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## Selling Democracy: Diplomacy, Propaganda and Democratisation in Taiwan

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# Selling Democracy: Diplomacy, Propaganda and Democratisation in Taiwan

Gary D. Rawnsley

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We will strengthen our efforts in publicising Taiwan's outstanding achievements in economic development and political democratisation to make the international community understand better the significant role we can play.

Foreign Minister Dr Tien Hung-mao, June 5th 2001<sup>1</sup>

- 1 The consolidation phase of democratic transition confronts Taiwan with a paradox: Taiwan is a vibrant democracy, but it is a democracy that is not considered a legitimate actor in the international system. How can Taiwan resolve this dilemma and project an image of itself to the international community that certifies it as a democracy deserving recognition? Finding a solution will not be easy, as the absence of diplomatic relations of any weight prevents Taiwan from meaningful political foreign engagements (Taiwan enjoys formal diplomatic relations with 27 governments, mainly in Central and South America and Africa). Taiwan is thus relegated to the fringe of international politics and is outside a framework of relations and decision-making that often has a direct impact on it. In theory, Taiwan can no longer be neglected, for political scientists have long argued that it is impossible to ignore democracies that base their sovereignty on a mandate conferred by the people through regular free and fair elections. However, political reality can be a cruel intrusion on such idealism, and drawing on these themes to appeal to international opinion or sense of justice risks falling on deaf ears. Taiwan has a population of around 23.5 million; it holds more elections than any other country except the United States and Switzerland, with voter turnout rates regularly surpassing 70%; and the ruling party accepted the legitimacy of its defeat in the 2000 election after fifty years in government. Yet Taiwan remains outside the United Nations. Moreover, Taiwan's most important democratic diplomatic partners of the early 1990s severed relations with Taipei *despite* democratisation (South Korea in 1992; South Africa in 1997). Democracy, it seems, is not universally recognised as a mark of distinction, even by other democracies; the China-Taiwan competition for

diplomatic allies suggests that international relations are still defined by strategic and geopolitical interests of states. This is the reality of Taiwan's diplomacy, and it is within this framework that propaganda must compensate for Taiwan's precarious international status. In short, Taiwan must, to paraphrase Leonard<sup>2</sup>, prove its relevance, and has decided to do so by profiting from the potential value of projecting its commitment to the democratic ideal.

- 2 This article is intended as an update of a discussion I started elsewhere<sup>3</sup> before the 2000 election. The original research aimed to understand why and how Taiwan has engaged in propaganda—a component of what Joseph Nye has termed “soft” power—to reinforce what I described as “informal diplomacy”:

Soft power works by convincing others to follow, or getting them to agree to, norms and institutions that produce the desired behaviour. Soft power can rest on the appeal of one's ideas or the ability to set the agenda in ways that shape the preferences of others<sup>4</sup>.

- 3 So far, Chen Shui-bian's election victory in 2000 has not had any significant impact on the construction or implementation of Taiwan's foreign policy. As discussed below, his administration has identified a new set of policies and priorities, most of which extend rather than contest the pragmatic approach adopted by his predecessor. Democratic propaganda did not begin with Chen Shui-bian's election in 2000. Indeed, the previous KMT administration demonstrated that it recognised the importance of soft power in its final years of presidential power. Foreign Minister Jason Hu spoke in 1999 of Taiwan's “achievements in political democratisation, economic liberalisation and social pluralism” as being “in tune with international trends”. “This fine image should be recognised by the international community,” he said<sup>5</sup>.

- 4 A series of external events has presented new possibilities and challenges in equal measure for reactive (event-driven) propaganda, for example, the election of George W. Bush as President of the United States, and of course the terrorist attacks on Washington and New York in September 2001. The biggest opportunity is undoubtedly Taiwan's membership of the World Trade Organisation, opening up the prospect of closer political ties across the Taiwan Strait as a by-product of greater economic interaction.

#### Aims

- 5 The present discussion is interested in discovering how the completion of Taiwan's transition to democracy has affected the propaganda that is designed to reinforce diplomacy activity, and suggests that democracy provides a new ideological context for understanding Taiwan's propaganda behaviour. It has little to say about the consequences of any particular propaganda strategy, as measurement of effect is almost impossible. For example, the August 2002 issue of the *Taipei Review* (p. 37) reported that “the American view of Taiwan has tended to become more favourable as Taiwan has conducted democratic elections and fashioned a free-market economy. A recent Gallup poll showed that 62% of Americans had a favourable image of Taiwan, while 22% had an unfavourable view and 16% had no opinion. Two years ago, only 47% had a favourable view of Taiwan”. Leaving aside important questions of method—how many Americans were sampled? From where do they obtain their information about Taiwan? How are favourable and unfavourable defined?—the poll does not provide any explanation for these figures: is American opinion more favourable now because of Taiwan's propaganda (which is highly unlikely) or because of the very act of

democratisation that has been discussed in the media and among American political elites? Similarly, how can the competition between Taiwan and the People's Republic of China (PRC) for allies in the Third World be understood through propaganda? Certainly aid can be considered an act of propaganda—of the deed, often the most important kind<sup>6</sup> that furthers Taiwan's endeavours to raise its international profile—but most developing countries recognise the economic benefit of “renting” their allies and playing one China against the other. As Ian Taylor has observed, “it is probably true that most Africans do not care much who is the ‘real’ China or with whom official diplomatic ties should be established. ... However, astute state elites... have become conscious of the fact that the diplomatic competition between the two countries is a diplomatic spat that elites in economically depressed countries [...] are able to profit from [...]”<sup>7</sup>.

