



One Country, One Censor:

How China undermines media freedom in Hong Kong and Taiwan



A special report by the Committee to Protect Journalists

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About this report

Understanding how China tries to influence the media is a first step to preserve press freedom. Hong Kong and Taiwan are on the frontlines of this battle. In deeply polarized Hong Kong, journalists are under pressure as independent outlets struggle to counteract strong pro-Beijing influence. And Taiwan must navigate how to maintain its openness and press freedom while fending off Beijing's vast resources and technological prowess. **A special report by the Committee to Protect Journalists.**

This report was written by CPJ Asia Program Coordinator Steven Butler. CPJ's China correspondent Iris Hsu contributed research and reporting. CPJ traveled to Hong Kong and Taiwan in May 2019 to speak with journalists, media freedom advocates, academics, and others.

Prior to joining CPJ in 2016, Butler served as executive director at the Institute of Current World Affairs, where he worked with institute fellows throughout the world, including in South and East Asia, and as senior editor and writer at the online magazine *OZY*. Butler lived and worked in Asia as a foreign correspondent for nearly 20 years, and was foreign editor at the Knight Ridder Washington Bureau.

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This report is available in English and 中文

Cover photo: Journalists and press freedom supporters stage a silent march to police headquarters to denounce treatment of the media during protests over a proposed extradition bill, in Hong Kong, on July 14, 2019. (Reuters/Tyrone Siu)

CONTENTS

One Country, One Censor: Introduction

6

Understanding how China tries to influence the media is a first step to preserve press freedom. Hong Kong and Taiwan are on the frontlines of this battle.

Future of Hong Kong's press freedom in doubt

9

In deeply polarized Hong Kong, the media is equally divided as independent outlets struggle to counteract strong pro-Beijing influence. Journalists are concerned about violence, travel or residency restrictions, digital security, and longevity of the open internet.

Taiwan's values at stake in China disinformation fight

22

Despite hosting one of the freest media scenes in Asia, Taiwan is in a bind. The island must find a way to maintain its openness and press freedom while fending off Beijing's vast resources and technological prowess for influencing the media.

Recommendations

32

One Country, One Censor: Introduction

China has become a top global economic power, and is fast expanding its military reach beyond its borders. It is simultaneously trying to influence the global public through the media to accept and support China's growing role in the world. The effort is far from straightforward given the many channels that China uses to make its influence felt, some open and perfectly legal, others hidden and suspect. As shown with Russian efforts to influence U.S. elections, open societies may be especially vulnerable to manipulation of information. Understanding the effort is a first step to finding ways to preserve press freedom. This report illustrates how China tries to influence media close to home.

In many respects, China's effort is a natural result of its growing influence in world affairs. After the Second World War, the United States emerged as a global superpower, in contest for supremacy with the Soviet Union, and tried to remake the world in its image as a capitalist democracy that championed press freedom. Of course, not all that effort was successful or principled considering CIA support for the overthrow of democratically elected, left-leaning governments and U.S. support for oppressive dictatorships that took harsh measures against journalists, including in Taiwan. But the United States established credible news agencies such as [Voice of America](#) and [Radio Free Asia](#), aiming to promote fact-based news as a selling point for liberal democracy. The [Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor](#) in the Department of State institutionalized the promotion of human rights, including press freedom.

China, meanwhile, is a champion of censorship and information control. China's government has core values that are inimical to democracy and press freedom despite constitutional provisions that say otherwise. [Article 35](#) of its constitution states: "Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of procession and of demonstration." But

plainly, Chinese people do not enjoy these rights. At the end of 2019, China had 48 journalists in prison, more than any other nation, according to CPJ research. China has faced a progressively more restrictive media environment since Xi Jinping became president in 2013.

Whatever the constitution says, Xi and China have made no secret about what's expected from the media. Xi outlined his expectations for media standards during a visit to news establishments in February 2016, as [reported](#) by Xinhua, the state-run news agency:

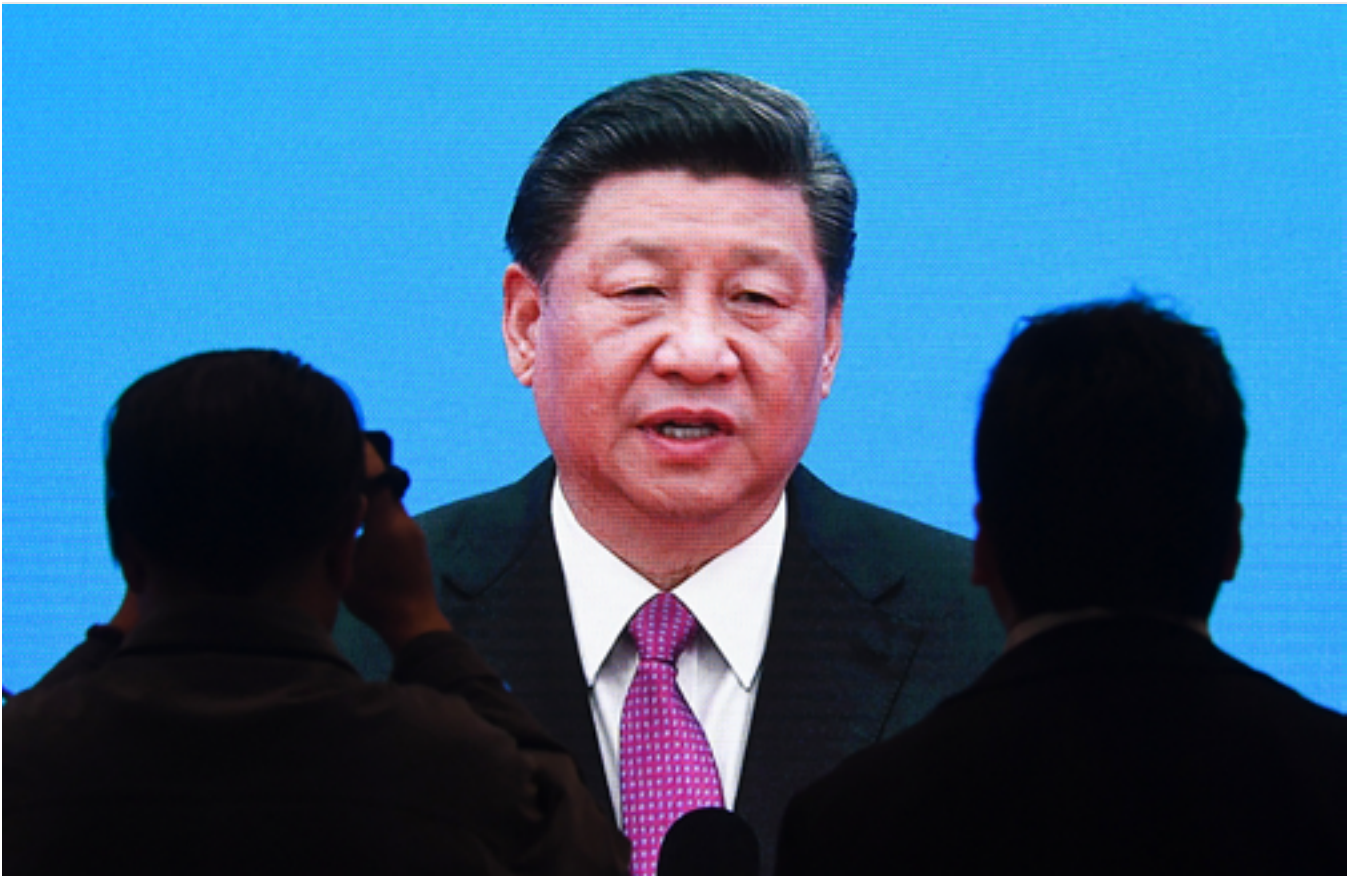
All news media run by the Party must work to speak for the Party's will and its propositions and protect the Party's authority and unity, Xi said.

They should enhance their awareness to align their ideology, political thinking and deeds to those of the CPC Central Committee and help fashion the Party's theories and policies into conscious action by the general public while providing spiritual enrichment to the people, he said.

Marxist journalistic education must be promoted among journalists, Xi added, to make them "disseminators of the Party's policies and propositions, recorders of the time, promoters of social advancement and watchers of equality and justice."

Journalists who step out of line in China face harsh consequences. The crackdown is especially intense in China's far-west province of Xinjiang where CPJ has [documented](#) 23 cases of journalists imprisoned for their work, nearly half of China's total imprisoned.

Foreign correspondents face [severe restrictions](#) when trying to report from Tibet, Xinjiang or elsewhere. And when journalists such as [Chun Hang Wong](#) of *The Wall Street Journal* or [Megha Rajagopalan](#) of *BuzzFeed News* report on sensitive topics, they risk expulsion. Since Xi came to power, investigative journalism has been [nearly wiped out](#) and journalists are [talking about](#) a "total



Journalists watch a live image of Chinese President Xi Jinping giving a briefing at the end of the final day of the Belt and Road Forum, at the media center in Beijing on April 27, 2019. (AFP/Greg Baker)

“censorship era.”

Of course, China has no power to enforce anything like “total censorship” beyond its borders. At the same time, it has every incentive to influence editorial content overseas; for example, to blunt international moves to prevent equipment sales by Chinese telecom giant Huawei; to potentially soften public opinion against its massive “Belt-and-Road” infrastructure program or the spread of Chinese military installations aimed at securing shipping routes; or simply to enhance China’s image as a matter of pride. China’s often strong reaction to criticism in the foreign press illustrates a high degree of sensitivity. China’s leadership cares about the nation’s image.

What is China’s playbook for controlling information abroad? And what is the impact on global freedom of the press?

This report looks at China’s efforts to influence media in Hong Kong and Taiwan, which are on the frontlines of

the battle for press freedom. Both Taiwan and Hong Kong have been bastions of civil liberties in East Asia. While one is a special administrative region of China and the other a breakaway island over which China claims sovereignty, both have vibrant Chinese and English-language media that operate outside of China’s direct control. As China has tried gradually to ramp up pressure in both markets to influence editorial content and sometimes to manipulate public opinion, freedoms in Hong Kong and Taiwan have come under strain. These two places may also be valuable signposts for how China exports censorship elsewhere in the world—and maybe, how to resist.

