The Media and Popular Protest in Pre-Democratic Taiwan

Gary D. Rawnsley[1]

Published in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol.20, no.4 (2000), pp.565-580

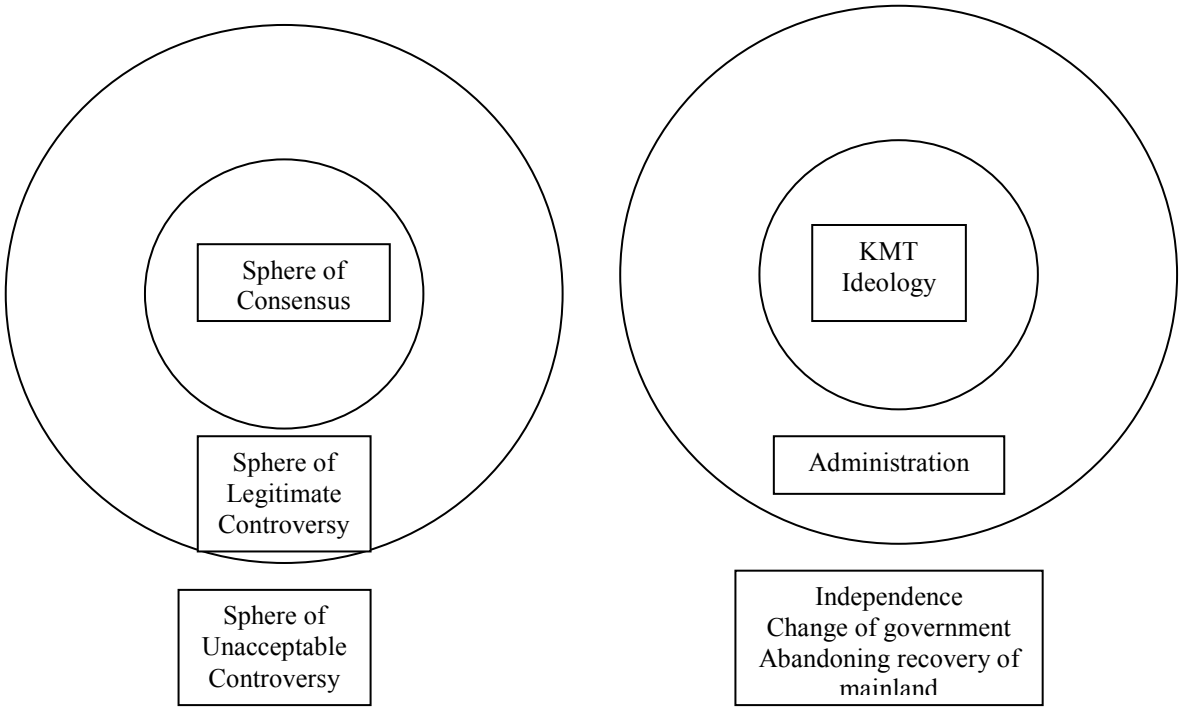
Introduction

Taiwan has a long tradition of powerful and vocal media that present a challenge to government strength. Descriptions of the political system have tended to focus on the authoritarian character of KMT governance.[2] Yet when we delve below such superficial analyses we instantly discover the extent to which this same government realised that it was necessary to tolerate a modicum of press freedom. The critical or opposition media provided a non–violent form of opposition, and helped to reinforce the Republic of China's (ROC) legitimacy as 'Free China', an image that was especially powerful in its Cold War diplomacy with the US.[3]

During the long period of martial law that began in 1949 the government of the ROC shouldered responsibility for setting the

boundaries of what could be expressed in the media.[4] Ambiguity was found at the margins where the commercial demands of the market clashed with political responsibility. The media often found themselves in the difficult position of trying to maximise audience share by giving them what they wanted, while fulfilling the political role they were expected to play by the KMT. Permissible (and encouraged) criticism included any that held the day-to-day administration accountable for their actions. If the media openly challenged the KMT's ideology, its political monopoly, or its goal of eventually recovering the mainland, or if they advocated independence, then they had crossed the boundaries and their activities could be classified as illegal. To illustrate this we can turn to the spheres of consensus, legitimate controversy and unacceptable controversy that Daniel Hallin developed to ease our understanding of the American media's position on the Vietnam War. The following diagram shows how the spheres relate to each other, and then demonstrates their applicability to the situation in Taiwan. The 'sphere of consensus' is here presented as a sacrosanct area that embraces the KMT's ideology. Thus acceptance of the KMT's monopoly on central power, the eventual reunification of the Chinese

Diagram 1 Hallin's spheres and their applicability to Taiwan



Source: Adapted from Hallin (1986)

mainland on the KMT's terms, and the concept of Taiwan as merely a province of China, all lay within this sphere.

The 'sphere of legitimate controversy' allows and encourages criticism. In Taiwan's case this meant acceptable criticism of the day-to-day administration of the island and, from 1950 onwards, limited electoral competition at the local level.[5] Entry to the 'sphere of unacceptable controversy' means that the permitted boundaries have been crossed. Here we find discussion of ideas that contradict the sphere of consensus, i.e. the KMT's ideology: the KMT's monopoly on government is challenged; the suppression of the Taiwanese identity is questioned,[6] as is the necessity of a prolonged state of martial law; and Taiwan's independence and sovereignty are advocated. Press freedom was permitted in all spheres except the sphere of unacceptable controversy. This therefore became the realm dominated by the opposition and underground media that challenged the KMT and sought to mobilise their audience around a radical political agenda.

