴⁰ This article was reportedly detested by Tsai Eng-meng who then proceeded to prohibit Hong from publishing any further articles on the ECFA, as well as give the order "that the *China Times* could not publish any news or comment against either ECFA or the 1992 Consensus."⁴¹ Needless to say, most, if not all, *Want China Times* coverage of the ECFA in 2010 and 2011 had nothing but positive things to say about it. In a number of articles released during this period, the ECFA is referred to as a "landmark" agreement.^{42 43 44} Despite the large amount of public concern about ECFA, felt that it was not necessary to address the negative feelings toward it, except where they could be so obviously trumped by the positive. For example, one article from late September 2010 directly relating to public opinion about the agreement was entitled, "65% Taiwan Firms See New Opportunities from ECFA," and the entire article was filled with similar percentages

³⁷ Jenny W. Hsu, "Ministry distorted ECFA study: DPP," *Taipei Times*, July 31, 2009.

³⁸ Ming-Tong Chen, "Taiwan in 2011: Focus on Crucial Presidential Election," *Asian Survey* 52, no. 1 (2012): 74.

³⁹ Shu-ling Ko, "Annette Lu urges more caution on China links," *Taipei Times*, September 9, 2010.

⁴⁰ Hsu, "China's Influence," 521-522.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 521.

⁴² "ECFA Committee's Role Should be Well Defined," *Want China Times*, October 10, 2010.

⁴³ "Cementing Taipei-Beijing Trust by Accommodating Uncertainties," *Want China Times*, January 01, 2011.

⁴⁴ Hsiu-lan Chen and Staff Writer, "Taiwan, China to set up trade promotion offices from next year," *Want China Times*, November 03, 2011.

that show blatant majority support for it. The opposition is only mentioned once, within the first sentence, saying that “34%...anticipate stiffer competition ahead,” and it is quickly thereafter, followed by even higher percentages of approval, 83% and 67.5% respectively.⁴⁵ These tactics of overpowering the negative with the positive, or refusing to acknowledge the negative at all, are easily discernable in a number of additional articles published in the *Want China Times*. It is a method of self-censorship that was likely a product of Tsai’s earlier order. Therefore, it is not difficult to detect the heavy pro-China rhetoric within the coverage of the ECFA. On the research scale, this easily hits a +2.

It would appear that the other influential opposition media outlet also has a somewhat heavy rhetoric as well. A number of stories report quite critically of the ECFA and its effects, both existing and impending. Some articles bring up issues of slowing markets, while others talk about the possible increase of income disparity between upper and lower classes of Taiwanese citizens.^{46 47} Perhaps because of the lack of reporting by pro-China news outlets on the areas of concern about the ECFA, these opposition outlets felt the need to make up for it by addressing these concerns heavily. Their style of reporting clearly ran opposite to the style imposed by Tsai in the *Want China Times*. When referring to the 1992 consensus, the phrase is preceded by “so-called” in some cases and is typically found within quotation marks –a question of its legitimacy.⁴⁸ These outlets, however, do offer credit where it is due by reporting adjacent to their biases when necessary, something the *Want China Times* simply wouldn’t do. One such article reports, “the ECFA would help shore up Taiwan’s overall economic growth and would help

⁴⁵ Staff Reporter, “65% Taiwan Firms See New Opportunities from ECFA,” *Want China Times*, September 28, 2010.

⁴⁶ Nathan Novak, “A downturn would strip the ECFA’s thin façade,” *Taipei Times*, September 5, 2010.

⁴⁷ Shu-ling Ko, “ECFA to widen income disparity: forum,” *Taipei Times*, September 13, 2010.

⁴⁸ Yan-chih Mo, “Ma expects defensive upgrades,” *Taipei Times*, January 1, 2011.

Taiwanese industries to excel.”⁴⁹ Despite their obvious biases against the pro-China message, these opposition outlets still tend to be more objective than their counterparts, and for that reason their coverage receives a -1 on the research scale. Altogether, the coverage of the ECFA weighs in at a +1, tilting more toward a pro-Beijing message.

The Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement

The Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement was a follow up to the 2010 ECFA, signed on June 21, 2013, which would further liberalize trade between China and Taiwan. The major controversy with this agreement is that it was pushed through without a public hearing.⁵⁰ Critics of the ECFA referred to the CSSTA as being a “backroom deal” conducted without review or discussion.⁵¹ The coverage of this particular agreement in Taiwanese media is slightly different than that of the ECFA.

While the reporting of the opposition media is similar to its previous coverage, the pro-China coverage is noticeably more objective than before. Whereas pro-China reporters did not publish anything negative about the ECFA, a number of articles about the CSSTA do just that. One particular article clearly explains how many view the pact as “unequal” and that it will “eventually allow China to consume Taiwan's publishing industry.”⁵² Of course, each side still has its bias. This can be clearly seen as both sides published nearly identical pieces with one slight difference. Both pieces were entitled, “Cross-strait service trade pact likely to be signed in June;” the significant difference between the two was a single word added into the piece by the

⁴⁹ Staff Writer, “ECFA SIGNING: HK academic says Taiwan will benefit from pact,” *Taipei Times*, June 30, 2010.

⁵⁰ “Reactions mixed on cross-strait service trade pact,” *Want China Times*, June 22, 2013.

⁵¹ Hsiu-chuan Shih and Staff Reporter, “Lawmakers protest service trade agreement,” *Taipei Times*, June 22, 2013.

⁵² “Reactions mixed.”

Want China Times: landmark.^{53 54} In the piece, they use ‘landmark’ to refer to the ECFA, whereas the *Taipei Times* simply calls the agreement by its name. It’s clear that each side was still partial to their own beliefs, but both sides tended to report on both the positive and negative viewpoints of the CSSTA. Given that the CSSTA was a major development at the time, the fact that the *Want China Times* chose to report both sides of its issues is actually in keeping with the workings of the Chinese propaganda apparatus. In an article published by Qiuqing Tai in the *Journal of East Asian Studies*, she explains that, “The flexibility and adaptability of the censorship strategies help the CCP maintain its political legitimacy despite the arrival of the information era.”⁵⁵ Essentially what this means is that the choice of the pro-China news outlet to report more objectively is a strategy for them to maintain their legitimacy. Nonetheless, this earns them a +1 on the research scale, down one point from before. The opposition media remains at a -1, added together the coverage balances out to a 0.

The Sunflower Student Movement

The Sunflower Student Movement, a product of the CSSTA, was a protest in which Taiwanese citizens, mostly students, protested the swift, un-reviewed passage of the agreement, claiming that the government lacked transparency in their dealings with China.⁵⁶ Beginning on March 18, 2014, protesters exercised civil disobedience by besieging and sitting in the Legislative Yuan in Taipei. The protest was largely supported and spread to other government offices throughout Taiwan. The student protesters issued four demands: “a civic conference on constitutional government, legalization of the mechanism for monitoring cross-strait agreements,

⁵³ “Cross-strait service pact likely to be signed in June,” *Taipei Times*, May 25, 2013.

⁵⁴ “Cross-strait service pact likely to be signed in June,” *Want China Times*, May 25, 2013.

⁵⁵ Qiuqing Tai, “China’s Media Censorship: A Dynamic and Diversified Regime,” *Journal of East Asian Studies* 14, no. 2 (2014): 188.

⁵⁶ John Fuh-sheng Hsieh, “Taiwan in 2014: A Besieged President amid Political Turmoil,” *Asian Survey* 55, no. 1 (2015): 144.

no action on the service trade pact until the new oversight law is enacted and a pledge by all legislators to work on the new legislation first.”⁵⁷ The protest lasted for 23 days and in the end the protesters were able to postpone the official passing of the CSSTA by getting the government to agree to create and adhere to an adequate oversight law, as stipulated in their demands. This caused progress in cross-strait negotiations to stall, preventing any further breakthroughs in 2014.⁵⁸ This victory, coupled with the large base of support for the movement in general, did not sit well with pro-China supporters, and it clearly showed within pro-China reporting. This situation brought with it a surge in pro-Beijing propaganda.