In Hong Kong, Chinese interests dominate commercial media. Police have repeatedly attacked reporters covering anti-government protests, so far without consequence. Local journalists are concerned that Beijing will retaliate for their critical reporting by blocking them from entering the mainland to work, while international correspondents



Press photographers in Hong Kong on June 13, 2019, wear helmets and protective masks to a police press conference to protest how police treated journalists during the previous day's demonstration against a proposed extradition bill. (Reuters/Thomas Peter)

fear their permission to stay in Hong Kong could be taken away. Digital security and the future of internet freedom feel precarious.

“The very rights of journalists are being taken away,” Jimmy Lai, chair of Next Digital, which owns the *Apple Daily*, said while addressing fears of China's increasing influence. “We were birds in the forest and now we are being taken into a cage.”

Meanwhile, Taiwan is struggling to find ways to cope with China's use of commercial pressures to influence media and to understand and counter a deluge of disinformation apparently aimed at manipulating public opinion as Taiwan approaches general elections January 11, 2020. Some of the response could potentially undermine the press freedoms that Taiwanese have enjoyed in recent decades.

“The executive branch has raised our concerns by trying to criminalize disinformation,” said Ian Chen, former

secretary general of the Association of Taiwanese Journalists.

Beijing's range of methods include openly or surreptitiously taking ownership of media properties; exerting influence through media owners with strong, unrelated, commercial interests in China; manipulating social media; outright propaganda; economic retaliation; and intimidating journalists. Meanwhile, China selectively blocks news originating outside its borders, giving it a strong upper hand in the war to control information and ideas.

Hong Kong civil society is strongly resisting China's increasing efforts to impose control. Taiwan may offer lessons on how democratic societies can cope.

Journalists like Tom Grundy, founder and editor of the news website *Hong Kong Free Press*, see China's activities in Hong Kong as just a first step. “Our concern is, we are on the frontlines of how China is exporting its censorship, playing the role of a testing ground,” he said. ♦

Future of Hong Kong's press freedom in doubt

Writing an analysis of press freedom in Hong Kong is challenging as protesters take to the streets in increasingly violent confrontations with police, demanding democratic elections, the chief executive's resignation, and an independent investigation of police behavior. Journalists have been caught up in the fray, and police have targeted them with beatings, blinding lights, tear gas, pepper spray, and rubber bullets.

The repeated police attacks on journalists trying to cover the turmoil, with no apparent consequences for the police, speaks to the broader concern that over the decades, the rise of China's influence in Hong Kong has gradually squeezed the once-freewheeling local press.

Hong Kong's press mirrors the territory's polarized political environment, with the dominant pro-Beijing media challenged by scrappy independent outlets and a few trying to walk a tightrope in between. Aside from covering the violence, local journalists worry that critical reporting on Hong Kong or China could lead China to bar entry to the mainland, stifling journalists' ability to earn a living. International correspondents fear being expelled just for reporting the news. China's growing intervention in the former British colony raises fears about digital security and the future of internet freedom.

When Hong Kong reverted to Chinese rule in 1997, China pledged that the legal and social systems would remain unchanged for 50 years. "Rights and freedoms, including those of the person, of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of travel, of movement, of correspondence, of strike, of choice of occupation, of academic research and of religious belief will be ensured by law in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region," [according](#) to the Sino-British Joint Declaration, which governed the Chinese government takeover.

After 22 years of restored Chinese sovereignty over Hong Kong, these freedoms are under severe pressure.

OWNERSHIP AND EDITORIAL DIRECTION

Even before protests broke out this year, Hong Kong's media environment had become increasingly constrained, at least in traditional print and broadcast. Founders and owners of media organizations should have rights to shape editorial coverage. A change in ownership can naturally lead to a change in approach to news and opinion. What's worrisome is when owners are subject to hidden, outside political pressures, or when a concentration of ownership effectively blots out the possibility of independent views. This is the risk in Hong Kong, as reversion to Chinese rule has been followed by increased ownership by business interests with close business and political ties to China.

According to a recent tally the Hong Kong Journalists Association (HKJA) provided to CPJ, mainland Chinese authorities or corporations led by Communist Party members control nine of 26 mainstream media outlets, including the dominant TV broadcaster, TVB, and the dominant English newspaper, the *South China Morning Post*. In addition, Chinese businessmen who are not residents of mainland China but instead have Chinese political appointments, such as deputies of the National People's Congress, control additional media properties, bringing to over half the number of media properties with close mainland political ties.

Changes started before the 1997 handover. In the former British colony, then anti-communist newspapers like the *Ming Pao* and pro-communist media outlets like *Ta Kung Pao* and *Wen Wei Po* freely competed for readers. Two months before the handover, *The Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) [took note](#) of the shift in editorial attitude, in particular at *Ming Pao*, which it described as "retreating" from aggressive coverage.

The *South China Morning Post* (SCMP), controlled

after 1993 by the Malaysian tycoon Robert Kuok who purchased his stake from Rupert Murdoch, has over the years seen the departure of a string of journalists amid concerns or open complaints that management was forcing them to tone down critical coverage of China. This included the China editor [Willy Wo-Lap Lam](#) in 2000, who [said](#) the paper's owner would not allow his brand of behind-the-scenes reporting on Beijing's political intrigue. Then-editor Robert Keatley [denied](#) that the *Post* had pulled back from Lam's aggressive coverage. The paper fired Beijing correspondent [Jasper Becker](#) in 2002, accusing him of insubordination, while Becker [said](#) it was a result of him pushing back as the paper softened China coverage.

In May 2015, the paper [dismissed](#) four experienced columnists who were often critical of China and Hong Kong. Months later in December, Kwok [sold](#) the paper to Alibaba, the giant Chinese internet retailer whose co-founder and former executive chair, Jack Ma, is a Communist Party member. Ma later [said](#) to the *SCMP*: "With its access to Alibaba's resources, data and all the relationships in our ecosystem, the *Post* can report on Asia and China more accurately compared with other media who have no such access."

Chow Chung Yan, the paper's executive editor, said that with the *Post*'s deep roots in the community, it was better placed compared to competitors to explain China to the world. With no growth prospects in the Hong Kong market, where it dominates the English readership, the paper has set its sights on overseas readers interested in China. It keeps four mainland Chinese bureaus with a staff of 50, Chow said. "We can be an independent voice," he told CPJ at *SCMP*'s impressive new headquarters, home to a [growing](#) multinational staff, including journalists with experience at publications like [Bloomberg](#) and the [Los Angeles Times](#). Its pro-China columnists and news stories that uncritically explain China's stance infuriate critics of Beijing, but the paper also publishes news and criticism of China and Hong Kong that would not see the light of day on the mainland, such as: "[Blindsided: why does Beijing keep getting Hong Kong wrong?](#)" Chow says that China [blocks](#) its website, noting that *SCMP*'s target audience is outside China.

Long-time business columnist Shirley Yam [resigned](#) in 2017 after the *SCMP* retracted a [published column](#) in which she described links between a Singapore investor and a close adviser to Chinese President Xi Jinping. The paper [said](#) the column contained "multiple unverifiable

insinuations," but did not specify exactly where the column went wrong or issue any correction. Yam told CPJ that she had full freedom to write during her 11 years at the *Post*. "This was no longer the case after the retraction of my column, which I cannot agree with," she said, leading to her decision to resign. The incident raises, but doesn't answer, questions about whether there are possible limits to *SCMP* coverage, including critical coverage of senior Chinese leaders, which has provoked [apparent retaliation](#) against foreign correspondents in Beijing. The *Post* does cover sensitive topics, such as Taiwan independence and the mass detention of ethnic Uighurs in Xinjiang, although it devotes considerable space to Chinese government views.

No one would doubt the independence of Chinese-language *Apple Daily* and the Next Digital company that owns it and is chaired by blunt-talking entrepreneur [Jimmy Lai](#), a Hong Kong resident who was smuggled out of China at age 12. Lai started manufacturing clothing in the 1970s and later made his fortune on the clothing retail chain Giordano. After the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, he founded Next Media (which became Next Digital in 2015) and launched *Next* magazine. Following a [critical column](#) in the magazine in 1994, where Lai insulted then-Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng and told him to "drop dead," China began to force branches of Giordano on the mainland to close, after which he sold his share of the company. "I was tossed out from China," he told CPJ. "I sold Giordano shares. Otherwise they would close down our shops." He launched *Apple Daily* in 1995.

Lai introduced tabloid-style journalism to Hong Kong and later Taiwan, and has openly supported democracy protesters in Hong Kong. He was [arrested](#) for protesting in 2014. For years, Lai has [complained](#) about a politically motivated squeeze on advertising at the company aimed at damaging its finances. "In the 90s, those property tycoons stopped advertising," he told CPJ, adding that recently the squeeze has tightened. "Since 2014, banks, they stopped, including some big names. No property, no airlines, no banks. They have connections with China." HSBC and Standard Chartered, two of Hong Kong's most prominent banks, said they made a commercial decision to stop advertising that year, [according](#) to *The Wall Street Journal*. Lai has said the companies always claim the cancelling of ads is a business decision, but the pattern is consistent. It's unclear whether the companies are under direct political pressure not to advertise or they've decided their



A front page of Hong Kong's newspaper Ming Pao with a joint petition against the proposed extradition bill, is seen in Hong Kong on June 4, 2019. (Reuters/Tyrone Siu)

commercial interests lie in trying to curry favor with Beijing on their own initiative.

In March, former Hong Kong Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying, known as C.Y. Leung—a senior Hong Kong political figure who as vice-chair of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference is seen as strongly pro-China, [launched](#) a social media campaign aimed at shaming advertisers in *Apple Daily*. [For several weeks](#), Leung posted [photos](#) of advertisements, and encouraged consumers to boycott the advertisers' products. Leung did not respond to a request for comment sent via Facebook Messenger.

In August, Chinese state-controlled media launched renewed attacks on Lai. The Xinhua news agency [published](#) a commentary entitled "Jimmy Lai's despicable legacy of fomenting chaos in Hong Kong." The commentary accused Lai of spreading disinformation and of inviting external forces to meddle in Hong Kong. Lai had met with

U.S. Vice President Mike Pence in July in Washington. The squeeze on *Apple Daily* advertising is consistent with China's increasing efforts to wield commercial muscle against companies that cross an ill-defined political red line, illustrated by the [resignation](#) of the chairman of Cathay Pacific Airlines over staff participation in anti-extradition law protests. While sales of the printed *Apple Daily* have declined, online registered readers approached three million in May, Lai said. A new, partial paywall offers a potential source of revenue to counteract the advertising squeeze.