- 6 My professional analyses of international propaganda—from the BBC and the Voice of America in the Cold War, through Radio Moscow in the early 1990s, and on to Taiwan—have concentrated on understanding why actors experience the need to disseminate their policies, intentions, reactions, and in some cases ideologies, to a global audience. This level of analysis allows us to appreciate how political actors imagine themselves, and how they would like the rest of the world to reflect that image back to them. In many senses, there is a sensible argument that in Taiwan's case the consequences of propaganda are insignificant, and that Taiwan's international position relies less on any kind of power it may (or may not) have—soft or otherwise—and more on external factors that are beyond its control, for example American support. Presidents Nixon and Carter are judged responsible for Taiwan's present isolation, while Clinton came extremely close to conceding the PRC's sovereignty over Taiwan. George Bush Jr., on the other hand, has declared—much to the consternation of his advisers—he will do “whatever it takes” to help Taiwan defend itself<sup>8</sup>. These are not the result of propaganda, so why should we be concerned with how Taiwan projects itself to the international community?
- 7 My earlier work on Taiwan approached the relationship between propaganda and diplomacy through the lens of the unequal diplomatic contest between Taiwan and the PRC<sup>9</sup>, and this remains a valuable method: Even after Taiwan's successful democratisation, this competition is still characterised by inequity in propaganda that matches the unequal competition in the political spheres; moreover, the competition is played out in the PRC's favour because it receives the benefits of international recognition. I have proposed that this competition can be measured by: the level of public and political interest each side is able to generate according to their perceived international status; the ease of access that each can secure to the government machinery of third nation-states and multilateral forums, and the level at which this occurs; and similarly the volume of interest the players can generate within, and their access to, the media. My research has identified a positive correlation between the level of media interest and diplomatic profile: Japan's ties with Taiwan improved through 1997 and 1998, and among the factors which contributed to the upgrading of relations is the increase in Japanese media coverage of Taiwan<sup>10</sup>. While I do not intend to revisit these debates in this paper<sup>11</sup>, it is worth reiterating that the unequal competition between the PRC and Taiwan makes propaganda an important diplomatic instrument that both governments ignore at their peril.

- 8 Moreover, democracy adds another problematic; democratic governments must appeal to public opinion and the electorate for support and consent for sometimes onerous political decisions and behaviour. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that domestic and international propaganda sometimes lack the consistency required for success—that they are addressing different constituencies with diverging and often competing interests, and this means the organisation, content and delivery of propaganda are in danger of falling out of synchronicity. Thus, while Taiwan’s democratisation offers more opportunities than pitfalls—the theme of this article—the risks associated with having to satisfy two different audiences remain. So, for example, the Chen administration has adopted a very bold stance towards the PRC and has tested to the limit what is and is not acceptable to Peking. Chen Shui-bian’s recent policy pronouncements that Taiwan and China are “one country on each side” of the Taiwan Strait (discussed below) demonstrate this; Chen is obviously appealing to his domestic constituency because he is having to carve out a political identity that is very distinct from his competitors as the race for the 2004 presidential election begins. Hence, Chen’s administration is transforming into a more pro-independence creature than it was at the time of his inauguration in May 2000. This stance, however, sits uneasily with the image that Taiwan is trying to project overseas and in the United States in particular—that Taiwan is a responsible member of the international community that will not provoke a war with the PRC. This is the price of democracy; authoritarian governments do not have to face these kind of problems, for they face no serious political challenge from within their borders. Hence, their domestic and international propaganda tend to appear far more consistent.
- 9 To proceed, we should be mindful of Gregg Wolper’s judgement that propaganda “remains the most useful term as long as readers understand that it does not imply the use of dishonest methods of false information, *although it does not necessarily exclude them either*” [emphasis added]<sup>12</sup>. Of course, we should not be at all surprised that the pejorative meaning of propaganda still resonates. After all, the twentieth century saw the most skilful application of propaganda in the service of totalitarianism. The association of propaganda with sinister pursuits guards the unwary against admitting that we are all indeed engaged in propaganda as much as we are its victims. Propaganda stands (erroneously) accused of manipulation, and we are naturally suspicious of any form of manipulation since it implies the secret exercise of power that is beyond scrutiny or control. In Philip Taylor’s colourful prose, propaganda is considered a “disease which somehow afflicts our individual and collective capacity to make up our own minds about what is happening in the world around us”.<sup>13</sup>
- 10 This attitude is infectious for it conditions how we view our involvement in propaganda: Diplomats representing Taiwan throughout the world continue to insist that “we” (Taiwan) do not engage in propaganda; rather, “we” tell the truth and simply provide factual information about our country. “They”—meaning the Chinese communists—engage in propaganda. It is, after all, the kind of insidious behaviour we expect from Communists. Popular opinion assumes that only others whose cause we repudiate do propaganda. However, academic research on the meaning and history of propaganda is more detached and reminds us that propaganda is merely an act of salesmanship, whether of an ideology, a particular political system, or a particular government/state<sup>14</sup>. Evidence accumulated from Nationalist China in the 1940s suggests that its diplomats accepted this definition and valued the contribution that

