News media performance and social responsibility in transitional societies: a case study of tabloidisation in Taiwan

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News Media Performance and Social Responsibility in Transitional Societies: A Case Study of Tabloidisation in Taiwan

by

Chen-li (Jenny) Liu

A Doctoral Thesis Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of
Doctor of Philosophy of Loughborough University

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Abstract

The development of the news media in western societies coincided with the formation of a fully democratic polity based on universal suffrage, and from the outset the press and later broadcasting were assigned a central role in providing the information and argumentative resources for citizenship and in checking for abuses of power. But the commercial news media were also industries, increasingly financed by the sale of advertising, and commentators saw the search for audience maximisation moving news towards sensation. While these developments gathered momentum over many decades in the West, in Taiwan they have been compressed into two, as the country has experienced a rapid triple transformation: from authoritarian, single-party rule, to democratic politics based on multi party competition; from a state managed economy to a market-driven economy; and from a restricted media system to an open one marked by fierce competition. Many observers see this highly compressed process of change, coupled with the relative weakness of civil society, generating a particularly aggressive form of tabloidisation, a withdrawal from social responsibility and ethics, and news system ill adapted to serving the needs of a still consolidating democracy.

This argument empirically through three detailed case studies of key stories places them in the context of the general changes reshaping Taiwanese news media and the original arguments over tabloidisation in the West, and concludes by exploring the possibilities for reform in the future.

Key Words: democratisation, commercialisation, tabloidisation, tabloid journalism, social responsibility, media ethics
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INTRODUCTION

Aim of the Thesis

The film, Return to Paradise, released in 1998 follows three young American men who met accidentally in Penang in Malaysia and became good friends. After their five week holiday, during which they are involved in drinking, girls and drugs, two of them return to New York while the third decides to travel to Borneo to save the endangered orangoutang. Unexpectedly, the police find drugs on his person and put him in prison as a suspected dealer. After two years, the Malaysian government send word to his companions in New York demanding that they return to Malaysia to accept their share of responsibility in the matter, otherwise their friend will hang in eight days. One of them does return to the courtroom and the judge, impressed by his bravery, commutes the death sentence. In pursuit of an exclusive an American journalist exposes the incident and criticises the Malaysian justice system, which infuriates the judge who restores the death sentence. Although the condemned man’s sister had begged the journalist not to cover the story until the verdict was announced, the journalist confidently assumed that her condemnation would prompt the judge to release the man. Unfortunately she was totally wrong.

In 2005 another film about journalism, Good Night, and Good Luck was released, the title coming from the sign-off line with which a CBS news presenter routinely closed his programmes. Its plot recounts how the news team defied Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin in the 1950s and opposed his campaign to root out suspected Communist elements within American government. In response to the journalists’ strong critique of the intimidation of witnesses and the climate of fear it engendered
McCarthy accused the veteran presenter of being a member of a leftist organisation. Despite pressure from the military, the sponsor and the corporation, the programme producer and reporters stood by the presenter. The event severely weakened McCarthy and helped to hasten his downfall.

These two films dramatise the central tension between responsibility and irresponsibility, evidence based comment and sensation, which characterises contemporary journalism. This tension dates back to the early days of newspapers but it has arguably been sharpened by recent changes in the environment within which the news media now operate.

Theories of democracy have always invested news media with a key role as the primary sources of the information and argument citizens require in order to exercise political choices responsibly. The struggle against state censorship and control has been a struggle to secure the freedom which allows journalists to assemble these resources for citizenship governed only by their professional standards and ethics. But the press was also an industry, privately owned and subject to the logic of profit maximisation, and from an early point in its modern development commentators pointed to ways in which the exercise of journalism as a profession was conditioned by, and in many critics’ eyes, distorted by, the unaccountable power exercised by owners and advertisers and by the demands of audience maximisation. One consequence of these economic pressures and logics that has attracted particular attention has been the shifting balance between serious journalism and sensation, a process that has come to be called tabloidisation.

In western societies the processes of both democratisation and commercialisation have taken place over elongated time periods. The installation of universal suffrage took almost a hundred years to complete in Britain, for example, while in the United States, the right to vote was still a major issue within the Civil Rights Movement of
the 1960s. Similarly, the commercialisation of the press did not develop in its full form until the advent of a mass consumer society, which arguably occurred first in the United States beginning in the 1940s and later in Europe from the late 1950s onwards. In addition, Britain and a number of other European countries had introduced Public Broadcasting Systems charged with supplying cultural resources for citizenship as a countervailing to the perceived failures of market-driven media.

Since Martial Law was lifted in 1987, followed a year later by the abolition of the newspaper ban, in modern Taiwan the processes of both democratisation and commercialisation have taken place in a very compressed time frame, and where, up until very recently, there was no effective alternative to commercial news media in the form of a significant PBS system. Over the last two decades Taiwan has experienced a rapid political transition from single party rule to a competitive electoral system, and a concerted economic shift from a state-managed to neo-liberal market oriented economy. Press freedom was significantly extended. The strong ties between particular media owners and particular political factions remained in place however, and continued to exert consistent pressure on reporting, particularly at election times. At the same time, the Taiwanese government adopted an open policy in the media industry, issuing a large number of new broadcasting licences and allowing transnational media into Taiwan. The result has been a rapid proliferation of media outlets, intensified competition for revenues and audiences, and an accelerating process of tabloidisation. Arguably the extent of Taiwanese tabloidisation is even more intense than in other advanced countries.

This thesis aims to contribute to general debates around the nature and consequences of contemporary tabloid reporting and the role of the media in societies in the process of political transition through the close analysis of developments in the Taiwanese news media since the end of military rule. Drawing on original interviews
with Taiwanese news practitioners and commentators and on detailed case studies of
three stories illustrating different aspects of tabloid journalism, the work addresses
five questions:

(1) How has tabloid journalism developed in Taiwan?

(2) How is the process of tabloid reporting organised? What pressures do reporters
and editors feel themselves to be under and how do they view their work?

(3) What are the main characteristics and presentational devices of tabloid reporting
as evidenced by the three case studies?

(4) On balance, has tabloidisation helped or hindered the movement towards full
democratisation and citizenship in Taiwan?

(5) What options are there for reforms and interventions that address the negative
aspects of tabloidisation?

Outline of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into three main blocks. The first provides essential context for
core debates by briefly reviewing the concepts of press freedom and responsibility
and the process of tabloidisation as they developed in the context of the news media’s
development in the West. The second outlines the development of the news media in
Taiwan and details the emergence of tabloidisation. The third employs three case
studies, of events illustrating different facets of tabloidisation, to explore the practical
operation of journalism in present-day Taiwan, the constraints it operates under, and
their consequences for journalistic responsibility and ethics. The thesis concludes by
examining the debates prompted by the shift to tabloidisation and the possible ways
their negative effects might be addressed.
Based on the first two theories outlined in the influential schema provided by *Four Theories of the Press*, Chapter 1 begins with an exploration of the development of the press in the modern era in the West, and the transition from authoritarian times to libertarian times. Chapter 2 focuses on the emergence of debates around the social responsibility of the news media in democratic society and the factors that impede its exercise. In Chapter 3, I then highlight the trend towards tabloidisation in advanced democracies looking at the origins of tabloid journalism and its current forms, focusing particularly on the reporting of scandal and tragedy, and the debates it has prompted.

With Chapter 4 we move to the analysis of Taiwan, reviewing the transformations in politics, economy and culture that have particularly influenced the development of the media from the colonial context to the present. Chapter 5 introduces the methods employed in the fieldwork, detailing why the qualitative approach was used and the three incidents were selected, how the sample of interviewees was constructed, and how the interviews were conducted and analysed. Chapter 6 focuses on the development of tabloidisation in recent years, and responses and debates occasioned by the media practitioners involved in the interviews.

In the next three Chapters, 7, 8 and 9 we draw on the original interview materials supported by secondary documentary sources to explore the reporting of three controversial incidents, each of which generated much discussion and reflection in Taiwanese society. Through them, we examine the extent of tabloidisation, the factors that shape journalists’ reporting and editors’ decisions, and their understandings of journalism ethics and social responsibility.

Chapter 7 looks at how the private lives of politicians are covered, exploring the scandal over clandestine video footage of a well-known female politician, Ms. Chu Mei-feng, committing adultery. Chapter 8 examines the tensions between
investigation and sensation in covering public issues, using the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) outbreak as an example. Chapter 9 focuses on the reporting of celebrity, through the suicide of a famous comedian Mr. Ni Min-ran.

Chapter 10 examines suggestions for change and debates on possible reforms put forward by scholars and other commentators concerned with the present state of the news media in Taiwan. The final conclusion mainly reaffirms the addressed research questions, points to the limits of the work presented here, and makes suggestions for further research on the issues raised.
Part I

Evolution of the News Media in Transition: Restricted Press, Free Press, Social Responsibility, and Democracy
CHAPTER ONE

Development of the Press in the Modern Era

As Maurice Fabre noted in his book, *A History of Communications*, “Writing is the memory of the ages of man” (cited by Schramm, 1988: 49) and as Wilbur Schramm has added, “Greater because it freed humans from being dependent only on what old people could remember, from being able to communicate only as far as the voice could carry or the signal fire could be seen; greater because it built a bridge into the measureless distance and the endless future” (Schramm, 1988: 28). For much of their history, however, written records were produced by hand--they were manuscripts--and available only in a limited number of copies. The invention of printing ended this scarcity and allowed the mechanical reproduction of mass copies. This provided the basis for both the modern book publishing industry and the development of the modern periodical press, with new editions, with novel contents, appearing at regular intervals, from monthly magazines of opinion to daily news sheets.

This technological development coincided with shifts in the political systems of European societies, with participation in the political process becoming increasingly broadly based, a process that culminated in the successful struggle for the institutionalisation of an universal adult right to vote in elections for political representatives. Two dimensions of this shift are particularly relevant to this present thesis: (1) the role of the press in the transition from authoritarian to democratic systems of rule, and (2) the resulting realignments in the relations between states, newspapers, and citizens.
1.1 The Press in Authoritarian Times

The Beginning of the Press

The dissemination of news predates the arrival of the newspaper, but its circulation was restricted, either to particular groups or particular localities. In the Roman Empire under Julius Caesar a handwritten sheet called the *Acta Diurna* (the day’s actions) would be posted outside the Senate chamber and other places in Rome, covering Senate news and official announcements to the public. In Tang Dynasty China (618–907 A.D.) the so-called *Ti-pao* (a kind of palace report or gazette), written by hand or printed from engraved wooden blocks, was distributed among the members of the court. In addition to official notices it contained reports provided by inspectors appointed by the emperor to find out what was happening in the provinces twice a year. This example is often cited as the most extensive early example of systematic news gathering and dissemination (Schramm, 1988: 150-51). The modern European press was a product of the social extension of political participation, mentioned above, coupled with the growing demand for commercial intelligence and information consequent on the expansion of mercantile capitalism, and later industrial capitalism.

The first modern newspaper is generally thought to be the *Nieuwe Tidingen*, a commercial bulletin circulated in Netherlands and Italy and launched in 1605 in Antwerp, the hub of the Dutch sea-going empire, by Abraham Verhoeven. Though whether 1605 is in fact the first year of publication is open to dispute since the earliest existed copy dates from almost twenty years later, 1621. Even so, there is no doubt that the period years between 1605 and 1610 marked a watershed. There were at least four German newspapers being published, in Augsburg, Cologne, Wolfenbuttel, and Strassburg, in that period and the decades that followed saw the press expand rapidly with the first newspapers being established in Austria (1620), England (1622), France
(1631), Sweden (1645), America (1689), and Russia (1703). These early publications were all printed on a single-page and issued weekly (Siebert, 1956: 2; Schramm, 1988: 117-18, 151-56).

The Press, the Citizen, and Authoritarian Rule

This initial phase of press development took place in a political context characterised by various forms of authoritarian rule. Consequently, as Siebert has noted, “practically all western Europe, utilised the basic principles of authoritarianism as the theoretical foundation for their systems of press control” (Siebert, 1956: 9).

The justification for authoritarian rule had been powerfully expressed by Plato. It was based on a strong defence of the superior abilities of educated elites and a profound distrust of ordinary people’s capacity to govern themselves. Plato was convinced that “the state was safe only in the hands of wise men, the magistrates, who are governed by moral authority and who use this authority to keep the baser elements of society in line. Just as the wise man disciplines himself by keeping the impulses of his heart and the greed of his stomach under control by his intellect, so in society the magistrate keeps other classes of members from degenerating into a confused chaos” (Siebert, 1956: 12). His ideal society was one in which “the state established and enforced the unity of political and cultural goals” by imposing rigorous control over the expression of ideas. Poets were required first to submit their works to the magistrates who would examine if “they were good for the spiritual health of the citizens” (cited by Siebert, 1956: 12).

The authoritarian systems of 16th and 17th century Europe shared this general view and consequently exercised strict control over the dissemination of cultural and political ideas and opinions among the general population. The printers licenced to produce publications were expected to “support and advance the policies of the
government in power so that this government can achieve its objectives” (Siebert, 1956: 18-19).

The system introduced by the Tudors in Britain (1476-1603) was prototypical. In 1530 Henry VIII established the first licencing system for all books printed in English. Without a royal licence printers were prohibited from publishing. Later, under Queen Mary in 1557, the Stationers’ Company was granted a charter giving its patentees or ‘privileged’ printers exclusive rights to oversee the printing industry including booksellers, bookbinders, printers and publishers. Queen Elizabeth set up the Star Chamber Decree in 1586, which listed detailed regulations relating to the right to print. Within the decree the two most significant regulations were “all master printers must register their presses with the Stationers Company” and “no new master printers to be appointed except with the concurrence of the High Commission for Causes Ecclesiastical” (Siebert, 1956: 19-20; Siebert, 1952: 47-49, 64-74; Schramm, 1988: 158).

The ascendancy of the Stuarts at beginning of the 17th century introduced another dimensions of control. As devout Catholics, James I and Charles I, were convinced that “since the king held his position directly under God. It became the religious duty of the subject to obey his sovereign” and that consequently, “Any attack upon the established government of the church was sedition; any questioning of the ecclesiastical powers of the crown was heresy” (Siebert, 1952: 108-09). As a consequence, prosecution for seditious libel “which came in time to embrace all types of public criticism and censure” (Siebert, 1956: 24) became a crucial additional device for controlling publishers and printers operating alongside the Crown Patents Monopoly, the trade regulations imposed by the Stationers Company and the licencing system.
Hope of the Press in Suppression

Similarly rigorous systems of control prevailed across the European continent. In response, news-sheets (newsbooks) named *corontos* (currents of news) developed devoted solely to reporting news from other countries and thereby avoiding the problems of commenting on national issues. In Amsterdam in 1619, Italian and German corontos began publishing, followed in 1621 by the first English coronto. However, James I forbade its import into England. At the same time he proceeded forcefully against domestic printing, suppressing the anti-Catholic publications produced by the Puritans. In this dark and chaotic moment, the poet John Milton mounted a majestic argument in his *Areopagitica* published in 1644, defending press freedom as the necessary literary expression of the more general principle of freedom of action (Siebert, 1956: 44, 147-49; Siebert, 1952: 196; Schramm, 1988: 156-7).

Not surprisingly, in such a repressive atmosphere almost all European papers were restricted in scope. Most were published only once a week, had limited circulations (usually of 300 copies or less) and focused on foreign rather than domestic news. However, when publishers exploited loopholes in the regulations by addressing contemporary national events and issues in a metaphorical rather than literal manner, the response pointed to a substantial pent up demand, particularly from the rising commercial and professional classes who were spearheading the formation of a new economic system organised around capital rather than land and a new cultural system organised around scientific inquiry and rational argument (Siebert, 1952: 157-60).

By the beginning of the 18th century this pressures had forced the authoritarian system of press control into retreat and dismantled state monopolies in publishing. This more open commercial playing field paved the way for the emergence of a daily press. The first English daily was launched in 1702, and by 1750 there were five titles operating. The *Wiener Zeitung* (Vienna newspaper) began in Vienna in 1703 and in
Germany in the first daily, in Augsburg, arrived in 1718. Even so, authoritarian regulation had not disappeared completely. In France, for example, authors whose articles which judged to “attack religion, arouse feelings against or pronounce attacks upon the authority of the Government, or undermine due order and tranquility” could still be sentenced to death. In Prussia the import of all foreign newspapers was prohibited for a time. In Austria 2500 publishers were banned within a period of two years. The English press was controlled by the imposition of a Stamp tax and heavier penalties of seditious libel (Schramm, 1988: 158-59).

1.2 The Press in Libertarian Times

The Turning Point

In retrospect however, these restrictions can be seen as attempts to hold back a tide of change that eventually proved impossible to stem. Innovations in science coupled with the Enlightenment philosophers’ questioning of established models of politics, economics and society were steadily dissolving the established foundations of entrenched power and authority. The persistent emphasis on empirical evidence and rational discussion and argument as against traditional doctrine, superstition, and despotism, proved particularly corrosive, as did the new model of politics, proposed in its most influential form by John Locke. This nominated the will of the people as the centre of political power and argued that the primary role of the state and government is to guarantee the conditions necessary for the exercise of individual liberty. If they failed to do so, popular consent to their continuing rule could legitimately be withdrawn and their power overthrown. This insistence on the right to maximum freedom of personal action was central to the world view of the rising
bourgeois classes of merchants, bankers and entrepreneurs who were demanding the right to pursue their economic interest with the minimum of government interference and to the expanding professional classes of doctors, lawyers, and officers who insisted on the right to govern their own activities through self regulation. As Siebert points out, “In most countries of western Europe, the interests of the developing commercial class demanded an end to religious disputes. It also required limitations on monarchial powers and on the special privileges of the nobility. Capitalistic enterprise was incompatible with medieval notions of status and security. The free contract became the basis of the economic liberalism which the age of expansion demanded” (1956: 42).

**The Press and the Public Sphere**

The thickening network of associations and clubs that grew up in both the commercial and professional sectors provided the basis for a new kind of civil society, and as Jürgen Habermas has argued, at the heart of this sector was the activity of argument and debate over contemporary events and issues. This space of deliberations Habermas dubs the ‘bourgeois public sphere’ (Habermas, 1989: xvii) which he defines “as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities governing relations in the basically privatised but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labour” (Habermas, 1989: 27). Furthermore, “this new public develops the institutional and intellectual resources that allow it to subject state policy to rational debate and criticism” (Edgar, 2005:33). The outcome of this activity of debate and criticism is the crystallisation of ‘public opinion’, a provisional consensus on contentious issues that claims to express the will of the people and demands that politicians take due account of it when formulating policies and regulations.
This process of opinion formation “not only occurred in face-to-face conversation” in coffee houses and other meeting places of the new bourgeoisie “but was also mediated and represented by publications, ranging from novels, plays and poetry to newspapers” (McGuigan, 2001: 87-88). Hence, according to Habermas, “a public sphere comes into existence when citizens communicate, either face to face or through letters, journals and newspapers and other mass media, in order to express their opinions about matters of general interest, and to subject these opinions to rational discussion” (Habermas, 1989:27). For Habermas, it is essential that this process is open to everyone and to all opinions equally, a condition which in turn requires a press which operates freely, is hospitable to diversity of viewpoints, subjects these positions to scrutiny on the basis of reliable empirical evidence and rational deliberation, and is prepared to champion public opinion on an issue once it crystalises (Habermas, 1989:37, 181, 184). As Croteau and Hoynes point out (2001: 20-1), this ideal model of “the public sphere views people as citizens rather than consumers” and demands that “mass media should ‘serve’ these citizens, rather than ‘target’ potential consumers.” They elaborate on what this means for journalistic practice by citing Murdock’s argument on the core cultural rights required for full citizenship.

First, in order for people to exercise their full rights as citizens, they must have access to the information, advice, and analysis that will enable them to know what their personal rights are and allow them to pursue them effectively. Second, they must have access to the broadest possible range of information, interpretation, and debate on areas that involve public political choices, and they must be able to use communications facilities in order to register criticism and propose alternative courses of action. And third, they must be able to recognise themselves and their aspirations in the range of representation on offer within the central communications sectors and be able to contribute to developing and extending these representations (2001: 21).
The Freedom of the Press

The idea that the press could only operate as a forum for the discussion and analysis of contemporary issues if it was relatively free from state interference was not simply notional. It was increasingly enshrined in law. Sweden became the first country to adopt a law guaranteeing the freedom of the press in 1766 while The Bill of Rights adopted by the First United States Congress in 1789 aimed to protect freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, and freedom to petition. Later, the First Amendment to the new Constitution, passed in 1791, expressly stated that “Congress shall make no law….or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press….,” (Siebert, 1956: 49; Schramm, 1988: 159-61). This formulation provided an influential model. In 1814 Norway proclaimed freedom of the press in its new constitution and Italy enacted a new regulation in its constitution of 1848. Britain, while not introducing a comprehensive conception of press freedom into law, did adopt a new libel law in 1881 “that got rid of the long-resented requirement that newspapers deposit money against possible judgments. The law also freed newspapers from prior inspection of their copy and from much of the fear of being hauled into court for trial on the accusation of criminal libel” (Schramm, 1988: 162).

The removal of these former restrictions had the effect of encouraging a more open expression of opinion, stimulating the launch of new titles, and accelerating the on-going transformation of the press into a commercial, and potentially very profitable enterprise, funded primarily from advertising sales.

Libertarian theorists argued that even though some information and opinions out of the multiplicity of voices that found their way into newspapers would be false and unsound, the state did not have the right to restrict them. Rather, the ideal was to create a ‘free market’ in ideas in which the judgments of readers would be the final arbiter of which opinions prevailed (Siebert, 1956: 51-52). For them, “anyone, citizen
or alien, who had the inclination should have the unrestricted opportunity to own and operate a unit of mass communication. The field was open to all.....the instruments of communication would be privately owned and would compete in an open market. Anyone with sufficient capital could start a communication enterprise, and his success or failure would depend upon his ability to produce a profit. Profit, in fact, depended upon his ability to satisfy his customers. In the end, the success of the enterprise would be determined by the public which it sought to serve” (Siebert, 1956: 52).

This conception of a market in ideas providing the basis for an open debate on contentious issues played a central role in the way the first wave of newspapers aimed at the rising bourgeois classes defined their role. These included The Times of London, the Neue Zurcher Zeitung (Switzerland), the Allgemeine Zeitung of Germany, the New York Times and the Sydney Morning Herald, first published in 1831, and The Times of India, founded in 1838 (Schramm, 1988: 160). Alongside this growth in an elite press, however, this period also saw the rapid emergence of a popular press more oriented to entertainment. Rather than seeing itself as taking a leading role in orchestrating political discussion it traded in areas that commanded high levels of popular interest--sports, reports of crimes, and scandals.

1.3 Summing-up

We have reviewed how the development of newspapers in the West has been indelibly shaped by a double process of transition that has been repeated in a number of countries elsewhere in the world in recent years.

On the one hand, there is a political transition from authoritarian or absolutist forms of rule to modes of government based on mass participation. As an central part of this
process, the press moves from being essentially a mouthpiece of government subject to a variable array of controls that screen out alternative and counter positions, to becoming a core component in a political public sphere devoted to open deliberation on political issues in order to facilitate the formation of public opinion reflecting the will of the people. On the other hand, there is a parallel economic transition, towards a press that comes to be seen more and more as a commercial enterprise and where the search for audience maximization becomes the key to attracting and maintaining the advertising revenues that come to form the project’s core financial base.

The conjunction of these two transitions generates tensions between the ideal of a press oriented to delivering the cultural resources required for the full exercise of citizenship and the reality of a press oriented to hailing readers primarily as consumers for the products and services advertised in its pages. This tension produces a situation where the press’s commercial success may be bought at the price of compromising its role as a core component of the political public sphere, and it to this paradox that we now turn.
CHAPTER TWO
Fat Media and Thin Democracy

The recognition that the commercial press’s pursuit of profit maximization may lead it to operate in ways that undercut its idealised role as a pivotal institution within the political public sphere, and a core site for staging rational discussion on contentious issues has led a number of commentators to explore the issue of press responsibility.

2.1 The Free Press and Social Responsibility

Although concepts of responsibility are integral to the notion of freedom of speech and of the press, they have tended to be less well publicised than the core economic argument that freedom of discussion requires a ‘free’ market, in which newspapers seek readers in open competition with the minimum of government restriction or interference.

The first major thinker to present a clear idea of the relation between freedom and responsibility was the German philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte. In his work *Foundations of Natural Right* published in 1797, he pointed out that:

This concept acquires necessity through the fact that the rational being cannot posit itself as a rational being with self-consciousness without positing itself as an individual, as one among several rational beings that it assumes to exist outside itself, just as it takes itself to exist….I posit myself as rational, i.e. as free. In doing so, the representation of freedom is in me. In the same undivided action, I simultaneously posit other free beings. Thus through my imagination I describe a sphere for freedom that several beings share. I do not ascribe to
myself all the freedom I have posited, because I posited other free beings as well, and must ascribe to them a part of this freedom. In appropriating freedom for myself, I limit myself by leaving some freedom for others as well. Thus the concept of right is the concept of the necessary relation of free beings to one another (Neuhouser ed., 2000: 9; Pan, 1984: 9).

This general position was later built upon by John Stuart Mill, Victorian England’s leading philosopher and briefly a member of Parliament. In his influential 1859 publication, *On Liberty*, he argued that everyone has the right to voice their views and that government should not silence the expression of unpopular or provocative opinions. On the contrary, maximising diversity of expression is an essential precondition for any system that claims to be democratic in more than name. His strong defence of freedom of speech, however, also entails an equally strong insistence on social responsibility. He emphasised that:

*We have a duty or responsibility (rather than a right) to be tolerant of others. We have no right to limit what others can think, and we owe respect to our intellectual opponents. This tolerance has social implications for its is necessary for the maintenance of an open society, it helps to build an intellectual climate in which others can grow, and is necessary for social progress (Taylor, 2000c: 6).*

Mill also introduced the so-called ‘harm principle’ which argued that “individuals should enjoy freedom from interference as long as their actions do not put others at risk, but that those who act without justifiable cause, or do harm to others require the active interference of mankind” (Taylor, 2000c: 5). This key principle insisted that the right to free expression carried the responsibility to take the feelings, interests and safety of others into account. This standpoint can also be applied to the performance of the press.