Political Control

The government of the ROC was responsible for determining which issues fell within each of the spheres, and was thus answerable for what could be expressed in the media. For example the government found it convenient to overlook the divisions within the opposition, especially over the issue of Taiwan's independence from China. Some critics of the KMT remained committed to both democracy *and* the eventual unification with China, though such complexities could not provide the easy packaging sought by KMT propaganda. The party maintained that opposing the KMT equated with advocating independence and subverting national security, and this provided the framework of political discourse until the late 1980s. The KMT–dominated media used a rich vocabulary to berate opposition activists who broke the law: they were classified in Chinese as different forms of criminals – *baotu* ('violent character'), *bufu fenzi* ('illegal individual'), *yexin fenzi* ('politically ambitious individual') – who were unable to distinguish right from wrong and lacked any sense of definable morality. Ultimately they were a threat to Taiwan's security, the ultimate justification of suppression against

which no one could easily argue. Such vocabulary made it absolutely clear that the opposition was located within the sphere of unacceptable controversy and therefore outside the realms of social and political toleration. Problems were also encountered because of the vague nature of many prohibitions: The press should refrain from publishing reports about political, military and foreign affairs that may damage the national interest; and they were instructed not to report anything that 'insulted' the leadership, or affected the reputation of the government. In this way the government could expand or contract the sphere of unacceptable controversy at will and enjoy tremendous latitude in terms of how these regulations could be defined and interpreted.

While the mainstream press had their own differences of opinion with the KMT government, they could never challenge the state apparatus in any meaningful way. The opposition press, on the other hand, were not so constrained, and they had another far more valuable political function than simply relaying news and views. These newspapers and journals provided a training ground for activists, eager to learn the arts of political participation, competition and mobilisation. In this way the opposition press performed many

of the same functions of traditional political parties: they provided the movement with ideological direction, opportunities for patronage, the aggregation of interests, and the recruitment and training of leaders.[7] Daniel Berman believes that the opposition press were more interested in these functions – forming a surrogate political party – than simply disseminating views and opinions:

> By continually pushing – and subsequently expanding – the limits of acceptable behaviour, by providing a non–violent, legal context in which a de facto opposition could develop and mature, opposition magazine organisations made a substantial contribution to the relatively smooth transition to a much more democratic form of government.[8]

They also created and shaped the identities that would coalesce around the opposition movement to the present, that is, representation of the poor, the working class, and most importantly, the Taiwanese. The authorities could never quite understand that

through these media the opposition movement was merely demanding what was provided for in the constitution – meaningful elections and the right to organise alternative political parties.

The challenge to KMT authority through the media can be traced back to the 28 February 1947 incident, usually abbreviated for convenience to 2–28. This was a defining moment in Taiwan's history that forced society to re–evaluate and re–structure its political attitudes. 2–28, as it is now known, also had far reaching consequences for the configuration of power over and through the media. For these reasons, the incident deserves close attention.

The Media and 2–28

As a Japanese colony from 1895 to 1945 the Taiwanese looked towards China as their 'motherland', and anticipated that the Chinese liberation of the island would deliver local autonomy. However, the mainland Chinese made it quite clear that they resented the Taiwanese as collaborators during the 1937–1945 war with Japan. These suspicions did not evaporate once the war ended, but instead

encouraged further strains between islanders and their supposed liberators.

At the close of the Second World War, Taiwan received climbing numbers of mainland Chinese who occupied most of the top positions in the party, government, and military – some 28,000 officials arrived on Taiwan after the Second World War. The islanders were prevented from participating in government and from satisfying their longing for greater self–rule. Such colonisation, along with the bureaucracy and corruption of governor Chen Yi's administration, generated much disappointment and resentment among the islanders against the mainland immigrants. On 28 February 1947, the simmering anger of the Taiwanese finally boiled over into a near–revolution after an isolated (some might say trivial) incident in Taipei led to violence and rioting throughout the island. Soon the rioters were demanding the introduction of meaningful political and economic reforms. The KMT government on the mainland feared that the incident on Taiwan was a threat to the cohesion of China and blamed communist agitators for the violence.

The issue of national security – but based on a definition of nation that excluded both Chinese communists and Taiwanese – provoked the government into shipping across the Strait some 10,000 troops to subjugate the 'revolutionaries.' Their 'fortnight–long rampage of execution, rape and pillage'[9] has entered Taiwanese history, and the consequences have been described as 'a bloodbath bloodier than the 4 June Tiananmen massacre'.[10] Between 10,000 and 20,000 people died, but the targets of the massacre had been carefully selected – Taiwan's social, political and intellectual elite. A whole generation of potential Taiwanese nationalist leaders was wiped out one fell–swoop.[11]

Governor Chen Yi held the free media responsible for 2–28, believing that their excessive criticism of the provincial government helped to reinforce the division between mainlanders and Taiwanese. In August 1946, for example, *Peace Daily* (*Ho–ping jih–pao*) commented on the 'bad caretakers,' the KMT, who 'either openly rob or secretly steal. … National pride,' said the paper, 'has been swept away … the Nationalists have lost the hearts of the people'.[12] Media reports of 2–28 had a clear contagion effect (broadcasts from Taipei, for example, could be heard in Keelung and Pan-chiao). Their role

in the revolution changed once they had been seized by the insurgents who used the media as platforms for their own demands and encouraged the revolution to continue. Identity was often invoked as justification for harsh reprisals against those involved ('Wang T'ien was executed because he "had incited the people to occupy the Taiwan Broadcasting Station and had appealed to the people to take over Taiwan and expel the mainlanders"'[13]). The founder and president of *Jen Min Tao Pao*, Sung Fei–ju, was charged with 'attacking the government's administration and its weaknesses.' Other victims who worked for that paper were executed, one was even burned alive. The founders of *Min Pao* were executed as leaders of the rebellion and the president was arrested. The paper was closed down for indulging in 'anti–government speech'.[14] Managers and journalists of many other newspapers suffered similar fates. In fact an estimated 100 members of the media were killed, arrested, or forced to flee Taiwan.[15] Moreover, the incident provided the basis for a more acrimonious relationship between the government and media. Accordingly, Chen Yi closed down all those

newspapers that were found to represent 'different elements *outside the Kuomintang Party* …' (emphasis added).[16] Clearly, the KMT now intended to control the media, and this involved the projection of their own interpretation of identity and the 'Chinese ideology'.[17] This contradicted Chen Yi's thoughts on the media that he had set down just one month previously:

> As for the media, freedom of public opinion has been given full respect to elicit a true democratic atmosphere. Taiwan's newspapers are free to publish any criticisms of the government. Criticisms with merit are accepted. Groundless charges and wild accusations which do not merit any rebuttal, will simply be disregarded. In this age of democracy, we must have the grace to tolerate opposition, especially as it is inevitable. ... There is no need to overact to reports that distorted the facts, for the truth will eventually prevail. ... Instead of being afraid, I welcome and hope to cooperate with the press. The fact that our achievements in Taiwan have effectively counteracted all the malicious reporting about us illustrates another big step forward in our democracy.[18]