The push and pull on media can come from both sides in a reflection of Hong Kong's political polarization. TVB, Hong Kong's largest broadcast channel, lost several advertisers this year, [including](#) the Japanese sports drink Pocari Sweat and Pizza Hut, after protesters rallied and [accused the station](#) of biased news coverage, tilted in favor of China against protesters' demands, according to news reports.



Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam speaks to the media after casting her vote at a polling station during district council local elections in Hong Kong on November 24, 2019. (Reuters/Thomas Peter)

Protesters also heckled and [harassed](#) TVB reporters on the street doing their jobs.

In an email, TVB said the allegation of biased coverage was “totally unfounded,” and that the station had received criticism from both sides. “In the past few months, the online world was filled with malicious lies, incitements, doxxing of our news staff and even death threats by radical protesters accusing TVB news reports of pro-police bias. The unfounded accusations had culminated in physical attacks of TVB news crew, seizure of memory cards containing news materials, damages to our vehicles and cameras. Radical protesters also harassed our advertisers threatening them to stop their TV commercials on TVB, thereby causing us economic harm,” a TVB spokesperson said.

Suspicious about TVB stem in part from the company’s ownership. TVB’s vice chair, Li Ruigang, is a former senior communist official in the Shanghai government. The media investment company he controls, [CMC Capital](#),

is TVB’s largest shareholder at 26 percent, according to [news reports](#). In comments to the media, Li has [dismissed](#) suggestions that he is influencing coverage. A [content analysis](#) of Hong Kong media by Clement Y.K. So, professor at the School of Journalism and Communication at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, placed TVB’s coverage far into the pro-Beijing camp, just short of the openly pro-communist newspapers. Other news broadcasters with smaller audiences include the publicly funded Radio Television Hong Kong, or RTHK, the privately owned Now TV/ViuTV, and Beijing-run CCTV.

Beyond traditional media is a lively scene of innovative digital startups on shoestring budgets that have garnered increasing public support with the surge of anti-government demonstrations in Hong Kong. Prominent among English-language readers is the nonprofit [Hong Kong Free Press](#) or [HKFP](#), which has been live streaming from tear-gas choked demonstrations and attracting a range of opinion pieces. Readership has nearly tripled in the last year,

according to the site's founder Tom Grundy, who also reported a record fund drive in 2019 and roughly a doubling of monthly donors. "We have the same commercial concerns as everyone else in media," Grundy said, adding that *HKFP* is facing an advertising boycott from China.

FactWire, another nonprofit, crowd-funded site publishing in English and Chinese, focuses on investigative stories.

The wave of interest in news is also helping to sustain independent Chinese-language news sites. In some cases, the operations have provided refuge for experienced journalists who may have left mainstream media in order to practice journalism as they wish, such as *Citizen News* Editor-in-Chief Daisy Li Yuet-wah, former chief executive of the online *Apple Daily* in Taiwan. Joining her as contributors are Kevin Lau, former editor of *Ming Pao*, and Chris Yeung, who chairs the Hong Kong Journalists Association. Li, who worked for *Apple Daily* for 13 years, says the shock of a brutal cleaver attack on her friend and fellow journalist Lau in 2014 prompted her to explore new ways of journalism. The site formally launched on January 1, 2017 with the help of three unnamed benefactors and is struggling to find a reliable financial model. "We may be good journalists, but we are lousy marketers," Li told CPJ. Yeung is also founder and contributor to *Voice of Hong Kong*, an English-language online opinion-journalism platform.

Citizen News has recently joined forces with three other news websites—*InmediaHK*, *Matter.news* and *Stand News*—in a funding program managed by the *LikeCoin* foundation in which subscribers pay US\$5 a month to allocate payments to their preferred authors on the individual sites, according to *Global Voices*. *Initium Media*, which produces longform and investigative stories, has instituted a *subscription* model.

Of course, the digital scene would be incomplete without a platform more sympathetic to China. *HK01*'s practice of expressing opposition to Taiwan or Hong Kong independence at the end of news stories, drew *condemnation* from the Hong Kong Journalists Association, which also complained about *HK01* pulling politically sensitive coverage. *HK01* hit back by accusing the HKJA of "overstepping its bounds," *according to* the *Hong Kong Free Press*.

In sum, Hong Kong has legal structures in place that have allowed freedom of speech and freedom of the press. The return of Hong Kong to Chinese rule in 1997 kicked off a gradual process by which most big media have come under increasing sway of mainland business and political

influence. The apparent manipulation of advertisers to steer them away from pro-democracy content has damaged some media, especially the *Apple Daily*, amounting to an assault on press freedom. Still, those voices persist in the robust, low-budget world of online media, even if reaching a smaller audience.

VIOLENCE AGAINST JOURNALISTS

Violence against journalists remains a disturbing undercurrent with potential to induce caution and self-censorship.

The police investigation into the February 2014 near-fatal attack on journalist Kevin Lau remains open despite the fact that two assailants, who *slashed Lau* from the back six times with a cleaver, are in prison serving out 19-year sentences over the incident. Why was Lau attacked? "We believe that attack was related to his work as chief editor, but we have no evidence," Daisy Li said. The mystery means that the threat is still potentially out there, if not to Lau, then to others who might inadvertently step on the same buried landmine. The threat could curb the appetite for certain kinds of aggressive reporting.

Keith Richburg, director at the journalism program at Hong Kong University, noted the lack of investigative reporting into triad activity, or organized crime, in the former colony despite it being an obvious topic. *Triads* trace their roots to secret societies during China's last imperial dynasty, the Qing. More recently, China has a record of co-opting the groups for its own purposes. Men who democracy activists believed were connected to triads *attacked* democracy protesters in 2014; and at least two men arrested in connection with an *attack* in July 2019 on protesters returning home at the Yuen Long metro station were affiliated with triads, news reports said.

In January 2014, prior to being attacked, Lau was abruptly removed from his role as editor-in-chief of *Ming Pao* and replaced by a Malaysian residing in Singapore. Current and former employees signed petitions expressing *concern* that the paper's editorial independence and pro-democracy stance would be curbed. Two months later, two men, including one with a cleaver, *attacked Lau* as he was getting out of his car near a restaurant in Sai Wan Ho on Hong Kong Island, sending him to hospital intensive care. Police *pieced together* hundreds of video surveillance tapes to identify and reconstruct the route of the attackers, leading to their arrest and eventual conviction about a year later. The two, who claimed they were offered



Women stand by a banner next to a desk set up to collect signatures in support of former editor of the liberal *Ming Pao* newspaper Kevin Lau in Hong Kong on February 28, 2014. Police are still investigating the near fatal attack on Lau. (AFP/ Philippe Lopez)

100,000 Hong Kong dollars (US\$12,821) to carry out the attack, [never said](#) publicly why it was ordered or by whom. Although *Ming Pao* staff analyzed investigative reports conducted under Lau's leadership looking for who had the means and motive to order the attack, neither they nor the police were able to point clearly to a single suspect, according to two former *Ming Pao* staff who declined to be named because they did not want to risk prejudicing any case should it go to trial again. A Hong Kong police spokesperson declined to comment, citing an open investigation.

The attack on Lau—still a topic of discussion and concern among journalists in Hong Kong five years later—stands out for its shocking brutality and the victim's prominence. But it's only the worst of a series of unsolved attacks on journalists and the media. In 1996, two unidentified men attacked veteran journalist [Leung Tin-wai](#), whose arm was severed and later reattached in the hospital, two days before the launch of his tabloid newspaper

Surprise Weekly. Two assailants with knives attacked radio broadcaster [Albert Cheng](#) in broad daylight in 1998 outside a radio station in Kowloon, just before he was to go on the air, sending him to the hospital for over [four hours](#) of surgery. Cheng [resigned](#) from the program "Teacup in the Storm" in 2004, citing death threats and the "suffocating" political climate in Hong Kong.

The year 2013 saw an uptick in incidents. While it's unclear exactly what prompted the increase, the stepped up attacks on journalists coincided with China's [increasing internal clampdown](#) on the media as Xi Jinping assumed the presidency. Two men wielding batons [attacked](#) Chen Ping, publisher of the weekly *iSun Affairs*, on the streets of Chai Wan. In June that year, someone in a stolen car [rammed](#) through the gate at the home of Jimmy Lai, leaving an axe and machete at the scene. Days later, a *Sharp Daily* reporter was [attacked](#) and injured. Shortly after that, three masked men wielding knives [threatened](#) distribution workers and burned 26,000 copies of Next Media's

flagship *Apple Daily*.

The Hong Kong Journalists Association [cited](#) 18 cases of assault or harassment in 2013, including attacks on Hong Kong journalists working in mainland China, and castigated the government for inaction.

A drumbeat of attacks on the media has continued. More than 30 journalists were attacked and injured during the 2014 Umbrella Movement protests, according to [HKJA data](#), with [no arrests](#) made. During this year's huge demonstrations calling for the withdrawal of the extradition bill and an independent investigation into police behavior among other demands, CPJ has documented many attacks on journalists. Most attacks came [from](#) the [police](#), some from the [gangs](#) who attacked protesters, and some by the [protesters](#) themselves, who attacked a journalist from the strongly pro-communist, Beijing-based *Global Times* during an airport demonstration.

In an email responding to a CPJ inquiry about pepper spray attacks on journalists, which [journalists](#) and [videos](#) indicate were unprovoked, an unnamed duty officer from the police public relations branch wrote: "On numerous occasions persons dressed in clothing normally worn by photographers or reporters, have attacked police officers or even attempted to prevent the arrest of offenders. Counterfeit press badges were seized in some cases as well. Appropriate, and necessary force, was used to stop attempts to frustrate the lawful arrest of offenders, and establish a safe distance between rioters and Police." The officer further said journalists needed to avoid placing themselves in danger. The response did not explain why journalists who were not taking any action against police had [been attacked](#). In an email to CPJ, the Hong Kong Journalists Association said that it had no information to independently confirm the police allegations, and that the police had yet to respond to a request to provide details or evidence. In October, the HKJA [filed](#) an application to bring judicial review proceedings against the commissioner of police for failures by the police to uphold duties to facilitate journalistic activity.