As Habermas argued in his influential analysis of the role of the press in the
constitution of the political public sphere, the press had three main functions in a
democratic society: to monitor the activities of government on behalf of the people, to
keep the public informed, and to provide a platform for active and open deliberation
on public issues (Taylor, 2000c: 12). However, as he pointed out, by the mid-late 19th
century newspapers were increasingly driven by commercial pressure to maximise
advertising revenue by driving up circulation with the consequence that in-depth
political coverage was increasingly replaced by sensationalism, scandal-mongering,
and the so-called yellow journalism. The result was a press increasingly oriented
towards entertainment (Taylor, 2000c: 2, 16-17; Habermas, 1989: 168).

This shift was widely noted at the time and generated an increasing amount of
critical commentary. In 1911, for example, Will Irwin an American writer and
journalist published a series of articles in Collier’s magazine attacking the failure of
the press to serve the needs of democracy. During the 1930s the behaviour of
newspaper owners in pursuit of profits became the target of attacks in such books as
America’s House of Lords by Harold Ickes and Ferdinand Lundberg’s Imperial Hearst
(Peterson, 1956: 78-79; Rivers et al., 1980: 2-3).

2.1.1 The Origin of Social Responsibility Theory

It was against this background of mounting criticism of newspaper performance that a
social responsibility conception of the press began to emerge. The first advocate of
this conception is generally thought to have been Walter Williams, the founder of the
Missouri School of Journalism, who in 1911 published The Journalist’s Creed which
is often seen as the first code of ethics for journalists. He argued strongly that
newspapers are a public trust and that journalists should take responsibility for the
general welfare of society. This general injunction was translated into the specific
provisions of the ‘Canons of Journalism’ which were adopted unanimously by the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1923 (Pan, 1984: 12; Peterson, 1956: 85; Rivers et al., 1980: 289).

In the 1940s the founder of *Time Inc.*, Henry R. Luce, put up 200,000 dollars and asked the president of the University of Chicago, Robert M. Hutchins, to chair a Commission on Freedom of the Press. The Committee reported on its findings in 1947, and social responsibility theory was officially incorporated into its final report, *A Free and Responsible Press*, and into *Freedom of the Press: A Framework of Principle* written by William E. Hocking, a member of the Commission, in which he emphasised that freedom of the press was conditional rather than absolute, and that newspapers had a responsibility to the society as a whole.

The Commission’s report listed five principles that could be employed as a measure of press performance. These stipulated that newspapers should:

(i) provide a truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent account of the day’s events in a context which gives them meaning,

(ii) serve as a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism,

(iii) give a representative picture of the constituent groups in society,

(iv) help in the presentation and clarification of the goals and values of the society, and

(v) provide full access to the day’s intelligence (Peterson, 1956: 75, 87-92; Pan, 1984: 1-2, 12-13; Rivers et al., 1980: 44-45, 48).

The lead provided by this intervention was followed up in the United Kingdom that same year when Sir William Ross was appointed by the government to chair a Royal Commission on the Press. Two years later the Commission presented a report that heavily criticised improper and intrusive interview techniques and argued that the prevailing situation of irresponsible reporting must be addressed but not necessarily
through the law. On the Commission’s recommendation, a General Council of the Press was established to encourage the concept of social responsibility and public service in the press. This can be regarded as the inception of the self-discipline movement within the British press (Pan, 1984: 12; Yang, 1996: 91-92; Peterson, 1956: 75).

2.1.2 Debating of Social Responsibility Theory

Because social responsibility theory was not born in authoritarian times but in liberal society, its main aim was to address what were perceived as the negative consequences of the over emphasis on freedom of expression (speech) in liberal theory (Peterson, 1956: 93; Taylor, 2000c: 2-3). Not surprisingly, given that the Hutchins’ Commission sought to impose curbs on the press’s exercise of editorial discretion, its recommendations were fiercely opposed by media practitioners at that time. They saw the core principles as both unrealistic and indefinite and argued that the Commission unduly ignored the essential role of newspapers’ commercial freedom to satisfy the reader’s needs in order to generate profits. Added to which, they felt the Commission’s intervention might prefigure a threat of interference or control by government. After three decades, however, the fundamental concept of social responsibility was gradually accepted by the American news industry (Pan, 1984: 2-3; Peterson, 1956: 103).

In 1973, William Burleigh, editor in chief of the *Evansville Press* in the State of Indiana, was invited by Marquette University to give a speech on the social responsibility of the press. He claimed that media practitioners seemed to be more concerned about their rights under the First Amendment of the Constitution.
guaranteeing freedom of the press than about their social responsibility. He argued that while the principle of freedom of the press referred to the citizen’s rights of access to a diversity of publications, it did not uphold the rights of publishers or journalists, as members of a privileged social stratum, to write whatever they wished. For him, freedom of the press was rooted in the citizens’ rights to be provided with access to accurate information and diversity of argument and debate, a right which carried with it an obligation on the part of newspapers to exercise responsibility to their readers. This emphasis on the rights of citizens rather than the rights of news organisations shifted the focus of debate on what was meant by responsibility (Pan, 1984: 3).

By the closing years of the 20th century, however, a combination of technological, economic, and political changes were steadily undermining news organisations’ commitment to press responsibility. Under the twin pressures of intensified competition and the introduction of new forms of electronic publishing on the internet, journalism was becoming more and more a commodity in search of consumers. As the need to craft a product that would attract readers and advertisers became more and more a dominant imperative, exercising social responsibility came to be seen as an obstruction to achieving this goal. Instead, a renewed emphasis on commercial conceptions of ‘the freedom of the press’ coupled with a defence of ‘the public’s right to know’ were mobilised in defence of prevailing practices. This neo-liberal reinterpretation of ‘freedom’ left Mill’s core liberal principle of doing no harm some way behind.
2.2 The News Media in the Neo-liberal Age

The period of the 1980s and 1990s marked a milestone in modern history. In the technological sphere, the rapid development of digital communications, and particularly the emergence of the Internet, opened up new opportunities for established media organisations while also intensifying competition from new forms of popular communications. In the economic sphere, the rise of neo-liberalism prompted a major shift in structures and policies from state management to markets and competition. In the political sphere, a number of countries in Europe, Africa, Latin America and Asia, shifted from forms of authoritarian or autocratic rule to varieties of democratic government. Studies conducted by a number of scholars have shown that the media played a crucial role in supporting this push towards democratisation in so-called transitional societies.

As O’Neil (1998:1-2) argues, “for democracies to function, civil society requires access to information as a means to make informed political choices. Similarly, politicians require the media as a way in which they can take stock of the public mood, present their views, and interact with society. The media are thus viewed as a vital conduit of relations between state and society.” Ideally then, in a ‘healthy democracy’ the full range of relevant opinions, ideas, and arguments can be freely circulated in a vibrant ‘public sphere’ or ‘space’ which the media play a key role in creating and sustaining (Croteau and Hoynes, 2001: 14). However, the transition to democratic political forms has been accompanied by the rapid turn towards markets, leading some commentators to identify a paradoxical movement in which politics moves away from the ideal state of democratic debate at the same pace as the media system becomes more intensively a profit seeking enterprise. The result is an economically ‘fat’ media but a correspondingly ‘thin’ democratic culture. As Peter Dahlgren (1995:
1) has noted despite the decline of authoritarianism, “in today’s world, democracy remains precarious and vulnerable.” The following exploration will identify the main forces producing this vulnerability.

2.2.1 The Impact of Politics on the Media

The Ties between States, Media, and Advertisers

We tend to assume that apart from the regulations governing commercial activity and particular forms of contentious expression (such as racial abuse or pornographic images), government in a democracy refrains from intervening in the operation of commercial media. It constructs the playing field and specifies some of the rules but companies themselves determine how they will play the game. In fact, however, some media entrepreneurs have become politicians or have had close ties with government. Arguably, the most spectacular recent instance of this convergence has occurred in Italy where Silvio Berlusconi, the present Italian Prime Minister, has consistently capitalised on his position as the country’s leading media proprietor to advance his political ambitions and has used his political power to protect his media interests. As Mancini points out although the case of Berlusconi is unique in modern times:

The Italian press has always been highly political. But the nature of this has traditionally been in its close association with political parties and the political establishment. The only major variation to this trend was the development of an ‘impure’ press, owned by industrial conglomerates and used to exert political power for their commercial advantage…..Such a situation is remarkable, in that it potentially creates a democratic vacuum for citizens who find themselves largely unrepresented and absent from the public sphere (Anderson and Ward eds., 2007: 241).

Nor is this symbiosis between politics and the media unique to Italy. As
McChesney argues, in relation to the United States, “far from being politically neutral, journalism smuggles in values conducive to the commercial aims of owners and advertisers and to the political aims of big business. Ben Bagdikian refers to this as the ‘dig here, not there’ phenomenon” (McChesney, 2004: 72-3).

**The Effect of Media Policy**

In the situation that obtained in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Europe, where (as we noted earlier) the state sought to exercise significant control over news publication, the original idea of striving to remove inappropriate restraints on media freedom could be strongly defended. However, deregulation does not mean that there should be no rules governing the operation of media markets. The defence of the public interest requires that the negative impacts of intensified competition and increased media concentration on corporate strategies and journalistic practices be addressed. As McChesney strongly argues:

> The U.S. media system—even its most ‘free market’ sectors—is the direct result of explicit government policies and in fact would not exist without those policies. Most dominant media firms exist because of government-granted and government-enforced monopoly broadcasting licenses, telecommunication franchises, and rights to content (a.k.a. copyright). Competitive markets in the classic sense are rare; they were established or strongly shaped by the government…..the term *deregulation* becomes somewhat misleading; it means, more often than not, government regulation that advances the interests of the dominant corporate players (2004: 19).

In contrast, in some European countries, like Britain, Germany and France, because of different media histories and regulations, above all the prominence of public broadcasting services, there has been a countervailing force to the power of commercial media conglomerates. Even so, as Peter Anderson has argued, public
service news organisations have not been able to entirely escape the effects of intensified competition.

The channel-hopping freedom opened up by the significantly increased competition has not only made it possible now for audiences to avoid completely the quality news programmes provided by the BBC, Channel 4 and, to a lesser extent, ITV (or indeed, any news programmes) in the UK, but also has caused even respected news producers to downgrade, in some cases radically, the amount or prominence of their news coverage, for example BBC3. The fragmentation of audiences occasioned by multi-channel has made it increasingly difficult for those wishing to hold the line on the quality and quantity of hard news in commercial companies. Yet, despite all the evidence for these adverse trends, the UK government has continued to try to forge ahead with the switch-over from analogue to digital television with a minimum of regulatory conditions relating to the quality of news journalism (Anderson and Ward eds., 2007: 55).

2.2.2 Commercial-Led News

During the first half of the 19th century, as Habermas and others have pointed out, the function of the press gradually shifted from underpinning the public sphere to becoming a commercial business, although in practice this demarcation was not always clear-cut. As a consequence of this process of commercialisation, Habermas argues, the press became “an institution of certain participants in the public sphere in their capacity as private individuals; that is, it became the gate through which privileged private interests invaded the public sphere” (Habermas, 1989: 183-85). As Ben Bagdikian (1990: 137) also points out, the growing importance of advertising to press finances since the late 19th century is another important driver of this shift, as we will discuss later.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and China and India’s turn to the market,
the last two decades of the 20th century saw the emergence of a neo-liberal capitalist economic system with global reach. The advanced countries, led by the United States, pressured developing countries to accept this global economic mode through the multilateral political force and command over international institutions such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), The International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank (McChesney, 1999c: 78). In the field of communications, the rapid development of new technologies—particularly satellites and the internet accelerated the integration of media industries into the new global media marketplace. As a result, “media and communication more broadly have become a much more significant sector for business activity” (McChesney, 1999c: 79) and seeking to maximise the returns on their investments has become the main motivation for media operators. In the process, ideals of public service have come under increasing pressure.

The Domination of Media Conglomerates

As Bagdikian (1990: 3) has indicated, accelerating marketisation coupled with the relaxation of the regulatory environment produced the paradoxical situation whereby, in the 1980s “many Communist societies have discovered that they are forced to move away from centralised control of information, though the change is slow and tentative. At precisely the same time the developed democracies of the world, including the United States, have begun moving in the opposite direction, toward centralised control of their mass media, this time not by government but by a few private corporations.” Nick Stevenson (1999: 3) supports this contentious arguing that “the media, are increasingly owned and controlled by large-scale transnational concerns…..the main agent of governance in terms of communications is no longer the state but the market.” In this situation, where newspapers, magazines, broadcasting or other media are increasingly dominated by a handful of giant
corporations operating across media sectors and on a global basis, smaller firms find it challenging to survive and either go out of business or are acquired by or merged with larger concerns. As Bagdikian (1990: 5) notes, the critical question is: “Why do the corporations fight for so much dominance, spending most of their executive time and billions of dollars in ferocious bidding battles, mergers, acquisitions, leveraged buyouts, and takeovers? The answer is an ancient one: money and influence.” In addition to amassing colossal wealth, the leading media barons “have dominant influence over the public’s news, information, public ideas, popular culture, and political attitudes” (ibid.). Rupert Murdoch, for instance, has established a global media empire which stretched over newspapers, magazines, satellite television, film industry, and the internet and operates in Australia, the US, UK, and Asia. Boggs characterises this pattern of expansion as ‘corporate colonisation’, arguing that “the economic, political, and cultural signs of corporate colonisation are increasingly abundant and readily visible in the contours of daily life” (Boggs, 2001: 9).

Interestingly, the dominant media corporations usually claim that the process of consolidation through mergers or acquisitions will improve media quality. In fact, the quality of most news media taken over by the media barons is widely recognised as mediocre with a marked predilection for sensationalism (Bagdikian, 1990: 6). Murdoch’s two best selling titles in the UK, *The Sun* and *The News of the World*, being well known examples. In Asia, *Apple Daily* owned by *Next Media Limited* of Hong Kong is perhaps the best instance of this tendency towards sensationalism (O’Neil, 1998: 159). As Bagdikian (1990: 7) points out, “when a corporation buys a local monopoly or market domination, few can resist the spectacular profits that can be made by cutting quality and raising prices.” From the journalistic viewpoint, John McManus (1994c: 1) argues that “newsrooms have begun to reflect the direction of managers with MBAs rather than green eyeshades. The reader or viewer is now a
‘customer.’ The news is a ‘product.’ The circulation or signal area is now a ‘market.’ As business logic begins to permeate the newsroom and journalism is crafted to serve the market.” In this context, the traditional journalistic values of acting as a gatekeeper and watchdog and of contributing to a vibrant public sphere are almost overwhelmed by the market-driven logics, regardless of individual journalists’ adherence to established codes of morality and ethics.

The Force of Advertisers

Advertising plays a crucial role in the hyper-commercialised media world of today because it has become the main source of revenue for the commercial media. In the 18th century, press advertising consisted of small, classified ads, that took up about one-twentieth of the total space. However, by the middle of the 19th century “advertising agencies arouse on the basis of business advertising” (Habermas, 1989: 190) and took full advantage of the new business opportunities opened up in Britain when the Prime Minister, Gladstone, in the 1850s, “removed regulations and taxes on advertising, and manufacturers were able to appeal to consumers over the heads of retailers, through the burgeoning media” (Branston and Stafford, 2003: 367).

In early magazines, ads were normally published in the back pages, but in the 1890s, as advertising revenue became increasingly important, they were moved to the front by editors. Soon after, advertisers demanded that editors placed their ads within major articles. As a consequence, as well as selecting articles that would prove attractive to readers, editors also needed to take the requirements of advertisers into account (Bagdikian, 1990: 137-38).

After the Second World War, the emergence of commercial television significantly accelerated and extended advertising activity. Then, with the wave of media consolidation in the 1980s and 1990s, a handful of transnational advertising super
groups came to dominate the advertising market partly “encouraged by concentration in the media industries” as McChesney states (2004: 141). The result was an interdependent relationship in which the paramount concern of popular news media became to satisfy the needs of advertisers rather than the needs of the public and the values of specialised journalism. Advertising agencies in effect possess a financial veto on media content. When they are dissatisfied with the ratings of news channels or the volume circulation of newspapers and magazines, they can pull their advertising out so as to force changes.

Given this brute financial reality journalists have no choice but to pursue strategies designed to maximise audiences. It is in this context that so-called tabloid and sensational journalism has gradually become a popular reporting form. Recent years have also seemed the increasingly use of ‘product placement’ by news stations, where product promotion is embedded in a news story.

This practice adds additional weight to McChesney’s stricture that “journalists were not partners who ran their own businesses; they were employees. So the term professionalism was misleading about how power operated in a newsroom and how news was generated…..The claim that it was possible to provide neutral and objective news was suspect.” In short, “the genius of professionalism in journalism is that it tends to make journalists oblivious to the compromises with authority they routinely make” (McChesney, 2004: 67-8, 73).

2.3 Summing-up

As we have seen in this chapter, in the post-war period the perceived abuses of press freedom led commentators on both sides of the Atlantic to formulate theories of the
press that emphasised social responsibility alongside commercial freedom. Although some media practitioners argued that the concept of responsibility, as presented in one of most influential forms, the Commission on Freedom of the press in the USA, threatened to usher in a greater degree of interference or control by government. Others argued that the primary goal of press freedom was not uphold the rights of publishers or journalists but was rooted in citizens’ rights of access to a diversity of publications, which carried with an obligation on the part of the press to exercise responsibility to readers.

When people celebrated the collapse of Communist in Russia and the end of authoritarian rule in a number of countries that had formerly been under military rule or were one party states in the late 1980s, they dreamed of a new democratic landscape. For their part, many media practitioners were justifiably proud of their efforts to advance freedom of speech and of the media and looked forward to contributing to constructing a democratic future. At the same time, this ambition was steadily compromised by the global turn towards marketisation and the consequent consolidation of commercial media power and the weakening of regulations safeguarding the public interest. The news media appeared to be more a servant of advertising interests and the new media tycoons than a pivotal element in an emerging public sphere. In the hyper-commercialism generated by a marketised news media, democratic process has become progressively weaker and thinner and the idea of the press as a central agency in advancing a political system centred on rational deliberation governed by communicative ethics as advocated by Habermas has come to appear less and less attainable.
CHAPTER THREE
Tabloid Tales

The recent increasing commercialisation of the press has stimulated renewed academic interest in the constitution of tabloid journalism. Tabloidisation is not a new phenomena. Debate on the growing sensationalism of newspapers has a long pedigree dating back to the rise of the popular commercial press in the late 19th century, but the dominant market position achieved by contemporary tabloids such as The Sun in Britain has given the issues added salience. The downward impact on established conceptions of journalism’s duty to the cultivation of citizenship may vary in different democratic countries, and no one can exactly predict its future development. As Zelizer (2000c: ix) states, “journalism is and always has been adverse to change.” Nevertheless, a broad consensus is emerging that the shift towards tabloidisation is not contributing to strengthening democracy. This argument is particularly relevant in transitional societies such as Taiwan where democratic politics is relatively recent and remains precarious. To understand current debates, however, we need to briefly retrieve the history of tabloidisation as it unfolded in Europe and America as they too faced a transition towards more fully democratic forms of government.

3.1 The Rise of Tabloid Journalism

3.1.1 The Evolution of the Tabloid

Popular Culture and Journalism
The popular press has always drawn on elements from popular culture, in addressing readers in colloquial language and articulating ‘common sense’ understandings. From the 16th and 17th centuries onwards publishers of print media have utilised accepted and familiar patterns of thought and expression in order to reach the widest possible readership and maximise profits (Conboy, 2006: 1, referred to Burke, 1978; Ong, 1982; Watt, 1991). With the waning of government controls and the rise of market competition in the mid 19th century, however, the new cheap popular publications aimed at the expanding ranks of skilled manual and routine clerical workers became more focused than ever on capturing the widest possible social readerships. The result was “a shift away from parliamentary and political news to sport, gossip, crime and sex” (Conboy, 2006: 3-4, cited in Wiener, 1988: 54).

In the United States, this trend was spearheaded by Benjamin Day’s *New York Sun* and James Gordon Bennett’s *New York Herald* in the 1830s. These major exemplars of the new Penny Press increasingly aimed less at businessmen, professionals and politicians than working people, pioneered a more sensational and emotional style, using vivid vernaculars, simple words, and human interest stories (Sloan, 2001:18-19; Habermas, 1989: 168; Sparks, 2000c: 18; Ornebring and Jonsson, 2008: 28-9). This populist audience building strategy was further developed in the 1880s and 1890s with the development of the so-called ‘yellow journalism’ introduced by Joseph Pulitzer’s *New York World* and William Randolph Hearst’s *New York Journal* in America (Sloan, 2001: 19-20). The term ‘yellow journalism’ came from the figure of the Yellow Kid, the main protagonist (with a yellow face) in one of the early newspaper comic strips. The introduction of humorous graphic narratives was taken by critics as a signal that the popular press was now more concerned with entertainment than enlightenment, a view confirmed by the deployment of more sensational, provocative, and melodramatic modes of storytelling in news reporting.
and the emphasis on gossip, muck-raking, crime and disasters (Habermas, 1989: 168; Sloan, 2001: 19-20; Conboy, 2006: 5).

These American popular newspapers provided a model for newspapers and magazines elsewhere seeking to extend their markets by basing their appeal on melodrama and entertainment values. For example, the *Star*, launched by T. P. O’Connor in 1888, after returning to the UK from America, where he had witnessed at first hand that the best way to catch the reader’s eye in a crowded marketplace, was to use familiar phrases, unmistakable meanings, and striking layouts (Conboy, 2006: 4; Engel, 1996b: 45). But the leading British exponent of the new style was Alfred Harmsworth (later Lord Northcliffe), who launched a new paper based on the style of American newspapers, the *Daily Mail*, in 1896. Aimed at the lower middle class that needed something shorter and more readable than the journalism provided by the ‘serious’ press, it introduced banner headlines across the page and serials. It was also the first paper to introduce a woman’s section dealing with fashions and cookery. Sports and human interest stories also occupied considerable space within the paper. These innovations were a success and its circulation rapidly achieved 600,000 copies by 1899 (Engel, 1996b: 59-64; Conboy, 2006: 4). The early *Daily Mail*, however, was an unsensational paper.

The Emergence of the Tabloid Version

On New Year’s Eve, 31 December 1900, Alfred Harmsworth was invited by Joseph Pulitzer to edit his *The World* for one day as an experiment. On 1 January 1901 he issued a ‘tabloid’ version, half the size of a standard broadsheet and with no story of more than 250 words. It was immediately hailed as ‘the newspaper of the twentieth century’ and its circulation for that day rose by more than 100,000 copies (Tulloch, 2000c: 131; Pound & Harmsworth, 1959: 265-68; Conboy, 2006: 7; Sloan, 2001:
The term ‘tabloid’ originated from a British pill manufacturers Burroughs, Wellcome & Co. in 1884 as a trademark derived from a conjunction of the words tablet and alkaloid. Harmsworth stole the word and applied it to his innovatory conception of a modern mass newspaper. For him, the heart of the tabloid idea was not so much its size (though that made it easier to handle and to read on trains and buses) but its economic efficiency as compared with the time consuming ‘old journalism.’ Like Burroughs and Wellcome’s pill, it was based on compression techniques, short paragraphs and short, simple sentences. Not all half broadsheets titles are tabloids, however, and the term has come to refer to the content and design rather than the size (Sparks and Tulloch eds., 2000c: 10, 92, 131, 133, 146; Sloan, 2001: 25; Ornebring and Jonsson, 2008: 28).

In 1903 Harmsworth launched the Daily Mirror “the first attempt to produce a regular popular newspaper” (Conboy, 2006: 7) in tabloid format and aimed at the female readership with a large number of different types of photographs on the front page. The original aim of targeting women was not a success and the title soon reverted to seeking a general readership. In 1910 the Daily Mirror pioneered the idea of the exclusive. For example, an exclusive photo of Edward VII’s dead body was put in the front page (Conboy, 2006: 7; Engel, 1996b: 147-8, 152). After the First World War, Capt. Joseph Medill Patterson and Col. Robert R. McCormick, who had been partners at the Chicago Tribune before, took Harmsworth’s advice and published the Illustrated Daily News, the first successful tabloid daily in North America (Sloan, 2001: 25).
3.1.2 The Current Tabloids

Following the shifts in politics, economy and technology throughout the world in the 1980s, tabloid has ceased to be a description of a particular type of publication and has become a more general term for a style of journalism and an attitude to reporting that has become increasingly prevalent across the range of news media. This process can be characterised as the ‘tabloidisation’ of news. There are, however, important national differences in its operation. In the US, as Bird (2000c: 213 cited in Bird, 1992) notes, “the term ‘tabloid’ usually refers to weekly supermarket tabloids, which cover no traditional ‘hard’ news, but only personality-driven feature stories.” With the possible exception of USA Today, the daily press in America, is regional rather than national. Most titles are broadsheet in style, so readers are likely to buy both regional papers and weekly tabloids.

In the UK, it is still customary to draw a sharp distinction between the ‘quality’ and ‘tabloid’ press, which implies that there is a continuing segmentation of audiences—“readers of the Guardian do not read the Sun and vice versa” (Bird, 2000c: 213; Sparks, 1992: 37-9). However, with the increasing generalisation of the tabloid tendency, the dividing line between quality (or serious) and tabloid (or popular) papers is becoming increasingly blurred. Some British scholars point out that elements of tabloid format and content have emerged in broadsheet papers; particularly on the front page. The Guardian offers a useful illustrative exemplar while the Independent “with its ‘youthful good looks and verve’ has acted as the catalyst for the major redesign of the Guardian in 1988 and subsequently of the Daily Telegraph” (Franklin, 2008: 15, referred to Engel, 1996a: 3). As a consequence, the standard components of the broadsheet front page are now concerned with “banner headlines, alliterative and ‘punny’ headlines, large print, less text, shorter words,
bigger pictures, colour pictures and more of them” (Franklin, 2008: 15).