propaganda can make to their work. Most enlightening are the papers of a former Nationalist Ambassador to the United States, Wellington Koo, currently archived at Columbia University in New York. These reveal that in 1949 he was advised to hire a prominent American public relations specialist whose clients had included an airline and Coca-Cola to promote and “sell” Nationalist China in the United States<sup>15</sup>. The significance of this cannot be overstated, for it reinforces our understanding of propaganda as an act of salesmanship: governments, policies and ideologies can be packaged and sold in the same way that soap, dog food or any other commodity is branded and marketed.

- 11 The problem with accepting a pejorative definition of propaganda that is embedded in a disapproving or moralising discourse is that it positions Taiwan forever on the defensive. Unless actors accept that they engage in propaganda, they will never be in a position to understand fully how to do it properly and what it can achieve. It is unfortunate that the political competition with China has determined the propaganda strategies pursued in Taipei. As recently as 1999, the battle for international hearts and minds was structured around the disagreements between Taiwan and the PRC, and rhetoric in Taipei still resonated with Cold War symbolism. For example:

The PRC has made great efforts to help its friends in Africa. Last year, its donations and loans to this region amounted to approximately US\$500 million. During the first half of this year, high-ranking government officials of the PRC paid 20 visits to Africa. These developments demonstrate clearly its intention to contain our development in this region and sabotage our friendship with African allies<sup>16</sup>.

- 12 Moreover, the Chairman of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission, Chang Fu-mei, launched in 2002 an initiative designed to strengthen Taiwan’s propaganda among overseas Chinese communities. “In an apparent attempt to win the hearts of overseas Chinese, China has been going all out in promoting its propaganda overseas,” he said. “Thus it is the commission’s priority to comprehensively counter such efforts by Communist China”<sup>17</sup>. So in many respects, Taiwan’s propaganda is still organised around the out-dated Cold War rhetoric that was associated with Free China’s ideological and geo-strategic struggle with the Communist regime in Peking; and this is unfortunate because such reactive posturing is self-limiting and ultimately self-defeating. Not only does rebuttal—counter-propaganda—publicise the original message, but it also throws Taiwan onto the defensive, drowning out the positive themes that are more valuable. By resorting to the redundant Cold War reasoning that propaganda is something that only the communists in Peking do, Taiwan’s attitude is simply nourishing the popular attitude towards propaganda as something evil, thus inviting audiences to switch off from ALL forms of persuasion, including their own. Moreover, an unfavourable understanding of propaganda as a value-neutral activity overlooks how credibility, balance, objectivity, accuracy and a proclivity for providing only information and “the facts” are all used to sell a political message in much the same way that one might use more overt and familiar propaganda techniques. Nicholas Pronay branded this “propaganda with facts”<sup>18</sup>.
- 13 How does this relate to our understanding of diplomacy? Hans J. Morgenthau, the patriarch of realist international relations, defined diplomacy as the “promotion of the national interest by peaceful means”, and he reserves a special place in his *Politics Among Nations* for showing how communications and propaganda do play an integral role in the conduct of diplomacy and international relations:

Regardless of the instrument employed, the ultimate aim of foreign policy is always the same: to promote one's interests by changing the mind of the opponents. To that end, diplomacy uses the persuasiveness of promises and threats in terms of the satisfaction of the denial of interests; military force ... [and] propaganda, the use and creation of intellectual convictions, moral valuations, and emotional preferences in support of one's own interests. All foreign policy, then, is the struggle for the minds of men; but propaganda is so in the specific sense that it endeavours to mould the minds of men directly rather than through the intermediary of the manipulation of interests or physical violence<sup>19</sup>.

- 14 Diplomacy is about communication, persuasion and negotiation, and less about "war by other means". This close association between the two activities implies that diplomats cannot, and should not, ignore the contribution that propaganda can make to their work. After all, as Peter Marshall has observed, diplomacy is about persuasion, not imposition<sup>20</sup>.