The February 28th Incident provides a dramatic illustration of how such issues as national identity, cultural reconstruction, and the search for political autonomy, have affected the media. Before liberalisation in 1987, the media were reluctant to pursue politics in any depth, mirroring the popular hesitation to demand any substantial political improvement. Indeed, it could be said that democracy was sacrificed for great stability based on economic development and industrial growth, both of which were actively encouraged by the KMT government:

> Seeing their elite and its successors systematically hunted down and murdered by the mainlanders traumatized the Taiwanese to the point that the phrase, 'politics is dangerous' became a watchword etched into their collective unconscious. Political activity became associated with a violent end.[19]

The Rise of the Opposition, 1947-1977

Although the KMT has permitted electoral contestation on Taiwan – albeit only at the local level – since 1950, elections were essentially non–competitive; competition occurred only between factions of the KMT. The fate of the Taiwanese leaders after the February 28 incident has already been noted. Thus organised opposition to the KMT was non–existent on Taiwan. Instead the nucleus of social movements that challenged the government were found in the United States and Japan. Some leaders had fled there during the 'White Terror' of the early 1950s, others had been sent there in exile. Several independent candidates did challenge the KMT's hegemony in elections and were successful. Critics were allowed to hold public meetings and sit in judgement over the regime provided such behaviour did not threaten the party–state rule over Taiwan. However, such activities were tolerated only because they presented no major threat to the party and because they strengthened the projection abroad of the ROC as a free and democratic political system. Involvement in elections provided a useful training ground

for activists, many of whom would in time become leading figures in the opposition movement (even Presidential contenders). Eventually, a velvet revolution occurred:

> A political opposition gradually emerged and skillfully expanded its political influence, and the ruling party gradually learned how to tolerate and live with the political opposition. The evolutionary phase of limited democracy was crucial for Taiwan's democratic breakthrough and consolidation because it provided enough time for the people and elites to 'learn democracy by practicing it' and for their political cultural values to become conducive to the practice of democracy.[20]

The political opposition learned to use short–lived, though powerful and inspirational political magazines or journals to consolidate their ideas and mobilisation. Daniel K. Berman has done most to add to our awareness of these magazines, and he allows us to understand why this specific medium was preferred over all others. First,

newspapers were difficult to establish and operate under KMT regulations. They had to be licensed and were governed by strict guidelines which restricted the number of pages that could be printed. Magazines were not subject to such harsh treatment. In addition magazines required less start–up capital, they could function according to irregular publishing schedules, and they were more durable than newspapers. These factors made them suitable for underground production and distribution.

The political magazines were at the forefront of the first attempt to create a credible alternative to the KMT. *Public Opinion News* (*Gounlun Pao*, established in October 1947) and *Free China Fortnightly* (*Ziyou Zhongguo*, established November 1949) were the earliest dissident media in Taiwan. *Free China Fortnightly* provided the inspiration behind the creation of the China Democratic Party in 1960. The magazine was launched in 1949 with subsidies from the government and the Ministry of Education as part of their liberal challenge to communism. It's co–founder was Lei Chan, a prominent KMT minister without portfolio and an adviser to the Office of the President. Although a committed party cadre, Lei earned the wrath of colleagues when during the 1950s, he pressed for a more

discernible separation of the party and the military. Typical of the editorials he published was one headlined 'The government should not lure people into crime,' intended as a critique of a corruption case among intelligence officers. Many, including Chiang Kai–shek and his son and heir, Chiang Ching–kuo, accused him of communist sympathies and placed him under close surveillance. Lei believed that 'single party authoritarian rule' was responsible for the KMT's defeat on the mainland, and that free discussion and criticism within the party might have stymied its failures. He called for the government to guarantee civil liberties and create a political system that included effective checks and balances. Only then would the KMT be strong enough to compete with the communists.

By 1956 *Free China Fortnightly* had refocused its attention on internal problems and became increasingly critical of corruption, constitutional violations, and the absence of multi–party politics in Taiwan. In short, this journal and others like it demanded merely what was provided for in the constitution. The editorials in the *Free China Fortnightly* assumed a more acerbic tone: 'We have tolerated

too much for the unity of the war against Communism. This in turn has led to an embrace of one party politics and hampers the path towards progress.' The journal warned that if the KMT, which 'selfishly, for the sake of its own interests is not willing to accept conditions of equality' with competing opinions should ignore such demands, then there was 'no hope at the present for democratic government in China. In that case the only recourse is to wait for the next revolution! Let more blood flow!'. Editorials advocated the creation of a loyal opposition movement, the China Democratic Party, to promote electoral reform:

> I hope that everyone who believes in democratic politics will gather to form an opposition party in order to break the monopoly of the KMT. The rationale for a new party is that it must gain political authority by competing in elections. Our constitution (Article 14) empowers individuals with the freedom to form a party. This new opposition party can be organised immediately, but it must be protected by the law.[21]

These stirring words led to Chan's expulsion from the KMT in 1955, after which he was placed under surveillance, his telephone conversations were monitored and his letters were opened. In September 1960 he was arrested and stood accused on various counts of sedition that included: associating with communists; denying the possibility of recovering the mainland; urging the United States to interfere in the internal affairs of the ROC; encouraging divisions between the government and military; helping communist 'United Front' tactics in Taiwan; and promoting the partition of mainlanders and Taiwanese. Lei was sentenced to ten years in prison and the China Democratic Party was destroyed at its conception.[22]

The owner of *Public Opinion News*, Lee Wan–ju, faced similar ill fate. In 1959 Lee also planned to organise a new political party, but constant government harassment and the repeated confiscation of printing facilities made *Public Opinion News* vulnerable to severe financial problems. However, the ultimate dissolution of Lee's press empire was not caused by blatant political or judicial interference, but by the KMT's decision to invest

enormous sum in *Public Opinion News*. Once they enjoyed a controlling interest, it was easy for the KMT to engineer the journal's downfall. Lee was forced out of business by the skilful manipulation of investment concerns, not by government pressure.