Sampson (1996: 44) argues that “quality journalists always felt some tensions between truth and readability. But they despised tabloids for their sensationalism and lack of scruple, and never mentioned them in their columns…..But since the 1980s the frontier between qualities and popular papers has virtually disappeared.” In other words, “the quality broadsheet press has changed its news agenda to one closer to that of the tabloids, that it has increased the amount of visual material, shortened its articles, and shifted the balance of editorial copy away from hard news reporting towards soft news, features, and columns” (Sparks, 2000c: 7). As a consequence, as Colin Sparks has argued:

The serious business of informing the public about the commonweal and the profitable business of attracting readers, viewers, and listeners with sensational entertainment confront each other as rival professional models…..If there is a process of tabloidisation going on, then it means that content marked by these features of sensational entertainment is becoming more common and driving out the serious journalism of the past (2000c: 10).

The tabloid wind also has blown into Western Europe and post-Communist East Central European countries. In Hungary, for instance, the press system “has been transformed from a Communist to a market-led liberal democratic media system during the post-Communist period,” and “the role of the media shifted from being primarily a propaganda tool to assuming more entertainment functions in the 1980s” (Gulyas, 2000c: 111-2). Compared to quality newspapers, tabloids “focus on ‘light’ news and human interest stories, and the articles are shorter” (Gulyas, 2000c: 124). However, Hungarian tabloids still differ from those in Britain. “There are more news stories on the front pages of Hungarian tabloids, the headlines are smaller, and there are fewer advertisements in the papers” (ibid.).
Interestingly, Germany appears to be an exception to the onwards march of tabloidisation. As Klaus Schonbach (2000c: 63, 67-8, 72) has argued, tabloid newspapers do not seem to work in Germany because the reader does not appreciate the mixture of information and entertainment. Even though more visual and vivid layouts are offered in the papers, German readers still preferred reading serious information rather than gossip in the politics or economics sections. “Those who want to be entertained watch television instead or read magazines” (Schonbach, 2000c: 72).

But this is an exception. Overall, the growing general influence of the tabloid ethos would seem to support the contention that “non-serious newspapers have ‘abandoned the public sphere’” (Conboy, 2006:10).

### 3.1.3 Tabloid TV Journalism

To talk of the current trend towards tabloidisation is to talk not simply of newspapers but also of broadcasting, and in particular television. Since the late 1950s and early 1960s the prevalence of television became a worldwide tendency. Initially, during the 1950s, television was a minority medium but over time, as set ownership steadily increased, it came increasingly to dominate people’s media time and attention. Most people would rather sit on the cozy sofa or couch watching evening TV news than reading newspapers a situation that had a negative impact on the press, with some newspapers closing and others are struggling to get their audience back (Bourdieu, 1998: 41-4). With the recent acceleration of commercialisation and marketisation, and the proliferation of channels, television has come to occupy even more of people’s media time as well as a larger slice of advertising revenues. However, given the contested nature of the attention economy TV journalists have had to become more
concerned with gaining an exclusive and promoting the ratings, to the detriment of established concepts of the role of news and information in the democratic process. As Bourdieu has argued:

Through the increased symbolic power of television overall, and, among the competing kinds of television, the increased influence of the most cynical and most successful seekers after anything sensational, spectacular, or extraordinary, a certain vision of the news comes to take over the whole of the journalistic field. Until recently, this conception of the news had been relegated to the tabloids specialising in sports and human interest stories. Similarly, a certain category of journalists, recruited at great cost for their ability immediately to fulfill the expectations of the public that expects the least—journalists who are necessarily the most cynical, the most indifferent to any kind of structural analysis, and even more reluctant to engage in any inquiry that touches on politics—tends to impose on all journalists its ‘values,’ its preferences, its ways of being and speaking, its ‘human ideal.’ Pushed by competition for marketshare, television networks have greater and greater recourse to the tried and true formulas of tabloid journalism, with emphasis (when not the entire newscast) devoted to human interest stories or sports…..human interest stories create a political vacuum. They depoliticize and reduce what goes on in the world to the level of anecdote or scandal (1998: 50-1).

Different Performance in Different Democracies

Bourdieu’s critique points to a universal phenomenon in democratic societies which is distinguished only by its extent. During the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, the US tabloid television supplanted the soap opera and grew up to a point “of being an expected part of the television lineup” (Glynn, 2000: 2, 100). In 1988 a new type of ‘actuality programming’ named America’s Most Wanted on the young Fox Television Network prompted over a thousand viewers to phone in to help police capture the fugitives. The show’s host, John Walsh, seemed to engage in “surroundings resembling a busy police precinct house or FBI office” and “looked into the television
camera with sincerity and firm resolve” (Glynn, 2000: 1). In the first two seasons, “viewers’ phone-in tips led to the capture of about one fugitive per week. By the time the show reached its fifth anniversary on the air in 1993, America’s Most Wanted attributed the capture of 250 fugitives to what Walsh calls ‘the partnership’ between media, audiences, and law enforcement” (ibid.). This new genre of spectacle and sensation, with its emphasis on audience involvement, was variously labeled ‘reality-based,’ ‘infotainment,’ ‘confrontainment,’ ‘trash TV,’ or more simply, ‘tabloid television’ (Glynn, 2000: 2). The former presenter of A Current Affair, Maury Povich, widely credited with pioneering the US tabloid TV news style in the latter half of the 1980s, openly mocked the established canon of impartiality that had governed news presentation by frequently shaking his head and scowling on air. As Andrew Calabrese (2000c: 45) notes, faced with this aggressive competition, “Not surprisingly, the major television networks—ABC, NBC, CBS—have moved progressively into the tabloid genre, with its emphasis on human drama, celebrity, scandal, and crime.” He further emphasises that “Today, there is widespread concern that tabloid television is not just a niche-market phenomenon, but rather that its principles and practices are infecting the mainstream, so to speak, in a race to the bottom of public taste” (ibid.).

In contrast, in Western Europe, there is a long history of public service broadcasting that, unlike the commercial system that has dominated US broadcasting from the outset, presents broadcasting as a core cultural resource for the responsible exercise of citizenship rather than a conduit for advertising. Since the 1980s, however, due to deregulation, the abolition of public broadcasting monopolies and the proliferation of commercial channels, the climate had changed placing the traditional conception of ‘public service’ under increasing pressure. As Brants and Bens note:

**Up to the early 1980s the public broadcasting system dominated in the 17**
countries of Western Europe. …there were only four commercial channels, in only three countries (Luxembourg, Finland and the UK). At the end of the 20th century the balance has shifted….cable, satellite and a wind of liberalisation have opened up markets for private companies in most West European countries and created a different broadcasting system (2000: 10).

Despite facing the threat of commercial channels and economic crisis, public broadcasters remain tied by their statutory obligation and responsibility to provide accurate and impartial coverage of current events and issues. Commercial competitors, in contrast, are primarily intent on selling audiences to advertisers, and are consequently more likely to mobilise tabloid journalism in pursuit of this goal. Even so, it remains the case that newspapers or magazines remain more likely to be tabloidised and sensational than television. As Brants and Bens argue:

Although there is a difference between public and private stations, there is no confirmation of a structural convergence of the former with the latter in the style and format of informational programmes. Both commercial and public channels in Germany have increased their political information in the news since the mid-1980s; commercial competition in Denmark has led to more varied news from more sources; and Dutch news increased its number of national political items (Brants, 1998). Public TV in Spain, however, has seen a dramatic homogenisation of programme supply. In spite of a discussion about the BBC ‘dumbing down’, media content in the UK still falls under strict programme obligations. Since the arrival of BSkyB in the early 1990s, which has no such obligations, ITV became ‘a much more belligerently commercial network’ (Tunstall, 1997: 252). However, on both BBC and ITV information programmes are important (2000: 19).

Mats Ekstrom (2000: 465), a Swedish scholar, very usefully suggests that “the communicative strategies of TV journalism, and audience involvement, take place within three main modes of communication: information, storytelling, and attraction.” Information refers to the provision of ‘relevant,’ ‘interesting,’ and ‘reliable’ message for viewers. Storytelling involves telling ‘dramatic’ and ‘exciting’ stories. Attraction
entails offering ‘shocking,’ ‘spectacular,’ and ‘extraordinary’ news to fascinate viewers. This allows us to think of tabloidisation as an audience building strategy based around attraction and public service broadcasting as a project based around information, with both utilising storytelling but with tabloid forms tending to employ melodrama rather than other forms of narrative organisation.

Within Asian societies, during the two decades from the mid-1980s to 2005 “journalism in Japan has undergone substantial change” (Yada, 2007: 175). Specifically, the format of so-called ‘hard news’ on political and social issues has been turning into ‘soft news’ that is “increasingly presented in a simplified and trivialized manner” (ibid.). This shift towards entertainment formats derives from “a culture of waido-sho (TV show that gained popularity through sensationalism, scandal and gossip)” (ibid.).

The waido-sho cover all kinds of news and information, such as murders, accidents, disasters, scandals, gossip and sport. At the same time, hard news on political and economic issues is reported in a similar manner. Such an approach to mixing up hard and soft news results in little distinction being made between the two (Yada, 2007: 176).

This sort of waido-sho culture has been seriously criticised by a Japanese journalist Toshio Hara, a former Kyodo News Service supervising editor, who argues that “It is a crime that waido-sho operate under a rule of ‘interested in everything’ without a sincere consideration of human rights. In fact, they along with viewers enjoy the unhappiness or misery of others” (Yada, 2007: 177).

In South Korea, the political reform of the late 1980s ushered in a democratic regime. Even so, Korean broadcasting remains tightly bound by strict regulations and has no national news channels so that terrestrial TV news performance seems, generally speaking, to maintain its standard although news on cable/satellite channels
are more tabloidised from time to time.

Compare Korean situation with Taiwan’s, since Martial Law was lifted in 1987 and newspapers and cable/satellite news channels have flourished, during the 1990s Taiwan has entered a new epoch. There has been fierce competition in the newspaper industry, especially from the Hong Kong tabloid media company Next Media Limited which arrived Taiwan in 2001 and stimulated a paparazzi culture and tabloidised news. Taiwanese TV news (there are six news channels now) has also been engulfed in a market war. Following the American example, large fleets of Taiwan’s SNG (satellite newsgathering) vehicles are often assigned by satellite-based channels to deliver live coverage of important events and breaking news. As we will see from the first hand testimonies of journalists working on contentious stories, explored in more detail in later chapters, making attractive news and raising the ratings have become essential duties for TV reporters. Sensational and spectacular footage is shown on TV channels almost every day. Indeed, on the basis of the case studies presented later in this thesis, there is a plausible argument to be made that tabloidisation in Taiwan is even more intense than in other advanced countries.

3.1.4 Tabloid Debates

Writing from within a framework rooted in an idealised model of the role of media in democracy, most media scholars and many practitioners regard tabloidisation as marking of decline in journalism’s mission to inform. They see it eroding journalistic ethics and undermining the role of mass media in constituting a vibrant public sphere. They characterise tabloid titles as less accurate and reliable than the serious press and condemn them as a threat to the vitality of liberal democracy (Glynn, 2000: 4; Sparks,
2000c: 2; Gripsrud, 2008: 34). There are, however, dissenting voices with some commentators arguing that tabloid papers “are more concerned with getting it right than their more august colleagues: they have to be, because the sort of things they write about are more likely to land them in court” (Sparks, 2000c: 9).

In a 1997 meeting organised by the British Foreign Office for editors and journalists from Britain, the US, France and Germany, a number of participants accused the quality British broadsheets of ‘dumbing down’ under the impact of Rupert Murdoch, proprietor of the country’s best selling daily tabloid, The Sun and owner of The Times, formerly the acknowledged newspaper of record (Sparks, 2000c: 8; Guttenplan, 1997: 18). The concept of ‘dumbing down’ implies that news coverage has reduced both its breadth and depth in favour of simplified, short articles which often involve celebrity gossip, entertainment, and sensationalism. Explaining this tendency, an editor of the London Times, Peter Stothard, argued that the news market in Britain is unlike the US. “There are five quality dailies published in London, whereas no US city has more than one, which with the exception of New York, which arguably has two. That competition drives the British serious newspapers to innovate and find ways of reaching out both to their existing readers and to potential new ones” (Sparks, 2000c: 8). As Sparks notes, summarising the arguments, “if, in the United States, the tabloid is seen as threatening to destroy news, in some other countries it is seen as one of the ways that the news can be rescued from irrelevance to the lives of the mass of people who would otherwise reject it entirely” (Sparks, 2000c: 9).

At the same time, other commentators have defended the tabloid media. John Fiske, who has a positive attitude towards tabloid journalism, offers an example from the cover of Weekly World News published on 15 March 1988 which was full of sensational, excessive language, banner headlines and illustrations, proposing that such a publication “is evidence of the extent of dissatisfaction in a society, particularly
among those who feel powerless to change their situation” (Fiske, 1989: 117; Gripsrud, 2008: 34). For the disaffected and the disadvantaged who are seen as a subordinate and excluded class, he goes on to argue, “such sensational exposures of the inadequacy of the norms are pleasurable in themselves, especially for those whose material social experience is ‘abnormal,’ that is, those who, if they adopted the dominant bourgeois values, would have to make sense of their own lives as ‘failures’” (Fiske, 1989: 116). He goes on to claim that even the more fantastic stories in supermarket tabloids offer “an alternative reality to the official one and carries utopianised fantasies of emancipation from the constraints of poverty and perceived social failure” (Sparks, 2000c: 25; Fiske, 1992: 50). In other words, tabloidisation “is a matter of rehabilitating popular taste against the unwonted disparagement of the educated and the powerful” (Sparks, 2000c: 25).

This analysis rests on the assumption that ‘middlebrow’ and ‘highbrow’ audiences tend not to read or watch tabloid or sensational news. But as Gulyas’s work in Hungary suggests, this argument does not square with the empirical evidence.

An interesting feature of the Hungarian case is that people with average or higher incomes, and in better financial situations, provide a larger share of tabloid readership.....This is mainly due to the fact that tabloids are read as a second newspaper by this group of society, which can afford to buy two newspapers a day.....Higher percentages in the young and middle-age group read tabloids, while the ratio is considerably lower in the old-age group (2000c: 123).

In the light of the concentration on personalities and private issues in the tabloid media, Ian Connell, commenting on the British tabloids, advances the view that:

Contrary to what has often been claimed about the tabloid press, they are every bit as preoccupied with social differences and the tensions which arise from them as serious journalists or for that matter academic sociologists. The
focus on personality and privilege is one of the ways in which these differences and tensions are represented as concrete and recognisable rather than as remote, abstract categories (1992: 82).

A particularly spirited defence of tabloids has been mounted by the former editor of one of the major American tabloids, Bill Burt. He is proud of his success in building the National Examiner’s circulation to over one million in less than three years. For him that fact that much elitist criticism, “sneers at the tastes of millions of people” (Bird, 1992: 90) confirms that “critics misunderstand the nature of tabloids in comparing them unfavourably with ‘straight’ newspapers” and fail to understand that “tabloids are primarily for fun and should not be taken too seriously” (Bird, 1992: 90-91). Comparing tabloid reporting methods with those used in ‘serious’ journalism, he and his staff contend that “‘respectable’ journalism has little relevance to the lives of many Americans, and that their product offers an alternative view of the world that intellectuals might prefer to think does not exist…..Tabloids are entertainment that also informs; newspapers are informational….., but they must also entertain to survive” (ibid.).

As Taylor notes, “Tabloid journalism is the direct application of capitalism to events and ideas. Profit, not ethics, is the prevailing motivation” (Taylor, 1991: 301). Brian Hitchen, the editor of London’s Daily Star, points out, “Information is only a commodity, like bread. It’s the value of an individual’s information to a commercial organisation. We sell it, so why shouldn’t they?” (ibid.).

3.2 The Features of Tabloidisation

We can identify four major defining features of tabloidisation that are particularly salient to the Taiwanese case studies to be presented in later chapters.
An Emphasis on Celebrity Culture

The term ‘celebrity’ has moved from its original meaning of figures worthy of celebration for their significant contributions to culture and society to its present focus on the stars of the sports and entertainment industries. As Alberoni points out, in contrast to the power elites who operate largely out of the public gaze and whose decisions determine the material structures of society, present-day celebrities “are, institutionally, a ‘powerless elite’” who are at the same time “the objects of an interest over which they have no control” (cited in Turner et al., 2008: 141). In practice, however, “the distinction between celebrity and other kinds of social or political elite status is becoming less clear as the signs of celebrity drive out less powerful alternatives” (Turner et al., 2008: 142). As presentational style and the manipulation of image has become more central to political performance, so politicians in particular have been pulled into the orbit of celebrity culture.

In order to advance their professional careers, celebrities have long courted favourable publicity but the acceleration of commercialisation has had the effect of turning “celebrities into commodities, products to be marketed in their own right or to be used to market other commodities. The celebrity’s ultimate power is to sell the commodity that is themselves…..the marketing of the celebrity-as-commodity has been deployed as a major strategy in the commercial construction of social identity. Within a highly fragmented but increasingly globalised mass market, the use of celebrities has become a very efficient method of organising cultural significance
around products, services and commercially available identities” (Turner et al., 2008: 144).

In his book, *The Image*, the American historian, Daniel J. Boorstin, in the early 1960s coined the phrase ‘pseudo event’ to describe events that would not have occurred otherwise but have been constructed solely for the purpose of attracting news coverage. He saw the manipulation of image as central to this process and “the rise of the image as a form of self-deceit, a kind of ‘democracy of pseudo-events’ in which ‘anyone can become a celebrity, if only he can get into the news and stay there’” (Taylor, 1991: 94).

Orchestrating carefully planned photo opportunities, that show them in the best possible light, is a major preoccupation for both celebrities and public figures but for tabloid journalists, seeking to maximise audiences however, finding ways to penetrate behind the carefully constructed wall erected by public relations to present the ‘hidden’ or ‘real’ person behind the image has become a major goal. One of the key devices for achieving this is candid photography that captures celebrities off guard, and often without their knowledge or consent, in private situations. This paparazzi culture aims to illuminate the backstage regions behind the front of stage performances.

**The Rise of Paparazzi Culture**

The term ‘paparazzi’ comes originally from the character *Paparazzo*, a tabloid photojournalist who hunted for targets among the circle of high society, in the Italian film *La Dolce Vita* (The Sweet Life) directed by Federico Fellini in 1960. After the film was released in Italy, the word paparazzo became synonymous with intrusive photographers who probe into the private lives of celebrities and public figures.

The dominant image of the paparazzi is of a photographer carrying a high-tech
camera and driving a fast car or motorbike to follow the tracks of public figures and clandestinely shooting their “doings and ways of life” in order to produce images that can form the hook or focus for tabloid news. Given the intense competition to obtain the most revealing shot and the rush to publish in order to steal a march on the opposition, there is little time for verification or checking. In recent years, the privacy of celebrities singled out for attention has been further eroded by the use of long lenses that can take shots over considerable distances, by the development of ever more compact video technology, and by the transition to digital technologies that allow images to be instantly uploaded to the newsroom. At the same time, the old adage that a picture never lies has been comprehensively undermined by digital processing that allows images to enhanced or ‘altered’ in a wide variety of ways for greater impact.

**Sensationalised Coverage**

Sensationalism is the third major feature of tabloidisation. It refers both to the *focus* of reporting on material such as crime, scandal and disaster and to the *style* of presentation using banner headlines, impactful photographs and dramatic language. As Conboy has argued, language is “more important in the make-up of a tabloid than the format itself” (2006: 14) and is “employed across the tabloid paper in a systematic way to build a composite version of the vocabulary and style of their ideal average reader; a sort of vernacular ventriloquism” (Conboy, 2006: 14; Conboy, 2002: 162). This point is supported by Dijk who argued that “dramatisation, exaggeration, and hyperbole are the main rhetorical tricks of the popular press to make the news more exciting” (Dijk, 1991: 219; Conboy, 2006: 16).

Television news, however, employs emotional footage to make an impact, a point underlined by the following conversation between a seasoned veteran of broadcast
journalism and a fledgling reporter, recounted by Edwin Diamond in his discussion of television news.

I’m going to tell you a story and after I tell it, you will know all there is to know about television news….The executives of this station [in New York] were watching all three news shows one night. There had been a fire in a Roman Catholic orphanage on Staten Island. One executive complained that a rival station had better film coverage. ‘Their flames are higher than ours’, he said. But another executive countered: ‘Yes, but our nun is crying harder than theirs…..’ (Longer, 1992: 113; 1998: 1 cited in Diamond, 1975: xi).

Bird (2000c: 221) argues that this search for sensation constructs American local news as “a litany of unconnected, usually violent images, often of events that have no immediate relevance to the region in which they're shown-freeway pile-ups, fires, police chases and stand-offs.” Where direct imagery of an event is unobtainable tabloid TV news has developed the “reenactment or dramatisaton” whereby “events are re-created by actors for the cameras” (ibid.).

**The Articulation of ‘Common Sense’**

The final defining feature of tabloidisation is its strategy of constructing its audience by articulating prevailing common sense assumptions and preoccupations.

In political science, there is a substantial literature detailing how politicians have sought to assemble broadly based coalitions of support by appealing to the shared values and world views that unite ‘the people’, transcending social cleavages and constituting them as “a unity…a single entity devoid of fundamental divisions” (Taggart, 2000: 92). These populist strategies find there commercial equivalent in news organisations’ efforts to maximise audiences by organising presentations around prevailing popular ideas and preoccupations. To the extent that this ‘commercial populism’ reinforces rather than challenges common sense thinking it can be
considered conservative and even reactionary, as in cases where an idealised image of ‘the people’ is bolstered by stigmatising minority groups. At the same time, in seeking to ventriloquise the voice of ‘the people’ news organisations also tap into popular distrust of authority, particularly of politicians and the public bureaucracies that govern everyday lives and are funded out of taxation, zeroing in on their inefficiencies, mismanagement, episodes of corruption, and the tension between the advancement of private interests and defence of the public good. Political scandals are a particularly potent focus for popular distrust. Since, as we saw earlier, in democratic theory politicians are elected in order to translate public opinion into workable public policies, and are required to place the public interest before their own, or others’ private interests, their betrayal of or departure from these ideals is particularly likely to fuel public distrust and anger. Added to which, lapses in their private behaviour are widely taken as indicators of poor judgment or moral lapses that may well recur in their public lives and undermine their capacity to discharge their duties effectively and sincerely.

3.3 Political Scandal

As John Thompson points out, scandals are not new and the term can be traced back to Greek, Latin and early Judaeo-Christian thought.

In terms of its etymological origins, the word probably derives from the Indo-Germanic root *skand-, meaning to spring or leap. Early Greek derivatives, such as the word *skandalon, were used in a figurative way to signify a trap, an obstacle or a ‘cause of moral stumbling.’ The word was first used in a religious context in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament.....Moreover, with the development of the Latin word *scandalum and its diffusion into Romance languages, the religious connotation was
gradually attenuated and supplemented by other senses. Hence the word *escadre* in Old French (eleventh century); this was derived from *scandalum* and meant both ‘scandal’ and ‘calumny’. Hence also the Old French word *esclandre*, from which the English word *slander* was derived (Thompson, 2000: 12).

The word ‘scandal’ first appeared in English, however, in the 16th century when it took on its modern meaning, referring to “actions or events involving certain kinds of transgressions which become known to others and are sufficiently serious to elicit a public response” (Thompson, 2000: 13). At that time, scandal might be spread primarily by gossip and rumour. With rise of news media, however, “scandals were no longer only local events which break out in contexts of face-to-face interaction” (Thompson, 2000: 31). A new form developed which Thompson calls “mediated scandal” in which scandals are not simply “reported by the media and exist independently of them: they are, in varying ways and to some extent, constituted by mediated forms of communication” (ibid.). In the early 1880s, for instance, an adulterous affair between Mr. Charles Parnell, the Member of Parliament (MP) for Cork and the leader of the Irish parliamentary party at Westminster, and Mrs. Katharine O’Shea, the wife of Captain O’Shea elected as MP for County Clare, had been exposed by the press and provoked heated debates. Since then, the sexual lives of politicians from Jeremy Thorpe in Britain to Edward Kennedy and Bill Clinton in the United States have become a staple of popular reporting. As Thompson (Thompson, 2000:120) argues, however, sex scandals involving the transgression of sexual codes are only one type of political scandal. There are also financial scandals, involving the misuse of economic resources, and power scandals, involving the abuse of political power. But why is political scandal more prevalent in liberal democracies today? Five factors have been suggested by Thompson.

To begin with, mediated forms of communication have simultaneously made
political leaders increasingly visible and intensified conflicts over the terms of visibility. On the one hand, politicians must “use the media as a way of achieving visibility in the political field” (Thompson, 2000: 108) while, on the other hand, “hidden activities which conflict with the images that leaders wish to project will emerge in the public domain, triggering off a series of events which may spin out of control” (ibid.).

Secondly, increasingly sophisticated technologies, such as the secret tape-recording, long-distance cameras, covert interception, and digital video cameras, have created more opportunities for the public to peek at politicians’ back-region behaviour in ways that may generate unanticipated and serious outcomes (Thompson, 2000: 109).

Thirdly, the changing culture of journalism formed by the new social movements, including the civil rights movement, the campaign against the Vietnam War, the women’s movement, and the gay rights movement, led to the renewal of investigative reporting. In the course of the 1960s and early 1970s a number of newspapers in the United States, including *Newsday*, the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Boston Globe*, set up special teams of investigative reporters (Thompson, 2000: 110). This change helps “the search for hidden secrets, and the disclosure of these secrets if and when they were found” (Thompson, 2000: 111). Nevertheless, there is always the danger that “investigative reporting would easily shade into a kind of prurient reporting in which hidden aspects of the exercise of power would be mixed together with hidden aspects of the lives of the powerful” (ibid.).

Fourthly, there has been a change in the political culture. With “the gradual decline of class-based party politics…..Parties could no longer rely on the old social classes which once provided the core of their electoral support” (ibid.). Instead, “the credibility and trustworthiness of political leaders becomes an increasingly important issue” (Thompson, 2000: 112). Thus political scandal became more significance as a
sort of “credibility test for the politics of trust” (ibid.). In this view, “we can understand why a scandal concerning the private life of a politician is seen by many people to have broader political significance” (ibid.).