Taiwan's pursuit of soft-power

- 15 Diplomacy involves a specific type of propaganda that is conditioned by, but at the same time reinforces, the formal or informal nature of the diplomacy. Moreover, it works across a variety of time frames, as propaganda proceeds at a pace that is relative to both the objectives of the diplomacy and the diplomatic environment. Hence, the formation of foreign policy and the design of propaganda should not be considered discrete activities. Consistency is essential, with the propaganda reinforcing and serving specific diplomatic aims.
- 16 The foreign policy objectives of Chen Shui-bian's government are<sup>21</sup>: National security and defending *de facto* Taiwan's sovereignty; Strengthening bilateral relations with other democracies, especially in the Asia-Pacific region (the United States and Japan in particular), and integration in regional forums; Persuading the international community that Taiwan should be allowed to enter intergovernmental organisations, including the United Nations and all its agencies; Promoting friendly relations across the Taiwan Strait; Fostering democratisation in China; Linking Non-Governmental Organisations in Taiwan and elsewhere<sup>22</sup>; and Strengthening and promoting Taiwan's democracy. This entails the repeated recitation of the so-called Taiwan "economic miracle". It also means affirming that Taiwan has experienced an irreversible process of political and social transformation into the modern constitutional democracy that was envisaged by its founders in 1947.
- 17 The final aim informs all the others: fulfilling these diplomatic objectives will be impossible unless Taiwan can persuade the international community that it deserves serious attention because of its democratic credentials. While the story of Taiwan's economic miracle is well known throughout the world<sup>23</sup>, its political transformation is less familiar. Hence, the Chen administration has made the projection of Taiwan's democracy the cornerstone of its foreign policy:

We are a vibrant democracy with full sovereignty. Unfortunately, we still find ourselves rejected by the international community ... We do not export arms, steal nuclear know-how, lob missiles over other countries, invade our neighbours, persecute scholars and religious worshippers, or violate human rights. We are isolated simply because of the fact of our proximity to our formidable neighbour across the Taiwan Strait. Moreover, unlike other pariah states, we have managed to develop and modernise our economy, and even to democratise our polity<sup>24</sup>.

- 18 In short, the Chen Shui-bian government is committed to a pro-active propaganda strategy organised around a single message that integrates Taiwan's foreign policy

interests and is value-driven: communicating the *idea* of democracy—that democracy is essentially “good”, facilitating peace and co-operation. This is a stark juxtaposition to the way Taiwan portrays the PRC—as a political system that should change; and that, as a democracy, Taiwan’s mission is to engineer that change. Hence, the aim of fostering democracy in the mainland is more than a flourish of political rhetoric for domestic consumption; it is designed to remind international audiences that the China they recognise as a legitimate member of the international system and accept as a member of the UN is not a democracy, and that the very idea of democracy can be a powerful tool for political change.

- 19 So, Taiwan is turning more to soft power to pursue its foreign policy interests and is assembling a long-term information strategy that avoids the sloganeering of the Cold War. This is illustrated in the conclusions of a meeting of President Chen and officials from the Presidential office, members of the Executive Yuan and the DPP held on September 8<sup>th</sup> 2002. The relevant propositions suggest the marriage by the democratic ideal of propaganda and diplomacy: set up a “Taiwan Democracy Foundation” to liaise with democratic organisations in developed countries; push for the establishment of an Asia-Pacific democratic alliance to advance democracy in the region; use state-owned media outlets as a “voice of Taiwan” to promote democracy in the region; invite Chinese leaders to observe the upcoming elections in Taiwan and offer to help train election staff in China; push for the establishment of an “overseas Chinese democracy alliance” to win support from overseas Chinese and international friends; and reiterate the government’s position that only the 23 million people of Taiwan have the right to decide the future of the country and that they are entitled to democratic measures including a referendum to this end<sup>25</sup>.
- 20 The Chen administration has developed several innovative methods of pursuing its foreign policy objectives: “Democracy-based diplomacy”; “Human Rights-based diplomacy”; “Civilian-based diplomacy”; “Public Opinion-based diplomacy”; and “Inter-parliamentary diplomacy”. Officially launched in April 2002, the latter refers to the creation of relations between parliamentarians in Taiwan and other democracies. One member of Taiwan’s parliament, the Legislative Yuan, noted how “lawmakers—representing the opinions of the 23 million people in Taiwan—are the ideal choices to demonstrate the fruits of democracy and liberty by linking Taiwan to the international community”<sup>26</sup>. While Taiwan’s legislators have always been involved in this kind of diplomacy—Taiwan has been a member of the Asian-Pacific Parliamentarians’ Union since 1965—democratisation has given their participation in these activities more credibility, for directly elected parliamentarians representing the entirety of Taiwan’s political spectrum are now fully involved in their engagement with the international community. In other words, who better to promote Taiwan’s democracy than the democrats themselves?
- 21 In addition to being the product of the kind of creative mind that Taiwan’s diplomacy requires, these different methods share a foundation in the island’s democratic political system. They represent the attempt to demonstrate that in a democracy, “Diplomacy is too important to be left to diplomats”<sup>27</sup>. They are consistent with the administration’s belief that everyone in Taiwan is responsible for, and can make a positive contribution to, Taiwan’s diplomacy. The specified objectives aspire to the decline of diplomatic elitism and the promotion of a more inclusive foreign policy. In



this context, Dr Tien has spoken of the need for “total mobilisation” in realising Taiwan’s foreign policy ambitions<sup>28</sup>.