On October 9, CPJ sent a [letter](#) to Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam calling on the government to establish an independent agency to conduct investigations into police attacks on journalists. A [response](#) on Lam's behalf by her private secretary, Ronald Cheng, said investigations into police work would be handled by the existing Independent Police Complaints Council (IPCC). However, on November 8, an independent expert panel appointed by the Hong Kong government [concluded](#) in a response

[posted](#) on Twitter, that the IPCC had a shortfall of "powers, capacity, and independent investigative capability necessary to match the scale of events and the standards required of an international police watchdog operating in a society that values freedoms and rights." The chief executive's office did not respond to CPJ's subsequent inquiry as to whether it would drop its opposition to forming a new independent body.

The pro-democracy Next Media and *Apple Daily* have continued to suffer from a variety of targeted attacks, including the January 2015 [firebombing](#) of Lai's home and the company headquarters on the same morning. Lai's home was [again attacked](#) with a firebomb in September 2019. In September, the [Hong Kong Journalists Association condemned](#) the publishing on recently launched Chinese-language websites of personal details of *Apple Daily* employees, including photos, dates of birth, residential addresses and contact information, in apparent violation of Hong Kong law. Global Voices [reported](#) that China's state-run television network was encouraging Chinese to publish the personal details of protesters and reporters, to a section of its website labeled "reporters from poisonous apple," in an obvious reference to *Apple Daily*. It also reported that the doxing website had been moved to a Russian domain after concerns were raised about privacy, and the details then spread on Chinese social media. CPJ research overwhelmingly shows that when journalists or a publisher such as Lai are targeted for attack, they've been known for critical reporting on Hong Kong or China. Police do make the occasional arrest and conviction, as in the Kevin Lau attack, but rarely convict those who are ultimately responsible.

But the overall record of going after those responsible—whether they're gangsters, pro-China affiliated organized crime members, or the police themselves—is weak, a complaint that appears repeatedly in the [annual reports](#) of the HKJA and is reflected in CPJ reporting over the years. That's true for targeted attacks and for violence against journalists during street protests, despite the handful of [arrests](#) following attacks on protesters and journalists by club-wielding gangs in July in Yuen Long. Yeung, the HKJA chair, suggested in an August [op-ed](#) that the Hong Kong police had in effect become a branch of China's public security machinery. Referring to recent police assaults on journalists in its [2019 annual report](#), the HKJA said: "The number and severity of those cases have raised a question of whether police officers have deliberately targeted reporters and, if so, why. Reporters remain skeptical



A Hong Kong woman distributes newspapers with the headlines 'Millions against Communist China shock the world' in a shopping district popular with mainland Chinese tourists in Hong Kong Sunday, July 7, 2019. (AP/Andy Wong)

despite repeated assurances by [then] Police Commissioner Stephen Lo Wai-chung that they were sincere in cooperating with the media. There are concerns that people's right to know will be jeopardized if reporters are not given easy and safe access to the places where news are unfolding." Police have repeatedly denied to CPJ by email that attacks on journalists are intentional.

On November 19, new police Commissioner Chris Tang took office [warning that "fake news"](#) was undermining the reputation of the force and [denying that an independent investigation](#) into police behavior is needed, according to news reports.

CHINA'S GROWING INTERVENTION

The "one country, two systems" formula was supposed to insure that Hong Kong carried on more or less as it

did before the accession to China for 50 years. But following the rise to power of Xi Jinping, who has centralized control and reasserted the authority of the Communist Party everywhere while promoting the role of ideology, an emphasis on one country has increasingly impinged on the idea of two systems. Richburg, also a longtime journalist in Asia, [suggested](#) in *The Washington Post* that the "one-country, two-systems" concept is unworkable, inevitably resulting in today's clashes. China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not respond to a request for comment as to whether the "one-country, two-system" concept is still viable.

China's diminishing inhibitions to intervening in Hong Kong affairs have unfortunate consequences for journalists. "The overall situation is not positive," Yeung said. "People feel different degrees of anxiety. I won't say there's a lot of tension or pressure, but you feel uneasy

and uncomfortable about the media environment. Not so much very direct threat or feeling of insecurity about personal safety—no, I don't think we are at that stage—but a lot of these things make you feel uncomfortable.”

Daisy Li, discussing the fallout from the attack on Kevin Lau, said the atmosphere darkened shortly after Xi came to power. “Journalism was definitely deteriorating, even in 2014,” Li said. “It was not only self-censorship, but also intervention by mainland China, through giving ads or not giving ads. Most of the mainstream media were already very timid in criticizing China or avoiding sensitive issues, or literally they took a pro-government stance.” Li said the *Citizen News* website has come under repeated denial-of-service attacks.

In 2015, [five men](#) associated with a book shop in Hong Kong's Causeway Bay disappeared and turned up on the mainland, some abducted from Hong Kong or in one case from Thailand, according to [news reports](#). The bookstore, Causeway Bay Books, published works of political gossip and intrigue banned in China. All five appeared on Chinese state television to say they travelled voluntarily to China. The next year, the owner and manager of the store, Lam Wing-kee, was released and allowed to return to Hong Kong, he [said](#), to retrieve a hard drive with customer data and then go back to China. Instead he stayed and denounced the Chinese for staging forced confessions. “It can happen to you, too, if I don't speak up,” he [warned](#) Hong Kongers in a press conference.

The abducted were not journalists, but as the HKJA [noted](#) in its 2016 annual report, “This has had an undoubted adverse impact on freedom of expression and press freedom in Hong Kong.” The booksellers were picked up for publishing material that was legal in Hong Kong, but not in mainland China. The same standard could easily cross the Hong Kong-Shenzhen frontier and be applied to journalists, without warning.

In 2018, the Media and Journalism Studies Centre at the University of Hong Kong—which supplies much of the budding talent to Hong Kong's media—was broken into in the middle of the night, according to Richburg, the director. The masked intruder entered the media lab using a stolen electronic key before moving on to the computer server room, the only sensitive part of the intrusion not caught on video camera as he moved systematically through the building. Police couldn't say who broke into the building or why, or what might have been left behind, according to Richburg, who says he now assumes that the program is under surveillance.

In January, [The Wall Street Journal](#), following a change in government in Malaysia, was able to review minutes of meetings between Malaysian officials of the previous government and Chinese officials, who offered to help use their influence to get other countries to drop a corruption probe involving Malaysia. According to the minutes, China offered to bug the homes and office of *Journal* reporters in Hong Kong, the *Journal* reported. “At a meeting the next day [June 29, 2016], Sun Lijun, then head of China's domestic-security force, confirmed that China's government was surveilling the *Journal* in Hong Kong at Malaysia's request, including ‘full scale residence/office/device tapping, computer/phone/web data retrieval, and full operational surveillance,’” according to a Malaysian summary of that meeting. “Mr. Sun says that they will establish all links that *WSJ* HK has with Malaysia-related individuals and will hand over the wealth of data to Malaysia through ‘back-channels’ once everything is ready,” the summary reads. “It is then up to Malaysia to do the necessary.”

The *Journal* reported that it employed security measures and could not confirm that surveillance was actually carried out.

Visiting Hong Kong this year, CPJ found foreign journalists had coined a new verb: to be Malleted, meaning to be expelled from Hong Kong for exercising the right of free speech. The saying implied fear that they could suffer the same fate as [Victor Mallet](#) should they offend China. Mallet was the Hong Kong-based Asia news editor for the *Financial Times* (*FT*), and an experienced journalist who had worked throughout Asia. As first vice president of the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Hong Kong, it fell to him to host a talk by Andy Chan, founder of the pro-independence Hong Kong National Party, while the president of the club was travelling. Mallet had nothing to do with arranging the talk, although he had stood up against pressure from the China Liaison office to cancel the event, according to club members. His resident visa was denied a few months later when it came up for renewal and he was subsequently barred from entering Hong Kong on a visitor's visa, normally issued routinely on arrival to U.K. citizens. (Mallet is now the *FT*'s Paris bureau chief.) An *FT* [statement](#) said: “The *FT* has not received an explanation for the visa rejection from the Hong Kong authorities and continues to seek clarity regarding this matter.”

While no official reason was given for the denial of Mallet's visa, it's widely believed to be China's punishment for hosting the Chan talk. The incident has made

foreign journalists based in Hong Kong say they are acutely aware that they and the club persist at China's pleasure, injecting a note of caution into decisions taken by the club and, some journalists say, into thinking about coverage of Hong Kong and China. "It has had a chilling effect on foreign journalists, leading to self-censorship," said Grundy of *Hong Kong Free Press*.

The Hong Kong government speaks in a confusing and contradictory way about what happened. Chief Executive Lam says that Hong Kong will uphold freedom of speech, but that advocacy of independence will not be tolerated. "All I want to say is that this is not a question of freedom of speech. It is a question of whether we are respecting 'one country, two systems,' and a constitutional question of whether we care if Hong Kong can continue to have our rights and freedoms protected under 'one country, two systems,' so that we can develop and our people can live in a stable and prosperous city," Lam said at a press conference, as [reported](#) by the *South China Morning Post*.

When asked at a press conference in October 2018 how journalists could navigate this, Lam provided no guidance. "I can't tell you exactly what journalists should say, or act, or interview, but I can assure you ... freedom of expression, freedom of reporting, are core values in Hong Kong," she [said](#).

There is, perhaps, one positive outcome of Mallet's expulsion for Hong Kong journalists. "No one is in jail; people aren't being killed. It's hard to convince the international community that press freedom is under siege here," said Yam, the former *SCMP* columnist who is also vice-chair of the Hong Kong Journalists Association. "Victor Mallet made that easier."

Hong Kong's values came under threat again in February 2019, when the government [proposed](#) amendments to the Fugitive Offenders Ordinance, informally known as the extradition bill. The government said the bill aimed to provide a legal path to extradite a murder suspect to Taiwan, but it also provided a means to send suspects to other jurisdictions, including to China for trial over alleged infractions of Chinese laws. The legislation appeared to be headed toward enactment since the government enjoyed majority support in the Legislative Council, which had [barred](#) some pro-democracy elected legislators from serving. But fear that Hong Kong residents could be subject to China's highly politicized judicial system was the spark that initially brought [millions](#) of Hong Kongers to the streets to protest the bill.