Fifthly, a factor particularly associated with the American context but not just restricted to the US is the growing legalisation of political life. In 1978, for example, “the Ethics in Government Act, passed in the aftermath of Watergate, was a landmark in the legal regulation of political life” (Thompson, 2000: 114), requiring “high-ranking officials to disclose details of their financial affairs and tightened the rules on conflicts of interest” (ibid.). A significant new office was created, the special prosecutor, appointed by a federal court and independent of the Justice Department, whose incumbent could be called on to look into cases of possible law-breaking. In British law, “a government official suspected of criminal wrongdoing can be subjected to the normal procedures of criminal investigation. Moreover, prime ministers can set up committees of inquiry to investigate matters of public interest and to make recommendations which can be enacted in law” (ibid.).

Taken together the above factors have combined to make the coverage of political scandal more prevalent, but, as we shall see later, in the case of the scandal surrounding a Taiwanese female politician, under the impact of tabloidisation, investigative journalism can involve unwarranted intrusions into politicians’ private lives, and as in this incident, which involved a magazine releasing a graphic covert video recording of the politician having sex with a married man, totally destroyed careers and reputations.
3.4 Tragic Coverage

Another of the Taiwanese case studies, of the news coverage of the suicide of a celebrated popular actor and comedian, highlights another long-standing characteristic of tabloid reporting, the sensationalist coverage of human tragedies and the focus on accidents, suicides, murders, and disease using gory or shocking images and exaggerated language. This kind of material raises the question of how journalists should respond to other people’s suffering and how far they are justified in intruding into private grief.

As Sanders has argued, reporting tragedies is necessarily intrusive and fraught with difficulties (2003: 93-4). On the one hand, journalists have a professional responsibility to cover incidents comprehensively and this involves speaking to people concerned in an accident, bereaved parents or, students whose classmates have been shot. At the same time, they are themselves witnesses to soldiers being killed on the battlefield, and patients/refugees dying from disease or famine. On the other hand, they must exercise sensitivity in deciding what material it is appropriate to cover and how to present it. “Being a good reporter is not being emptied of humanity” (Sanders, 2003: 94); and practicing compassion is a necessary attribute of good reporting. Take the Dunblane incident as an example.

An unemployed man walked into the primary school in the Scottish town of Dunblane on 13 March 1996 and shot dead sixteen children and a teacher. He then committed suicide. During the heartrending aftermath some journalists approached the bereaved parents and used long-lens cameras to take pictures of grieving relatives. In the end, without precedent, the broadcasters pulled out from covering the funerals to avoid further intrusion into the families’ grief. Not all the journalists approved of this decision however. As one ITN (Independent Television News) journalist said:
“…A policy of withdrawing from news because the participants in a situation may be upset by our presence makes me very uneasy” (Sanders, 2003: 93; Thomson cited in IPI report, 1996:23). This remark illustrates perfectly the permanent tension between the professional desire to report fully and the journalists’ private sympathy, and even identification, with the victims.

Images, because of their immediacy and graphic nature, pose particular dilemmas. During the War in Vietnam, a Buddhist monk who appeared on the streets of Saigon to protest against the war burnt himself to death. The whole event was caught on camera by two AP (Associated Press) journalists and shown across the world. Later one of them explained that “he could perhaps have prevented the immolation by rushing at the monk and kicking the gasoline away if I’d had my wits about me. As a human being I wanted to; as a reporter I couldn’t” (Sanders, 2003: 102 cited in Arnett, 1994: 119). This decision can be viewed as displaying “a lack of misericordia 【merciful heart】 than the triumph of professionalism” (Sanders, 2003: 102).

As Sanders puts it: “Information about suffering is not simply about transmitting data; it is about creating an emotional link between you and the person who suffers to engender compassion” (Sanders, 2003: 104). Yet today, journalists working in a climate characterised by tabloidisation are under increasing pressure to jettison a humanistic philosophy in favour of securing the most dramatic and impactful coverage. As the American journalist Tom Palmer has noted: “Media moguls have long known that suffering, rather than good news, sells. People being killed is definitely a good, objective criteria for whether a story is important. And innocent people being killed is better” (Sanders, 2003: 103 cited in Moeller, 1999: 34). Randall describes good journalists who “are hard, cynical, cold, calculating and maybe even a little cruel. The sort of people who can look a corpse in the eye –and smile” (2000: 122).
Tabloid journalists are under particular pressure to be ‘calculating’ and obtain bereaved family details, interviews with the victim’s family/relatives, photographs of the victim that can be converted into stories focusing on individualism and personalisation and published under arresting headlines on the front page. During the outbreak of ‘mad cow’ disease in Britain in 1996 and 1997, for instance, the four London-based tabloid papers- the *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror*, and *Sun*- used eye-catching headlines which arguably reinforced the public sense of serious risk and helped fuel a popular panic (Brookes, 2000c: 200-6). The Taiwanese reporting of the SARS epidemic in 2003, examined in detail in a later chapter, is another case in point where long running coverage heightened public concern and engendered substantial debate and controversy within both journalistic and government circles. At the same time, the coverage also drew attention to inefficiencies and failures in the official response to the crisis that played an important role in devising better strategies for responding to future emergencies. The question was one of where the balance should be struck, between graphic reporting of the deaths of SARS patients and the distress of relatives, coverage that could fuel unnecessary levels of public anxiety and panic, and the necessary investigation and evaluation of the way the hospitals, local authorities and national government, handled the crisis.

### 3.5 Summing-up

This chapter has traced the rise of tabloid journalism, and it recent expansion presented its key defining features and sketched in some of the main features of the debates it has prompted.

Although the process of tabloidisation has developed over a long period within
Western culture, since the 1980s a combination of economic, political and technological changes has infused it with a fresh dynamism. Tabloids are mainly associated by their critics with the negative values of sensationalism and commercialisation, while sympathetic academic commentators and media practitioners point out that this sort of popular journalism can also be seen as a successful attempt to articulate the views and preoccupations of the majority. As we noted earlier, this pursuit of commercial populism has contradictory possibilities, driving investigations of mismanagement and misbehaviour by those holding public office on the one hand while continually pushing the boundaries of intrusion into private lives on the other.

Additionally, in our discussion of the defining features of tabloidisation we have singled out for particular attention—an emphasis on celebrity culture, the rise of paparazzi culture, sensationalised coverage, the articulation of common sense of the particular salience of political scandal and tragic coverage—provides essential general context for the analysis of Taiwan’s tabloidisation and the case studies we have chosen to illustrate its dynamics.
Part II

The Trend of the News Media in Contemporary
Taiwan
CHAPTER FOUR
Taiwanese Transformations:
Democratisation and Commercialisation

Since the lifting of Martial Law, Taiwan has experienced a rapid economic transformation from state-directed development to market-led growth, highly advanced technological development, and a major political shift, from single party rule to democratic government based on party competition. These transitions have had a major impact on the Taiwanese media environment leading on the one hand to rapid growth and intensified competition and on the other to a substantial increase in the freedom accorded to journalist to report the news and comment on current events and issues.

Every year Freedom House, a non-profit institution, publishes an annual survey of media freedom worldwide, ‘Freedom of the Press’, which covers 195 countries and territories. Their criteria for evaluating degrees of freedom is based on Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the right includes the freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers.” They assess the level of press freedom in each country in terms of the three categories: the legal environment (0-30 points), the political environment (0-40 points), and the economic environment (0-30 points). A country’s score is based on the totals for the three categories: a score of 0-30 places the country in the Free press group; 31-60 in the Partly Free; and 61-100 in the Not Free press group (Karlekar et al., 2004: ix-xii,10). Since the assignment of scores is necessarily
subjective, the accuracy and validity of the results is open to dispute, and some may question why most Northern European states are ranked higher than the US, Britain and Germany. But as the only global guide compiled on an annual basis it at least allows for some sort of comparison. In 2008 Taiwan’s score was 20 placing it in the ‘Free press’ group with an overall ranking of No. 32 in the world (Karlekar et al. 2008).

These figures, however, only detail the general framework within which the news media operate, they say nothing about media performance. In the case of Taiwan they conceal the crucial shift from serious journalism to tabloid news that has taken place as a direct result of market liberalisation. Before looking at the development of tabloidisation in Taiwan, however, we first need to sketch in the general context by outlining the development of the Taiwanese media and the transition that has taken place in recent years. This is the task of this current chapter.

4.1 The History of Taiwan and Its Media

Before looking in more detail at contemporary developments and transitions in Taiwan’s media, we first need to trace island’s development to 1949 and the emergence of the early media system.

4.1.1 The History of Taiwan

The Republic of China (R.O.C.) as Taiwan is officially designated is located on the Western Pacific Rim to the southeast of mainland China from which it is separated by the Taiwan Strait. It is a small island and its shape looks like a sweet potato (figure 4.1)
but with a high population density over 23 million. According to archaeologists’
discoveries and suggestions, the earliest inhabitants came from either southeastern

**Figure 4.1 The location of Taiwan in Asia-Pacific**

Source: from the Government Information Office (GIO) of the
Republic of China
Website: http://www.gio.gov.tw/taiwan-website/2-visitor/map/index.htm

China or Austronesia (太平洋南部諸島) around five or six thousand years ago (Liu,
2004:1; Wang, 2001: 7; Lee, 1993: 29). In the 17th century, a number of *han ren* (Han
person\(^1\) from the southeastern provinces Fujian and Guangdong in China began immigrating to Taiwan to seek a new life free from war, famine and poverty (Brown, 2004c: 35; Wang, 2001: 2). In the 1580s the first European Portuguese explorers sailed down the west coast of island and, according to legend, were struck with its beauty and named it ‘\textit{Ilha Formosa}’—‘beautiful island’ (MacLeod, 1923: 2; Copper, 1996c: 24-5; Davidson, 1903: 9-10). Soon afterwards, Taiwan was invaded by the Dutch and the Spanish. During this initial period of colonisation, Han immigration to Taiwan not only continued but increased and Zheng Cheng-kung\(^2\) along with ‘30000 mostly Han Chinese’ (including the soldiers) ousted the Dutch and ruled for over 20 years.

After the failure of the Han rebellion against the Manchu who had seized power on mainland, however, Zheng surrendered to the new Ching dynasty in 1683. Originally some Ching officials “advocated repatriating all Han and abandoning the island” (Brown, 2004c: 44) but Admiral Shi Lang “argued strongly that for reasons of maritime security it had to be incorporated into the empire” (ibid). Therefore in 1684 Taiwan officially became part of China and was subordinated to Fujian province. From the outset of the modern period then Taiwan has always been dominated by imperialist forces, though rather than the contemporary global form of ‘cultural imperialism’ (Tomlinson, 1991; 1999), the early colonial situation seems to have been a sort of ‘regional’ or ‘local’ cultural imperialism, in political-economy and education. Dutch missionaries established schools to educate Taiwan’s aboriginal peoples in how

\(^1\) According to Brown’s explanation (2004c: 6-7), “there are 56 officially recognised ethnic groups (\textit{minzu}) in China—the Han ethnic majority, constituting 91 percent of the population, and 55 ethnic minorities, together constituting 9 percent of the population.”

\(^2\) Zheng Cheng-kung who was born in Japan in 1624 and went back to China in 1631 had been granted a royal rank as Koxinga in Ming Dynasty and succeeded his father’s international maritime trade. In 1661 he commanded around 20000 to 25000 soldiers to Taiwan because of food shortages and escaping from the Manchu troops pursuing and then defeated the Dutch in 1662. In fact, Zheng planned to make Taiwan as his base to revolt against the Ching Dynasty. However, he died in 1662, and Taiwan had been ruled by Zheng’s clan for 21 years (Brown, 2004c:40-41; Copper, 1996c: 25-7).
to read and write Dutch and preached the Gospel (MacLeod, 1923: 25-7; Copper, 1996c: 25). In addition, they attempted to take economic control and established the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie or VOC) to “contest the Portuguese and the Han Chinese of Fujian as middlemen in the lucrative but prohibited trade between China and Japan” (Brown, 2004c: 37 cited in Campbell, 1903:457; Blusse, 1990:254-55). Furthermore, to advance their aims they used Han farmers and labourers in agricultural production. At that time, there were no indigenous newspapers in Taiwan and the main source of regional news was the ‘Batavia’s daily diary’\(^3\) published in Indonesia (the Republic of Indonesia) and sent by the merchant marine from there (Wang, 2002: 10; Machnight, 2002: 5-6).

In 1885 Taiwan was elevated to the level of an autonomous province of China, and the Ching court appointed Liu Ming-chuan as the first governor. Liu established a temporary capital in Taipei and introduced a series of innovations, setting up schools for aborigines, re-instituting the tax and land system, introducing electric lighting in the streets, and linking Taiwan to China’s telegraphic system. He also built harbours and the island’s first railway line (Brown, 2004c: 46-7, 52; Copper, 1996c: 28-9). Taken together, these innovations incorporated Taiwan into a version of modernity based on technological ‘progress’, but Liu was unable to eradicate the Chinese Emperor’s continuing commitment to entrenched forms of bureaucratic and feudal governance.

The corruption and weakness of the Ching regime contrasted sharply with the success of the Japanese push to modernisation following the Meiji Restoration in the 1860s, a contrast that was brutally underlined by the Sino-Japanese War\(^4\) in 1894.

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\(^3\) The Batavia’s daily diary was a records of trade and anything else that seemed relevant when Indonesia was colonised by the Dutch Empire since the 17th century. Batavia (modern Jakarta) became the headquarters in Asia at that time as it was an important post for the export of spices to Dutch and a core of marine transit through Europe to East Asia (Machnight, 2002:5).

\(^4\) The success of the Meiji Restoration in the 1860s led to Japan a shift from a locked state to an open
The Ching troops and fleet were comprehensively defeated by the more technologically advanced Japanese forces and the emperor was forced to sign the humiliating Treaty of Shimonoseki, which ceded Taiwan and the Pescadores (Penghu Islands) to Japan, initiating a system of rule that lasted for 50 years.

In 1911 the Ching dynasty finally collapsed on the mainland and in 1912 the new Republic of China was launched by the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang or KMT). But its control was shaky from the beginning with feuding warlords maintaining their own armies and controlling large tracts of territory. In addition, Japan attempted to make further incursions into China’s territory and economy. It was against this background of Japanese ambition and the chaotic state of Chinese society that a group of intellectuals supported by the Soviet Union formed the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1921. A number of overseas Taiwanese students, who had been influenced by both Marxism-Leninism and the example of the Chinese Communist, established the Taiwanese Communist in 1927 to oppose to autocracy of Japan.

Initially the KMT and CCP had formed a united front to confront the warlords and the Japanese but they split in 1927. With the death of the first leader of the new republic, Dr. Sun Yat-sen⁵, in 1925 his successor, Chiang Kai-shek, who had been a Japan-USSR-trained military student and had never had a liberal education, became a political leader. Influenced by “the enormous new KMT members from the old bureaucracy and the warlord regimes” (Fairbank, 1986c:220), he realised the importance of holding central control and saw that the CCP had infiltrated into the

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West-oriented state. Japan had been attempting to stretch its forces in Asia and casting greed eyes on Taiwan since then. With the excuse of suppressing the Korean internal rebellion (the Tonghak movement), Japanese troops were secretly dispatched to Korea when the Korean court requested Chinese aid. Subsequently the Sino-Japanese War broke out in 1894 (Fairbank and Liu, 1980:106).

⁵ Dr. Sun Yat-sen was born in a farmer’s family on 12th November 1866. He was sent to Hawaii to accept the western education when he was twelve years old. In the light of corruption and weakness of Ching court, Dr. Sun drove the revolutions and founded the Republic of China in 1912. Unfortunately, he had not accomplished the unification of China yet and died untimely of cancer in 1925 (Martin, 1944).
KMT. To counter this perceived threat he ousted Soviet advisors and CCP leaders in 1926 and the following year embarked on a policy of slaughtering communists. Faced with this onslaught the CCP went underground and struggled to survive in the villages. Some commentators argue that if Chiang had not suppressed the CCP and had maintained the KMT-CCP united front, Chinese history would have been rewritten.

Chiang’s rise to power began when he was appointed by Dr. Sun to head the newly-organised Whampoa Military Academy in May 1924, a base which he used to build up military strength in the 1930s. In contrast, the CCP’s leader Mao Tse-tung was born into a poor family in Hunan Province and went to a primary school to study at the age of sixteen. Later he studied by himself because his family refused to support him. He was influenced by his reading of world history, great heroes, and western theories. In 1913 he decided to enroll at a teachers’ training school in Changsha, the Hunan Provincial First Normal School, and obtained his degree in 1918. That year, with some friends he helped to found the New People’s Study Society, many of whose members were later to take leading parts in the growth of the Communist Party. Mao’s thinking was deeply influenced by two scholars. One was a professor of political economy, Li Ta-chao and the other was Chen Tu-hsiu, Dean of the Faculty of Letters at Peking (Beijing) University. The latter advocated parliamentary democracy and thought highly of the French system. Mao had acted as an assistant librarian for Li in the library of Peking University. At the same time, he attended some of his lectures and joined his Marxist Study Group. In 1919 Mao returned to Changsha to take up a post as a teacher in a primary school. He taught, wrote articles and helped to establish a United Students’ Association for Hunan Province. His thinking at the time was clearly laid out in an article he wrote for the Review, in which he asked:

*What is the greatest question in the world? The greatest question is that of*
getting food to eat. What is the greatest force? The greatest force is that of the union of the popular masses. What should we not fear? We should not fear heaven. We should not fear ghosts. We should not fear the dead. We should not fear the bureaucrats. We should not fear the militarists. We should not fear the capitalists…… If we study history, we find that all the movements that have occurred in the course of history, of whatever type they maybe, have all without exception resulted from the union of a certain number of people. A greater movement naturally requires a greater union, and the greatest movement requires the greatest union…… why is the great union of the popular masses so terribly effective? Because the popular masses in any country are much more numerous than the aristocracy, the capitalists, and the other holders of power in society…… If we wish to achieve a great union, in order to resist the powerful people whom we face who harm their fellow men, and in order to pursue our own interests, we must necessarily have many small unions to serve as its foundation. We are peasants, and so we want to unite with others who cultivate the land like we do…… the interests of we who cultivate the land can only be protected by ourselves! (Howard, 1977: 47-48)

As Fairbank (1986c:226) points out, “Ideology and organisation have of course been the winning combination in most revolutions. In the case of China, what came from the Soviet Union through the Comintern took a considerable time to find its adaptation to Chinese life and conditions. For example, the Marxist-Leninist analysis of history gave the key role to the urban proletariat, the industrial working class, and its urban leaders of the communist party, but the CCP got nowhere until it substituted the peasantry for the proletariat, in effect, standing the theory on its head.” In contrast to Mao’s grasp of mass psychology and the advantage conferred by support from Soviet Union, the Nationalist Government had exhausted its power during eight-year war with Japan and underestimated the potential of the CCP.

After the end of the Second World War in 1945, Taiwanese people initially celebrated the end of Japanese colonisation and the island’s return to the Republic of China. However, the first troops sent by the Nationalist Government treated the Taiwanese as badly as the Japanese government had done. “KMT officials continued
their corrupt practices, seizing all Japanese property — public and private — and considerable Taiwanese property as well. Portable pieces of Taiwan’s infrastructure left by the Japanese, including raw materials, equipment, and goods, were sold by Nationalist officials for personal profit in Hong Kong and Shanghai. Inflation skyrocketed — the inflation rate was 3,400 percent in 1949 and was not reduced to 3 percent until 1961” (Brown, 2004c: 58-59). The situation came to a head in 1947 with the tragedy of the February 28 Incident provoking riots across Taiwan. Between ten and twenty thousand activists were rounded up and shot — by the sides of roads, from bridges, and at a large open racetrack. The Nationalists hunted down survivors of this bloodbath during the following months, sending many more to torture and jail. In a few weeks, the liberal-minded, educated, and generally pro-Japanese middle class was virtually destroyed. Media owners and journalists were arrested and killed, and many newspapers and magazines were sealed up or closed by the government. From that point on Taiwan’s press industry went into decline.

People whose fathers, brothers, or aunts had been implicated in the events of 228 were barred from government work, including school teaching, and remained under a dangerous cloud of suspicion for decades. As one participant bitterly recalled, “Under the Japanese, we learned to trust the word of the authorities. The Nationalists betrayed that trust; they will never have it again” (Gates, 1987: 45-6). The government’s violent response to the 228 uprising eliminated much of the potential Taiwanese leadership, terrorised the population, and left the mainlanders firmly in control generating an enduring division within the Chinese community between the islanders, who had settled on the island before the War, and the mainlanders who had arrived.

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6 When the first poorly trained and undisciplined troops sent by the Nationalist Government took over Taiwan in 1945, the officers treated Taiwanese people with unjustness and preyed their personal property, which led to the high inflation and shortages of daily necessities. On 27 February in 1947, an elderly woman was beaten while resisting arrest for selling untaxed cigarettes in Taipei, and a bystander was shot in the commotion. On 28 crowds rioted across the island, seizing the police stations, arms, and radio stations and killing a number of mainlanders (Chi, 2007: 102-112).
with the Nationalists.

On the mainland, the civil war between the Nationalist Government and the CCP continued. Facing the threat of the CCP, the National Assembly added to the Constitution a set of ‘Temporary Provisions Effective During the Period of Communist Rebellion’ in 1948. The KMT eventually not only because of their incompetence on the battlefield but because their mismanagement of the economy had alienated major sectors of the Chinese people. In contrast, the CCP had “mobilised the countryside much as they had North China. With feverish energy the North China cadres, once infiltrated into the Northeast, carried through many of the procedures of organising local production, village indoctrination, land reform, thought reform of new cadres, and recruiting of troops and populace to unite in a patriotic war. This was a pervasive achievement, applying their skills of social engineering under forced draft. And it worked” (Fairbank, 1986c:265-266).

4.1.2 The Emergence of Taiwan’s Media

The initial Mandarin newspapers in Taiwan were imported. In the mid-19th century a number of newspapers published on the southern coast of China and Southeast Asia became popular. They included ‘Shen Pao’ (申報) founded in Shanghai, 1872 and book-type newspapers like ‘Yong Pao’ (甬報) published monthly in Ningpo, 1881 and daily newspaper ‘Shu Pao’ (述報) launched in Guangzhou, 1884. Hong Kong newspapers were also sold in Taiwan to promote the market. The first printed newspaper was the ‘Taiwan Prefectural City Church News’ (台灣府城教會報) founded by a British pastor in 1885, which used Roman alphabetic writing (Wang, 2002: 3, 10, 67-73). The first Taiwanese based Chinese newspaper ‘Di Chao’ (邸抄),
an imitation of Peking’s official newspaper ‘Jing Pao’ (京報), was published the following year, 1886 during Liu’s governorship but it was handwritten. With the arrival of the Japanese, however, the media system expanded rapidly. The Japanese government on the island employed the media as a sort of imperial ideological apparatus. To this end, they not only founded official newspapers to consolidate their authoritative rule they also restrained the free speech of civil newspapers and censored the contents, with the result that privately-operated newspapers were constantly struggling and were usually short lived (Wang, 2002: 3-4, 11-12).

The largest circulation title, the ‘Taiwan Daily Shin Pao’ (台灣日日新報) was re-published in 1924 (initially in 1915) and supported by the Japanese government and continued until 1944 as an organ for promoting Japanese policies on public issues. The official line did not go completely uncontested however. The ‘Taiwan Min Pao’ (台灣民報), for example, founded in 1923, began life as a monthly magazine entitled ‘The Taiwan Youth’ (台灣青年) published by Taiwanese students in Tokyo in 1920. Through their articles they attempted to awaken Taiwanese national consciousness and protest against Japanese occupation. In 1927 it was allowed to move from Tokyo to Taiwan and merged with another newspaper as a weekly the ‘Taiwan Shin Min Pao’ (台灣新民報) in 1929. It was then permitted to be daily in 1932. In 1944 however, the Japanese merged all newspapers together as ‘Taiwan Shin Pao’ (台灣新報) because of the Second World War (Wang, 2002: 93-111).

Given the restrictions on the newspaper press, magazines played an important role to the period of Japanese rule, as spaces for the expression of diverse interests within civil society. The first monthly, the ‘Taiwan Industrial Magazine’ (台灣產業雜誌), was set up in 1896, to be followed by magazines on a wide range of areas. At the peak of production there were 424 titles. One title that deserves to be singled out was the ‘People Magazine’ (人人雜誌), the earliest vernacular literature magazine
established in 1925. It had links with the 1919 May Fourth Movement (五四運動) on mainland China and platform of anti-imperialism, anti-feudalism and anti-classical Chinese (Wang, 2002: 113-5).

The Japanese also mobilised the new medium of radio as a propaganda tool. The first station began broadcasting for five hours every day in 1928 and was followed by seven stations in different counties and cities (Wang, 2002: 122). As with the press, it was the Japanese, with their strong commitment to modernisation, who established the essential infrastructure for a developed media system.

When the Nationalists arrived on the island, they not only immediately took over the Japanese official newspaper ‘Taiwan Shin Pao’ re-entitled as the ‘Taiwan Shin Sheng Pao’ (台灣新生報) but removed all newspapers in Japanese and established other papers to promote their cause and consolidate their position. Leading titles included the ‘Chinese Daily News’ (中華日報) founded by the KMT in 1946 and the “Independence Evening Post” (自立晚報), the first evening newspaper, set up by a mainlander in 1947. At the same time, local Taiwanese took advantage of the Japanese defeat to establish new titles. One of them was the ‘Public Forum News’ (公論報).