- 22 The list of diplomatic objectives reveals that Taiwan’s foreign policy is still essentially driven by its relations with the People’s Republic. This is understandable: Peking continues to cast such a long shadow over Taiwan that political and public discourse still tends to be structured around the issue of cross-Strait affairs, especially during election campaigns. Dr Tien Hung-mao’s most urgent responsibility when he was appointed Foreign Minister was to calm fears, within Taiwan, among its allies (formally recognised or otherwise) and in Peking, that a Chen Shui-bian administration need not necessarily lead to the outbreak of war across the Taiwan Strait. The fears were logical: Chen represented a party that had campaigned in previous elections on the platform that Taiwan should declare “independence”, and thus give up any pretence that it can reunify with China on Taiwan’s terms. Although Chen had avoided this platform in the 2000 election campaign, Peking still claimed that, if elected, he would promote or declare Taiwan’s independence, thus giving a pretext for China to attack the island. Sensitive to Peking’s concerns, and grateful that Taiwan’s voters had elected him President despite China’s rhetoric (albeit without a majority; Chen won only 39.3% of the vote), Chen moved quickly to ease fears that a new crisis was on the horizon. His inaugural speech launched what has been termed a “peace offensive” that included the now (in)famous “five no’s”<sup>29</sup>, namely: 1) no declaration of Taiwan’s independence; 2) no change in the name “Republic of China”; 3) no revising the constitution to suggest that Peking and Taipei should negotiate on the basis of “special state-to-state” relations; 4) no referendum to decide Taiwan’s status; and 5) no abolition of the National Unification Council<sup>30</sup> as long as China does not attack Taiwan. In addition, Chen proposed to set up direct sea and air links across the Taiwan Strait provided China could guarantee Taiwan’s security. These concessions seemed to send Peking a positive message: after Chen’s inauguration, China’s belligerence subsided, and “a modest resumption of negotiations in due course is conceivable...”<sup>31</sup>.
- 23 Yet democracy has also tempted Taiwan to be bolder and more assertive in its relations with China. It has endeavoured to push the boundaries even further, to test its newly-discovered confidence in the belief that public opinion and the United States will come to Taiwan’s aid if and when military conflict breaks out across the Taiwan strait. Taipei’s decision to change the wording of passports to read “issued in Taiwan” instead of “The Republic of China” is the latest provocation to Peking’s sensitivities. Meanwhile, George W. Bush has gone further than any American president since Nixon in affirming security ties between Washington and Taipei—a sentiment shared by both Richard Halloran, formerly of the *New York Times*, and Robert Sutter in a recent *Issues and Studies*<sup>32</sup>—thus ending the strategic ambiguity that allowed the US to support Taiwan while preserving its commitment to the “One China” policy.
- 24 The boldest move so far was in August 2002 when President Chen referred to what has become known as the “one country on each side” theory. In a telecast Chen announced that “Taiwan’s future and destiny can only be decided by the 23 million people living on the island [...] with Taiwan and China on each side of the Taiwan Strait, each side is a country.” He went on to affirm that “Our Taiwan is not something that belongs to someone else. Our Taiwan is not someone else’s local government. Our Taiwan is not someone else’s province”<sup>33</sup>. It is hardly surprising that the Chinese government in Peking viewed these statements as provocative, the latest in a developing political

agenda that seems to suggest Chen Shui-bian is becoming ever more willing to push Taiwan's independence. As a propaganda device, the statement had little effect, other than spark the usual debates among pro- and anti-independence activists within political circles and the media (especially in Taiwan and the United States). In fact, there is every reason to suspect that making this statement was inappropriate at a time when the United States, a key player in maintaining cross-Strait peace, had more pressing concerns—continuing the war against terrorism, and building an international coalition (that Washington hoped would include Peking) in the United Nations in support of military action against Iraq. The United States does not welcome any distraction from these objectives, especially one that serves to heighten tension with the PRC and risks dragging Washington into any cross-Strait conflict, hot or cold.

- 25 On the issue of direct links across the Taiwan Strait, Taipei's propaganda has experienced difficulties in presenting a justifiable argument for rejecting Peking's overtures. In May 2002 Qian Qichen, the Chinese Vice Premier, announced that that negotiations on three links—transport, trade and postal services—could proceed as long as both sides accepted that this was a domestic economic matter: "Since the issue of the three direct links is a purely economic affair, related talks can leave out the political meaning of one China", he said. This was intended to placate Taiwan's business community who have longed advocated direct links between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. Taipei's response was welcoming, but cautious: direct links, said President Chen, are "not a cure-all" for the problems that separate Taiwan and the PRC<sup>34</sup>.
- 26 While explanations for Taiwan's hesitation are embedded within the complicated historical, political and strategic relationship between the two sides, it is clear that this is evidence of Peking seeking the moral high ground: how can anyone object to such offers of negotiation that do not require discussion of seemingly intractable political problems? The Chen administration could not, therefore, reject the proposals outright because it would then be viewed as unreasonable; neither could it simply accept Peking's advances because then it might be seen as appeasing the PRC. In the circumstances, therefore, caution and hesitation were the best that the Chen administration could offer.
- 27 What is most interesting from the perspective of propaganda has been the response by Taiwan's media to Qian Qichen's statement. For example, an editorial by Taiwan's *The Liberty Times* newspaper applied the classic propaganda device of scare-mongering to raise fears of direct links among its domestic readers: "Once direct links open, tourists from China may come, because it is compatible with Peking's policy of engulfing Taiwan"<sup>35</sup>. Another editorial was equally fearful: "Direct links will shake the national identity, the beliefs of the people and Taiwan's democratic system. Direct links will cause a further outflow of businesses and capital and a hollowing out of local industries. The day direct links are established will be beginning of Taiwan's absorption into China"<sup>36</sup>. While it is impossible to establish without focus group research and the commissioning of wide-scale opinions whether or not voters in Taiwan are persuaded by such propaganda, these editorials nevertheless draw our attention to the language that the anti-China constituency uses, and indicates how it remains prepared to resort to the Cold War imagery of hordes of Chinese ready to "engulf" Taiwan. Divisive issues such as cross-Strait relations continue to prompt the most emotive kind of propaganda