On May 13, before the largest of the anti-extradition-law

demonstrations, CPJ [called for](#) withdrawal or amendment of the bill on the grounds that it provided inadequate safeguards to prevent misuse against journalists. The bill explicitly excluded rendition based on political or spurious offences, and any rendition would have to be endorsed by Hong Kong's chief executive and approved by Hong Kong's highly respected judiciary. However, the Hong Kong courts would not have been given a chance to review evidence in a case. Furthermore, the chief executive is effectively chosen by China, undermining any claims to independence. "If the request comes from the mainland, it's almost unthinkable that the chief executive would reject it in the end," Johannes Chan, law professor at the University of Hong Kong, told CPJ.

The Hong Kong business community was more comfortable with the basic approach of the bill. Felix Chung Kwok-pan, leader of the pro-business, pro-China, Liberal Party in the Legislative Council, told CPJ he did not think journalists would be at risk.

Fears ran high that China could go after a critical journalist on unrelated or fabricated charges and haul them in front of a mainland Chinese court—essentially using legal avenues to capture journalists and not have to abduct them, as happened in the case of the booksellers. "The Chinese will use any means to file charges against a reporter they don't like, will say he hit someone, or something," said Dennis Kwok, a member of Hong Kong's Legislative Council who represents the legal community. Philip Dykes, chairman of the Council of the Hong Kong Bar Association, argued that journalists would be most vulnerable to the law, followed by academics and politicians. China is consistently one of the world's worst jailers of journalists, according to [CPJ research](#). Just the threat created by the bill could be enough to induce a high degree of self-censorship among Hong Kong journalists. "Once we have the fugitive offenders law we will have no protection as a journalist," said Jimmy Lai.

Chief Executive Lam initially suspended the bill, but after months of additional street protests [agreed](#) to formally withdraw it in early September. Protesters have continued to march, calling for her resignation and for an independent inquiry into police behavior. However, aside from the concession over the extradition bill, China has adopted an increasingly hard line, blaming the continued violence on the lack of tough security laws, according to [reports](#). A high-level Communist Party meeting in early November concluded with a call for increased control over political appointments in Hong Kong, national security legislation,



A journalist is injured as riot police and protesters clash near China's liaison office in Hong Kong on July 28, 2019. (AFP/Vivek Prakash)

and the introduction of “patriotic” education, according to [news reports](#). Lam also received a strong endorsement from China’s leadership, [according to reports](#), dimming prospects for further accommodation to protesters’ demands.

Meanwhile, China began an information war against the protests on social media channels that are blocked in China: Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. In response, Twitter suspended 936 accounts that it [said](#) originated in China and were “deliberately and specifically attempting to sow political discord in Hong Kong.” Facebook [removed](#) seven pages, three groups and five accounts for “coordinated inauthentic behavior” related to Hong Kong. China [objected](#) to the move and said that it had a right to put out its opinion. A few days later, on August 22, Google [said](#) it had disabled 210 YouTube channels originating in China to combat “coordinated influence operations” related to Hong Kong. An [analysis](#) of the accounts by researchers at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute concluded that, “the information operation targeted at the protests appears to have been

a relatively small and hastily assembled operation rather than a sophisticated information campaign planned well in advance.” It’s not clear whether or how far Chinese efforts go beyond the dataset that was studied.

Hong Kong may have experienced an early instance of internet censorship in November when a channel named “dad finds boy” on the Telegram messaging app was [shut down](#) just a few weeks after an October 25 court injunction that banned the publication of Hong Kong police officers’ personal details, according to [news reports](#). The channel was widely used to share private information about officers and their families. On October 31, the court also banned the spread of online messages inciting violence, according to [reports](#). Telegram spokesman Remi Vaughn told CPJ the channel was temporarily suspended for breaching Telegram’s terms of service by publishing calls to violence.

The court, however, reaffirmed the importance of press freedom in Hong Kong when, over police objections, it exempted journalists from the ban on doxing when they reveal information about police in the normal course of



A pedestrian walks past a closed newsstand with the logo of the South China Morning Post (SCMP) in Hong Kong on December 12, 2015, following the acquisition by Chinese internet giant Alibaba of the English-language newspaper. (AFP/Anthony Wallace)

reporting the news. The Hong Kong Journalists Association had sought the [exemption](#) at a November 8 hearing. “Lawful reporting and freedom of the press are important to Hong Kong,” said Justice Russell Coleman, as [quoted](#) in the *South China Morning Post*.

Even without legal rendition to China, anti-subversion laws, or broad internet censorship, the supportive environment needed for a truly free press has been severely compromised. The head of one prominent news bureau that covers the Asia region from Hong Kong said, on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue, that his organization was actively looking to relocate elsewhere in Asia. Other foreign journalists discussed the possibility with CPJ. Hong Kong’s relatively central location, freedom of the press, rule of law, and convenient transportation links have made it an attractive base for regional work.

Yeung, chair of the Hong Kong Journalists’ Association, noted the gradual shift in the atmosphere affecting local

Hong Kong journalists. “The pressure that journalists are facing here, it’s not so much like what’s happened in some Asian countries, where they face violence or physical threats to safety, but more like you won’t be allowed to visit the mainland. Some reporters who have done some sensitive stories, they were not given permission to cover events in China. They were banned, or blacklisted. They want to be quiet, wait for the ban to be lifted. They worry if they publicize it they will never get accreditation for events or be allowed to be there for a long period of time. Those people in those cases, they don’t come to us [HKJA for help]. They might not even want us to be involved.”

China has not been shy in its surveillance efforts. Journalists and ordinary citizens have had phones searched, and sometimes content deleted, when crossing the Chinese border, [according to news reports](#). It’s unclear whether China has also installed surveillance apps, as [news reports](#) indicate it has done elsewhere in the country. The Hong

Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council and the State Council did not respond to a request for comment left on message boards on their respective websites. The Cyberspace Administration of China did not respond to an email request for comment.

At a police press conference in August, journalists said they found themselves [being photographed](#) by a woman who would not initially identify herself, stoking fears they were under surveillance. “Slowly watching the death of HK’s free press. I’m sure many suspect she is passing photos onto the CCP [Chinese Communist Party] to have certain people ‘mysteriously vanish,’” said one [Twitter post](#). The Hong Kong Federation of Journalists, which has close ties to China and identified the photographer as a journalist from China, [condemned](#) what it called prejudice and discrimination against reporters from the mainland.

CONCLUSION

From the period before the handover to Chinese rule in 1997 until today, press freedom in Hong Kong has come under a gradual and now accelerating squeeze, despite China’s pledge to maintain Hong Kong’s open society. Jamil Anderlini, Asia Editor at the *Financial Times* and a longtime China correspondent, [predicted](#) in October that the squeeze would inevitably worsen, in a reflection of China’s increasing totalitarianism and the obvious failure so far to achieve its goals in Hong Kong. He predicted that

“news outlets would be muzzled,” along with dismissal of civil servants and judges, and the introduction of patriotic materials in the education system. Likely, the internet will be censored. That, he suggested, would be a best-case, if increasingly unlikely, scenario as turmoil on the streets continues.

The initial cause of Hong Kong’s ever more restrictive environment is the gradual change in control of large media properties, which have come under mainland Chinese ownership or influence. This has left independent journalism underfunded, even though the online scene is in some ways robust.

Targeted violence against individuals has underscored the potential dangers for journalists that challenge China’s wishes or report on organized crime. Attacks by police against journalists covering protests have raised serious questions about official support for the values of freedom of the press.

But perhaps most concerning is the bleeding ethos from China into Hong Kong of total censorship that has shut down independent media in China. The methods are less effective than what’s used in China—long jail sentences for offending scribes. But pressuring businesses to withhold advertising, arbitrarily cancelling the visa of a correspondent, increasing double-speak about forbidden topics and free speech, and doxing and spying on journalists all take a toll. As China ratchets up the pressure on Hong Kong media, it’s not clear where or if it will stop. ♦

Taiwan's values at stake in China disinformation fight

Taiwan hosts one of the freest media scenes in Asia, a product of its evolution from military to democratic rule in just over 30 years. But today, as China becomes more aggressive in finding ways to spread its message, Taiwan faces a dilemma: How does it maintain its openness and press freedom while facing an adversary that has vast resources and technological prowess, and lacks the values that have made Taiwan a democracy?

Based on CPJ reporting, Taiwan does not have a clear answer. As this report documents, China's influence over local legacy and social media has grown. That influence has become potentially more worrisome as general elections on January 11, 2020 approach, reflecting fears that China is intervening surreptitiously to sway the outcome. Facing potential threats, Taiwan has employed a patchwork of legal and regulatory approaches to punish media for inaccurate reporting or distortions, while experimenting with other methods of fighting lies with truth.

What China does and how Taiwan reacts could have ramifications far beyond Taiwan, as democracies from South and Southeast Asia to Africa and Latin America struggle to maintain fairness and transparency, while depending economically on China, or face foreign manipulation similar to Russia's intervention in the 2016 U.S. election.

TAIWAN'S MEDIA AND THE WHITE TERROR

Fifty years of Japanese rule over Taiwan ended abruptly in 1945 with Japan's defeat in the Second World War. Press freedom flourished for a brief period until the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party, or KMT) under Chinese President Chiang Kai-shek fled the communist-controlled mainland and took refuge on the island. Afterwards, Taiwan endured 38 years of continuous martial law—one of the longest such periods on record—from 1949 until 1987. During this period known as “White Terror,” at least 73 journalists were imprisoned, 26 executed, and three

placed under constant surveillance while six committed suicide, died in detention or died for other reasons, according to [research](#) by Chen Pai-lin, chairperson of the Department of Journalism at the National Chengchi University.

In short, Taiwan's free press of today was birthed from an extremely unfree media environment. “Just 30 or 35 years ago Taiwan was where the PRC is [today],” said Audrey Tang, Taiwan's minister without portfolio or “[digital minister](#),” referencing the mainland's formal name, People's Republic of China. “The state-run media at the time was the only media and there was, frankly speaking, lots of propaganda around.”