The magazine market was also extensive. In the beginning of Taiwan’s restoration there were 43 magazines, being made up of 126 publishers by 1947 including publicly- and local-operated titles (Lee, 1993:996-998; Wang, 2002:131-3, 141-144, 158-163). In the radio sector, the incoming Nationalist took over the stations set up by the Japanese and used them to pursue a programme of obliterating Japanese influence and re-educating the islanders in Chinese culture. Mandarin language broadcasts

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May Fourth Movement was originated by a large number of students in mainland China in 1919. The major cause of the incident is that after the First World War a “Versailles Peace Conference” was held in Paris. The delegation of National government put forward that all imperial charters and unequal treaties to China had to be abolished. But the imperialist empires rejected the request. Therefore, plenty of universities’ students in Beijing originated the patriotic movement on 4th May 1919 and protested against the hegemony of imperialism and the old feudalism. In the aspect of literature, some scholars advocated the vernacular instead of classical Chinese (Fairbank, 1986c:182).
occupied 42%, of total transmission time but Taiwanese (Minnan) also took a sizeable share, with 39.7%, with Japanese relegated to just 3.5%, eclipsed by both Kejia (Hakka) 7.4%, English 7.4% (Wang, 2002:172).

4.2 The Development of Media in Modern Taiwan

When the KMT leader Chiang Kai-shek was defeated by the CCP and retreated to Taiwan in 1949, the island entered a new era which can be usefully divided into six phases.

4.2.1 State Regulation, Control and Policy

Confronted with an unstable domestic situation, rooted in the native Taiwanese population’s continuing resentment of the February 28 Incident and its aftermath, and the tense international situation the followed the onset of the Cold War, Chiang declared Martial Law ushering in a long period of authoritarian rule. The KMT was installed as the only legal political party, and dissent was suppressed. People were required to speak Mandarin in schools, businesses, government offices, and public place and native tongues like Minnan or Hoklo and Kejia were prohibited. The great majority of government positions, at both local and national levels, went to mainlanders rather than native Taiwanese. These policies were defended by recourse to the argument that Taiwan faced ever-present possibility of invasion from the Communists and that emergency provisions were necessary to prevent infiltration and consolidate the regime. Critics however have argued that to maintain Martial Law for almost four decades stretches this rationale to breaking point and beyond.
A crucial turning point was reached in 1950 when North Korean Communist troops crossed the thirty-eighth parallel and invaded South Korea, ushering in the Korean War. The American government sent U.S. troops to South Korea and ordered the U.S. Seventh Fleet to patrol the Taiwan Strait to prevent China from attacking Taiwan. From that point on Nationalist Party rule was consolidated and Taiwan began a new era of military and economic aid from the U.S.

Under the KMT’s authoritarian state, the media played special role in combating the Chinese Communists and the Soviet Union by advocating Dr. Sun Yat-sen’s ideal of ‘The Three Principles of the People’\(^8\) and promoting the ‘Revival Movement of Chinese Culture’ in opposition to Mao’s ‘Great Cultural Revolution’\(^9\) which dominated politics on the mainland from 1966 to 1976. In pursuit of these goals the government passed legislation and introduced codes designed to restrict press freedom and set up machineries of censorship to intervene in the contents of the media. According to Gary Rawnsley, “Economic development, nation-building, and national security provided a convenient justification for authoritarian rule and party-state control of the media, enforced by agencies representing the party, the provincial government and the state. These agencies.....were responsible for creating and controlling a complex patron-client network in media appointments. For example, newspaper editors were members of KMT, a system of patronage that placed political appointees in prominent and powerful gate-keeping positions..... Government agencies also enjoyed responsibility for guaranteeing the media did not

\(^8\) The three principles are The Racial Solidarity of the People—‘Nationalism’, The Governmental Authority of the People—‘Democracy’, and The Social Welfare of the People—‘The People’s Socialism’ (Martin, 1944: 99-100).

\(^9\) The Cultural Revolution was regarded as China’s ‘Ten Lost Years.’ Since the increasing tension between Mao Tse-tung’s faction and the CCP establishment, Mao dismissed or demoted some opponents in party, government, and army. Furthermore, Mao’s group fielded the Red Guards who were teenagers and rampaged through the cities, destroying the ‘Four Olds’ with impunity which were old ideas, culture, customs, and habits. This assault hamstrung the government, yet did not create a unified mass movement to take its place (Fairbank, 1986c:316-317).
address subjects that were deemed off limits, such as advocating communism or Taiwan’s independence from the Republic of China. Such regulations for governing media content that existed were thus rather arbitrary and reflected the KMT’s political agenda” and also “limited the media’s purpose and performance” (Rawnsley, 2004: 209, 211).

This has led some researchers to see the KMT’s efforts to control cultural life as an instance of Antonio Gramsci’s ‘cultural hegemony’ or the exercise of ‘ideological state apparatuses’ (ISAs) as outlined by Louis Althusser. Gramsci argues that “the supremacy of a social group or class manifests itself in two different ways: ‘domination’ (dominio), or coercion, and ‘intellectual and moral leadership’ (direzione intellettualee morale). This latter type of supremacy constitutes hegemony” (Femia, 1981:24). He also points out that “hegemony is the predominance obtained by consent rather than force of one class or group over other classes” (ibid.). Gramsci divided the superstructure into two realms: ‘political society’ and ‘civil society’. The former entails coercive apparatus, for the purpose of assimilating the popular masses to the type of production and economy of a given period. The latter exercises hegemony over the entire national society through so-called private organisations, such as the church, the trade unions, schools, and mass media (Femia, 1981: 25-26).

Althusser pursues and elaborates on this distinction, arguing that “The Repressive State Apparatus function ‘by violence’, whereas the Ideological State Apparatuses function ‘by ideology’” (Althusser, 1984: 19) and operate through a variety of institutions that are relatively autonomous from the state. However, does it advance our understanding to characterise the KMT government in the 1950s and 1960s to think of them as exercising ‘cultural hegemony’ or constituting an array of ‘ideological state apparatuses’? We can explore the question via three standpoints. First, Taiwan was not an industrial (or capitalist) country but an agricultural one at
that time.

Second, the Nationalist government replaced a long standing colonial power, the Japanese, and “thought that it alone represented the true China and believed that one day it would return to control the mainland” (Rawnsley, Gary D. & Ming-yeh T. Rawnsley, 2001: 29). A number of Taiwanese people thought so as well, but under conditions of Martial law civil society institutions that might have supported an alternative local consciousness and Taiwanese identity had not yet been fully formed. Thus, it is difficult to talk of the granting or withholding of consent.

Third, most Taiwanese (excluding the aborigines) identified themselves as Chinese since their ancestors came from China. Hence, rather than thinking of the KMT as exercising ‘cultural hegemony’ and mobilising ‘ideological state apparatuses’ it might be more productive to see them as simply employing ‘state power’ and media propaganda to advance their aims against the Chinese Communists.

In the 1950s the KMT government announced ‘five restrictions’ on newspapers. These remained in force until 1988 when they were finally lifted. The restrictions covered: (a) the number of newspapers permitted— restraining the issuing of licences, (b) the publishing location— moving to another place (city or town) to print papers was restricted by the requirement to register location, (c) the quantity of paper— rationing paper, (d) the number of pages— only one and a half pages were permitted, and (e) the papers price— the price was set by the government not by the newspaper. In addition, in 1954 the government promoted the ‘cultural cleaning movement’ and in 1958 the Legislative Yuan secretly adopted the Fifth Amendment of Publishing Act which aimed to clamp down on critical reporting of the court, and material

\[10\] Initially the major purpose of the movement was to eliminate pornography, sedition, criminal publication and fabricated rumor. But the Legislative Yuan secretly revised a vague ban (law) on publishing before long as a practice of the cultural cleaning movement, which caused a lot of media owners, journalists, and some legislators to oppose the law, but to no avail (Wang, 2002:225-235).
considered to be seditious or pornographic. Additionally, the Executive Yuan would have the authority to punish media by issuing warnings, fining them, ending publication, and revoking their licence (Wang, 2002: 220-30).

In the magazine sector, as Wang Tian-bin (2002: 238-40) notes, the ‘Taiwan Magazine Institute’ was established in 1950 against a background marking by the continuing threat from the CCP and KMT’s continuing commitment to return to the mainland regain power. There were around 42 members. The following year, the organisation changed its name as ‘Taiwan Magazine Industry Institute’ in order to conform to the Organisation Act. By 1959, its membership had risen to 276, according to the News Media Yearbook 1961, and in that year it adopted a convention at the annual meeting. Its provisions included:

(a) developing freedom of speech, proclaiming democracy, advocating peaceful and legal innovation, supporting the constitutional government, and consolidating the lawful base.

(b) respecting the country’s sovereignty, espousing national policy, strengthening to opposition to communism and the Soviet Union, striving for the restoration of mainland China, rejecting neutralism and appeasement, and struggling for the victory of a free world.

(c) promoting patriotism, refuting instigated speech, and consolidating the unification of the country.

(d) reporting and analysing truth with a scientific attitude, discarding prejudice, and promoting a reasonable, impartial, and legal attitude to the expression of ideas.

(e) obeying the impartial principle, maintaining an elevated character, clarifying the contents of productions, and refusing any temptation (in the form of a bribe or offer of a favour).

(f) nurturing harmonious social relationships, strictly observing moral regulations,
and encouraging the colleagues one another to be righteous, and set a positive example.

Looking at the content of the convention, it is apparent that magazine practitioners had made every effort to uphold ethical standards of journalism. At the same time, their commitment to unconditional loyalty to the state and to anti-communism easily became an excuse to exclude dissent and control press freedom. During the so-called ‘White terror’ of the Martial Law period between 1950 and 1987, “hundreds of reporters, writers and editors were harassed, interrogated and often jailed” (Rawnsley, 2004: 210-211). Take, for example, ‘Freedom China’ (自由中國), a semimonthly set up in 1949 by a group of mainland intellectuals (including Lei Zhen, Hu Shi, and Hang Li-wu and others) which proclaimed the value of freedom and democracy, and urged the government to transform the economy and politics. In the 1950s commentators from the magazine put forward a request for the reform of domestic affairs and offered President Chiang advice, an initiative that was received coldly. Then, in 1960 when Lei Zhen attempted to establish a new party together with other Taiwanese politicians, he and his colleagues were arrested and denounced as ‘rebels’, and the magazine was forced to close. This incident deeply influenced the local opposition elites (Wang, 2002: 240-43).

Against this background of tightly controlled politics and limited licence to dissent, it is scarcely surprising that the eventual lifting of Martial Law widely seemed as a key turning point in Taiwan’s democratic development. There were a number of factors behind this shift but arguably the most important was that Chiang Ching-kuo, who succeeded his father Chiang Kai-shek as head of state, was sympathetic to reform and democratisation. Taiwan’s rapid and successful industrialisation coupled with the island’s loss of diplomatic status when its seat at the United Nations was withdrawn and reallocated to mainland China, has changed the economic and political context
markedly. The KMT’s original policy of regaining control of the mainland came to look increasingly unrealistic and obsolete, and attention shifted to consolidating Taiwan as a significant player in the emerging world economy in its own right. This required government to draw on the widest possible pool of talent and to build popular consent for its policies.

When Chiang Ching-kuo became premier, he started down this road by appointing local Taiwanese as well as mainlanders as officials in the government. A number of Taiwanese intellectuals ran for the legislature, for positions as county magistrates or councilmen. At the same time, they used the platform provided by elections to voice their democratic ideals and localised (Taiwanese) ideology creating a new ‘electoral culture’ in Taiwan. As Gary D. Rawnsley and Ming-yeh T. Rawnsley (2001:14 cited in Laufer & Paradeise, 1989) have argued, by helping “to structure participation and competition within the political arena” the media helped to weaken authoritarian rule “made a positive contribution to the consolidation of democratic procedure.” Particularly, “magazines, not covered by the press ban, provided a voice for politically-marginalised Taiwanese and offered a counter-discourse to the mainstream media” (Rawnsley, 2004: 211). This growing articulation of opposition eventually led to the formation of Taiwanese first Taiwanese opposition party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), was officially formed on 28 September 1986 followed by the New Party (NP), the People First Party (PFP), and the Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) between 1993 and 2001.

Faced with the mounting pressure for political transformation, President Chiang finally lifted Martial Law in 1987. The restrictions on newspapers were abolished to following year and a new Law of National Security and Assembly was passed protecting people’s freedom of assembly and demonstration. Following President Chiang death in 1988, Vice President Lee Teng-hui succeeded to the presidency
becoming the first local Taiwanese to hold the position. He terminated the Period of Communist Rebellion on 1st May 1991 and five years later became the first president elected directly by the people. As Rawnsley indicates, “In comparison to others that occurred during the so-called ‘Third Wave’, Taiwan’s democratisation was one of the smoothest, least violent and most inclusive” (Rawnsley, 2004: 209). In 2000 Chen Shui-bian from the main opposition party, the DPP, was elected president ending 55-years of KMT’s rule, and was re-elected to a second term in 2004. This electoral victory confirmed both the upsurge of Taiwanese consciousness as a major political current and the cementation of a liberalised political confirming a decisive shift from authoritarianism to democratic rule. Nevertheless, in 2008 the former mayor of Taipei City, Ma Ying-jeou, a prominent KMT’s member, defeated the DPP’s presidential candidate, Hsieh Chang-ting, and won the presidency. This marked a further maturation in the political environment, and in conjunction with the liberalisation of the economy, had a major impact on the media system.

4.2.2 Key Developments in the Media System

As we have noted, before the lifting of Martial Law the media operated overwhelmingly as the promotional arm of the government, the military, and the KMT. Political liberalisation and the shift in economic policy from state management to more market-oriented organisation transformed the media landscape. Drawing on the work of Shu (2003) and Wang (2002), the following sections highlight some of the main elements in this transition.
(1) Newspapers

As Table 4.1 shows, between 1960 and 1987 there were only 31 newspapers published in Taiwan. Of the three with the largest circulations in the 1950s, the ‘Central Daily News’ (中央日報) and the ‘Chinese Daily News’ (中華日報) were run by the KMT while the third, the ‘Taiwan Shin Sheng Pao’ (台灣新生報), was operated by the government. In the 1960s two civilian-operated titles, the ‘United Daily News’ (聯合報) and the ‘China Times’ (中國時報) became popular but both were owned and operated by KMT members.

Table 4.1 The number of newspapers from 1960 to 1987 in Taiwan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Owners</th>
<th>State-operated</th>
<th>KMT-operated</th>
<th>Civilian-operated</th>
<th>Military-operated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Numbers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In the 1980s the third major national newspaper, the ‘Liberty Times’ (自由時報) was launched. Initially it established as a local paper in 1946 titled ‘Taitung News’ (台東導報) and renamed several times, it operated a strategy of giving issues away free for a period, and rapidly established a substantial readership based, which has remained until now (Wang, 2002: 474; 2003: 301-4).

As Taiwan’s economy grew during the 1970s and 1980s, specialised economic and financial titles such as the ‘Commercial Times’ (工商時報) and the ‘Taiwan-based Economic Daily News’ (經濟日報) appeared. After Taiwan’s expulsion from the United Nations in 1971 the government recognised that rising living standards and expanded leisure opportunities were a precondition for maintaining popular support. Seeing a gap in the market, the owner of the United Daily News launched the ‘Min
Sheng Daily’ (民生報) in 1978 originally named the “Hua Pao” (華報), with contents built around daily life, sport events, show business gossip and entertainment news. Later, with emergence of a more organised political opposition in the 1980s titles representing alternative positions to the KMT, such as the ‘Independence Evening Post’ practically published in 1947 and the ‘Commons Daily’ (民眾日報) in 1950, emerged (Wang, 2002: 338-42, 403, 412; Wang, 2003: 281, 292-6).

After the restrictions on the press were finally lifted, the number of titles increased rapidly, rising from 31 in 1987 to 514 by mid-2003 (Wang, 2002: 396; Rawnsley, 2004: 212). More specialised financial newspapers such as the ‘Business Post’ (財經時報) and the ‘Taiwan Biz News’ (產經新聞報), and evening papers like the ‘China Times Express’ (中時晚報) and the ‘United Evening News’ (聯合晚報) were also launched at this time. With the rise of the advanced technology most newspapers employed computer typesetting and created new layouts and diverse contents (Wang, 2002: 396, 398, 409, 415-6).

Currently four dimensions of Taiwan’s newspaper industry were worth noting. Firstly, young people are increasingly accessing the Internet or using digital devices such as mobile, PDA, podcasting and vodcasting to obtain information (The R.O.C. Publication Annual 2006: 40). According to the result of ‘A study of action in access to the media for teenagers in 2008’ by the Centre for Media Literacy in Taiwan at National Chengchi University, commissioned by the Fubon Cultural & Educational Foundation, the Internet is the most important medium for teenagers. The time spent accessing the Internet in a week is 16.1 hours compared to television’s 15.36 hours. Those aged 6 years and over with experience to use the Internet increased from 36.2% to 55.1% compared to 2004.

Secondly, due to the fierce competition in the media market 7 newspapers, the ‘Jing Evening News’ (勁晚報), the ‘Min Sheng Daily’, the ‘Star News’ (星報), the ‘Central
Daily News’, the ‘Taiwan Daily’ (台灣日報), the ‘Great Daily News’ (大成報), and the ‘China Times Express’, were shut down between 2002 and 2006. Some small companies were merged with big conglomerates.

Thirdly, a tabloid newspaper ‘Apple Daily’ (蘋果日報), owned by the Hong Kong based Next Media Group, arrived in Taiwan in 2003 affecting readers and stimulating other papers to adopt its reporting style. We will look more closely at Apple Daily’s impact in Chapter 6 when we examine the rise of tabloidisation in Taiwan.

Fourthly, the paid for newspaper industry was suffering from the influence of free papers. The free tabloid ‘Sharp Daily’ (爽報), for instance, was also launched by the Next Media in 2006. Another free daily ‘Upaper’, targeting the daily Taipei Metro (mass-rapid-transit) riders, was published by the UDN (United Daily News) Group in 2007 (The R.O.C. Publication Annual 2003: 9-12; 2004: 9; 2008: 15, 18; GIO).

(2) Magazines

Although publishers faced problems, notably from the impact of the international energy crisis in the early 1970s, the magazine market experienced substantial growth, with, as Table 4.2 shows, the number of titles more than tripling between the 1950s and the 1970s, from 500 to 1,534, expanding rapidly between the 1970s and 1980s and again in the 1990s from 4,282 titles in 1991 to 6,641 in 2000 (Wang, 2002:530).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>1950s</th>
<th>1960s</th>
<th>1970s</th>
<th>1980s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Numbers</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>1,400</td>
<td>1,534</td>
<td>2,695</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Four aspects of this expansion are worth noting. First, community magazines began
to be developed. Faced with rapid economic development in the countryside and the increasing numbers of students entering higher education, the Government Information Office (GIO) of the Executive Yuan both encouraged young people to enter journalism and promoted community magazines in every village and town. These initiatives had two aims: to support the local and cultural development process and to cement better lines of communication between the government and local people (Wang, 2002: 343).

Secondly, owing to the increase in the number female workers and the raise of feminism, there was a rapid growth in magazines for women segmented to appeal to different categories of readership. For instance, ‘New Sisters’ (新姊妹), ‘Crown’ (皇冠), and ‘Modern Ladys’ (當代少女) which offered entertaining anecdotes and romantic stories were designed to appeal to the general female audience. Other leading titles particularly aimed at younger women. They included ‘non-no’ and ‘ViVi’ (薇薇) from Japan and focused on fashion, leisure, lifestyle, and make-up presented with high production values and exquisite pictures. Mature single workers, seeking knowledge and high quality lifestyle, and housewives, who wanted to obtain information on managing finances and family relationships, cooking, decoration, and the upbringing of children, preferred reading ‘The Woman’ (婦女雜誌), ‘Women and Family’ (婦女與家庭) and ‘Living Psychology Monthly’ (張老師月刊). There was, however, considerable overlap in content across market segments and this, together with fierce competition, led to many women magazines being closed down (Wang, 2002: 344, 356, 428).

Thirdly, in an effort to improve the quality of magazines and promote their cultural and educational functions, the GIO established the ‘Golden Tripod Awards’ in 1976. The metal tripod in ancient Chinese society was an important utensil on which people would carve the merits and virtue of their ancestors as a memorial. It
symbolised that Chinese culture would be handed down for generations. Initially the awards set up two categories: *Excellent magazine* and *Outstanding merits for publication*. In the First Golden Tripod Awards, 21 magazines won the former award and 23 the latter. From 1980 the awards also included divisions for: *Journalism*, *Magazines*, *Books*, and *Music albums*. The following year a *Magazine art design award* was added and in 1985 an award for *Recommendable excellent publication*. Two categories *Music albums* (merged with ‘Golden Music Awards’) and *Journalism*, were canceled in 1996 and 2001 respectively, and a new category *Special Contribution Awards* added (GIO; Wang, 2002: 346).

Fourthly, in the context of Taiwan’s diplomatic circumstances in the 1970s and the continual patriotic movement there was a rapid growth in magazine of political comment providing a platform for politicians outside the ruling KMT party. This trend accelerated after the death of Chiang Kai-shek in 1975 and when his son Chiang Ching-kuo was elected as president in 1978. According to a study by Ou Yang Sheng-en on the evolution of opposition magazine (Wang, 2002: 344, 352-54), there 55 different titles of political comment were established between 1975 and 1984. An early example, Huang Hsin-jie and Kang Ning-hsiang’s ‘Taiwanese Political Forum’ (台灣政論) launched in 1975 was closed under the terms of the publishing law. But in 1979, Kang Ning-hsiang successfully launched ‘Eighty Years’ (八十年代) to be followed two months later by the ‘Formosa Magazine’ (美麗島) established by Huang Hsin-jie who was later arrested in connection with the Kaohsiung Formosa Incident.

This incident is a turning point in Taiwanese democratisation. Originally the elections for Central Civilian Representative would due to be held at the end of 1978. In order to reinforce the opposition’s power a number of political elite figures such as Huang Hsin-jie, Shih Ming-de, Kang Ning-hsiang, and Yu Deng-fa actively got involved attracting the ruling party’s attention. At the same time, the American
government declared that they would be establishing the diplomatic relation with the mainland Chinese government (CCP) instead of the Taiwanese government (KMT) in the following year. In response, the KMT government announced that it was stopping the election temporarily, a decision that angered opposition politicians. They called for the state to lift Martial Law and re-elect all members of parliament. In 1979 Formosa Magazine in Kaohsiung attempted to organise a demonstration on 10th December, International Human Right Day, but their request was not approved. Because of the breakdown in negotiation, there was a serious bloody confrontation between the police and opposition politicians. All opposition elite members were arrested, including Huang Hsin-jie, Shih Ming-de, Lin Yi-hsiung, and Lu Hsiu-lien. Their magazines ceased publication (RDEC, 2003: 3-7), but the events marked a significant step towards democratic reform.

Another breakthrough in the development of the magazine market occurred in 1996 when that the ban of setting ‘journalist’s position’ dating from 1952 was abolished. Since then, magazine journalists have been undertaking the interviews (Wang, 2002: 540). During the 1990s, despite economic depression and the rise of the Internet number of magazine continued to increase to 6641 by 2000. This figure included new specialised titles such as the ‘Common Wealth Magazine’ (天下雜誌) and the ‘PC Home Computer Family’ (PC Home 電腦家庭) which have been highly successful (Wang, 2002: 530). However, over 10 titles closed down in 2007. Some of them transferred into the Internet industry (The R.O.C. Publication Annual 2008: 71).

(3) Radio

Radio has long been one of the most popular media in Taiwan with almost all households having one or two receivers. We can understand its development in accordance with four stages.
A. Sprouting stage (1949-1961)

When the Nationalist government fled to Taiwan after the civil war, there were only ten radio stations on the island. By 1961, this number had grown to 38. Although 28 of these were privately-owned, the government-owned and affiliated stations (5 military stations, 4 state-owned, 1 KMT-owned) enjoyed a significant advantage. The Broadcasting Corporation of China (BCC 中国广播公司) run by the KMT, for example, took up a disproportionate amount of the scarce electric power (Wang, 2002: 244).

B. Foundation laying stage (1961-1971)

Due to the restriction on the number of stations permitted there were still only 38 operating over this period. However, as Tables 4.3 and 4.4 show, there was a marked increase in the number of stations and transmitters. The emergence of television in 1962 directly impacted on the development of radio by reducing the revenue from radio advertising. Even so, the private stations continued to make substantial investments and improve the quality of programmes.

Furthermore over the decade, many stations shifted their management structure to become enterprises. Responsibility for regulating radio management was divided among three governmental agencies (Wang, 2002: 288-9, 292).

(i) The Ministry of Transportation and Communications was responsible for allocating frequencies, distributing licences, and monitoring equipment.

(ii) The Headquarters of the Police Guard presided over monitoring programmes, censoring literature programmes in dialects, and ensuring that programmes complied with the regulations and met the requirements of radio security.

(iii) The Government Information Office under the Executive Yuan took charge of stipulating the programme’s theme and enforcing standards, and rewarding the
superior programmes (although that responsibility shifted to the Cultural Bureau under the Ministry of Education in 1967).

Table 4.3 The number of radio stations from 1961 to 1970

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Owners</th>
<th>Military-run</th>
<th>Publicly-run</th>
<th>Privately-run</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>66</td>
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<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>67</td>
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<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>68</td>
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<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>79</td>
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<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>79</td>
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<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>95</td>
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<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: refer to Wang Tian-bin’s The Evolution of Mass Communication in Taiwan (2002:289)

Table 4.4 The number of radio transmitters from 1961 to 1970

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Owners</th>
<th>Military-run</th>
<th>Publicly-run</th>
<th>Privately-run</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td></td>
<td>38</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td></td>
<td>38</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td></td>
<td>38</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td></td>
<td>38</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: refer to Wang Tian-bin’s The Evolution of Mass Communication in Taiwan (2002:289)

* The original source did not have the statistics in the three owners but only the total in 1970.
In 1968 the BCC began experiments with frequency modulation (FM) broadcasting. These were successful and in 1969 local FM stations were launched in Taichung, Kaohsiung, and Hualian. Additionally, the BCC established a Department of Overseas Radio at the ‘Voice of Free China’ (自由中國之聲) with 12 services spread over North America, West Europe, Africa, South East Asia, and North East Asia (Wang, 2002: 295-6).