on both sides. Does such polemic facilitate reasoned judgement, clear decision-making, and valuable diplomatic communication?

- 28 The horrifying terrorist attacks against the United States in September 2001 offered Taiwan an opportunity to reaffirm its tacit alliance with Washington and present itself as democratic member of the international community that also felt threatened by international terrorism. Taiwan has offered assistance to the United States in fighting the war against terrorism, and to the United Nations in helping with its humanitarian work in war-ravaged Afghanistan: “As a member of the international community and a democratic ally,” said President Chen Shui-bian, “the Republic of China will support the United States in its actions against terrorist organisations and endorse various anti-terrorist conventions and resolutions proposed by the United Nations”<sup>37</sup>. The propaganda is clear; Taiwan is willing to make a positive contribution to an international system that shuns it, and to support United Nations resolutions even though it is denied membership of that organisation. Such statements help the government to demonstrate the absurdity of Taiwan’s present status and generate international sympathy based on its democratic credentials.
- 29 However, the reality is that democratisation has not really increased Taiwan’s visibility at all, even though the lifting of martial law in 1986 was a positive and long-overdue development that allowed Taiwan to finally ensure that reality lived up to the rhetoric of “Free China”. Describing the momentous changes that have taken place in Taiwan, Jason C. Hu, a former Director-General of the Government Information Office (GIO) and KMT foreign minister, has expressed sadness that “perhaps because these reforms were not achieved at the cost of bloodshed or social turmoil they have ... not gotten sufficient press or attention”<sup>38</sup>. Taiwan is considered sufficiently “news-worthy” only when further, more dramatic ingredients are added: the military threat from the PRC, aeroplane crashes, earthquakes, train crashes in the United Kingdom that kill Taiwanese citizens. In other words, Western public opinion is most familiar with Taiwan through negative news stories and images. If the government wishes to make sure that Taiwan’s democratisation is promoted, its diplomats and GIO officers abroad must find new ways of managing the news that circumvent such a gloomy representation. Manufacturing interest in Taiwan will raise its profile in the media, and encourage awareness of the issues it faces. As Jacques Ellul noted in his seminal study of propaganda, timeliness is important. “Propaganda”, he observed, “can have solid *reality* and *power* over man only because of its rapport with fundamental currents, but it has seductive excitement and a capacity to move him only by its ties to the most volatile immediacy”<sup>39</sup>.
- 30 In 1949, the Nationalist embassy in the United States hired Norman Paige, a former ABC correspondent with vast experience of the Far East and responsible for the “best” radio station in the Philippines. Paige recognised that media attention to the China situation had waned: “We will have to get your story back on page 1,” he told Joseph Ku, “and that is difficult to do without the benefit of spectacular news stories”<sup>40</sup>. Thus, President Lee Teng-hui’s visit to Cornell University in 1995 certainly captured the attention of the world’s media, and the press in the United States, Japan and Hong Kong all came out in support of closer relations with Taiwan<sup>41</sup>. Such coverage helped raise awareness of Taiwan: “If you now ask Canadians on the streets who President Lee is, they know,” reported the *Free China Journal* on January 19<sup>th</sup> 1996 following his controversial visit to Cornell. “Before that, their knowledge about Taiwan was limited”. As the head of the

Taipei Representative Office in the United Kingdom, Dr Tien Hung-mao is striving to develop stronger lines of communication with the British media than any of his predecessors, agreeing to regular interviews with the BBC, the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Economist*. Journalists are thus a crucial link in Taiwan's horizontal network of communication and propaganda in the UK. Moreover, Dr Tien is committed to practising the more personal style of diplomacy that he promoted as Foreign Minister, regularly attending functions organised by the British-Taiwan Parliamentary Group, the Foreign Office, universities, and Britain's major political parties<sup>42</sup>. This gives Dr Tien a direct opportunity to discuss with influential individuals in British politics and civil society the Taiwan political miracle he is dedicated to advertising.