“Nobody who remembers the martial law wants to go there. It's really the bad old days,” said Tang, who serves in the government of President Tsai Ing-wen of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), the KMT's main rival.

PRESS FREEDOM IN TAIWAN

Indeed, it couldn't be more different today. Taiwan boasts a lively and unrestricted media landscape. With multiple 24-hour news broadcasters, more than 10 printed daily newspapers, and countless competitive media outlets, Taiwan's nearly 24 million residents enjoy robust freedom of speech and the press.

Most of the mainstream newspapers and news broadcasters have their own political allegiance or ideology and almost every political faction has its own media outlet and online platform. But a shadow hangs over this otherwise lively and diverse scene: fear that the Chinese government has taken openness and freedom as an opportunity to use hidden means to influence public opinion in Taiwan. As Tang put it, “Disinformation is a threat especially for open societies.”

How to maintain Taiwan's openness while preventing unwelcome manipulation by a hostile political force—let alone a giant next door whose economy is key to Taiwan's



A Taipei newspaper delivery woman counts piles of evening newspapers bearing headlines of Hong Kong's midnight handover to Chinese rule on June 30, 1997. (Reuters)

prosperity—is a riddle for which there isn't yet a satisfying answer.

Unlike in Hong Kong, Taiwan [prohibits](#) direct ownership of media properties by mainland Chinese entities or individuals without the government's approval. That prohibition has nonetheless failed to halt China's efforts to influence media or prevent individuals with strong business interests in China, who are potentially vulnerable to Chinese pressure, from owning Taiwanese media. Advertising, too, plays a role: Taiwan bans advertising by Chinese state, but not commercial, entities. A cursory look at Taiwan's newspapers indicates that papers that are critical of China do not carry advertisements from China. It pays to be pro-Beijing.

China's influence, or at least the rise of China-friendly news coverage, picked up in 2008 when chairman of the Want Want Group, Tsai Eng-meng, and his family acquired one of Taiwan's biggest media companies, the China Times Group. Tsai is a native Taiwanese billionaire

who made his fortune manufacturing and selling crackers and drinks in China. He has openly [promoted](#) closer relations with China in preparation for what he sees as eventual reunification of Taiwan with the mainland. The group has an extensive list of media properties including *The China Times* and two other newspapers, three magazines, three TV broadcasters, including CTITV and China Television, and eight news websites or apps, [according](#) to the company. Some business practices have landed the Want Want Group in trouble and raised questions about its independence from Chinese influence.

Concerns about mainland influence over Taiwan media, including social media, deepened during the December 2018 mayoral election in the major southern city of Kaohsiung which saw the [rapid rise](#) of Han Kuo-yu. Han, a once obscure KMT politician, achieved victory amid a strong social media campaign that supported him and denigrated his opponent, sometimes falsely. He has since become the KMT candidate for president in the January



This photo shows a journalist reading an advert placed in the Apple Daily newspaper in Taipei on June 28, 2019, placed by a Hong Kong campaign group calling for solidarity with Hong Kong protesters demanding the withdrawal of a bill that would allow extraditions to the Chinese mainland. (Sam Yeh/AFP)

2020 race where he'll face the DPP's Tsai. The DPP has leaned toward independence and incurs strong criticism from China, while the KMT favors friendlier relations with the mainland.

The KMT declined CPJ's repeated requests to interview party officials. The Want Want China Times Media Group did not respond to CPJ's email requesting comment.

INFLUENCE IN TRADITIONAL MEDIA

When Su Shulin, then-governor of Fujian province in China, visited Taiwan on an official tour in March 2012, *The China Times*, one of Taiwan's largest dailies, dedicated at least one story daily to his activities in Taiwan. While the stories were presented as news with flattering photos of Su and Fujian province, it turned out that the Fujian government had paid *The China Times* for the coverage to promote tourism, according to a [report](#) by *New Talk*, an independent news website.

New Talk published a document entitled "2012 Fujian Governor Taiwan Tour Propaganda Plan" (2012福建省長訪台宣傳計畫), detailing Su's travel schedule, the word count of each story *The China Times* should publish, and an added budget for Xiamen city. A *New Talk* reporter called the Xiamen city government and confirmed that a payment would be made to The Want Want Group's Chinese branch.

The report prompted heavy criticism of the newspaper and an [investigation](#) by the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC), Taiwan's cabinet level agency that oversees relations with China. *The China Times* was fined NT\$1.8 million (US\$57,368) for the illegal placement of advertising for Chinese authorities, according to the newspaper. Tsai said *The China Times* was unfairly vilified. "Do these advertisements really hurt national security?" Tsai said in an [interview](#) with his newspaper. "We should be allowed to profit from this."

Research published in April 2019 by the Nikkei Asian Review [found](#) that Want Want China had received \$586.7

million in subsidies from the Chinese government since 2004. The publication compiled the figures from [published](#) financial records. Want Want, responding to reports of the subsidies, said the grants were local government incentives aimed at attracting investment and had no connection to the conglomerate's media business, according to the Review. "Taking subsidies or rewards from the Chinese government does not violate Taiwan's laws," Chiu Chui-cheng, deputy minister of Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council, told the Review. "What we are concerned about is if the money comes with (a) political agenda against Taiwan," he said, adding that at the time there was no evidence that it did.

Nonetheless, on May 2, 2019, Taiwan's National Security Bureau, Taiwan's intelligence agency, delivered a [report](#) to the legislature outlining China's alleged infiltration of Taiwan's media and spreading of false news. Deputy Director-General Chen Wen-fan said some editorial content was being reviewed in Beijing prior to publication, although he refused to name the outlets involved. "It's really clear to those of us who monitor this which media the NSB was talking about," said Ketty Chen, vice president of the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy, an independent, primarily government-funded organization that promotes democracy. "Collaboration with the Chinese regime is now public knowledge." CPJ was unable to obtain contact details for the NSB.

A week later, China hosted 70 Taiwanese media executives and commentators at a forum in Beijing hosted by the municipal Communist Party-run *Beijing Daily* and Taiwan's Want Want China Times Media Group. During the forum, Wang Yang, the powerful chair of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, a legislative advisory body, [exhorted](#) Taiwan's journalists to promote the "one country, two systems" approach that's been applied in Hong Kong. The event drew a swift rebuke from Taiwan authorities who accused China of interfering with Taiwan's internal affairs and harming press freedom. Among the attendees were staff of the privately owned newspaper *United Daily News*, who dismissed the event as routine. "It is not news that Chinese officials have always been promoting connections," Chen Yan Qiao, senior reporter at *United Daily News*, told CPJ in an interview. "But that doesn't mean we will accept what they are selling."

In June, [newspaper readers](#), [NGOs](#), and [media](#) outlets accused Want Want China Times Media properties of [downplaying](#) Hong Kong's massive pro-democracy protests while other newspapers put it on the front page. Also

that month, a [Facebook user](#) discovered that *The China Times* had removed its past reporting on the June 4, 1989, Tiananmen Square massacre just in time for the 30th anniversary, in an apparent effort to understate China's widely reported atrocities. The discovery was confirmed by internet blogger [Joy Hsu](#) and news outlets including [Central News Agency](#), [Storm Media](#), and [Apple Daily](#). A recent check of the website by CPJ found that some of the posts had been restored. *The China Times* did not respond to an email request for comment.

On June 23, 2019, tens of thousands of people marched in Taipei to voice their frustrations with the "Red Media" that appear to be bought by China. The [protesters](#) asked for stricter legislation and revocation of broadcasting licenses to punish and prevent Chinese interference.

Nearly one month after the rally, *The Financial Times* seemed to confirm the concerns of intelligence officials when it [reported](#) that *The China Times* and the Want Want-owned CTITV news broadcaster were taking instructions on how to slant coverage and where to place stories related to China from the Taiwan Affairs Office, the Chinese government agency that handles Taiwan affairs. In response, the media conglomerate released a [statement](#) calling the story unsubstantiated and threatened to sue the British newspaper and its reporter, as well as any media outlets or individuals that quoted the story. Immediately after the story came out, Taiwan's National Communications Commission (NCC), an independent body [modeled](#) after the U.S. Federal Communications Commission, [said](#) it was opening an investigation into the allegation of Chinese interference. An NCC officer told CPJ in November that the case is still under investigation.

In August, Reuters [reported](#) that "mainland authorities" had paid at least five media groups in Taiwan, which it didn't name, to run favorable articles about China. The article, citing unnamed sources and signed contracts reviewed by Reuters, said China's Taiwan Affairs Office had paid 30,000 yuan (US\$4,300) for two feature stories about China's efforts to attract business people to China. Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council [said](#) the payments would, if confirmed, violate national security laws and regulations governing cross-strait relations. Contacted by phone, the MAC asked CPJ to request comment by email, to which it did not respond.

Of course, many media outlets have made efforts to remain independent amid growing pressure and political polarization in Taiwan. "I've been asked by Chinese officials to do 'joint projects' with them," said Zhou Jing-wen,

editor-in-chief of Chinese-language [Liberty Times](#), one of the largest daily newspapers on the island. “I politely smiled and that was the end of it.” Zhou told CPJ that her newspaper tried in 2008 to send a reporter to Beijing to cover the Boao Forum, an annual gathering of regional leaders, but the visa was never granted. “Since then, we stopped sending our journalists to China,” Zhou said. [Liberty Times](#) also shuns advertisements from China, including commercial ads that are allowed under law, spokesperson Jackson Su told CPJ. On the political spectrum of Taiwanese media, [Liberty Times](#) is more supportive of the ruling, independence-leaning DPP.

[United Daily News](#), which leans closer to the KMT perspective, also said it maintains independence from Chinese intervention. “Our newspaper has a very mature standardized operation,” said Chen Yan Qiao, the senior reporter. “Even if someone within the newspaper received pressure from personal connections in China, it is very unlikely to affect our critical reporting.”