To encourage radio stations to produce quality programmes the GIO set up the ‘Golden Bell Awards’ in 1965. The ‘bell’ here refers to a classical Chinese serial bell which was a sort of etiquette instrument for education in Chinese culture. This metaphor was designed to emphasise that radio practitioners should be responsible for the education of the public. Nine programmes, but only 2 from privately-run stations, were given awards in the first Golden Bell Awards, covering the genres of journalism, drama, music, children, services, advertising and composite. In 1966 it added new special awards, involving the type of civilian art, journalism for mainland China, and personal skills. In 1971 television was subsumed into the Awards (Wang, 2002: 293-4).

C. The growth stage (1972-1987)

The prosperous economy and society pushed forward the dynamic broadcasting industry. In 1980 there were 156 radio stations totally while the number of transmitter had steadily risen from 215 in 1970 to 310 in 1980. The FM network was also expanding.

This period also saw innovations in the organisation of the industry. Faced with the continuation of the broadcast restrictions and intensified competition for advertising, in 1976, ten private stations formed a united network to save resources and share the benefits of advertising. Specialised transport radio stations emerged. The first was
launched by the Police Radio Station (PRS) in Taipei in 1971 in order to improve transport flow and driving security. Subsequently, in 1973 the PRS established branches in Taichung and Kaohsiung, followed by the BCC setting up a similar station in Taichung in 1974. There were also innovations in programming with live broadcasts increasingly rapidly and the beginnings of 24-hour broadcasting (Wang, 2002: 357-60).


This expansion of spectrum capacity, coupled with ending of Martial Law, saw a rapid expansion in the private radio sector, starting in 1993. Between 1993 and 2000, in order to resolve the continuing problem of underground radio stations, the military returned some frequencies to those who wanted to establish legitimate radio stations. By the end of 1989 there were only 32 radio companies. But by mid-2003 there were 174 radio stations. Call-in radio stations had been legalised in 1994, creating a climate of fierce competition. Some companies formed chains and others opted to develop niche markets, either locally based (as with the dialect stations) or addressing specific interest groups such as music, leisure information, indigenous peoples or religion.

In addition, the Voice of Free China stretched its international arm with 15 languages over to Arabia. At the same time, the BCC also cooperated with the Family Station Inc. in the US to improve the quality of transmitting cross over the South America. Furthermore, since 1996 many radio stations had been launching websites to take advantage of the emerging E-world (Wang, 2002: 438-41, 557-61; Rawnsley, 2004: 212; Yang, 2005: 10; The R.O.C. Radio Yearbook, 2003-3004: 55).

(4) Television

The development of Taiwanese television can be divided four main phases.
A. The first phase (1961-1971)

By 1962, there was general support among scholars, governmental officials and businessmen for the establishment of Television. In 1959 a TV research group drawing on investment and skills from Japan was set up. The following year, the group sent a delegation to Japan to investigate how TV there worked. The first TV station in Taiwan, the Experimental National Education Television (教育實驗電視台), was launched two years later, in 1962 (but the following year changed its name to the National Education Television and Broadcast Station 教育電視廣播電台). It aimed to raise general educational standard and help of those who were not able to go to school. In the same year, the first commercial television station, Taiwan Television Enterprise (TTV 台灣電視公司) a Taiwan-Japan collaborative enterprise, was launched. Initially Taiwan did not produce its own television sets and the government restricted the volume of imports. But as Table 4.5 shows, once the domestic mass production got underway after 1962 sales of TV sets rose dramatically, increasing over ten fold between 1962 and 1964 and again between 1965 and 1971 from 62.4 thousand to 672.7 thousand.

The second major station, the China Television Company (CTV 中國電視公司), with the BCC taking a half share and the rest coming from 28 private radio stations plus some other enterprisers, was launched in 1969. Two years later, the third main TV station, the Chinese Television System (CTS 中華電視台) jointly supported by the Ministry of National Defense and the Ministry of Education, was launched with the aim of developing military education and social education. In the light of the changing of international situation and the growing economic importance of cultural industry, however, it was re-organised and re-launched with a wider function, as the Chinese Television Cultural Limited Company (華視文化事業股份有限公司) (Wang, 2002: 298-305).
Table 4.5 The number of television sets from 1962 to 1971

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>3,334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>16,279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>36,026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>62,434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>108,415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>163,918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>343,735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>438,816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>510,228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>672,721</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


B. The second phase (1972-1987)

By 1987 the three main television channels were competing fiercely for both viewers and advertising leading, as Table 4.6 shows, to growing public dissatisfaction with the quality of the programming. In 1970 31.30% of those polled said they were satisfied while 39.93% expressed dissatisfaction. By 1978 those proportion of those expressing satisfaction had dropped to 19.28% while the figures for dissatisfaction had jumped to 53%. They were joined by an increasing number of columnists, governmental officials, and scholars.

So why did the regulatory system seem so ineffective in enforcing standards? Professor Lee Zhan (Wang, 2002:384) has put forward three factors. Firstly, the Broadcasting and Television Law had no clear policy and explanation of the basic function, goal and character of broadcasting. Secondly, it was unable to reconcile the
defense of the public interest with the economic need to have a commercially successful TV system. Thirdly, it stipulated only that programmes related to the press, education, and public service should account for 50% of total output and imposed no detailed requirements on the types of programmes to be made or their scheduling. Furthermore, it failed to intervene when programming that was clearly ‘entertainment’ was classified as ‘educational and cultural’ in order to satisfy the quota.

### Table 4.6 Audience satisfaction with television 1970-1978

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1970 (%)</th>
<th>1978 (%)</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely satisfied</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>Sampling:1067 in 1970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>31.30</td>
<td>19.28</td>
<td>Sampling:1128 in 1978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td>39.93</td>
<td>53.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely dissatisfied</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>6.73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No idea</td>
<td>24.46</td>
<td>19.91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: refer to Wang Tian-bin’s *The Evolution of Mass Communication in Taiwan* (2002: 382)


Between 1987 when *Martial Law* was lifted and 1993 the government constantly clamped down on illegal broadcasting, partly in an effort to resolve this problem and partly in response to opposition demands for a more open system, a fourth terrestrial television station ‘Formosa Television (FTV)’ (民間全民電視台) mostly sponsored by DPP members was eventually inaugurated in 1997 and a Public Television Service was established the following year in order to countervail the commercial forces (Wang, 2002: 585, 601-4).

Despite being illegal, cable television systems, the so-called ‘the forth station’,
had been developing rapidly since the late 1960s, responding to popular demands for more overseas information and entertainment. The government had proved ineffectual in curbing them. Under pressure from mounting promotion and evidence on cable TV from legislators, scholars and media practitioners, eventually in 1993 the ‘Temporary Administrative Regulations on the Broadcasting System of Cable Television Programmes’ was promulgated, followed later by the ‘Cable Radio and Television Act’. By the end of 2004 the cable system was distributed over 25 counties and cities within which there were a total of 51 operating districts and 63 cable operators. Over 100 channels were available (Wang, 2002: 579-83; Liu, 1994: 39; Zhao, 2005: 27-32; Chung, 1997: 55; The R.O.C Television Yearbook, 2003-2004: 37). As professor Zhao (2005: 5 cited in Chiang, 1998) notes, the proportion of time spent watching television which is devoted to cable TV has been rising steadily since it became legal, increasing from 20% in 1993 to 60% in 1999. Currently the proportion has reached to over 85%, the highest in Asia (Huang, 2005: 54).

Satellite television services also developed. Originating with programmes from the Japanese public service organisation NHK, which were begun to be received in Taiwan in 1987, following the open policy (enshrined in the ‘Satellite Broadcasting Act’ of 1999) satellite service expanded (Wang, 2002: 589).

D. The Fourth Phase (2005-present)

Following the three major Acts adopted in 2003 (Cable Radio and Television Act, Radio and Television Act, and Satellite Broadcasting Act), political parties, government and the military have progressively withdrawn from direct involvement in the media since 2005. Furthermore, in order to serve the interests of the public and raise broadcasting standards the Public Television Service (PTS) was restructured as the Taiwan Broadcasting System (TBS) in 2006, merging with the CTS (mentioned
earlier), Hakka TV, Taiwan Indigenous Television (TITV) and Taiwan Macroview TV into a single composite entity in 2007 (The R.O.C. Television Yearbook, 2003-2004: 33-4; GIO).

(5) The Internet and digitalisation
In the 1990s Taiwan stepped into a flourishing Internet world. According to an investigation by the Institute for Information Industry by 2004 (III, 2004), almost three quarters (73%) of island’s population possessed a personal computer, with the figure rising in the major cities standing at 84% for Taipei and 80% for Kaohsiung. The percentage of the general population using the Internet stood at 61%. By 2008 (III, 2008) this figure had increase to 76.1%. This infrastructure provided the basis for a rapid growth in free online newspapers. The first title, ‘tTimes.com.tw’ (明日報) was launched in 1999 but closed in 2001 due to an operating deficit. Nonetheless, as Shih has shown, “some local online newspapers which carry less commercial spectrum, such as the E-South, have successfully maintained their popularity. From 2000, some public service-oriented newspapers, such as the Epro Environment, also started making their debuts on the Internet” (Shih, 2002b; Wang, 2002: 483). At the same time, the major established titles also opened web based sites. The ‘www.chinatimes.com’ (China Times online news) and ‘udn.com’ (United Daily online news) were set up in 2000 and immediately proved popular. After that, more newspapers followed in their steps (Wang, 2002: 512).

Owing to the rise of the Internet and competition from cable (or satellite) TV, the proportion of the population reading newspaper was declining year by year. According to a survey by AC Nielsen, the figure had dropped from 76.8% in 1992 to 59.4% in 2000 (Wang, 2002: 518-9). There are signs, however, that online news had arrested this decline and has attracted the segment of the audience, aged between 20
and 39, who were least likely to buy or read printed editions.

The moves by commercial companies to take advantage of digital technologies have been accompanied by a concerted government push to move all communications systems into the ‘digital era’. DAB (Digital Audio Broadcasting) was developed in the 1990s and has been experimentally transmitting since 2000 and it is expected that the proportion of DAB radio set will reach 45% in 2010. In addition, internet radio, another variant of digital radio, has been increasingly popular since 2001. Not only can people listen to live radio programmes through the internet they can also catch missed programmes (Wang, 2002: 570-2; The R.O.C Radio Yearbook, 2003-2004: 59-60).

Digital Television, also promoted as ‘High Definition Television’ (HDTV), has been promoted by the Executive Yuan since 1992. A draft plan entitled ‘The developing regulation of digital wireless television’ was adopted on 2 June 2005, accompanied by an official promise that a digital receiver would be inserted into all television from 2008 and that analog channels would be retired by the end of 2010. To accelerate digitalisation the government has also encouraged cooperation with international media companies, set up the awards for superior digital programmes, promoted the mass production of digital television sets, and reduced the commodity tax (Lai, 1997:109-110; The R.O.C. Television Yearbook, 2003-2004: 26). In fact, the five terrestrial television stations (TTV, CTV, CTS, FTV and TBS) designated for digitalisation have had digital transmitter since 2002. The TBS was responsible for pilot research and development on digital programmes and software platforms. According to a commissioned survey from the GIO in 2004, 24.4% of Taiwanese people have watched programmes on wireless digital TV. As a whole, however, digital taken up was only 12.1% (The R.O.C. Television Yearbook, 2003-2004: 35; Tsai, 2005: 335).
4.2.3 Patterns of Ownership

As mentioned above, during the period of single-party rule (the KMT) and the government dominated media markets and though there were some privately-run media, the owners of the most important enterprises, like Mr. Wang Ti-wu, the founder of the *United Daily News* and Mr. Yu Ji-chung, the head of the *China Times*, had a close ties with the KMT. As a consequence, most reports in these two major newspapers were the KMT oriented. In contrast, the opposition media were struggling for survival under conditions of constant suppression. However, after end of military rule and the subsequent deregulation of newspaper, radio and television (including cable and satellite television channels), media ownership rapidly diversified. Looking across the range of media sectors we can identify four broad groups of media owners.

(1) Ownership by opposition political actors

Following the end of *Martial Law* some opposition political actors have taken advantage of the new openness and entered the media field. In the newspaper sector, the ‘Taiwan Daily’ (台灣日報) was launched by DPP members during the 1990s to be followed by of the free newspaper, the ‘Feng Pao’ (風報) in 2001. One of currently leading newspapers *Liberty Times* was established by a magnate who has close ties with the DPP. After 1993 the ‘Formosa Television (FTV)’ channel as well as the ‘People Radio’ (全民電台) were actively supported by DPP’s legislators while the UFO radio network (飛碟聯播網) was founded by the NP’s ex-legislator Mr. Chao in 1997. But the People Radio was sold to the UFO in 1998 (Wang, 2002:482, 566, 602).

(2) Ownership by parties and entrepreneurs

Taiwan’s media have also seen new alliances formed between political parties and
commercial entrepreneurs. As Feng (1995:41-42) points out, in 1992 the KMT, the Central Film Company, the United International Holdings and an investment company established collaboratively the ‘Buo Shin Entertainment Corporation’ with the KMT as the largest shareholder. The DPP hold stakes in at least 24 cable television stations; and one of the NP members integrated around 200 proprietors into the ‘Cable Communications Developmental Association of the ROC.’

(3) Ownership by commercial interests

In the late 1990s Taiwan was facing a crisis of economic decline and the resulting escalation of competition in media markets placed small companies or groups in severe financial difficulties. This allowed the big media firms founded by entrepreneurs with abundant funds to buy up assets cheaply and to create conglomerates that posed a substantial challenge to the ruling party’s dominance in both the market and political arena. As Murdock (1982:119) points out, communications conglomerates “operate mainly or solely within the media and leisure industries, using the profits from their original operating base to buy into other sectors.” For instance, the financial bloc around the Business Weekly Media Group who owned not only Business Weekly but also ‘TO GO’ and ‘Digital Weekly’ took over the ‘Bella’ (儂儂) magazine group in the 1990s. Another major move occurred when the ‘Want-Want Foodstuff Conglomerate’ purchased CTV, CtiTV, and the China Times Media Group in 2008 creating the ‘Want-Want China Times Group.’

The two leading Cable MSO (Multiple System Operator) in Taiwan were the ‘Eastern Multimedia Group’ (東森多媒體集團) and “GigaMedia” (和信媒體). The former not only owned cable channels but also had stakes in radio production, the hybrid fiber coaxial industry and digital TV development. The latter focused on the broadband internet, video network services, and wireless communication development.
as well as the promotion of digital TV. In 2002 however, the ‘China Network Systems (CNS) Co. Ltd.’ (中嘉網路股份有限公司) was taken over by MBK Partners (安博凱), a big investment company, and in 2007 became GigaMedia’s partner and won the first licence to operate digital TV (Tsai, 2005: 341-2; Tsai, 2005: 529-30).

(4) **Foreign ownership**

Foreign conglomerates also took advantage of the newly liberalised environment to expand their business to Taiwan. Local version of two major US based papers, the ‘Asia Wall Street Journal’ (亞洲華爾街日報) and ‘International Herald Tribune’ (國際先驅論壇報) were launched in the 1990s (Wang, 2002:484). The leading Hong Kong-based tabloids Next Magazine and Apple Daily introduced Taiwanese editions in 2001 and 2003 respectively. Generally speaking however, foreign company would seek local Taiwanese partner to form a joint company or corporation. The women’s magazines, ‘BAZZAR’ (哈潑時尚), ‘ELLE’ (她) and “Marie Claire” (美麗佳人) are good examples as the science and technology magazines, ‘Newton’ (牛頓雜誌) and ‘Science Eyes’ (科學眼) are (Wang, 2002:546).

Table 4.7 shows the top operators and owners in each major media sector according to a research conducted in 2007 by the Survey Centre of Shih Hsin University. As this table shows, two major multi media conglomerates now have significant degrees of control within Taiwan’s commercial media. The Hong Kong based, Next Media group has established a leading position in both major print media sectors, newspapers and magazines while the Want-Want China Times Group (which as we noted earlier, is owned by a major industrial conglomerate) has a significant presence across all four sectors. This degree of concentration and cross ownership points to the relative weakness of the regulatory system, an issue we will return to later.
### Table 4.7 The top 4 operators and owners in each media sector 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media &amp; owners</th>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Magazine</th>
<th>Radio</th>
<th>Wireless TV</th>
<th>Cable TV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Places</td>
<td>Apple Daily</td>
<td>Next Media</td>
<td>Next Media</td>
<td>BCC (Popular)</td>
<td>FTV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Next Magazine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Zhao Shao-kang</td>
<td>FTV Inc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Liberty Times</td>
<td>Union Construction Group</td>
<td>China Times Weekly</td>
<td>BCC (Music)</td>
<td>Zhao Shao-kang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>China Times</td>
<td>Want-Want China Times Group</td>
<td>Common Wealth Magazine</td>
<td>CWM Ltd.</td>
<td>BCC (News)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Want-Want China Times Group</td>
<td>Common Wealth Magazine</td>
<td>CWM Ltd.</td>
<td>BCC (News)</td>
<td>Zhao Chao-kang</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: refer to the data of the Survey Centre of Shih Hsin University on the media in 2007
4.2.4 Advertising Growth

In the 1960s newspaper dominated the media landscape and provided the main media outlet for advertising. In the 1970s as the economy grew and expanded and the population became better educated the circulation of newspapers and the revenues they derived from advertising both rose rapidly. As Table 4.8 shows, between 1961 and 1970, total advertising revenue more than tripled. Over the same period, however, the proportion of total revenue contributed by advertising declined from 62% to 35.80%.

**Table 4.8 Newspaper advertising revenues from 1961 to 1971**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Advertising revenue (Unit: ten thousand NT dollars)</th>
<th>Percentage of total revenues contributed by advertising (Unit: %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>13,268</td>
<td>62.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>14,688</td>
<td>54.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>15,657</td>
<td>51.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>19,425</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>21,100</td>
<td>47.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>23,050</td>
<td>41.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>28,000</td>
<td>41.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>36,500</td>
<td>42.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>43,900</td>
<td>40.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>51,080</td>
<td>35.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>53,760</td>
<td>35.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: refer to Wang Tian-bin’s *The Evolution of Mass Communication in Taiwan* (2002: 257)
Original source: Yan Bo-chin’s *The Study of Taiwan’s advertising amount for 25 years* (1987: 296)
As Table 4.9 shows, this drop began in 1962 with the emergence of the television industry and continued through the decade as it became the most popular medium. As Table 4.9 demonstrates, television rapidly became a major advertising medium with growth rates that exceeded those for both newspapers and radio. In the 1970s however, newspaper was still the major advertising medium with revenues that continued to outstrip those for television.

As Table 4.10 shows, the growth rate rose rapidly from 5.25% to 35.93% between 1971 and 1980, the average growth rate was 22.43%. As a medium for information and entertainment, however, television has been the first choice of Taiwanese people since the 1970s. Table 4.11 clearly shows that the advertising revenue in 1980 was around 7 times that in 1971. For magazines, in the 1960s and 1970s there were strict restraints (mentioned earlier) that hindered their development so that despite the rise of opposition outlets and women’s magazines, advertising revenue did not grow as much as it otherwise might have done.

Nevertheless, the growth rate in the magazine industry was higher than other media from the 1980s to the 1990s. As Table 4.12 shows, advertising revenue in 1978 was 4 hundred million dollars, rising to 90 hundred million dollars in 1998. The growth rate is 22.5%. However, at 40% the growth rate of TV channels is the highest of the three media sectors, following the adoption of the Cable Radio and Television Act was in 1993. In 1998 newspapers and television retained their position as the most attractive media to advertisers with revenues of 277 and 324 hundred million dollars respectively (Hsiao, 2001: 67-70).
Table 4.9 Rates of advertising revenues and growth rates for three media from 1960 to 1971

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th></th>
<th>Radio</th>
<th></th>
<th>Television</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advertising revenue (ten thousand NT dollars)</td>
<td>Advertising rate (%)</td>
<td>Growth rate (%)</td>
<td>Advertising revenue (NT dollars)</td>
<td>Advertising rate (%)</td>
<td>Growth rate (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>10,230</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>3,300</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>13,268</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>+29.62</td>
<td>4,494</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>+36.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>14,688</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>+10.77</td>
<td>5,168</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>+15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>15,657</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>+6.6</td>
<td>5,526</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>+6.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>19,425</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>+24.07</td>
<td>6,605</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>+19.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>21,000</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>+8.62</td>
<td>7,300</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>+10.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>23,050</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>+9.24</td>
<td>8,300</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>+13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>28,000</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>+21.48</td>
<td>8,500</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>+2.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>36,500</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>+30.36</td>
<td>9,200</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>+8.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>43,900</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>+20.27</td>
<td>11,200</td>
<td>10.21</td>
<td>+21.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>51,080</td>
<td>35.26</td>
<td>+16.36</td>
<td>11,040</td>
<td>7.62</td>
<td>-1.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>53,760</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>+5.26</td>
<td>10,800</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>-2.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: refer to Wang Tian-bin’s *The Evolution of Mass Communication in Taiwan* (2002: 305)
Table 4.10 Newspaper advertising revenues and growth rates between 1971 and 1980

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Advertising revenues (ten thousand NT dollars)</th>
<th>Growth rates (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>53,760</td>
<td>5.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>59,882</td>
<td>11.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>84,460</td>
<td>41.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>108,580</td>
<td>28.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>135,260</td>
<td>24.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>159,300</td>
<td>17.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>194,154</td>
<td>21.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>242,484</td>
<td>23.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>325,620</td>
<td>34.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>442,620</td>
<td>35.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: refer to Wang Tian-bin’s *The Evolution of Mass Communication in Taiwan* (2002: 326)

Table 4.11 Television advertising revenues and growth rates from 1971 to 1980

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Advertising revenues (ten thousand NT dollars)</th>
<th>Growth rates (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>44,210</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>54,500</td>
<td>23.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>72,450</td>
<td>32.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>90,600</td>
<td>25.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>100,700</td>
<td>11.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>132,000</td>
<td>31.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>159,500</td>
<td>20.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>203,000</td>
<td>27.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>248,850</td>
<td>22.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>295,380</td>
<td>18.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.12 Growth rates of company numbers and advertising revenues in the four media in 1978 and in 1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Company Numbers</th>
<th>Growth rates</th>
<th>Advertising revenues (Unit: hundred million NT dollars)</th>
<th>Growth rates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>11.65%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazine</td>
<td>2328</td>
<td>5500</td>
<td>2.36%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV channels</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>2.79%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Hsiao Hsiang-wen (2001) ‘The Development of Taiwanese Media Advertising’ in Kuo Liang-wen ed. Taiwan’s Advertisement Development

In the late 1990s and early 2000s however, the rise of the Internet impacted on advertising growth in the established media. In response, the established media have changed their strategies in an effect to maintain profits, employing devices such as reducing the amount of space devoted to advertising in the print media and setting up targeted radio programmings (classic, hits music, teenager, the elderly and the like). Cable channels, however, did not seem to be affected by the transition (Wang, 2002: 476-7, 567-8).

Comparing advertising revenues in the five media from 2000 to 2004, as Table 4.13 shows, wireless (terrestrial) TV has been declining year by year. By contrast, cable TV has kept growing and was attracting around 3 times the amount of wireless TV advertising revenue in 2004. Magazine and newspaper showed a downward trend but in 2002 and 2003 advertising revenues rose again mainly due to the arrival of the Hong Kong based tabloid publications, Next Magazine and the Apple Daily in 2001 and 2003, which generated a new readership (as mentioned above). With more
phone-ins and targeted programmings on the radio, revenue in this sector was also slightly up.

Table 4.13 Advertising revenues of the five media from 2000 to 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unit: thousand NT dollars</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wireless TV</td>
<td>13,001,710</td>
<td>11,559,542</td>
<td>9,816,078</td>
<td>8,785,627</td>
<td>8,628,362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cable TV</td>
<td>17,668,074</td>
<td>16,143,669</td>
<td>22,358,848</td>
<td>24,627,825</td>
<td>25,381,186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>18,745,551</td>
<td>16,414,195</td>
<td>12,190,938</td>
<td>15,120,362</td>
<td>16,524,403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazine</td>
<td>7,200,213</td>
<td>6,509,510</td>
<td>6,613,026</td>
<td>7,557,114</td>
<td>8,063,754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>2,310,490</td>
<td>2,219,508</td>
<td>2,521,834</td>
<td>2,692,176</td>
<td>3,267,401</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: refer to the Advertising Magazine 2005, August, Vol. 167

According to a survey by Taiwan’s Nielsen Company News, the total advertising revenue of the five media, television, newspaper, magazine, radio and outdoor media, reached 222.33 hundred million dollars in the first half of 2008 an increase of 1.1% than over 2007. The major factor behind this growth was the advertising spending of political parties leading up to the presidential election held in March 2008, which accounted for 4.9 hundred million dollars. In that period the fastest growing medium was radio, at 19.1% followed by wireless TV at 11.4%. In contrast, print media (newspapers and magazines) and outdoor media kept dropping.

In the first half of 2009, due to the global financial crisis the total revenue of the five media declined to 183.81 hundred million dollars, as Table 4.14 shows, this is a 15.7% drop compared to same time in 2008. Among the media, the sharpest fall was in the newspaper industry 26.2% followed by outdoor media at 24.8% and magazines at 23%. 