- 31 One of the most surprising discoveries of my original research was that neither diplomats nor GIO officers received any formal instruction in how to use, or interact with, the media of the countries where they are stationed. This was a serious indictment of their approach to modern diplomacy given that Taiwan depends on propaganda for evading the problems of non-recognition. Now, however, it looks as though the situation is set to change: As Foreign Minister, Dr Tien Hung-mao was responsible for creating an Institute of Diplomacy in Taipei that will offer instruction to both diplomats and representatives of Taiwan's growing number of non-governmental organisations. The curriculum will include training in the art of public diplomacy, a development that should facilitate the future realisation of Taiwan's commitment to publicising its democratic qualifications.
- 32 THE REPRESENTATIVES of those governments and states that do not enjoy diplomatic recognition find it incredibly difficult to perform even the most cursory of symbolic functions, given that they are outside the diplomatic circle<sup>43</sup>. To overcome these problems, Taiwan is exploring and developing creative methods of diplomacy, all of which involve propaganda. Selling Taiwan involves the same techniques used in selling any commercial product or service: identifying themes, messages and styles of delivery that will appeal to the audience that the source wishes to persuade.
- 33 The Cold War offered Taiwan the opportunity to exploit the international ideological divisions and describe itself as "Free China", though the credibility of that label was undermined by the reality of martial law. It is ironic that, with the end of the Cold War and the creation of a democratic Taiwan, that label—perhaps more relevant today than at any time in the past—has disappeared. This is in recognition that "Free China" is today a rhetorical device with less symbolic resonance than "democratic Taiwan". This is not to deny that the Cold War casts a long shadow over Taiwan's propaganda organisation as it does relations with the PRC. As I write, the Asia-Pacific is gripped by concern over the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) that allegedly originated in Guangdong province in China. Taiwan is engaged in a fierce verbal attack against the PRC, blaming the Chinese government for keeping quiet about the disease for too long, and for keeping Taiwan outside the World Health Organisation when membership may have helped control, if not prevent, an outbreak on the island.
- 34 With democracy come new challenges: propaganda addresses several constituencies, often with diverging and often competing interests. Under the Chen Shui-bian administration, the dangers lie in the policy-making community rather than the propaganda designed to communicate its decisions. After all, the damage caused by an assertive, yet careless China policy may be so extensive that it is beyond rescue by even the most sophisticated spin. The backlash (within Taiwan and the PRC) against Chen's

“one country on each side” model demonstrates that policy and propaganda must proceed with caution to maintain the idea Taiwan is a responsible member of the international community, while avoiding antagonising Peking further and communicating what might be termed the arrogance of democracy.

- 35 While public relations alone will not solve Taiwan’s diplomatic difficulties, a well-constructed propaganda machinery and message that is consistent with the government’s foreign policy objectives offers long-term possibilities. In contrast to the kind of Cold War rhetoric that trapped Taiwan’s propaganda in a limiting mindset, democracy provides Taiwan’s propaganda with an enduring and appealing theme, and Chen Shui-bian’s government appears enthusiastic in exploring every conceivable avenue to convey its message. Whether anyone is listening is another matter altogether. After all, as Taiwan is fast learning, democracy does not come with any guarantees, and of course no propaganda organisation can control the pace and extent of diplomatic change. However, Taiwan can take comfort from evidence that suggests its democratic propaganda does seem to be reaching the right people: In June 2002, US Secretary of State Colin Powell told the Asia Society, “People tend to refer to Taiwan as ‘The Taiwan Problem’. I call Taiwan not a problem, but a success story. Taiwan has become a resilient economy, a vibrant democracy and a generous contributor to the international community”.<sup>44</sup>

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## NOTES DE FIN

1. Report on The Current State of ROC Diplomacy, delivered to the Legislative Yuan, June 5th 2001, available at [www.mofa.gov.tw](http://www.mofa.gov.tw).
2. M. Leonard, *Public Diplomacy*, London, Foreign Policy Centre, 2002, p.52.
3. G.D. Rawnsley, “Selling Taiwan: Diplomacy and Propaganda”, *Issues and Studies* Vol. 36, No.3, 2000. G.D. Rawnsley, *Taiwan’s Informal Diplomacy and Propaganda*, Basingstoke, Macmillan & New York, St. Martin’s Press, 2000.
4. Joseph Nye, “Soft Power”, *Foreign Policy*, No.80, Fall 1990.
5. Jason Hu, “The current state of ROC diplomacy”, speech delivered November 4th 1999, <http://mofa.gov.tw/emofa/eframe6b.htm>.
6. Rawnsley, *Taiwan’s Informal Diplomacy*, pp. 31-33.
7. Ian Taylor, “Taiwan’s Foreign Policy and Africa”, *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 11, No.3, 2002, p.129
8. R. Halloran, “An End to Ambiguity?”, *Taipei Review*, August 2002; P. Tyler, *A Great Wall: Six Presidents and China*, New York, Century Foundation, 1999; R. Sutter, “The Bush Administration and U.S. China Policy Debate – Reasons for Optimism”, *Issues and Studies*, Vol. 38, No.2, 2002.
9. In my previous work on this subject I adopted the terms “authority” and “challenger” powers used by Gadi Wolfsfeld (*Media and Political Conflict: News from the Middle East*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997) in examining media coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict.
10. “Japanese find new links with partners in Taiwan”, *Free China Journal*, May 1st 1998.