At the start of the movement, pro-China outlets reported on it normally without any overtly pro-China rhetoric. For the first few days of the occupation, the coverage did slightly tilt toward its bias, as it usually does. In one of the first stories, the movement itself is talked about rather objectively, though the police were criticized for how they dealt with the student protesters, their attempts to remove them being called “half-hearted.”⁵⁹ This shows the anti-protest sentiment, which is the basis for the pro-China message in this story. As the movement continued gaining momentum and support, the pro-China rhetoric became periodically stronger. Three days after the previous story was published, another story came out that illustrates the rhetorical increase. The main theme of the story was the spread of the protest to southern Taiwan, but its focus hosted underhanded criticisms. It compared the Taipei protesters to the southern protesters, saying that they lacked the enthusiasm of the south. “On the other hand, KMT branches in Tainan, Kaohsiung, Taichung and Miaoli saw passionate protesters who rallied

⁵⁷ Staff, “TRADE PACT SIEGE: Legislative Yuan occupation timeline,” *Taipei Times*, April 11, 2014.

⁵⁸ Hsieh, “Taiwan in 2014,” 145.

⁵⁹ Staff Reporter, “Students occupy legislature to protest cross-strait pact,” *Want China Times*, March 19, 2014.

around the KMT's buildings, a contrast to the situations in Taipei and New Taipei.”⁶⁰ The protesters in Taipei who started the whole movement are being criticized for being at the Legislative Yuan instead of at the KMT headquarters, even though the whole point of the protest is to prevent the CSSTA from being pushed through the Yuan making it a much more symbolic – and practical– location.

The coverage continues on this slope throughout the duration of the protest. Each day brings a new propaganda tactic. The day after the previous story, another was released that talked about how Chinese netizens disliked the pact for being too unequal in favor of Taiwan, as if to convince the Taiwanese they were getting such a good deal.⁶¹ Toward the close of the second week of protests, a story was printed that outright called Taiwan’s politicians losers for the all of the support garnished by the Sunflower Student Movement, while simultaneously questioning its nature as being democratic, and whether the protesters really know all about what they are protesting.⁶² At the end of the movement, the pro-China outlet takes one last crack at the protesters by suggesting that they seek to manipulate the media, quoting an unverified source as saying that they urge the media to “stand on [their] side.”⁶³ The rhetoric of the Sunflower coverage began rather objectively but quickly hit a steep upward curve, earning itself a +2 on the research scale.

As far as the opposition goes, there was a good amount being reported about both sides of the issue. Of course they published many stories about the immense support received by the

⁶⁰ Mei-chun Kuo and Staff Reporter, “People in southern Taiwan join protest against China trade pact,” *Want China Times*, March 23, 2014.

⁶¹ Yin-chong Luo and Staff Reporter, “China’s internet users express dissent over cross-strait pact,” *Want China Times*, March 24, 2014.

⁶² Chen-kai Chu, Lee Ming-hsien and Staff Reporter, “All Taiwan’s politicians are losers,” *Want China Times*, April 1, 2014.

⁶³ Staff Reporter, “Student leaders seek unity as Sunflower sit-in comes to an end,” *Want China Times*, April 10, 2014.

student movement. One such story is about how farmers went out of their way to donate a massive amount of crop, especially sunflowers, to the movement and were later harassed by police for it.⁶⁴ However, they also published stories about the opposition to the Sunflower movement, one specifically about its large base of support. “Organized by a group called the White Justice Society League, demonstrators outside Taipei Main Station called for the restoration of the Legislature Yuan, the normalization of democracy and the protection of the freedom of speech.”⁶⁵ The opposition’s coverage of the Sunflower movement was like this pretty much all the way through. Perhaps it is because the movement spoke volumes on its own, earning and maintaining so much support, that they felt it was not necessary to slant their coverage against the pro-Beijing message and could get their own message out clearly by remaining completely objective throughout. Their coverage receives a 0 on the rhetoric scale.