ONLINE BATTLEGROUND

As in Hong Kong and many other places, some of the most independent-minded journalism operations are online startups. After leaving the Want Want China Group, Hsia Chen became chief editorial writer for [The Storm Media](#), one of the largest internet outlets in Taiwan, according to Amazon’s Alexa [traffic report](#). “When we first started in 2014, we didn’t think much about how to manage relations with China,” Hsia said. The Storm Media website enjoyed high traffic from China at the time. But when Occupy Central, the democratic movement in Hong Kong, took place in September 2014, Chinese authorities blocked the website. Hsia advised her boss, Storm Media Group’s chairman, to give up on building an audience in China. “Once you ask for Chinese authorities’ permission, they will inevitably demand certain things from you in return,” she said. China continues to block the website, Hsia told CPJ.

Chinese and English-language digital startup [The Reporter](#) launched in 2015. Funded by a continuing grant from a local computer tycoon and reader contributions, it emphasizes investigative reporting. Editor-in-Chief and Deputy CEO Sherry Lee told CPJ the site, which has published investigative stories on the crackdown on Uighurs in China’s [Xinjiang](#) province and a series of [reports](#) on Taiwan’s “White Terror,” is also blocked in China.

Essentially, all Taiwan-based major news sites are at

least partly blocked in China, according to a [United Daily News](#) report in 2015 that monitored the accessibility of 16 Taiwanese news websites for 85 days. The data showed that no website was fully accessible throughout the full period; the only difference was “fully blocked” or “partly blocked.” [Liberty Times](#)’ Editor-in-Chief Zhou confirmed this was true of her paper. Chen, of [United Daily News](#), said his paper’s website was blocked when it reported in 2010 on pro-democracy writer and activist Liu Xiaobo’s Nobel Peace Prize, recognition Beijing strenuously opposed, and it has been blocked on and off since. The Cyberspace Administration of China did not respond to an email request for comment.

The blocked websites illustrate the uneven playing field between Taiwan and China and China and everywhere else, for that matter. China electronically blocks traditional and social media from the outside via the so-called Great Firewall and heavily censors domestically produced content, giving it near total control over what people in China can read or watch.

However, China faces far fewer restrictions reaching people in Taiwan, which has no active censorship operation. Taiwanese are free to report the news and express their views, including pro-China opinions, while on the mainland, Chinese who report sensitive news or opinions contrary to official Communist Party policy may [land in jail](#). Wu Jieh-min, associate research fellow at the Taiwanese thinktank Academia Sinica, who has studied Chinese efforts to influence Taiwan, told CPJ in an email that China’s social media interference in Taiwan has become a routine, daily activity.

[Michael Cole](#), a Taipei-based policy analyst, said social media manipulation has become more sophisticated. “At first, they were using Chinese citizens, but the audience quickly realized it because they were using simplified Chinese and phrases,” Cole said. Now, he said, the content appears to be produced in Taiwan, based on the language and presentation. Idiomatic Chinese language usage in Taiwan and mainland Chinese has evolved in different ways over the years of separation. China also uses simplified forms of written Chinese characters; many mainlanders are unable to read or write the traditional forms common in Taiwan.

The one-way flow of information—and disinformation—came to the fore during the Kaohsiung mayoral election. The victor, Han, ran as a populist, China-leaning candidate who promised to bring riches to the southern city and to restore pension benefits to retired government



In this photo taken on June 23, 2019, protesters hold placards with messages that read “reject red media” and “safeguard the nation’s democracy” during a rally against pro-China media in front of the Presidential Office building in Taipei. (AFP/Hsu Tsun-hsu)

workers, whose families often came from the mainland. Yet news reports noted that his rise was accompanied by the widespread circulation of false news stories on social media that appeared to benefit him. *Taiwan News*, for example, reported several instances of false, viral, social media posts, including one claiming that his opponent in a debate was being fed answers through an earpiece, and another falsely claiming that his opponent begged attendees at a rally not to leave. “While there is no specific story which has swung public opinion away from the DPP and towards Han, the steady stream of false stories, lies, and misleading propaganda has had a cumulative effect,” the paper reported. In another instance, the *Liberty Times* reported that politicians cited false stories that Han led in polling conducted by a university that had never conducted any polling. A recent analysis in *Foreign Policy* pointed to “a campaign of social media manipulation orchestrated by a mysterious, seemingly professional cybergroup from China.”

Authorities in Taiwan fear that China is repeating this kind of intervention as the campaign for the January 11, 2020, general election heats up. The Mainland Affairs Council held a [press conference](#) September 26 expressing concern about China using the internet to spread false information while taking other steps to meddle in the election. According to recent [news reports](#), Taiwan’s national security community acquired a confidential report, allegedly typed in the simplified Chinese characters used on the mainland, detailing China’s attempt to, translated literally, “wage war against Taiwan’s cognitive space.” This included operating a troll farm to manufacture disinformation on social media with the stated aim of fostering a pro-Beijing government in Taiwan by 2020.

In April 2019, *CommonWealth*, a bilingual English-Chinese magazine, published an interview with a pseudonymous internet marketing specialist who said he began his own political operation business after helping a KMT councilor win an election. The online political operative

told *CommonWealth* that he already had clients involved in the 2020 presidential race, and that while he does not deal with the Chinese Communist Party, he knows others who do despite the likelihood their activity is illegal under Taiwanese law.

TAIWAN'S COUNTER-MEASURES

Taipei's legislative approach to blocking Chinese interference has been piecemeal and gradual, seemingly buffeted by events and lacking a consistent strategy. Meanwhile, recent bills introduced by the ruling DPP are problematic for freedom of expression and the press, raising questions about who decides what is and isn't true, and subjecting enforcement to potential political manipulation. At the same time, other methods that don't involve law enforcement have yet to prove themselves. Wu, of Academia Sinica, told CPJ that Taiwan needs to launch a comprehensive review of measures aimed at preventing Chinese interference. The DPP did not respond to an email request for comment on the proposal.

Among Taipei's laws aimed at thwarting China's attempts to exert control over the island are those that prohibit foreigners, or residents of Hong Kong, Macau, or China from taking actions to [influence elections](#); [prohibit Chinese state investment](#) in Taiwan while [limiting](#) investment by Chinese individuals to non-sensitive areas; and [prohibit](#) a wide range of activities that essentially amount to espionage. The 1991 Governing Relations between the People of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area Act prohibits publication of political propaganda for the Chinese Communist Party, effectively ruling out state advertising.

The laws do little to address the evolution of Taiwan's relationship to China and the broader impact on media, including the reality that influential Taiwanese with strong business ties to China have an incentive to promote policies favorable to China, and strong disincentives to offend Beijing. Over the years, investment and trade have made Taiwan dependent on the Chinese economy, and the rise of Chinese tourism to Taiwan has made the island's economy vulnerable to a boycott. China delivered a taste of that on July 31, 2019, when it [banned individual](#), but not group, travel to Taiwan. Chinese authorities gave no reason for the ban; local [newspapers interpreted](#) it as an effort to isolate the island and harm re-election prospects for President Tsai.

China has repeatedly showed that it stands ready to use its economic power for political ends, as was illustrated

by its decision to [cancel](#) television broadcasts of National Basketball Association pre-season games in response to a single offending tweet from a team manager. The chief executive of Cathay Pacific Airlines, Hong Kong's flagship carrier, [resigned](#) after the company came under pressure from Beijing over employees' participation in pro-democracy demonstrations. Marriott International was forced to temporarily [shutter six websites](#) last year and apologize to China after it listed Taiwan, Macau, Hong Kong, and Tibet as separate countries on a questionnaire sent to customers. Also last year, China [pressured](#) U.S. airlines to stop referring to Taiwan as separate from China, while Taiwan [considered](#) punishing airlines that complied. Airlines [responded](#) by dropping country references to all Chinese cities. Hollywood has [preemptively censored](#) scripts to avoid trouble in China and [faced Chinese censorship](#) when it failed to do so.

Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council [outlined](#) the depth of the problem a day after the *Financial Times* article that alleged direct editorial intervention in Taiwan media by the mainland's Taiwan Affairs Office (behavior that the council suggested may violate a 2013 Taiwanese national security law that was [amended](#) on July 3, 2019). In a statement, the council said: "The Chinese Communist Party has long taken advantage (of) Taiwan's democratic and open society and pursued a 'united front' strategy to interfere in elections, to reach out to our media, interfere with media independence, use distortion to spread false news, aiming to change popular understanding in order to benefit candidates who favor Beijing's position."

Pending [legislation](#) would bar individuals who gained great economic benefit in China from operating media properties in Taiwan. That's defined in the [draft bill](#) as businesses having 30% or more assets in China, or making 30% or more of their total revenue in China; individuals who have received NT\$1 million (US\$33,000) or more from Chinese authorities within the past five years; or business groups that have received NT\$5 million or more from Chinese authorities within the past five years. The office of DPP legislator Wang Ting-yu, who sponsored the bill, told CPJ that the bill is in the preliminary stage of debate.

The unspoken target of the legislation is almost certainly Tsai Eng-meng of the Want Want China Times Media Group. Vice-chairman Jason Hu [told](#) the BBC in an interview that the Group "resolutely oppose the passage of such an ideological bill." Hu rejected the allegation that the group's disproportionate reporting on Han helped him



Supporters of Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Chairperson and presidential candidate Tsai Ing-wen hold up their mobile phones as they celebrate Tsai's election victory in Taipei, Taiwan, on January 16, 2016. (Reuters/Pichi Chuang)

win the Kaohsiung mayoral election and said he believes that a better relationship with China would be good for Taiwan.

Opposition Kuomintang legislators boycotted scheduled votes on the bill [September 22](#) and [October 15](#), accusing the ruling DPP of suppressing the media. The KMT caucus whip, Tseng Ming-chung, told the Central News Agency that the bill violates freedom of the press and expression, and could put Taiwanese working in China in danger, according to [news reports](#).

Any moves aimed at restricting media ownership by citizens in Taiwan are likely to raise such a furor. "It's a tricky proposition because you touch issues of freedom of expression," said Ketty Chen of the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy. "The Taiwan government is aware that this is delicate."

Laws that target prohibited media behavior rather than

ownership are more benign than, for example, so-called [fake news legislation](#) recently passed in Singapore that includes hefty criminal penalties in a tightly restricted media environment. Historical incidents in Taiwan include a [fine](#) to Formosa TV for not giving equal time to candidates in 2004 as required by the [Civil Servants Election and Recall Act](#), and a 2006 fine to Eastern Broadcasting Company for "disrupting public order or adversely affecting good social customs" by reporting on a kidnapping case when the hostages had not yet been released. In these cases, the NCC investigated alleged violations and levied fines according to its findings.