One of the most influential magazines of the pre-reform era was the *Taiwan Political Review* (*Taiwan zhenglun*), created in 1975 by Kang Ning–hsiang. Advocating free and open debate about any issues that the people of Taiwan felt the need to discuss, and demanding greater Taiwanese involvement in the political life of the island, the *Review* highlighted the injustices and extra–constitutional nature of the political system. Again, the journal intended to provide the basis for a substantive political movement. Thus Kang 'introduced a model of the opinion magazine that could be used to work towards change within the system, building a political party apparatus that could eventually emerge at a proper time, fully formed, from the recesses of its journalistic cover to smooth the transition to a democratic political system'.[23] By its fifth issue, the circulation of the *Review* had peaked at 50,000 with 2,000 subscribers abroad, although these are conservative estimates; we can never know for sure exactly how many read the journal as it

circulated. We owe to the *Review* the term *tangwai* to refer to political activists outside the KMT ('a new party without a formal title'[24]). Such labelling had immense symbolic significance for it provided a sense of cohesion to the opposition movement. Its most vociferous writer, Huang Hua, despaired of the subdued character of his people: 'To be afraid of politics and the KMT is a widespread pathology our society,' he wrote. Huang described how, although the KMT had committed many serious errors, 'it never feared being ejected from office or being violently overthrown because the people of Taiwan were cowed by it'.[25] By the end of 1975, the *Review* was closed down, and Huang and his colleagues were arrested.

Other journals appeared, such as *China Tide* (*Xia Chao*), a socialist publication that from July 1976 to January 1979 advocated reunification with the mainland, criticised the domination of foreign capital in Taiwan, and generally campaigned for social welfare rights for peasants and workers; and *This Generation* (*Je Yidai*), organised by former staff of the *Taiwan Political Review*, and renamed *Great Virtue* after it was suspended. The October 1977 issue was accused

of having violated the law and was sentenced to close down for one year.

Transformation: 1977–1986

With the accession of Chiang Ching–kuo to the presidency in 1978 following a brief interregnum after his father's death in 1975, the conditions were in place to ensure Taiwan's political system would keep pace with its dynamic economy. During his life, Ching-kuo had been anything but a democrat, but he did realise that a series of international shocks required the ROC to discard its authoritarian political system. As premier and chairman of the KMT he recruited Taiwanese into the party and government, thus launching the 'Taiwanization' of the ROC that would enable Taiwan–born Lee Teng–hui to succeed him as President. A populist, Ching–kuo championed anti–corruption at all layers of the government, and sought to make the state more responsive to public opinion.

The late 1970s were marked by a number of external shocks that had widespread internal repercussions. The political opposition discovered renewed hope with the election of Jimmy Carter to the

US Presidency and his platform that expressed a genuine concern for human rights throughout the world. Yet his decision to fully normalise relations with the PRC, together with renewed economic competition with the mainland to corner the export market during a global recession that for a time seemed to threaten the Taiwan economic miracle, reinforced the KMT's determination to hold on to power. The state could again justify this by claiming it had the island's security at heart, but it had little effect. The government's muted response to, and management of, changes in the external environment 'hammered away at its legitimacy in the eyes of its citizenry'.[26] Government legitimacy was further eroded when the national supplementary elections, scheduled for December 1978, were cancelled. This was a major set–back for the *tangwai* who had appeared to be heading for a landmark victory, but only the *Formosa* faction decided to protest, thus ripping apart the opposition movement even further. However, America's move and the KMT's response, the emerging democracy movement in the PRC (quickly suppressed once it had served the interests of the leadership), and

even the success of the Iranian revolution, all emboldened the *tangwai*. President Chiang's 'Taiwanization' of the ROC had held open the opportunity for greater ethnic diversity in the political process. It had also nullified the opposition that had previously mobilised its support along ethnic cleavages, and would eventually pacify those who defined politics in Taiwan with reference to national identity. The *Formosa* faction believed that the climate was now ripe to press harder for expanded political involvement. Twenty years on, the leaders of the movement would suggest they were concerned with Taiwan's security in light of the normalisation of relations between the US and China:

> In the past, the US – which led the fight against Communism – supported Taiwan wholeheartedly. But this was no longer the case after its decision to consider detente with Beijing. We realised it was time to reconsider Taiwan's future from our own viewpoint, instead of allowing the KMT to be the only decision maker for the island's destiny (Shih Ming–teh, quoted in the *Taipei Times*, 9 December 1999).

In 1977, a young Taiwanese politician by the name of Hsu Hsin–liang ran as an independent in the election for magistrate of Taoyuan County. Under Chiang Ching–kuo's commitment to expanding opportunities for native Taiwanese to enter government service, he had already served one term as a member of the KMT, but he had angered his party colleagues by straying from the official line. The party therefore decided he should not run for a second term. Standing anyway, Hsu lost to his KMT opponent. This provoked strong public protest in the county town of Chungli where the governing party was accused of electoral fraud. According to one observer, this was the largest public demonstration of its kind since 1947:

> In the face of this public display the regime backed down and admitted that there had indeed been fraud. Hsu was re–elected. The Chungli incident marked a change of atmosphere, a toleration for active and outspoken political dissent.[27]

Despite his popularity and victory in the election, Hsu was still dismissed from office by the central government in June 1979. This was a response to his lead in an anti–KMT demonstration in Chiaotou which the government alleged had compromised his official position. Hsu mobilised his supporters and launched a new political journal, *Formosa* (*Mei Li Dao*) on 16 August 1979. This was a more radical publication than any of its predecessors that had merely challenged the KMT to reform the system. *Formosa* went further, and committed the cardinal sin of calling for Taiwan's independence and direct popular confrontation with the government. Articles complained that the government arbitrarily closed down critical journals, whether they were communist, subversive, or neither; called for a complete reform of the National Assembly; and criticised the rather haphazard commitment to the democratic vision of the Three Principles of the People. These facts were widely advertised in another journal, *Current Monthly* (*Nuanliu zazhi*) in a lively 1984 article by Chen Yanghao entitled 'Prohibit! Prohibit! Prohibit!' (*'Jin! Jin! Jin'*):

> The KMT's censorship policy was everywhere in society and for no explicable reason the KMT prohibited every kind of behaviour: it forbade any revision of the constitution before recovering the mainland; it forbade any new party from forming; it forbade the registration of any newspaper; it forbade strike, demonstrations, and criticisms of national policy; it forbade the election of a provincial governor and the mayors of Taipei and Kaohsiung cities; it forbade the reading of works published by mainland Chinese authors; it forbade the expression of views by political rallies; it forbade students to have long hair and to help politicians in elections. Most of these activities do not violate the constitution. They are merely the subjective views held by those in power and run counter to society's contemporary trends and the natural inclinations of our people.