The next section will serve to analyze how intensely the pro-Beijing propaganda affects the Taiwanese people by looking at how their perceptions of identity are changing over time.

Analysis

In order to adequately analyze the effectiveness of the pro-Beijing propaganda rhetoric on the people of Taiwan, trends and patterns in the national identity must be observed over the same time period as the propaganda. As stated before, three specific areas need to be looked at to understand the complete identity: national, party, and status identification. The following charts, created and published by the National Chengchi University Election Study Center, show the trends of these three aspects in Taiwanese identity from the early 1990s all the way through 2014.

⁶⁴ Jason Pan and Staff Writer, “TRADE PACT SIEGE: Farmers donate sunflowers and pineapples,” *Taipei Times*, April 1, 2014

⁶⁵ Alison Hsiao, “Anti-occupation protesters come out in thousands,” *Taipei Times*, March 30, 2014.

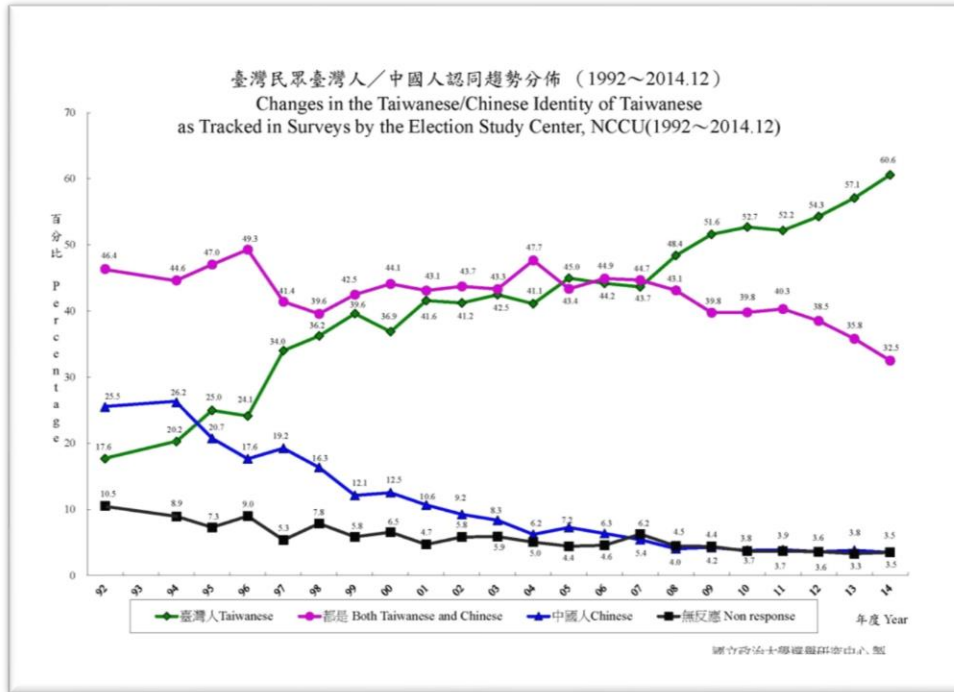


Figure 1 – National Identification. (Source): Core Political Attitudes Trend Chart, Election Study Center, National Chengchi University