Table 4.14 Advertising markets falling sharply in the first half of 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Wireless</th>
<th>Cable</th>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Magazine</th>
<th>Radio</th>
<th>Outdoor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1H2004</td>
<td>26,141</td>
<td>24,039</td>
<td>22,756</td>
<td>21,981</td>
<td>21,606</td>
<td>16,381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1H2005</td>
<td>24,039</td>
<td>22,756</td>
<td>21,981</td>
<td>21,606</td>
<td>16,381</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1H2006</td>
<td>22,756</td>
<td>21,981</td>
<td>21,606</td>
<td>16,381</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1H2007</td>
<td>21,981</td>
<td>21,606</td>
<td>16,381</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1H2008</td>
<td>21,606</td>
<td>16,381</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1H2009</td>
<td>16,381</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: from the Nielsen Company 2009 survey
http://tw.nielsen.com/site/news20090727.shtml

The importance of advertising as a source of finance has given advertisers considerable potential control over the direction of media. One channel of influence operates through the links between senior politicians and major corporations. At least 12 enterprises, for example, had a relationship with Chen Shui-bian (the now disgraced DPP member) who became president in 2000. They are: (1) Good Food Provider, (2) Fubon Group, (3) China Motor Corporation (CMC), (4) Daan Bank, (5) Continental Engineering Corporation, (6) Macoto Commercial Bank, (7) China Airlines, (8) First Bank, (9) Chunghwa Telecom, (10) Taiwan Shisheido, (11) Taiwan Mobile, and (12) Taishin Bank (Shu, 2003: 136-8). The second major channel of influence is through the Taiwan Advertisers’ Association (TAA) made up of 33 big
enterprises. In 2001 the Association signed an agreement with four civil organisations (Taiwan Media Watch, Taiwan Association of University Professors, Mother Media Watch, and Taiwan End Child Prostitution Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes, ECPAT) to put pressure on media producers to provide output that was more in line with both the commercial interests of advertisers and the moral priorities of the participating organisations. The Association outlined its aims as:

“to integrate the power of Taiwanese advertisers to promote prosperity in industry and Commerce, maintaining good customs in society, constructing a happy life environment, assisting society to be peaceful and progressive. We hope to have a cooperation with quality media, advertising commercial agents and specialised scholars to advance a fair, impartial, open, and credible advertising environment; protecting the rights and interests of the advertiser and enterprises; encouraging the making of quality programmes and positive news reporting to rectify the social ethos. For the next generation, we will urge the media to get rid of violent, pornographic and exaggerated news, and immoral, oppositional programmes. We are willing to devote every effort to insist on the above idea and to take the social responsibility” (Shu, 2003: 132-3; Wang, 2002: 59).

This declaration provoked a fierce discussion in the media and among scholars. Some commentators were concerned that the Association might become an invisible and unaccountable source of control. A media professor Chen Bing-hong, teaching at National Normal University, spoke for many critics when he expressed his opinion in the correspondence column of the United Daily News, saying that he thought that it was improper for advertisers to interfere in media contents and suggested that the TAA should give out its telephone number and address and accept reader’s or audience’s complaints and operate in an accountable manner. Furthermore, all those
organisations who represented consumers should assume active responsibility for monitoring the TAA. An article published by *The Journalist* magazine also questioned the motives of the TAA’s and noted that some enterprisers on the list had close ties with the DPP and were assigned by the government as national policy consultants. President Chen Shui-bian’s decision to congratulate them personally and deliver a supportive speech added to suspicions that the TAA might become a political tool to repress free speech. Professor Hsu Jia-shih, however, argued that there was no need to worry too much about advertiser influence as the media operated according to their own professional criteria of news value and there are other powers in place to guarantee freedom of the press (Wang, 2002: 60-2). This view was to prove altogether too sanguine.

During April and May in 2004 after the presidential election, according to the *Media News* published by the College of Mass Communication at Ming Chuan University, the Media Monitoring Alliance (閩聽人監督媒體聯盟, MMA) and the TAA jointly oversaw the withdrawal of advertising from the ERA and CtiTV news channels as protest against inaccurate reporting of the election. This decision prompted considerable dispute among TV practitioners and media scholars. Most TV managers pointed out that media monitors were free to put forward their opinions on the improper conduct of news reporting and remind the media of the need to adhere to principles of social responsibility and self-discipline but that boycotting the media by withdrawing advertising, directly undermined the ideal of press freedom based on the relative autonomy of journalists. In response, other commentators argued that while this was an admirable ideal, it had in fact been breached in practice. A fact confirmed by the manager of the news section at the TTV, Wang Chi-ying, who admitted that during the course of the election some cable channels had broadcast untrue reports. The boycott action of the MMA and TAA at least had the effect of prompting
self-examination in every TV station.

The leader of the Department Advertising at the Chinese Culture University, Luo Wen-kun, noted that advertisers had the right to choose the media they dealt with since they were the main source of their profits. Other academic commentators disagreed. The director of Journalism Studies at Ming Chuan University, Cheng Chi-rong, arguing that the MMA’s actions had overstepped the mark and that it was worth discussing whether it had the right to critique TV channels. Professor Feng Jian-san, teaching journalism at National Chengchi University, however, insisted that advertising is a force threatening the freedom of the press, and that instituting a boycott is a way of restraining the media. Although the major initiative in this incident was not taken by the TAA, its influence cannot be ignored.

4.2.5 Developing Markets and Competition

Surveying the development of competition in media markets after the end of Martial Law and the introduction of a more liberalised environment, we can identify three important trends across the two major media sectors - the press and television.

(1) Press market segmentation — We see strong growth in specialist newspapers and magazines covering specific areas and readerships, from finance and economics such as the ‘Investor News’ (財訊快報), the ‘Taipei Times’ in English (台北時報) and the ‘Excellent Monthly’ (卓越雜誌), to leisure and entertainment like the ‘Great Daily News’ (大成報) and the ‘Star News’ (星報) (Wang, 2002: 398-9, 428, 478-9).

(2) Changing operating strategies — Intensified market competition has prompted two major corporate responses. Firstly, increased concentration and the formation
of conglomerates, as evidenced by the groups around the two largest newspapers, the *China Times* and the *United Daily News*, and the new entrant, the *Liberty Times* which operates its own publishing enterprise, transit company, record division (CD, VCD and DVD), film studio, travel service and PR company. Secondly, we have also seen increasing collaboration. The multimedia company based around ‘Sinorama Magazine’ (光華雜誌), for example, has produced programmes jointly with radio stations (Wang, 2002: 474, 485-98, 550).

(3) *Competition in the TV market*— Taiwan joining the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2002, has profoundly impacted on the media industries; especially television. With the open policy and the arrival of foreign investment Taiwanese consumers have more opportunities to select high quality programmes but TV practitioners are faced with mounting competitive pressure. In addition to the five terrestrial stations (mentioned earlier), by the end of 2001 the government had issued licences to 63 satellite broadcasting providers and 97 channels in total. 5 broadcasting service proprietors of Direct Broadcast Satellite (DBS), 3 service proprietors of offshore DBS, and 16 programming providers of offshore satellite broadcasting (32 channels) were allowed to run (Wang, 2002: 589, 615). This is in addition to the 5 major cable MSO’s: *Eastern Multimedia Group* (13 cable companies), the *China Network Systems* (10), the *Fuyang Media Technology Inc.* (富洋媒體科技股份有限公司, 7), the *Taiwan Base Network Group* (台灣基礎網路集團, 6), and the *Taiwan Broadband Communication Inc.* (台灣寬頻通訊顧問, 5) and 22 independent conglomerates. The ratio of ratings on the wireless TV stations to the cable channels in 2005 is 2.4: 7.6 compared to 7:3 ten years earlier (Sun, 2006: 21-2; Zhuang, 2005: 410-12). Plus there are six 24-hour cable news

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11 DBS refers to a satellite that transmits television signals that can be picked up directly by a home viewer.

4.2.6 Popular Media Content

In the early days of restoration in Taiwan, newspaper content focused on international news, with only a small amount of local news, and the rest of the space was occupied by advertising. But when the United Daily News was established, the chief editor decided to emphasise domestic social and economic issues. Much of the social coverage was continual like ‘a series of detective novels’, featuring crime cases, political morals, or natural disaster. This trend attracted more readers and increased sales volume. Since then, every newspaper no longer ignored the influence of social news and was engaged in the pursuit of social stories (Wang, 2002: 186-90).

However, in the eyes of critics at that time there were 10 common failings on reporting crime issues (Wang, 2002: 190-1).

1. Journalists often used obscene and filthy words in descriptions of crimes, particularly those of a sexual nature.

2. Making use of large or salacious headlines to catch readers’ eyes.

3. Reporting recounted the details of how crimes were done raising the possibility of imitation effects.

4. The criminal was depicted as a hero (or heroine), which stimulated young people to imitate their behaviour. The scant attention paid to punishments led the reader to assume that committing a crime would deliver excitement without major adverse consequences.

5. Reporting crime with emotional diction; even presenting subjective condemnation
of the defendant to affect judiciary judgment.

(6) Uncovering the victim’s (or people concerned) name, address and position breached journalism ethics, and denied offenders the opportunity to reform themselves and start a new life away from public scrutiny.

(7) Publishing sensational or brutal photographs.

(8) Playing up the adverse consequences of crime for the law-abiding it was argued, weakened public commitment to good virtues and self-discipline.

(9) Publishing excessive details of the police handling of crimes helped perpetrators to evade capture.

(10) Tolerating or even approving bad behaviour harmed the social good.

Following the reform of politics and the extension of press freedom, Taiwan’s media were free to take on the ‘Fourth Estate’ task of overseeing the government. As the former director-general of the Government Information Office, Jason C. Hu, noted:

Deregulating the news media allows media professionals to handle information according to the best of their ability and free judgement. It is extremely important for the media to make information available, serve as a government watchdog, make social assessments, and resolve conflicts. Therefore, the government as well as the public should respect and safeguard the independence of the media in their role as an impartial fourth estate that checks and balances the executive, legislative and judicial branches of the government (Rawnsley, 2001: 17 cited in Hu, 1994).

These aims were advanced in 1999 by the passing of the so-called ‘sunshine laws’, “officially known as the Freedom of Information Act, the National Secrets Act, and the Archives Act” (Rawnsley, 2001:17). These gave journalists a clear indication of which information is public property, and which is not. Administrators would no
longer have the power to arbitrarily determine which documents are classified; that task will fall to an independent legal department. The Laws also inform journalists and, more importantly for the expansion of democratic procedure and accountability in Taiwan, citizens how to access public information. The government would no longer exercise absolute authority in preventing journalists from having access to possibly sensitive information.

At the same time, the intensification of competition accelerated the move towards tabloidisation and the growing concentration on sensation, scandal and celebrity. As we will see in more detail in the later chapters, the Hong Kong-based tabloids *Next Magazine* and *Apple Daily* are famous for their paparazzi-style reporting, launched Taiwanese editions in 2001 and 2003 respectively. Their style not only “drew a tremendous amount of attention in Taiwan’s media circle” but was also “strongly criticised by the politicians, celebrities, as well as the mainstream media that have dominated the market” (Shih, 2002b). At the same time, it was welcomed by commentators who believed its more aggressive and disrespectful stance would expose the mistakes and wrongdoings of celebrities, politicians, and officials and subject their actions and behaviour to the court of public opinion (Wang, 2002:550; Shih, 2002b).

The major innovation in television has been the success of imported drama and film from America, Japan and particularly Korea. This has intensified popular interest in film and television stars with people eagerly consuming gossip about them, collecting souvenirs and even imitating their dress and life styles. As we will see in one of the case studies to be presented later, fascination with the lives of television personalities provides one of the main stands of tabloid coverage. Another innovation in the broadcasting sector, with particular relevance to our focus in this thesis, has been the introduction of phone-in programmes that provide a platform for viewers and listeners
to express their opinions. These proved particularly popular during election periods with people phoning in with suggestions and critiques via phone-in programmes. This is a classic populist device, celebrating the assumed wisdom of common sense and the ‘voice of the people’ against the claims of expertise and special interest groups. Most commentators have, however, welcomed this development and agreed with Rawnsley that “This is an encouraging sign that the so-called new media are gradually opening spaces for political debate, and are thus fostering the further consolidation of Taiwan’s democratic culture” (Rawnsley, 2001: 78). Recent years have also seen the proliferation of niche Internet discussion groups that cater for specialised interests and tastes. But as one observer has noted, greater openness in the expression of opinions does not necessarily deliver increased understanding of the issues. “The speed and efficiency of the electronic media may have created more chances to express opinions but they do not guarantee the public a better understanding of the issues” (Rawnsley, 2001: 79, cited in Chen Chun-hung, Taipei Times, 13 December 1999).

4.3 Summing-up

Like other advanced countries, Taiwan has gone through the double transition of democratisation and commercialisation with profound consequences for the media system. The crucial demarcation point is the lifting of Martial Law in 1987. After that, Taiwanese media have experienced a rapid and dramatic period of change. The new prosperity made the established and emerging media, newspapers, magazines, radio, television and the Internet, much more dynamic.

Owing to the open policy, new players, including politicians and foreign conglomerates, moved to enter the expanding media market. Under the impact of
intensified competition every media outlet had to increase its efforts to secure a profit. In many cases this generated a shift in strategy and content marked by a movement towards more tabloid modes of reporting. This trend was both accelerated and consolidated by the arrival of the Hong Kong-based tabloids Next Magazine and Apple Daily in the 2000s.

Having, in this chapter, sketched in some of the main features of the double transition that have reshaped the general media environment in Taiwan, we will turn to a more detailed examination of the process of tabloidisation. But before presenting the results of our empirical research it is necessary to detail how the study was planned and conducted.
CHAPTER FIVE
Methodology and Fieldwork

In later chapters I will explore the development of tabloidisation and responses and debates addressed by the interviewees, as well as the practical operation of tabloidisation in Taiwanese journalism through three detailed case studies that illuminate different facets of the process. This present chapter elaborates on the research methods employed, looking at the selection of case studies and the conduct of the research.

5.1 Quantitative and Qualitative Methodologies

In the field of methodology, whether in communications and cultural studies or social science research, there are two major approaches: quantitative and qualitative. Generally speaking, quantitative research designed to yield statistical data is still accorded greater respect. Investigators will typically set hypotheses or predictions “about the expected associations or cause-effect relationships between variables” (Gunter, 2002: 230), collect numerical data to analyse, and then produce findings “which lead to the acceptance or rejection of a specified hypothesis” (ibid.). Briefly, quantitative approach follows natural science research in emphasising “objective facts,” “precise measurement,” and “statistical techniques” (Neuman, 2007: 42; Deacon et al., 1999: 4), which meet the accepted criteria of empirical scientific inquiry. In terms of media and communication research, this style of research is operationalised through two major techniques, surveys and experiments. The former
is often applied to study media audience, media producers, and media content and the latter is mobilised to demonstrate whether a hypothesis set by researchers is correct or not. The collected data of both methods are analysed by computer programmes which may allow researchers to compare results across different studies.

In contrast, qualitative approaches remain secondary within social sciences and are still criticised for being “non-scientific” and “invalid” (Berg, 2004: 2; Jensen, 2002: 235). However, over the last two decades, qualitative research has begun to be more widely accepted as integral to the process of inquiry and passive tolerance has been replaced by active dialogue between qualitative and quantitative researchers (Jensen, 2002: 235 referred to Rosengren, 2000). Berg points out that:

**Qualitative research properly seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings. Qualitative researchers, then, are most interested in how humans arrange themselves and their settings and how inhabitants of these settings make sense of their surroundings through symbols, rituals, social structures, social roles, and so forth (2004: 7).**

Another useful definition of qualitative research is offered by Creswell:

**Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Creswell, 2007: 36 cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005: 3).**

Quantitative research appears to be more rigorous and to have the capacity to generate law-like statements of cause and effect, but because it sees social inquiry as
essentially coterminous with inquiry in the natural science, it cannot fully explore the understandings of situation held by actors or explicate the ways they organise choices and behaviour in situated contexts. Consequently, as Berg points out, “if humans are studied in a symbolically reduced, statistically aggregated fashion, there is a danger that conclusions—although arithmetically precise—may fail to fit reality” (Berg, 2004: 7 cited in Mills, 1959). Neuman reinforces this point:

Human social life is based less on objective, hard, factual reality than on the ideas, beliefs, and perceptions that people hold about reality. In other words, people socially interact and respond based as much, if not more, on what they believe to be real than what is objectively real. This means that social scientists will be able to understand social life only if they study how people go about constructing social reality. As people grow up, interact, and live their daily lives, they continuously create ideas, relationships, symbols, and roles that they consider to be meaningful or important. These include things such as intimate emotional attachments, religious or moral ideals, beliefs in patriotic values, racial-ethnic or gender differences, and artistic expressions. Rarely do people relate to the objective facts of reality directly; instead, they do so through the filter of these socially constructed beliefs and perceptions (2007: 43).

Qualitative approaches do not replace quantitative techniques. On the contrary, they can be employed very productively in combination. Qualitative methods do, however, help to address the most conspicuous limitation of quantitative inquiry by allowing “researchers to share in the understandings and perceptions of others and to explore how people structure and give meaning to their daily lives” (Berg, 2004: 7).

5.2 Why Choose the Qualitative Approach

This thesis aims to chart the rise of tabloid journalism in contemporary Taiwan and to trace its impact on the organisation of news reporting and the day-to-day experiences
of journalists. First hand testimony from key actors is, therefore, at the heart of this project. Relatively, open ended interviews, rather than closed questionnaires, were also judged to be the best way of eliciting full replies from those respondents outside of the news media (such as academic commentators) who were asked to comment more generally on the impact of tabloidisation and the possible public policies that might address the situation. Interviews offer flexibility in the ordering of questioning and allow respondents the time and space to elaborate on their answers in the own style and in their own voice. The way they describe events is often as illuminating as what they describe. Plus, as we will see in later chapters, participants often demonstrated or dramatised a general point they wished to make by recounting a particular incident that for them crystallised the forces at work. These kinds illuminating anecdotes are difficult, and often impossible, to accommodate within the organisation of a standard questionnaire.

The Three Case Studies
In designing the qualitative research, three controversial issues that had occurred in Taiwan in recent years were selected as case studies through which to explore the practical production of tabloid news and illuminate the general phenomenon of tabloidisation. The case study approach, which “particularly explores delimited entities, such as communities and organisations, but also singular individuals and events” (Jensen, 2002: 239 cited in Gomm et al., 2000; Yin, 1994), is widely used in qualitative research. “Some sources define the case study method as an attempt to systematically investigate an event or a set of related events with the specific aim of describing and explaining this phenomenon” (Berg, 2007: 283 cited in Bromley, 1990). Or, as Hagan puts it, a case studies are “in-depth, qualitative studies of one or a few illustrative cases” (Berg, 2007: 283 cited in Hagan, 2006). Taken these definitions
together, we can say that case study research “is an approach capable of examining simple or complex phenomenon, with units of analysis varying from single individuals to large corporations and businesses; it entails using a variety of lines of action in its data-gathering segments, and can meaningfully make use of and contribute to the application of theory” (Berg, 2007: 283 cited in Yin, 2003).

The three instances explored in this thesis were chosen because they illustrate three of the key dimensions of tabloidisation outlined earlier: the reporting of the personal lives of politicians and the organisation of scandal; the tension between investigation and sensation in the reporting of risk events; and the reporting of celebrity.

**Forms of Data Collection**

The techniques normally employed in case study research consist of in-depth interviews, the analysis of documents, artifacts, and audiovisual materials, oral or life histories, and participant observation (Berg, 2004: 251; Creswell, 2007: 130; Jensen, 2002: 243). Since, my investigations of the cases in question took place after the event, participant observation was not available as an option. Consequently, after careful consideration, it was decided to base the research presented here primarily on personal (one-on-one) in-depth interviews with key participants supplemented by the analysis of newspapers, audiovisual materials and other secondary sources. As Jensen points out, depth interviews offer several advantages:

*A commonsensical justification for this fact is that ‘the best way to find out what the people think about something is to ask them’ (Bower, 1973: vi). Particularly in-depth interviewing, with its affinities to conversation, may be well suited to tap social agents’ perspective on the media, since spoken language remains a primary and familiar mode of social interaction, and one that people habitually relate to the technological media (2002: 240).*
The role of interviewing as a means of accessing actors understandings is further emphasised by King who argues that the principle “purpose is to gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena” and to explore “the research topic from the perspective of the interviewee, and to understand how and why they come to have this particular perspective” (King, 2004: 11 cited in Kvale, 1983: 174).

The types of questions asked (which are listed in detail in Appendix 2) addressed three main things: Behaviour, Beliefs, and Attitudes (Deacon et al. 2007: 75-77). In addition, all interviewees were asked to complete a form (see Appendix 3) giving their name, age, gender, education, and present position.

The questions about behaviour focus on how reporters had obtained information, how they would react to pressures from their editors (or proprietors), and how they had responded to situations where officials and government had failed to adequately manage the situation of the questions dealing with beliefs and attitudes, asked reporters to reflect on the events they had covered, and on the process of tabloidisation more generally, to explain their working concepts of journalism ethics and social responsibility, and to say what, if any, options for reform they supported.

The interviews were ‘semistandardised’ with the basic range of questioning being determined in advance but allowing for the running order to be altered to match the flow of the interview, and for additions and deletions to be made in subsequent interviews—in order to generate more insights into the subject’s perspective (Berg, 2004: 93, 95).

In addition to the interview material, in connection with the SARS case study a small study of newspaper headlines was conducted to establish basic descriptive statistics on the overall frequency of stories focusing on fatalities or political issues (Deacon et al. 2007: 89). Materials were accessed electronically using the news
database of the National Normal University and National Taiwan University in Taiwan. An analysis of the total 4619 news headlines in three mainstream newspapers—the China Times (CT), the United Daily News (UDN), and the Liberty Times (LT)—over the period from 24 April to 23 May 2003 generated a total of 443 items of SARS-related news coverage. These were then coded to establish how many focused primarily on fatalities or political issues and to produce the overall distribution of attention detailed in Chapter 8. Because the analysis was restricted to headlines however, which may or not be an accurate index of the contents and focus of the stories that appear underneath them, these figures can only be taken as broadly indicative.

**Four Interviewed Groups**

There were 28 interviewees in total (see Appendix 1). They fall into four broad groups—editors, media proprietors or managers, reporters, media scholars, legislators and a government official. The reporters and media proprietors I selected have (had) been all working for the mainstream media as we can see from Table 5.1.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.1 Four Interviewed Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 1  Three Cases</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The VCD scandal of Chu Mei-feng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The suicide comedian Ni Min-ran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SARS epidemic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 2  Media Proprietors (Managers)</strong></td>
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Interviewing Techniques and Ethical Issues

At the same time, interviewing also presents problems as a method of inquiry. People do not always say what they really think or they do not provide adequate information. The quality of response is heavily dependent on the type of questions asked, the interviewee’s position and character, and the interaction between interviewer and interviewee. In addressing these issues five points need to be born in mind.

(1) When you begin to contact potential participants, it is essential to begin building a relationship. In the course of the initial contact, it is essential to let them understand clearly the research purpose and its significance. Secondly, giving them a clear outline of what you are interested in and expect to cover, in advance, allows them to start preparing information, thinking back over their earlier lives and experience, and sifting them for their value and significance. After they have agreed to be interviewed, you have to go on to fix a date and a venue for the interview (Deacon et al., 1999: 295). The length of the interview depends on the need of the study and interviewees’ situations because they may be busy people. But the duration of the in-depth interview is usually at least 30-60 minutes. If when contacted potential participants are reluctant to be interviewed, you cannot force them and should have alternatives.

(2) Next, listing open-ended questions that are clearly understandable is a key point in interviewing although the order in which they are asked and the exact wording may change depending on the specific interview situation. There are four mainly separate informant groups in this study, each with a distinct set of questions. Some useful guidelines for formulating interview questions are offered by Denzin.

Questions should accurately convey meaning to the respondent; they should motivate him to become involved and to communicate clearly his attitudes and opinions;…any specific question should have as a goal the
discerning of a response pattern that clearly fits the broad contents of the investigation...; if questions raise the possibility of the respondent’s lying or fabricating (which is always a possibility), care should be taken to include questions that catch him up, or reveal to him and the interviewer that his previous answers have been incorrect (Berg, 2004: 87 cited in Denzin, 1970: 129).

During interviewing, it is not strictly necessary to ask all interviewees all the questions in order. It is important to leave space to explore particular replies in more detail and to ask follow-up questions.

(3) Arranging a comfortable and quiet environment is helpful to the progress of the interview. However, some interviewees might request to be interviewed in their office or somewhere like a café, nearby. As long as it is convenient to them, you have to conform to their demands. If you have no choice but to be in a crowded restaurant, you need to try to pick a corner that is as quiet as possible. Negotiating a location with interviewees before interviewing is an essential step since it allows the researcher to think about how best to adapt the organisation of the interview to the practical circumstances.

(4) Inevitably, some situations throw up of ethical dilemmas, such as the problem of deception and of confidentiality (Neuman, 2007: 301-2). Since these conditions are most likely to happen in covert research they did not present too great a problem in the present study. Indeed, as we will see, a number of respondents were remarkably candid in recounting their experiences and expressing their opinions. This willingness to ‘confess’ however creates its own ethical issues around the terms on which the interview takes place and the conditions under which it is subsequently used in publications. In terms of basic principles, nonetheless, it is essential to obtain permission from interviewees to use tape (or digital) recorder in advance, and to give them your promise that you will keep the
data safely and confidentially or delete them after completing the transcript. If they have consented to the request, you need to check the recording equipment out and make sure it works well before the interview takes place. Simultaneously, you also have to inquire whether interviewees will allow their names to be published and any documents or audiovisual materials they have provided to be used.

(5) Your personal appearance and attitude (manners) also cannot be neglected. Generally speaking, dressing smartly and neutrally is sufficient. Additionally, you must keep interviewees feeling that you are friendly, trustworthy, confident and considerate while interviewing, which will motivate them offer more information. Of course, not all interviews will go smoothly. Occasionally, the interviewee might be dissatisfied with your performance or upset over something during interviewing, so you have to think of the solution to the difficulties beforehand.

5.3 Selecting the Three Events

The three events selected as case studies are central to this thesis. They illuminate not only the general features of Taiwanese tabloidisation but also the perspectives on journalism ethics held by reporters and editors. In choosing them several considerations were taken into account.

(1) Three controversial and contrasted issues

The first criterion of selection was that all three cases had been hugely controversial. Reporting on each lasted nearly a month and promoted widespread debate on the condition of Taiwanese journalism. The duration of the reporting illuminated the
process of tabloidisation in a particularly clear and extend way, while the scale of professional and public reaction highlighted the issues of ethics that particularly exercised people.

The second criterion of selection was that each of the cases illustrated a contrasted dimension of the tabloidisation process. The first explores the attention given to the private lives of politicians focusing on the scandal provoked by the publication of clandestine video footage of a well-known female politician, Ms. Chu Mei-feng, committing adultery in 2001. The second explores the tension between investigation and sensation in covering public issues using the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) outbreak in 2003 as an example. The third examines the preoccupation with celebrity, taking the suicide of a famous comedian, Mr. Ni Min-ran in 2005.