Such subjective views determined how the government would react to *Formosa*. The popularity of the journal at first astonished and

then frightened the government who had allowed the magazine to circulate. The crunch came when the activists behind the magazine began to organise political meetings throughout Taiwan that attracted thousands in attendance. A series of rallies and demonstrations ended spectacularly in Kaohsiung on 10 December 1979 (to coincide with Human Rights Day), a few days before elections to the Legislative Yuan were scheduled to take place. The police were called to prevent the group from congregating (permission to meet had been denied), and a riot ensued after *Formosa* publications were seized by police, and activists severely beaten while in custody. As C.L. Chiou has observed: 'The 'Formosa' affair ... was a mass organisation, a political institution, with many salient party characteristics offering a clear and credible threat to the authoritarian power of the ruling KMT ... That, the Nationalist government was not prepared to tolerate'.[28]

Bowing to both international and domestic pressures, the government was required to hold trials for those involved in the 'Formosa' incident in an open military court. The island's mass media were permitted to report the procedures and to cover in full the speeches made by the defence lawyers. Fearing for their safety, very

few attorneys step forwards to represent the defendants. Among those who did choose to take such risks included Chen Shui–bian who, in 1994 was elected the DPP mayor of Taipei and as Taiwan's president in 2000. Hsu Hsin–liang was found guilty and sentenced to exile in the United States.[29] Seven other 'Formosa' leaders were sentenced to between twelve years and life imprisonment, while more than sixty others were sentenced to a mere three to eight years in prison. The president of *Formosa* Shih Ming–teh, the DPP's presidential candidate in 1996 and after the party chairman, was imprisoned from 1980 to 1990 for his part in the incident. Lin Yi–hsiung, at the time a member of the provincial assembly, was imprisoned for four years. At the time of writing, he is the Chairman of the DPP. Annette Lu, elected Chen Shui–bian's Vice–President in 2000 also stood accused in 1979. Their defence lawyers addressed human rights issues and alluded in their speeches to the principles of law and democracy. Because the trials received such intense media attention, such orations reached a wide audience. Thus although 'the KMT did manage to win the legal battles,' notes Chiou, 'they

certainly failed to convince the Taiwanese people and to win a moral–political victory. Because of media coverage, the 'Formosa' defendants 'Overnight ... became political martyrs whose martyrdom would continue to haunt the KMT regime up to the present day'.[30]

When the political dissidents were expelled to the US, the *tangwai* movement spread abroad with them. Hsu Hsin–liang continued to write and publish passionate articles advocating the overthrow of the KMT government. He went so far as to suggest in the 1982 issues of *Formosa* (now published in the US) that the only way Taiwan would throw off KMT domination was by engaging in urban guerrilla warfare against the government. Hsu even went so far as to introduce the translation of a Cuban guerrilla terrorist manual – a move guaranteed to draw him to the attention of the US government.

Back in Taiwan, the *Independent Evening Post* continued to act as a thorn in the KMT's side. Editorials contested decisions to arrest prominent dissidents, while reports covered human rights issues, political repression, and the rise of the *tangwai*. One of the most famous stories that the *Post* covered was Hsu Hsin–liang's proposed

return to Taiwan. On 29 November 1986, Hsu left New York for Tokyo, a flight that involved a scheduled refuelling stop in Taipei. On 1 December, some two thousand people congregated at the Chiang Kai–shek International Airport in Taoyuan to greet him. Violence broke out when the military and airport police tried to disperse the crowd. As water hoses and tear gas were turned on the people, three policemen were injured.[31] For the KMT–controlled press this incident justified the continuation of martial law: how could the government tolerate the existence of a group of subversives who used violence to achieve their objectives? The press reported that support for the DPP had fallen, and in the subsequent elections, reminded voters that the party 'fomented violence at the Taoyuan international airport'. Only the *Independent Evening Post* reported that the police had started the violence. The DPP were anxious to tell their side of the story, and showed video footage in public to reinforce it.

The *Independence Evening Post* again found itself the focus of political attention when, in September 1987, two reporters

obtained visas in Japan to visit the PRC. As circulation soared the editor in chief, Wu Fengshan, and the two reporters themselves were indicted for 'filing false documents'. They were all acquitted by the Taipei District Court in April 1988. Their innovative approach to journalism suggested that the *Post* offered readers a radical alternative of news and information from the style of reporting offered by other newspapers.[32]

Now however, the opposition movement itself had split between those who sought to overthrow KMT domination by further radical action on the streets of Taiwan, and those who deemed it necessary to use legal parliamentary channels to undermine the system from within. As the factions within the movement grew, the competition between the journals and magazines intensified. In turn their credibility was often damaged. Financial pressure and commercial competition forced many magazines to provide titillation – to expose special and otherwise secret 'facts' that had little basis in truth. And as the credibility of the magazines was suspect, the reputation of the whole *tangwai* movement that they supported was discredited. By the mid–1980s, the relevance of the magazines began to fade and videos, produced and distributed underground by

members of the opposition became much more common. The opposition had discovered the convenience and value of the electronic media, and the so–called '5–20' incident in 1980 demonstrated just how important such videos had become.