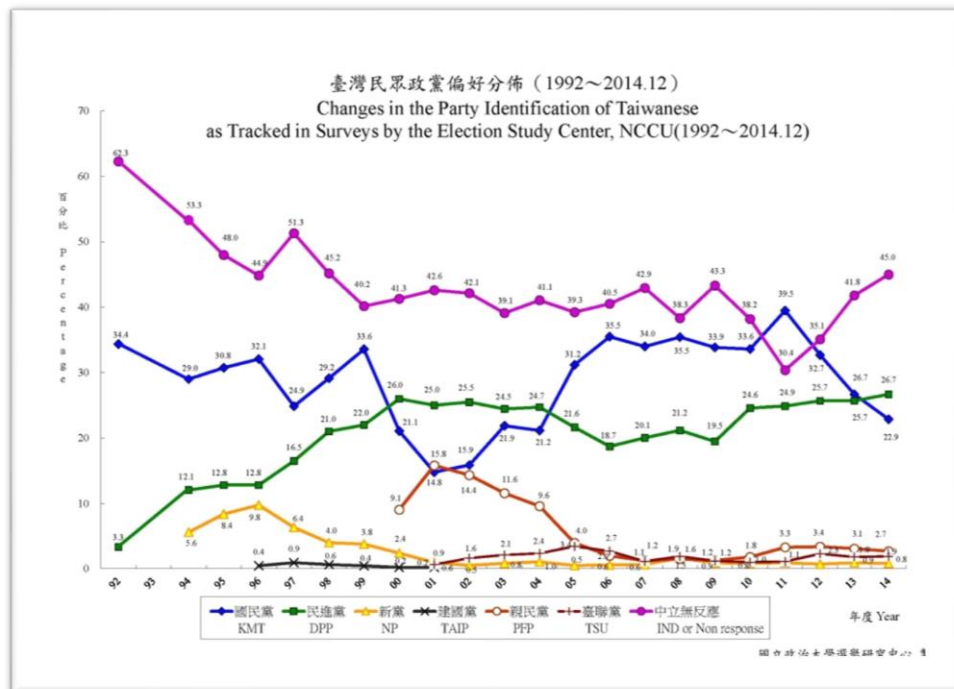


Figure 2 – Party Identification. (Source): Core Political Attitudes Trend Chart, Election Study Center, National Chengchi University

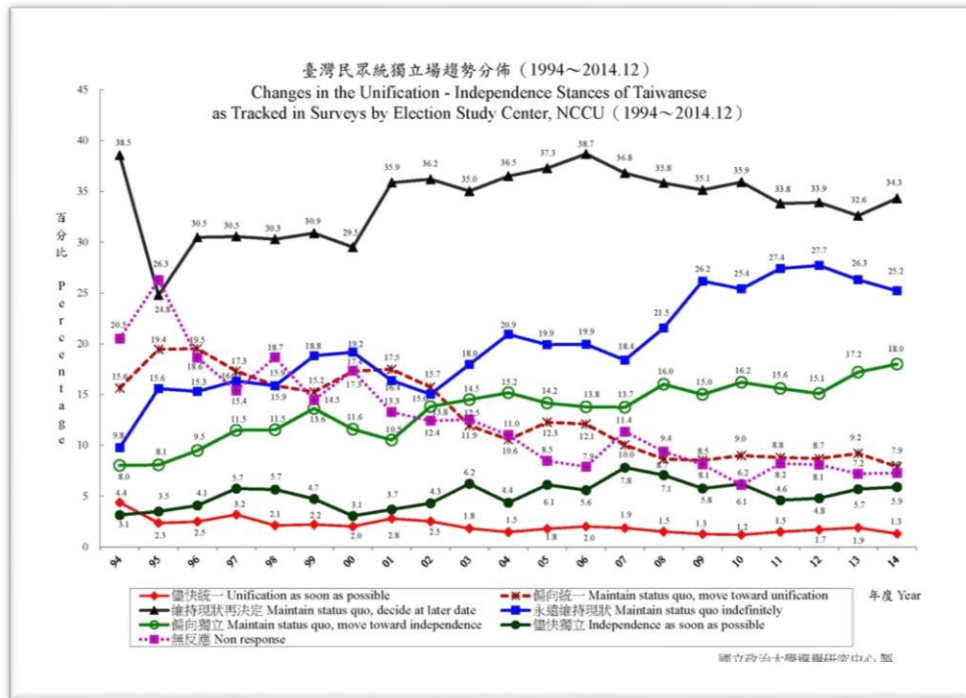


Figure 3 - Status Identification. (Source): Core Political Attitudes Trend Chart, Election Study Center, National Chengchi University