11. Interested readers can explore these debates in Rawnsley, 'Selling Taiwan', and Rawnsley, *Taiwan's Informal Diplomacy*.
12. G. Wolper, G. "Wilsonian Public Diplomacy: The Committee on Public Information in Spain", *Diplomatic History*, Vol.17, No.1, 1993, p.17.
13. P.M. Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1996, p.1.
14. *Ibid.*, p.7.
15. Memorandum from Joseph Ku to Wellington Koo, February 3rd 1949, Wellington Koo Papers, Columbia University (New York), Box 180.
16. Jason Hu, "The current state of ROC diplomacy", speech delivered November 4th 1999, <http://mofa.gov.tw/emofa/eframe6b.htm>.
17. "OCAC aims to boost Taiwan's image", *Taipei Times*, October 8<sup>th</sup> 2002
18. P.M. Taylor, P.M., *War and the Media: Propaganda and Persuasion in the Gulf War*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1992, p.19.
19. H.J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 5th edn., New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1972, p.333.
20. P. Marshall, *Positive Diplomacy*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1997, p.132.
21. GIO press release, September 6th 2001, [www.gio.gov.tw](http://www.gio.gov.tw).
22. See Dr Tien Hung-mao's report on The Current State of ROC Diplomacy, delivered to the Legislative Yuan, June 5th 2001, available at [www.mofa.gov.tw](http://www.mofa.gov.tw). Information supplemented by interview with Dr Tien in London, June 25th 2002.
23. Taiwan's "foreign trade is larger than that of 171 countries and it has accumulated a massive foreign exchange reserve, which at the end of 1998 stood at US\$90.3 billion – the third highest in the world." Taylor, "Taiwan's Foreign Policy and Africa", p.127.
24. GIO press release, September 6<sup>th</sup> 2001, [www.gio.gov.tw](http://www.gio.gov.tw).
25. "Chen compares China's tactics to terrorism", *Taipei Journal*, September 13<sup>th</sup> 2002.
26. *Taipei Journal*, June 21<sup>st</sup> 2002.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Interview with Dr Tien Hung-mao, London, June 25<sup>th</sup> 2002.
29. [www.president.gov.tw/php-bin/prez/showspeak.php4](http://www.president.gov.tw/php-bin/prez/showspeak.php4).
30. The National Unification Council was founded in October 1990 to oversee relations the eventual unification of Taiwan and China. In March 1991, it announced a three-phase programme called the National Unification Guidelines: 1) unofficial contacts via people-to-people exchanges and activities; 2) opening "three links" (postal, air and sea, and trade); 3) negotiations on unification based on democracy and economic development.
31. J.P. Cabestan, "Chen Shui-bian's Victory Rules out Détente in the Taiwan Strait", *China Perspectives*, No. 29, May-June 2000, p.37.
32. Halloran, "An End to Ambiguity?"; Sutter, "The Bush Administration and U.S. China Policy Debate".
33. See "President Chen: 'One country on each side'", *Taiwan Communiqué*, No.102, September 2002.
34. "Chen says 'three links' no panacea for economic ills", *Taiwan Headlines* (Internet edition), October 24<sup>th</sup> 2002.
35. "Say 'no' to direct links with China", *Taipei Times*, July 17th 2002.
36. "Fools are rushing in", *Taipei Times*, June 27<sup>th</sup> 2002.
37. GIO press release, October 8<sup>th</sup> 2001, [www.gio.gov.tw](http://www.gio.gov.tw).

38. Jason C. Hu, *Quiet Revolutions on Taiwan, Republic of China*, Taipei, Kwang Hwa Publishing, 1995, p.iv.
39. J. Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, New York, Vintage, 1965, p. 43. I do, however, take issue with Ellul's apparent idea that propaganda should jettison the themes and myths of previous campaigns and concentrate on fixing the propaganda around the need for timeliness. Ellul underestimates audiences who, he assumes, is unable to concentrate on any time other than the here and now. News is therefore fleeting and not remembered. In contrast, I would suggest that news can provide the opportunity to ensure the continuity of propaganda that will now have a greater audiences share and interest. Context is as important as immediacy.
40. Memorandum from Joseph Ku to Wellington Koo, February 3rd 1949, Wellington Koo Papers, Columbia University (New York), Box 180.
41. For details of the some 2,000 news reports and commentaries, see *Free China Journal*, June 9th 1995, p.1, and June 16<sup>th</sup> 1995, p.2.
42. Interview, London, June 25<sup>th</sup> 2002.
43. See M.J. Peterson, *Recognition of Governments: Legal Doctrine and State Practice, 1815-1995*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1997, p.104 for details of how informal relations without symbolic attachments proceeded in the Nineteenth Century.
44. "Colin Powell: Taiwan a success story", *Taiwan Communiqué*, No. 102, September 2002.