Feeling that their rights had been neglected by the government for long enough, 5,000 farmers from the central and southern parts of Taiwan staged in May 1988 a demonstration in Taipei.[33] Sadly the protests turned to violence, with more than one hundred protesters being arrested. The press and the three national television stations all portrayed the incident as a 'riot', a term resonant with political significance. Their news reports were full of images of an hysterical public attacking the Legislative Yuan, parked cars being set on fire, policemen wounded by flying stones, and the streets of Taipei in chaos.[34] *The China Times* buried reports in the back pages, choosing to downplay the street protests rather than being forced to take sides. However, the *China Times* decided to not live up to its liberal image, and instead voiced the same fear of social

and political chaos and reluctance to criticise the military or police that could be found in conservative society.

Perturbed by the images of the riots as threats to security, two small private organisations, the Green Group (*Luse Xiaozu*) and the Third Image (*Disan Yinxian*), captured visual records of the incident on camcorder and edited them into short factual documentaries. Both tapes suggested that the police and army were responsible for the riot by attacking innocent protestors. The tone of the video emphasised a peaceful demonstration, attended by people determined to exercise their democratic rights in standing up to authority and being brutally suppressed for doing so.

The quality of the camcorders could not compete with the professional television cameras, while some of the images were deliberately blurred by the producers to avoid the possibility of their being used as evidence. Moreover, the GIO classified as illegal all the programmes produced by the Green Group and the Third Image, and thus prevented them from being sold, rented, or broadcast in public. The videos did, however, find their way on to the black market where they were widely available and became very popular.

The popularity of the black market versions of the videos implied that the people of Taiwan were eager to seek alternative versions of political events. Clearly, they did not trust the coverage of politics offered by the three national television stations. This explains why the KMT's Department of Cultural Affairs felt obliged to later produce and distribute another video that contained re–edited news material gathered by the television networks. Although this single official account of the incident recounted the identical story transmitted through television, it did at least mean that the KMT government had sensed the pressure generated by this movement against the mainstream electronic media and felt that it had to respond.

So, during the mid–1980s the electronic media replaced journals, magazines and to some extent, newspapers as the main communication channels for the opposition movement. Several independent and illegal video producers, including the Green Group, the Third Image, and New Taiwan, began to disseminate their own electronic versions of the underground journals. Between 1986 and

1988, the above three companies produced between 50 and 60 videos, covering DPP rallies and election campaigns, street protests, parliamentary confrontations, and appeals to particular issues (the environment, for example). But eventually the popularity of these videos likewise faded. Not only did the KMT begin to crack down on the organisation of social movements, but the production companies themselves were forced out of business by competition from the pirate market. However, the most significant limit to their activity was the most simple: restrictions on the press were abolished in 1988. Now it was cheaper and more convenient to obtain one's news from newspapers. The videos had championed the course of press freedom and liberalisation within the industry. Once this was achieved, they were forced out of business.

The Media and Liberalisation: The 'New Media'

The process of democratisation in Taiwan has been far from linear, and the boundaries between liberalisation and political reform were often blurred and difficult to identify. Nevertheless, it is clear that reform of the media environment proceeded as part of the movement towards full liberalisation that started in 1987, even though it was

slow and protracted. Restrictions on the publication of daily newspapers were not lifted until January 1988 (at which time there were just 31 legal newspapers published. By 1999, this figure had risen to 360[35]); areas of the electronic media were liberalised only after political reform – receiving and transmitting cable television broadcasts remained illegal until 1993, while call–in radio stations were only legalised in 1994, though underground radios continue to broadcast due to the high costs of entry to the market; the Publication Laws that controlled the press via strict licensing regulations were not abolished until 1999 upon the recommendation of the GIO. At the time of writing (Spring 2000), the KMT still enjoys considerable influence over three of the four network television stations, as well as the majority of radio networks. Prior to 1993, there were only 33 legal radio broadcasting stations in Taiwan. By 1998, the number increased to 80, with another 65 under construction. The GIO explains this rapid and welcome expansion with reference to the release of many frequencies that were previously reserved for the needs of the military and the telecommunications industry.[36]

It is clear that political liberalisation stimulated a quick response by Taiwan's media. The media were swept along by the developing political climate and the popular mood for greater and quicker change, and many within the industry wondered why the media could not be liberated immediately with the lifting of martial law. A general movement was created that liberalised the media before the appropriate legislation was in place. In other words, the media liberalised themselves, rather than waiting to be liberalised by the government's legal machinery. Such impulses also captured the popular imagination, and the slow liberalisation of the media became itself a prominent political issue. Cable television channels and call–in radio stations proliferated between 1987 and 1993, even though neither were legal at that time. Not only did such 'new' media suggest that people expected and demanded greater diversity in ownership and content – giving more choice in both – but their creation and popularity were viewed as an organised and deliberate response to the unhurried change in the mainstream media. Often popular activities directed against the bias of the electronic mainstream media – and the three national television stations in particular – had been used as a method of mobilising opposition

against the government. The DPP had been especially active in this regard, and many of its members have been involved in the scholarly debate about the future of Taiwan's media. This means that media issues themselves had a tendency to become highly politicised: media issues have frequently developed into *political* issues.

Throughout the last two decades the government still felt that 'illegal' electronic media presented a serious threat to its power and chose to confiscate vital broadcasting equipment or close the enterprises altogether. While the people wanted to exercise their new–found political rights of participation and demanded greater competition within the media environment that might assist the creation of a truly plural society, the government did not wish to rush the process. Yet we must note the persistence of opposition radio stations in particular. Many had their equipment confiscated one day, only to be broadcasting again the next: Their demands to be heard could not be suppressed. The title of these radio stations provide an indication of their political orientation: the Formosan New Voice, for example, and the Voice of Taiwan (rather than the

Republic of China), both stations that were very popular among taxi drivers (the traditional base of support for the DPP) and were able to mobilise political activities. This 'incitement', sometimes encouraging the expression of a distinctly Taiwanese voice, worried the government and explains their reaction.