The first event, the ECFA, primarily taking place between its signing in 2010 and its implementation in 2011, received a +2 in the pro-Beijing media and a -1 in the opposition giving it a +1 overall on the rhetoric scale. This means that the pro-Beijing message was stronger than the opposition, so discernably, if it reached the public, it should have some kind of effect on them. In terms of national identification in Figure 1, one can observe the changes between the years 2010 and 2012 on each line. The reason for looking through to 2012 is that the ECFA was implemented early in 2011 and the coverage continued through 2011 along with its progress. Between '10 and '11, those who identify as only *Taiwanese* rises 0.5%, going from 51.6% to 52.2%. Those who identify as *Both Taiwanese and Chinese* showed the opposite trend, instead rising 0.5% to 40.3%. The next year, though, they flipped and each went distinctly in the opposite direction at 2.1% and 1.9% respectively. With those who identify as only *Chinese*, there

was a marginal increase of a mere 0.1% followed by a drop of 0.3%. Figure 2 beholds a similar observation. There is a marked increase of 5.9% in those who identify with the pro-Chinese KMT party, and then a drop of 4.4%. Those who do not identify with a particular party run opposite to those who identify with KMT, first dropping 7.8% then rising 4.7%. The majority switches between the two in the first year, giving the KMT group the majority, then it switches back the next year. There is also an increase of 1.5% in those who identify with the pro-Chinese PFP up to 2011, and then another 0.1% increase after. There is, however, an increase of 0.3% in DPP identifiers as well, followed by another 0.8%. In Figure 3, the only significant changes between 2010 and 2011 come from variations of maintaining the status quo. There's a 2% increase in maintaining it indefinitely, and a similar drop (2.1%) in maintaining it and deciding at a later date. This data suggests that the pro-Beijing message may have had the intended effect on national and party identification in 2010 but soon lost it the following year. And it certainly didn't promote well enough its main wish of unification throughout both years as the majority preferred the status quo. It's possible that the hype of the ECFA was highly anticipated by many, and the coverage reflected it making people feel like they could be closer to China. But when it came to implementation, people began to see the downsides of the agreement and noticed the lack of reporting coming from the pro-China media causing much distrust.

The coverage of the second event, the CSSTA signed in 2013, was slanted equally with the pro-China rhetoric reaching a +1 and the Pro-Taiwan rhetoric reaching a -1. The CSSTA garnered a lot of distrust and criticism which was reported on both sides of the media spectrum. When looking at the identity trends, it is observed that the significant changes in Figures 1 and 2 come from the same lines as before: in Figure 1, the *Taiwanese* and *Both* lines continue on their respective rise and fall relative to the previous year; in Figure 2, KMT identification continues to

fall, whereas the Independent/No affiliation and the DPP continue to rise. Regarding Figure 3 during this event, something interesting happens. The *Indefinite Status quo* and the *Later date Status quo* drop together by 1.3% and 1.4% respectively while the *Move toward independence Status quo* rises by 2.1% and *Immediate Independence* rises by 0.9%. The *Move toward unification Status quo* rose as well but only by 0.5%, and the *Immediate Unification* only rose up about half of that (0.2%). It would appear that the pro-China media's objectivity caused stagnation in their support base as the majority of Taiwanese media consumers verified their mistrust of it by acknowledging that it had been self-censoring with regard to the previous ECFA. If the pro-Beijing message had any effect in this case, it was certainly negative.

As if to make up for lost support, coverage of the last event, the Sunflower Student Movement, saw a sharp rise in the pro-China rhetoric. The pro-China outlets simultaneously downplayed and exaggerated the events of the protest movement. They painted the students as a group of misguided youth, tools for the DPP who did not fully understand what they were doing while at the same time regarding them as violent criminals who were breaking the law, stealing things, and causing unprovoked harm to police officers. "The student movement has been complicated by the storming of the Executive Yuan on March 23, during which students damaged the building and stole personal items belonging to lawmakers, which has been seen as a turning point in the protest. Over 200 people including students and officers were injured during the clashes."⁶⁶ Once again the rhetoric was extremely pro-China earning a +2 on the scale. From the end of 2013 to the end of 2014, the identity lines in Figure 1 kept their same progression with the *Taiwanese* and *Both* lines rising and dropping by 3.5% and 3.3% respectively. The *Chinese* identity line showed a very minor change, though in the opposite direction than before with a

⁶⁶ Cih-ti Cuei and Staff Reporter, "Sunflower Movement needs to distance itself from partisan politics," *Want China Times*, March 28, 2014.