More recently, the NCC has turned its attention to what the law identifies as harmful reporting of false information without sufficiently verifying facts. Indeed, NCC Chairperson Nicole Chan resigned from her post in April after coming under sharp criticism for failing to do enough to

stem the spread of false news, according to [news reports](#). A CPJ search of [all NCC fines](#) levied since 2006 shows that the first fines issued by NCC over inaccurate news reporting came earlier this year in [February](#) with NT\$200,000 (US\$6,530) fines levied against two broadcasters in separate cases. CTITV was fined for misreporting a political candidate's speech and Eastern Broadcasting was fined for misreporting facts related to African swine flu. The NCC told CPJ that the reports "improperly affected the public's right to receive information, undermined the rights of the audience, and undermined the fairness and credibility of the media, thereby jeopardizing the public interest."

The Want Want Group's other media outlets objected to CTITV's fine, with *The China Times* derisively calling the NCC the "[news police](#)." Fines increased after the NCC came under criticism for lax enforcement. As of July, CTITV had been fined nine times in 2019 for various infractions, [according](#) to the Central News Agency. In March, the NCC fined the broadcaster NT\$1 million (US\$32,000) over seven infractions, including unbalanced political reporting by allegedly giving excessive coverage to Kaohsiung Mayor Han, who subsequently became the KMT presidential candidate, [according](#) to the *ETtoday* news website. In April, CTITV was [fined](#) another NT\$1 million for running a false story that farmers had discarded 2 million tons of pomelo citrus fruits into a reservoir, distorting the market. CTITV said it would appeal.

Cole, the Taipei-based policy analyst, said the fines are small, given the size of the company. "For them, it's pocket change. It has no deterrent value," he said.

In May, Taiwan's legislature [approved legislation](#) to increase fines in the Disaster Prevention and Protection Act for knowingly spreading false information about disasters, for which harm to the public can lead to imprisonment. Similar increases in fines were [enacted](#) for the spread of false information about food safety or contagious diseases.

The ruling DPP also in April [proposed](#) criminalizing false reports about trade and reputation, which would be punished by fines and brief imprisonment—a proposal that followed CTITV's false pomelo story. Additional [legislation](#) proposed in October would require TV stations to make timely and proportionate corrections in response to orders from the NCC if a news report by the station is judged to be erroneous by an involved party. The office of DPP legislator Lin Chun-hsien, who sponsored the bill, told CPJ that the bill supplements existing legislation requiring corrections by strengthening NCC supervision.

These measures are concerning; the danger is that this

government, or a successor government, could misuse these laws to suppress political criticism. In 2018, CPJ [objected](#) to legislative proposals that would criminalize on-line speech.

Authorities have already prosecuted several people for false or inciting speech on social media under existing statutes. These prosecutions include a woman in her 70s who was [charged](#) under the [Social Order Maintenance Act](#) after she sent a message in a private group chat on LINE, a messaging application, saying that President Tsai was willing to gift NT\$450 million to Haiti but wouldn't give Kaohsiung city NT\$20 million to help prevent dengue fever. She faced up to three days in jail or a fine of NT\$3,000 (US\$100). She paid the fine. A man suggested on Facebook that the pilot of China Airlines' presidential airplane should land in Beijing with Tsai aboard. The Ministry of Justice [investigated](#) and prosecuted him for violating Article 153 of the Criminal Act, which prohibits incitement of others to break the law.

"It's only 30 years since the end of martial law," said Ian Chen, former secretary general of the Association of Taiwanese Journalists. "It's dangerous to criminalize the dissemination of lies."

Indeed, the opposition KMT came out strongly in an October 31 [statement](#) against recent legislative proposals that would ban any participation by Taiwan citizens in Communist Party activities, on the grounds that they would not only obstruct relations with China and threaten Taiwan's economy, but also interfere with freedom of expression. For example, the bill could preclude the Communist Party-run *Beijing Daily* from hosting Taiwan journalists. The measures, if enacted, could create potential hazards for journalists trying to decide if normal reporting activities put them in violation of the law.

Wu, of Academia Sinica, told CPJ the bill is nonetheless needed to counteract China's comprehensive efforts to influence Taiwan. "As long as it's regulated by the legislative process under the principles of due process and rule of law, it is democratic," he said.

Brian Hioe, editor-in-chief of news website *New Bloom*, summed up the bind caused by fear of Chinese manipulation. "It's one of the interesting paradoxes that progressive civil society in Taiwan is pushing for legislation to combat fake news, while civil society activists fear that legislation against fake news in Southeast Asia, for example, will be used by governments to crack down on political dissent," he said.

Regardless, current and proposed measures don't seem

well designed to cope with the most oft-cited threat: a possible deluge of coordinated social media surreptitiously posted by China or its surrogates.

Viral reports on social media can easily form the basis of news reports in traditional media, a concern Audrey Tang, the minister without portfolio, expressed in an [interview](#). Tang, who oversees digital affairs, outlined a different method of combating online disinformation, essentially by flooding the zone early with what the government believes is accurate information. Disinformation, Tang said, has a specific legal definition in Taiwan: “intentional, harmful untruth, and most importantly, harmful is to the public, to the democratic system.”

The aim of Tang’s program is to combat disinformation without resorting to censorship or ordering the removal of online content. The idea is to try to identify disinformation campaigns in real time by detecting the initial A/B testing that helps purveyors of tweets or other messages to identify which are mostly likely to spread quickly. Tang said that teams have been set up in Taiwan’s ministries to detect disinformation campaigns at the early stages and, within 60 minutes, launch a counter campaign with truthful information. “Our observation is that if we do that, then most of the population reach this message like an inoculation before they reach the disinformation, and so that protects like a vaccination,” she said.

“The mainstream media, of course, then picks up this counter-narrative and then do a balanced report. What we have witnessed is that if we don’t come up with this counter-narrative and ready videos or films, or at least picture cards, then after six hours, that’s after a news cycle, it’s hopeless. Truth be told, it is actually very exhausting.”

Journalists like Hioe are not optimistic about the effectiveness of this approach. “I generally suspect that fake news will continue to circulate through avenues the government is unable to fully regulate,” he says. “Responding quickly to fake news can minimize its spread, but it is hard to stamp out fake news altogether.”

Tang argues that, in the long run, the most useful tool is to teach media literacy, helping consumers of news to distinguish between false and accurate information on their own. She says that younger Taiwanese are fully

skeptical and have the tools, but that older consumers are often more susceptible. Tang’s office told CPJ in November that it was continuing its efforts to combat digital disinformation.

CONCLUSION

Taiwan has experienced a remarkably swift journey from a highly controlled media environment to one of the freest press and broadcast scenes in Asia, just as it has enjoyed a swift transition from autocracy to democracy. This transition is fundamental to its case for distinguishing itself from China and striving to maintain separation from Chinese communist control.

Taiwan has well-grounded fears that China is taking measures to influence Taiwan’s media and obtain what it likely considers a favorable outcome in Taiwan’s January election: a government led by the KMT and its presidential candidate Han Kuo-yu, which favor warmer cross-strait relations than President Tsai Ing-wen and the ruling DPP. And while the effort bears careful watching, their success may be hard to gauge even after the results are in. According to Academia Sinica’s Wu, an important factor in the campaign that could offset China’s efforts to influence Taiwan is its aggressive actions toward Hong Kong, which have alienated Taiwan’s voters and disadvantaged the KMT.

China’s efforts deserve exposure, perhaps by Taiwan’s community of investigative journalists. Still, Taiwan has no reason to turn back on its recent history of openness and press freedom, which gives Taiwan’s citizens free access to different sources of information and the ability to decide what’s true concerning presidential candidates or any other topic.

If Taiwan can ward off Chinese influence without resorting to draconian measures aimed at curbing freedom of the press, it could offer an important lesson to others facing media manipulation from the outside. Taiwan may show that societies do not have to give in to fear and impose restrictions and controls. Instead independence from outside influence may be preserved by a vigorous collective commitment to openness and transparency. ♦

Recommendations

CPJ offers the following recommendations regarding press freedom in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

TO THE HONG KONG AUTHORITIES

- Police should stop the repeated gratuitous attacks on journalists and individual police officers should be held to account for their actions.
- The government should establish a new independent commission that has strong investigative powers to look into police attacks on journalists, and to recommend not only disciplinary action but changes in police operations and training to prevent future attacks.
- Police should prioritize investigating and prosecuting past crimes against journalists.
- Hong Kong should establish a clear set of criteria for granting visas to foreign correspondents so that the process is routine and journalists cannot be barred for doing their job or reporting critically.
- The government should offer a clear explanation for why Victor Mallet of the Financial Times has been denied entry to Hong Kong, and take steps to reverse this decision.
- The Chief Executive must commit to journalists that they will not face action from the government by exercising their rights to freedom of speech under Hong Kong's Basic Law.
- The government should commit to a free and open internet by codifying this right in law, in line with international norms and standards.

TO THE TAIWANESE AUTHORITIES

- Taiwan's legislature should move to end criminal penalties against journalists and publications over news stories and not enact any further such penalties.
- To head off government regulation, media groups should consider self-regulatory measures and standards to address errors of fact and promote transparency over issues such as paid content, whether from China or elsewhere.
- Any penalties assessed on media groups should be based on and proportionate to actual damages caused.
- Any effort to restrict disinformation needs to be narrowly defined, subject to review by an independent body, and not subject to criminal penalties.
- Regulation and enforcement of media laws should focus on transparency rather than penalties or censorship.
- Taiwan should launch a comprehensive review of measures aimed at preventing Chinese interference with the goal of formulating a strategy that preserves freedom of the press.

TO THE CHINESE AUTHORITIES

- China should halt the practice of using placement of commercial advertising to reward and punish publications or broadcast channels.
- China should fully respect provisions in Hong Kong's Basic Law that call for freedom of speech.
- China should halt and disavow any efforts aimed at doxing journalists by putting personal information online.
- China should stop spreading disinformation on social media about Hong Kong or Taiwan.
- China should be transparent when expressing government views through the media or social media.



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