So why did the government decide to legalise such media? In the case of cable television it had little choice. As Sheila Chin has noted, cable television in Taiwan 'originated from regular Common Antennas Television (CATV) systems and the activities of "Fourth Channels" set up by cable television pirates and political opposition'.[37] The term the 'Fourth Channel' was used by the public in Taiwan to refer to its status as an illegal addition to the three official television stations. Unlicensed stations had existed since 1969, but had few viewers due mainly to the low quality of programming offered. The launch of AsiaSat 1 in April 1990 changed all that. Now programmes could be delivered (illegally) by satellite and the illegally redistributed by cable operators, making it much easier for audiences to receive a variety of alternative programmes. Their quality was still questionable, and one should resist the temptation to believe that the 'Fourth Channel' was

committed only to providing a voice for opposition politics: 'Its popularity stemmed from its ability to broadcast material unavailable on free–to–air stations, such as Japanese TV series, professional wrestling, and pornography' – hardly a heady mix of programmes that would change the world![38]

In 1985, the GIO had already started to research the cable environment, and in 1989 began work on a draft law to regulate an over–chaotic illegal market. This was prompted by pressure from American television stations who protested the redistribution of their programming by illegal cable stations without payment or permission. By 1991, cable television served only 40,000 households. Just prior to the passage of the Cable TV Law in 1993, cable had already penetrated almost half of Taiwan's households. The Legislative Yuan, therefore, only legalised an already wide–spread and extremely popular phenomenon. By 1995, cable television accounted for 60 - 70 per cent of the market (23 per cent in Hong Kong, 8 per cent in Japan);[39] by 1999, the market penetration had increased to 80 per cent, the highest in the Asia–Pacific region.[40]

Underground radio has never been legalised in the true sense of the word. Instead, the government has relaxed regulations that governed the creation of new community–based radio stations and invited applications for licenses to operate on newly opened frequencies. In August 1996, the New Telecommunications Law was passed that reaffirmed underground radio stations would continue to be prosecuted and their operators fined or jailed. This has not deterred the pirates of the airwaves: by the end of 1997, there were an estimated 80 to 90 underground radio stations that defied the government.

Conclusions

During the period of martial law – 1949 to 1987 – most journalists in Taiwan, whether they represented the mainstream press or the opposition magazines, embraced the norms of their profession and the idea that they had a duty to serve as a check on government activities. Many of the more idealistic journalists from the mainstream press, usually against their editors' wishes, contributed to the poorly staffed and poorly financed *tangwai* magazines the bulk of critical stories that their own journals were prohibited from

publishing. To understand this it is important to remember that the KMT remained committed to the constitutional provisions for democracy and press freedom, and only argued that these should be suspended *temporarily* in the interest of anti-Communism. The KMT accused such political journals as *Formosa, China Tide, Eighties* and others, of jeopardising national security, and exaggerating the social division between mainlander and Taiwanese. Nevertheless, the opposition challenged as illegal the extra-constitutional network that bound together state, party, and media. They believed that it was their duty to highlight the inconsistency in the government's logic, between the promise to promote democracy and the harsh reality of martial law. In this way, the *tangwai* hoped to erode the legitimacy of the KMT and mobilise the people of Taiwan (especially voters) to support their agenda for reform. The *tangwai* had developed their own form of media – first journals, then videos, always produced and distributed underground – until a twist of irony dealt them a death blow: the achievement of the political reform, social liberalisation, and freedom of speech that they had championed for over three

decades put them out of business. They were deprived of their raison d'être.

In short, the media contributed to Taiwan's liberalisation, but only in a small way because Taiwan's democratisation was essentially elite–driven with opposition pressure acting as a further influence. The media *served* democratisation, but were unable to drive the political agenda. The underground media had wide appeal, but were not considered a serious challenge. Hence the opposition media were tolerated as long as they did not try to organise a political movement against the government. The political organisations and personalities *using* these media as a front for their activity provoked the government to respond in often oppressive ways. Media liberalisation allowed the government to publicise and thus legitimise its political transformation. It increased popular awareness and understanding of the changing political agenda, while at the same time granting the opposition a legal voice. The media are today certainly more critical of the government than at any time in the past, and they feel a responsibility to hold the political process to account. In the second half of 1999, for example, the repercussions of the earthquake continued to reverberate through the media long after the

tremors had eased. The media were central in questioning the performance of the government in responding to the problems caused by the earthquake that rocked Taiwan on 21 September 1999: re–housing, welfare, unemployment, the problems faced by the aboriginal tribes that lost everything at the epicentre, the need to investigate who was responsible for the inferior construction of many homes and schools (raising questions of political corruption that damaged the KMT in particular). Other problems were equally intractable, such as the public outcry over the National Assembly's decision in September 1999 to extend its own life, even though public opinion favoured abolishing this anachronistic institution of government. The media were not prepared to let these issues just disappear. In other words, the media have contributed more to the *consolidation* of democracy in Taiwan than to democratisation itself.

Gary Rawnsley

School of Politics

University of Nottingham

University Park

Nottingham, NG7 2RD

UK

Fax: 44+(0)115 9514859

e-mail: gary.rawnsley@nottingham.ac.uk

Home telephone/fax: 44+(0)115 9678684

Notes

1 This paper is based on Gary Rawnsley & Ming-Yeh Rawnsley, *Critical Security, Democratisation and the Media in Taiwan* (London: 2001).

2 Prior to 1996 when the first Presidential election by popular vote occurred Taiwan was neither a dictatorship nor a democracy, but a strange hybrid of both, what is often referred to in the literature as 'soft' authoritarian.

3 See G.D. Rawnsley, *Taiwan's Informal Diplomacy and Propaganda* (Basingstoke & New York, 2000).

4 The Government Information Office (GIO), a subdivision of the Executive Yuan and thus under the jurisdiction of Taiwan's Premier, is the government agency responsible for regulating Taiwan's media.

However, under martial law the GIO worked hand in hand with the Taiwan Garrison Command (TGC), the chief institution entrusted with control over the media. This was a military agency that enjoyed a 'reputation for arbitrariness and ruthlessness'. (Thomas B. Gold, *State and Society in the Taiwan Miracle*, (New York, 1986), p.63.) The TGC was required to ensure the restrictive provisions of martial law were obeyed, and that included suppressing the media when necessary. Hence on the surface the GIO was technically the highest institution supervising all forms of domestic publications and electronic media, but the Garrison Command remained in de facto control until the end of martial law, at which time many TGC cadres simply transferred to the GIO.