0.3% drop. The lines in Figure 2 also continue in the same direction. The *Independent* line still rises by about 3.2% to maintain the majority of Taiwanese sentiment. The *DPP* line rises 1% while the *KMT* line falls by 3.8%. The two lines cross at this point securing the *DPP*'s place as second after *Independent*. In Figure 3, each of the lines having to do with some form of reunification drop while those having to do with some form of independence reveal a slight rise. Those having to do specifically with maintaining the status quo still hold the majority, although both lines show different trends. *Maintaining the status quo indefinitely* became less popular as it dropped by 1.1%, while *deciding at a later date* maintained its place as the most attractive option with a 1.7% rise. If anything, pro-Chinese propaganda within this last event drove down its overall support given the rises in the opposition to Chinese and pro-Chinese identity, as well as unification.

When taken altogether, this information paints a confusing picture. At first, during the ECFA timeline, it appears as though the strong pro-Beijing propaganda is working, but then it quickly shifts and appears as though it isn't. In the next timeline the message is not so strong but it also appears to have no effect on Taiwanese identity as the trends continue as they were before. In the final time line, as the pro-China rhetoric shifts back to a very strong one, the trends still tend to move against its desired effect. So what exactly is happening? The hypothesis of this research was: *H₁: The more intense the pro-Beijing rhetoric is, the more independent the Taiwanese national identity will become.* The timeline does in fact show a rise in a purely Taiwanese national identity, but it does not appear that pro-Beijing propaganda had much, if anything, to do with it. Though a number of changes do occur over the duration of the three events, most of them are minor with few significant shifts that would suggest some kind of effect related specifically to propaganda. Even when taking into account the opposing rhetoric, the

picture remains just as confusing, showing positive trends when it is both stronger and weaker. Perhaps the issue is much deeper than shallow propaganda and has to do more with socialization than media consumption. That is certainly an avenue for future research that may yet be fruitful.

Conclusion

It is well known that China has been using its propaganda apparatus to penetrate deeply into the Taiwanese media in order to promote support for its reunification with Taiwan. This research has shown that, for some reason, China's influence over the Taiwanese media appears to have little effect on the Taiwanese people. There have certainly been some ups and downs in the patterns of Taiwanese national identity in recent data polls; however, in relation to China's propaganda campaign these rises and drops seem erratic, as if there is some other force at play. Given its ever-growing power and economic influence, one would think it should have a much larger effect than it is having on Taiwanese identity, regardless of whether that effect works for China or against it. So what does this mean?

It is possible that few Taiwanese people still consume the mainstream media as their primary source of information without a healthy amount of skepticism. The findings of this research suggest that public opinion in Taiwan is likely being organized and focused elsewhere – perhaps through other internet sources like blogs and social media. Further research is yet necessary to understand whether this is the case.

In terms of U.S.-Taiwan-China relations, the status quo seems to be an important factor in maintaining stability between the three. This research shows that, at least for the moment, they will maintain such a relationship. But the erratic trends and the continuous rise of an independent Taiwanese identity foreshadow a future of conflict. China will not retract its pledge to use force

to take Taiwan if necessary, and the U.S. is obligated to intervene if force is used to threaten Taiwan's sovereignty. Further research to understand the reasons for these trends might help to guide the future away from conflict and toward a more reasonable alternative. However, because Taiwan's struggle between independence and unification is so perpetually complex, it is the opinion of the author that an absolute answer to the question posed by this research may not be achievable until this major issue finds its resolution, or at least until desperation gets the best of one or both sides. Until then, it couldn't hurt to keep a watchful eye on this particular topic as steps toward an answer may yet continue to materialize.

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