5 For further details see Linda Chao & Ramon H. Myers, *The First Chinese Democracy: Political Life in the Republic of China on Taiwan* (Baltimore, 1998), p.43.

6 'Taiwanese' refers to the Chinese who have lived in Taiwan since the 16th Century. The largest group are the Min–nan who arrived in Taiwan from southern Fuchien province and speak southern

Fuchienese. This book will also make reference to the Hakka, a smaller sub–ethnic group of Taiwanese from Fuchien and Guangdong provinces and speak Hakka. 'Mainlanders' are nationalists who arrived in Taiwan in large numbers after their defeat by the Communists in 1949 and suppressed expression of the Taiwanese identity.

7 See Daniel K. Berman, *Words Like Colored Glass: The Role of the Press in Taiwan's Democratization Process* (Boulder, 1992). Berman uses Samuel Huntington's functions of party organisation as his model, developed in 'Political Development and Political Decay,' *World Politics*, 17(3) 1965.

8 Berman, *Words Like Colored Glass*, p.194.

9 Simon Long, *Taiwan: China's Last Frontier* (London, 1991), p.54.

10 C.L. Chiou, *Democratizing Oriental Despotism* (London, 1995), p.74.

11 Many useful accounts of 2–28 are available that explore the variety of explanations for the incident. The most useful is Lai Tse-han, Ramon H. Myers & Wei Wou, *A Tragic Beginning: The Taiwan Uprising of February 28, 1947* (Stanford, 1991).

12 Ibid., p.76.

13 Ibid., p.154-5.

14 *Taipei Times*, 7 March 2000.

15 *Taipei Times*, 1 September 1999.

[16] Lai *et.al*., *A Tragic Beginning*, p.154. While mainlanders certainly dominated the KMT, it would be wrong to assume that the party did not also attract a large number of Taiwanese members. By April 1950, the party had recruited only one thousand new Taiwanese members. Two years later, Taiwanese accounted for over half the membership – some 56 per cent. Chao & Myers, *The First Chinese Democracy*, p.31.

17 The Chinese ideology allows both sides of the Taiwan Strait to project themselves as the true guardians of Chinese culture and identity. Both subscribe to the idea of *Chung Kuo*, or China as the 'Middle Kingdom', 'centre of the universe.' In the past, the KMT based its legitimacy, and therefore state power, on the Chinese ideology. Any violation in Taiwan's political or cultural life would not be tolerated

18 'Governor-General Ch'en I's Speech at an Administrative Conference', 9–10 January 1947, quoted in Lai *et. al*, *A Tragic Beginning*, p.207.

19 Gold, *State and Society in the Taiwan Miracle*, p.52

20 Chao & Myers, *The First Chinese Democracy*, p.13.

21 Quoted in ibid., p.55.

22 Lei continued to press for political reform after he was released from prison. In January 1972, he submitted a 10,000–character petition to Chiang Kai–shek outlining ten areas in need of urgent reform. These included using the word 'Taiwan' in the official name of the country to declare independence.

23 Berman, *Words Like Colored Glass*, p.183.

24 Shih Ming–teh in the *Taipei Times*, 9 December 1999.

25 Huang Hua, 'Jianxingren di xinxin' ('The beliefs of a prisoner whose sentence was commuted'), *Taiwan Zhenglun*, 3 October 1975, p.39

26 Gold, *State and Society in the Taiwan Miracle*, p.129.

27 Peter R. Moody, *Tradition and Modernization in China and Japan* (Belmont, 1995), p.270.

28 Chiou, *Democratizing Oriental Despotism*, p.94. A full account of the 'Kaohsiung incident' can be found in Chou & Myers, *The First Chinese Democracy*, pp.57-9.

29 Hsu was visiting the US when rioting broke out in Kaohsiung. He did not return to Taiwan to stand trial. He therefore escaped imprisonment, but was unable to return from the US.

30 Chiou, *Democratizing Oriental Despotism*, p.94.

31 In 1987, Hsu sneaked ashore back to Taiwan, but was imprisoned for illegal entry, though released shortly afterwards. Having resigned from the DPP, Hsu was an independent candidate in the 2000 election for President of Taiwan. Hsu came fourth out of five candidates, having secured 0.63 per cent of the vote (79,429 votes).

32 The *Independent Evening Post* was also the first newspaper to publisher the new constitution of the ROC, drafted by leading dissident Lin Yi-hsiong.

33 The farmers' grievances had deep roots. The main explanation for this particular protest, organised by the Yunlin Farmers Rights Promotion Union, was the government's effort to acquire Most

Favoured Nation status from the United States. This prompted the Legislative Yuan to loosen restrictions on the importation of fruit and vegetables. The farmers worried about the impact this would have on their livelihoods.

34 The confrontation began at around 3pm and continued well past midnight. It was marked by long periods of stand-off between the farmers and police, rather than continuous violence. This illustrates the power that was attached to the media portrait of the incident as a 'riot'. University students joined the farmers and staged a sit-down protest. However, this only made the situation more chaotic that it already was. One of the DPP's legislators, Chu Kao-cheng, was in the crowd and was accidentally injured after his attempt to negotiate with the police failed. For the next three years, this day was commemorated in a variety of non-violent ways by the opposition movements.

35 GIO, *Taiwan's Media in the Democratic Era* (Taipei, 1999), p.4.

36 Ibid., p.7.

37 'Broadcasting and new media policies in Taiwan', in Annabelle Sreberny–Mohammadi, Dwayne Winseck, Jim McKenna & Oliver

Boyd–Barrett (eds.), *Media in Global Context: A Reader* (London, 1997), p.82.

38 See 'Cable Cat's Cradle', *Free China Review*, 46(2), February 1996.

39 Ibid.

40 GIO, *Taiwan's Media in the Democratic Era*, p.10.

Gary Rawnsley is a lecturer in the School of Politics, University of Nottingham. His research now focuses on the politics of Taiwan, with particular reference to political communication and election campaigning. He is the author of *Radio Diplomacy and Propaganda* (1996), *Taiwan's Informal Diplomacy and Propaganda* (2000), and editor of *Cold War Propaganda in the 1950s* (1999), all published by Macmillan and St. Martin's Press.