The VCD scandal of Chu Mei-feng illuminates the problems faced by female politicians, the ethical concepts held by media practitioners, the legal limits to sensationalism, and the construction of audiences as social voyeurs. The SARS epidemic displays the journalists’ drive to uncover the poor crisis management of government officials, and, at the same time, their contribution to escalating the ensuing social panic. The suicide incident of Ni Min-ran throws particular light on the intensely competitive nature of tabloid journalists and the possible contagion of suicide coverage.

(2) Rethinking journalism ethics and social responsibility

The three case study events promoted a barrage of public comment and criticism from scholars, media reformers, media practitioners, and citizens. Many appealed to the news media to draw a line in the sand limiting sensation, and to take more account of journalism ethics and self-discipline. Nevertheless, as we will see, faced with an increasingly competitive market place news practitioners interviewed for this study
often reported finding themselves caught uncomfortably between the owners’ demands to maximise ratings (or finances) and their own sense of social responsibility. Addressing this dilemma raises major policy questions for the organisation and regulation of journalism that we will return in the final chapter after we have presented the detailed material from the cases studies.

5.4 The Conduct of the Fieldwork and Analysis

Before returning to Taiwan to conduct the interviews, I completed the design of the questions for the different interview subjects and collected the news coverage relative to the three cases. I also contacted personal friends who had contacts among the groups I wished to interview to help me start building my sample and make appointments. Personal contacts and recommendations often play a key role in securing access to research subjects and situations, particularly where these are inside the ‘corridors of power.’ However, in Asian societies, including Taiwan, having someone known to the participant to introduce you and vouch for you, plays a particularly central role. It is part of an intricate web of obligations and favours. Once initial contacts have been secured, however, it is possible to extend the sample through ‘snowballing’, capitalising on recommendations made by the interviewees whose own agreement to be interviewed then operates as a ‘calling card’ for the next person in the chain.

I then set off for Taiwan on 3rd September 2005 and remained there until the 28th of February 2006. For the first three weeks I was checking materials for the interviews, keeping in touch with people I wanted to interview, and practicing interviewing techniques. All Interviews took place in Taipei City, Taiwan’s capital. They began on
28th September 2005 and ended on 11th January 2006. During that period of time, I also used the library at the National Taiwan University to access relevant background and contextual documents and collected relevant photographs from newspaper and the magazine websites. The major exceptions were the crucial audiovisual materials and the court written judgment relating to the Chu Mei-feng scandal. These were provided by personal contacts.

The interviews generally went well. Respondents seemed to trust me and offered plenty of information, some because I had been recommended to them by my friends and my cousin, others because they saw my own past experience as a radio presenter as providing shared experience and common ground. One indication of the level of rapport achieved was that all agreed to my requests both for digital tape-recording, (made before the interviews took place) and for permission to publish their names in the thesis. The average duration of each interview was about 45 minutes.

At the same time, I was not able to gain access to all of the people I wanted to interview. Most newspaper owners or managers refused to be interviewed as did the legislator of the ruling party. These are major gaps but despite repeated approaches I was unable to secure co-operation. At the same time, there were some unexpected additions to the sample among senior figures, including a senior official of the Local Government Information Office, and a chief reporter of a satellite television station.

During the six months I spent in Taiwan, in addition to conducting the interviews I began transcribing all the material, initially into Chinese, and then translating into English, a process which took almost three months to complete after I had come back to the UK. Although time consuming, this process had the advantage of giving me the chance to review the data thoroughly and to make considered decisions as to which passages to mark up in the transcripts. I did not use qualitative computer programmes, like ATLAS ti or NVIVO 7, for this purpose for two reasons. Firstly the data set was
relatively small and secondly I was not undertaking a systematic study of styles or the organisation of expression, I was locating passages that dealt directly with the core issues of the thesis.

Overall, this study can be seen as an exercise in Grounded Theory in which first hand testimony is employed to explore the everyday practices through which tabloidisation is accomplished and to generate insights that are then tested against the interpretations offered by current academic analysis (Berg, 2007: 287).

An Additional Pilot Study

Apart from the one-on-one and in-depth interviews, I conducted an additional pilot work for the study. It aimed to discover what concepts of journalism ethics final-year undergraduate journalism (or mass communication) students operated with.

It presented three ethically sensitive news scenarios (see Appendix 4) to 8 final-year undergraduate students taking degrees in journalism in Taiwan and asked them to comment on whether they would cover the stories and if so, how. The 8 students were selected from four Universities which have an established reputation for teaching in Journalism Studies (or Mass Communication). They are National Chengchi University, Fu Jen Catholic University, Shih Hsin University, and Tamkang University. Each University contributed 2 students, one female and one male, to the study. Although the results are not reported in this thesis, the exercise offered valuable clues to themes worth pursuing both in the analysis presented here and in a further research on journalism ethics education.
CHAPTER SIX
Tabloidisation in Taiwan: Responses and Debates

As we noted in Chapter 4, in common with other transitional societies, over the last two decades, Taiwan has experienced major transformations in both its economic and political organisation. Both have had major impacts on the organisation and performance of the media systems of which the most noticeable and most marked has been an accelerating trend towards tabloidisation. This chapter explores the development of this process, its general effects on the conduct of journalism, and the responses and debates of the public.

6.1 The Beginnings of Taiwan’s Tabloid Media

The origins of Taiwanese tabloid media development can be dated back to the late 1970s and 1980s. Although Martial Law was still in force at the time, the owner of the United Daily News decided to launch a new paper called the Min Sheng Daily in 1978. It was built around ‘soft news’ drawn from the areas of sports, culture and art, showbiz, and popular entertainment and was designed to complement the United Daily News’s focus on ‘serious news’. Its arrival promoted an immediate response from rivals. With another major daily newspaper, the China Times, inaugurated a new weekly magazine, the China Times Weekly, which combined ‘hard news’ and ‘soft news’ (Wang, 2002: 340, 345). Two other magazines the Jade Magazine established in 1982 and the Scoop Weekly launched in 1986 adopted a sensationalist stance, emphasising celebrity’s scandals. Despite the different emphases in their
coverage, all four publications used conspicuous photos of people and banner headlines on their front covers. *Jade Magazine* would regularly carry pictures of naked figures and photos suggesting sexual activities. While in western societies, these kinds of photographs had been familiar for some time, but in Taiwan with its markedly more conservative folkways at that time, they were both novel and highly controversial. In contrast, national television, which was still limited to the ‘old three TV stations’ dominated by the ruling party (KMT), was still very conservative both politically and morally, the content continuing to focus on politics and economics or education and society, with very few sensational stories. This pattern also continued to apply to most newspapers, with most media proprietors, editors and journalists working with a sense of strong self-censorship alongside the external constraints on political reporting imposed by *Martial Law*.

As we saw in Chapter 4, however, after *Martial Law* was lifted in 1987 the media environment changed significantly. The shift from authoritarianism to democratisation, coupled with the end of the restrictions on newspapers in 1988 and the Publishing Act in 1999, ushered in a new era of increased competition and greater openness. Four developments are particularly worth noting. First, there was greater diversity of speech in the media, alongside a greater interest in, and concern with politics. Secondly, the number of media outlets proliferates rapidly creating an increasingly competitive media market. Thirdly, this expansion generates demand for a substantial increase in the number of journalist, bringing large number of young people into the media, many of whom had little or no professional training. Fourthly, with the emergence of a consumer society advertisers see the media as more central to their activities and demand greater returns in terms of the size and composition of the audience delivered. However, as Pan Jia-ching, a professor of journalism at National Chengchi University, pointed out, this new found openness created new pressures
which presented major challenges for the maintenance of responsible practice.

The genuine freedom and democracy cannot be simply concerned with an Act abolished but whether the public would be sound and mature, whether politics and culture would be on the correct trajectory, whether the political and economic force could be withdrawn from the media, whether the media could avoid degenerating. No matter government, parliament, society or the media should have got many things to do. The repeal of Publication Act is just a first step of winning over the real freedom for journalism publishing. But how are we able to constitute a liberal and open communication system in society? How should we push forward the media to be really free and responsible for the journalism industry? All these questions which will be assured depend on the efforts in all respects. (Wang, 2002:510)

6.2 The Rise of Tabloid Journalism in Taiwan

One of the increased points of pressure concerned the relations between journalists and their employing organisations. In 1994 ownership of the Independence Post was transferred to a Taipei City Councillor, Chen Cheng-chung, and the editor in chief and certain senior staff were fired provoking widespread staff resentment and protest. The incident sparked a general reaction among journalists and scholars, which led to the establishment of the Association of Taiwan Journalists in 1995, one of whose main concerns was defending journalists’ professional autonomy. At the same time, a ‘convention of journalism ethics’ was drawn up to define what constituted professional responsibility. One of the key expectations was that journalists should take on the role of the ‘Fourth Estate’, checking on government activities, drawing attention to mismanagement, exposing corruption, offering advice and critique, suggesting alternative policy options, and championing the publics’ ‘the right to know’ by uncovering information that citizen’s needed to have access to in order to
make rational political choices, but which power-holders might wish to conceal (Wang, 2002: 506-8).

In the early period of democratisation, The Journalist magazine established a reputation for the incisiveness of its political reports. At the same time, the turbulence that accompanied the introduction of multi party competition sometimes provided a sensational spectacle that no news outlet could ignore. In a famous incident, members of the opposition DPP, including women members, engaged in a fist fight with members of the KMT on the floor of the Legislative Yuan. The brawl was caught on camera and shown not only across Taiwan and throughout the world, creating a highly negative image of the island’s new democracy.

The crucial turning point in the tabloidisation process, however, originated overseas, with the arrival of Taiwanese editions of publications developed by the Hong Kong media magnate, Jimmy Lai.

APPLEISATION

In 2001 Mr. Li Chi-ying (known in Hong Kong as Jimmy Lai), owner of the Hong Kong Next Media, invested a substantial sum in launching a Taiwanese version of Next Magazine, to be followed two years later by a version of his best selling Hong Kong tabloid, the Apple Daily. Because they originated overseas neither publication had long standing ties with powerful officials and notable figures on the island nor were therefore outside the system of favours and reciprocities that provided Taiwanese reporters with sources while at the same time imposing constraints on their freedom of action. In addition, the Lai titles employed paparazzi photographers and credit reference agencies (to obtain background information ‘target’ figures) in ways that were alien to established journalistic procedures on the island. As the publisher of the Next Magazine Peir Woei (interviewee No.01, see Appendix 1) explained in
Since the governing party has been changed in 2000, lots of things have to be reformed in Taiwan. We always think, in essence, the exposure of scandal is a basis of reformation. That is why we report the sort of things in our weekly magazine but we still have a definite criterion. We certainly hope to uncover more and more illegal public affairs.

Although a large number of Taiwanese journalists condemned the magazine’s and Apple Daily’s style of reporting, they attempted to imitate it. Even the conventional three papers-bloc—the United Daily News, the China Times and the Liberty Times—embraced the new tabloid climate in response to intensifying market competition. Some Taiwanese commentators have referred to this phenomenon as ‘Appleisation’. Using Colin Sparks’ classificatory schema, these titles moved from belonging to the ‘serious’ press to becoming ‘semiserious’ press and ‘serious-popular’ press (Sparks, 2000c:13-15). As Dahlgren (1992:7) points out, this transition is taking place across the globe, as “the ‘serious’ press as a whole, seems to be in marked decline in the contemporary world….The popular and tabloid press has been growing.”

**Paparazzi Culture in Taiwan**

Paparazzi photography, which plays such a central role in contemporary tabloid journalism, did not exist in Taiwan before the arrival of Hong Kong Next Media. Once introduced however, a growing number of press photographers using high-tech camera and driving fast cars or motorbikes began to follow politicians, celebrities, and in an effort to obtain ‘candid’ shots of them off duty and in revealing or embarrassing situations.

Hong Kongers dubbed the paparazzi the ‘puppy team’ or ‘gou zhai (dui)’ in Chinese after the ‘Criminal Intelligence Bureau’ (CIB) sector of the Hong Kong
Police Force whose members were specially trained to follow and track designated targets using the full range of available high-tech equipment. Since they exhibited the tenacity of hunting dogs they were nick-named ‘gou zhai dui’.

Paparazzi culture arrived in Taiwan in 2001 with the launch of *Next Magazine* along with the popular description of its practitioners as ‘gou zhai’. Initially it was seen as introducing a welcome fresh dimension of candid coverage into reporting and some public figures attempted to harness the sense of informality and veracity by orchestrating paparazzi style coverage of themselves on and off duty. These efforts to manage candid coverage in the interest of image building, however, were in continual tension with uninvited, uncontrollable attention, and the breaches of privacy that this entailed.

**Abundant Visual Images**

The growth of paparazzi photography as a key practice in news gathering was reflected in the marked increase in the use of visual images in press design and display. As Karin Becker points out, the resulting visual field is at the heart of tabloid style.

Yet, a component common to the various constructions of the sensational is that attracting attention takes precedence over other journalistic values, including accuracy, credibility and political or social significance. In the US, the sensationalism of the tabloid press was intensified by ‘photographs of events and personalities reproduced which are trite, trivial, superficial, tawdry, salacious, morbid, or silly’ (Taft, 1938: 448). It was not the subject matter, in other words, but the ways the photographs reproduced it which appealed to the emotions and thereby created the sensation (1992: 133).

*Next Magazine* and *Apple Daily* have been highly successful in harnessing this new visual effect to create an instantly recognisable style marked by sensational headlines.
and vivid photos. The cover of the Next Magazine Vol. 284 (see figure 6.1), for instance, carries two banner headlines and eye-catching photos soliciting the reader’s engagement with a financial scandal and the killing of a university’s student by a gang.

Another representative front page (see figure 6.2) from Apple Daily features the dead bodies of a group of Chinese tourists who were involved in a fatal traffic accident in Taiwan on 2\textsuperscript{nd} October 2006, which left 6 dead and 15 wounded. Even now, most general newspapers in Taiwan would hesitate to carry such a photo on the front page. The visual field of Apple Daily is not defined solely by its dramatic use of photographs however. It also deploys colourful illustrations and diagrams, often borrowed from or modeled on sources in popular culture to display information. Take two examples, one is an illustration of the Skycar invented by Moller International Inc. in the United States, which shows its detailed configuration and function (see figure 6.3). The other a diagram, taken from the image of fast-food shop (see figure 6.4), displays statistics for Taiwanese employment in August 2006, the largest ‘kola cup’ showing the unemployed number in services industry (nearly six million people), the middle one showing the number of engineering jobs and the smallest one showing the situation in agriculture, forestry and fishery.

Compare these examples to the layout of the front pages in the three main traditional papers, they are much less spectacular with no sensational headlines and much less taken up by images. Take, for example, the front page of the Liberty Times (see figure 6.5) reports that the principal of the National Taiwan University was urging students to recover personal virtues and not to cheat in examinations, plagiarise in assignments, park bikes out of order, or clamor around the classroom. In the China Times example (see figure 6.6), the major story deals with the problem of the overproduction of bananas. In both cases the lead story is accompanied by a photo
directly related to it. In the *United Daily News* example (see figure 6.7), however, while the main headline relates to the conflict between two banks in the process of merging. The photo features a totally unrelated image of a wedding feast. This layout illustrates the argument, made earlier, that the paper has moved from ‘serious’ to ‘serious-popular’ in Sparks’ terms. There are banner headlines, a photograph takes up as much space as the main text, and the image is firmly in the ‘human interest’ category, but the main story focuses on an important shift in the financial system. Similarly, while the other two examples both carry banner headlines and photos that occupy half or more of the page space, both the lead stories address ‘serious’ issues, in education in the one case and the economy in the other.

![Figure 6.1 Cover of the Next Magazine Vol. 284, 30 October 2006](image-url)
Figure 6.2 Front Page of the *Apply Daily*, 3 October 2006

Figure 6.3 An Introduction of Skycar in the *Apply Daily*, 4 November 2006
Figure 6.4 A Population Statistics on Taiwanese Employment in August, 2006

Figure 6.5 Front Page of the Liberty Times, 15 October 2006
Figure 6.6 Front Page of the *China Times*, 15 October 2006

Figure 6.7 Front Page of the *Untied Daily News*, 15 October 2006
6.3 Market-Driven Journalism

Alongside the impact of the tabloid style imported from Hong Kong, the tabloidisation process in Taiwan has also been driven by the intensification of competition generated by the proliferation of media outlets. According to the Publication Annual 2005 published by the GIO of the Executive Yuan, there are over 700 registered newspapers which 50 papers have a regular circulation and over 6500 registered magazines. As to television, excluding home-shopping services and the five terrestrial television stations, there are over hundred and thirty cable and satellite channels (Liu, 1997:124; 137), including six 24-hour news channels. In addition, the recent rapid rise of the internet has increased competition for audiences and advertising money still further with serious negative impacts on the print media. The China Times Express ceased publication in November 2005 and the Great Daily News, the Central Daily News, Taiwan Daily and the Min Sheng Daily all closed in 2006.

Attracting and retaining advertising revenue is the key to the economic viability of all commercial media that cannot cover costs from direct sales to customers. At the same time, the pursuit of this goal has a major impact on journalistic strategies since in an increasingly competitive market, maximising audience share pushes editors and reporters towards a search for sensation and immediate impact. No wonder Carl Bernstein, one of reporters to break open the Watergate scandal, blames the market orientation of modern US journalism for creating an ‘idiot culture’ of journalistic titillation in which “we teach our readers and our viewers that the trivial is significant, that the lurid and loopy are more important than real news” (McManus, 1994c: 1-2).

With the exception of Public Television Service and certain religious channels most newspapers and broadcast stations in Taiwan have been caught up in this process to a greater or lesser extent. But what sorts of content constitutes the major ‘selling’ points
of tabloid presentation? The answer is political scandals, celebrities’ lives, and crime.

**Digging Up Political Scandal**

Although, as we saw in an earlier chapter, the media exposure of political scandal has a long history, but as we noted above, the pursuit of political leaders or officials by reporters and paparazzi is a relatively recent development in Taiwan. In the process political figures have become like movie stars, celebrity politicians whose public and private lives are continually under media surveillance for material that can be translated into front page stories. Twenty years ago, journalists mainly confined themselves to reporting the official political agenda and major policy initiatives, probing the private lives of politicians and officials, not to mention his/her transgressions, was both difficult and strongly discouraged. Nowadays however, private lives are no longer off limits and reporting political scandals allows media institutions to celebrate its role as servant of the public interest while retailing material that is known to be a major attraction to audiences. In considering the reporting of political scandals, however, we need to disentangle three dimensions.

First, in their claimed role as watchdogs on abuses of power, reporters have a professional responsibility to expose politicians and government officials suspected of malpractice or criminal wrongdoing. Mr. Chen Che-nan, the former Deputy Secretary-General to the President, for example, was forced to resign his position in 2005 when his sexual proclivities and corrupt dealings in connection with the Kaohsiung Mass Rapid Transit System were exposed. The following year, Taiwanese prosecutors charged President Chen Shui-bian’s wife, Wu Shu-chen and three former presidential aides with corruption over the alleged misuse of state funds. The majority of the population, including Taiwan’s opposition, called for the President’s resignation.
In a political system in which corruption is commonplace, cases of this sort are exposed and reported on a regular basis.

Second, in an age of mediated visibility, where the construction of a positive image is essential to a successful political career, political leaders continually attempt to use media to achieve visibility on terms that they can control. “Cable television allows politicians to address their own local constituencies (the process known as narrowcasting) free from mediation by journalists. (Subscription rates for cable increased by 5% during the 1996 presidential election campaign, suggesting the voters demand greater access to cable when their interest and involvement in politics is highest.) It is not surprising that many politicians have become media celebrities by starring in their own television or radio programmes” (Rawnsley, 2004: 214). In this situation of image saturation lapses in moral behavior are unlikely to remain hidden or unreported and will attract strong censure when they do come to light. As Thompson (2000: 108) notes, “mediated visibility can be a trap. The more visible you are, the more vulnerable you may be, because more visibility will generate more interest from the media and, however much you may with to manage your self-presentation through the media, you cannot completely control it.” The case of Shieh Kuo-liang, a young legislator, provides an instructive example. He was photographed by a magazine reporter having a seemingly romantic dinner with an attractive young woman, thought to be his new girlfriend (see figure 6.8). Mr. Shieh denied this and suspected that he might have been the victim of a ‘honey trap’ since the girl, who had actively invited him for a meal, was the gastronomic columnist for the magazine that carried the story.

Third, on occasions, the media may be actively used as tool of political attack. As the incident of the fist fight on the floor of the parliament, mentioned earlier, demonstrates in extreme form, Taiwan’s two major parties display a high level of mutual antagonism, particularly during election campaigns, and only too willing to
disseminate ‘black’ propaganda in an effort to damage opponents. The VCD scandal of Ms. Chu Mei-feng, which we will explore in detail in a later chapter, for example, might not have unfolded in the way that it had Ms. Chu not been a legislator or forced her to leave the political field. As Thompson (2000:7) points out, “Political scandals can be, and often are, terrible personal tragedies for the individuals who are caught up in them; their lives may be thrown into chaos and their careers may be disrupted or even destroyed.” As we will see, the Chu case is a perfect illustration of this process in action. However, it is complicated by the fact that she was also a well known television personality and therefore a show business celebrity as well as a politician.

Figure 6.8 Cover of the TVBS Magazine Vol. 469, 25 October 2006

Exposing the Private Lives of Celebrities

In a media saturated culture, the private lives of celebrities from the worlds of sports and entertainment are a particular focus of attention and fascination and a pivotal element in the tabloid mix. As Ting Yuan-kai (interviewee No. 07, see Appendix 1), a reporter who works for Sanlih E-Television, recounted in interview:

In the past, I mean before the Next Magazine and the Apple Daily coming to Taiwan, I had been a reporter in the movie and television section for a print
press. At that time political and social news or whatever would be the headline in the front page. As to those celebrities’ information would be always put in the back. The showbiz journalist like me would hardly be noticed at all. Nonetheless, when both media were launched in Taiwan, the media ecology underwent a big change. Suddenly entertainment information often became the headline. Now as a TV reporter, I had to keep chasing the celebrity’s track when I was assigned. This situation will apparently emerge out of the rating. You know today the manipulative mode of TV news is to produce a news as a series of dramas or a detective novel. Viewers’ sentiments will rise and fall by the different news plot every day.

As this account suggests, in a commercially-driven climate the show business reporter and paparazzo become crucial mediators between celebrities and audiences (fans). By establishing an emotional connection candid portraits and intimate details shorten the social distance between audiences and movie stars, sports stars, and even some television anchors. As the editor in chief of the Jade Magazine Tian Cheng-chung (interviewee No.02, see Appendix 1) pointed out in interview, audiences are often ambivalent about intimacies secured through the use of tabloid techniques.

Don’t you think normally a person has got two sides? When he says the media should not report in tabloid style, in fact he has a desire to peep into the celebrities’ stories through the words and photos and feels delighted.

As Figures 6.9, 6.10, 6.11 and 6.12 show, celebrities actions in public spaces are now recorded in intimate and continuous detail by the Taiwanese tabloids, raising major questions about intrusion and the violation of privacy.

Sensational Crime News
Because crime, and policing, impacts on the security of citizens, the safety of public spaces, and the quality of public life, and poses vital questions and choices for public policy, it is necessarily a core focus for media reporting and analysis. Yet in the new
market-oriented environment the coverage of crime in the popular Taiwanese media tends to focus on sensational and lurid incidents and trials, and heighten the dramatic impact by borrowing presentational techniques from television fiction series or movie scenarios. The result is what Fox and Van Sickel (Fox and Sickel, 2000:3) have dubbed ‘tabloid justice’.

This trend is most evident on Taiwan’s television news channels where the competition is far more intense than in the print media and where there are
opportunities to offer live coverage. For major events, it is not unusual to have over 20 TV cameras and around 50 or 60 journalists on the spot jostling to ‘snatch’ the latest developments and relay them in real time in an effort to give viewers a “present, immediate and actual” sense of being on the scene (White, 2003). Live coverage often shows a chaotic scene, with reporters and camera crews constantly struggling for advantageous positions and the most dramatic footage. If the police are in the process of breaking into a house where criminals have been hiding, for example, the regulations stipulate that reporters are not allowed on the scene, but it is not uncommon for camera crews to try to follow the attack team into the house and premises to record the dramatic and possibly bloody events.

In addition, reporters frequently make predictions or presumptions about the development of a criminal case before the police make a formal announcement, thereby possibly prejudicing the fairness of any subsequent trial.

6.4 Responses and Debates on Tabloidisation

As Rooney (2000: 91) notes, “The debate about tabloids is a debate about quality.” Because tabloid “focuses on sensational or gossip-filled reports of crime stories or the personal lives of celebrities,” “the word tabloid is often used in a derogatory sense, and tabloid journalism is generally assumed to be bad journalism (Örnebring and Jónsson, 2004)” (Wang, 2009: 750). The widely perceived decline in journalistic standards and the quality of reporting in Taiwan has prompted a range of responses and questions but discussion sooner or later comes back to the key questions of what pressures do reporters and editors feel themselves to be under and how do they view their work and on balance, has tabloidisation helped or hindered the movement
towards full democratisation and citizenship?

**Criticisms**

The perception that the growth of tabloidisation marks a decline in journalistic standards is widespread in market-driven media systems. In Britain, McNair (1996:160) suggests that popular tabloid journalism in the 1990s sunk to “new depths of prurience and sensationalism, to the extent that traditional press freedoms in the United Kingdom have been placed at risk.” While James Curran argues that “there had been an erosion of serious news in large circulation British newspapers since before World War II” (Sparks, 2000c: 22 cited in Curran, 1980). In the United States there is a widespread “belief that the tabloids are less truthful or reliable than the serious press and that this inaccuracy is in some way infecting the latter” (Sparks, 2000c: 9). These concerns are shared by many Taiwanese journalists who entered the profession before the intensification of press tabloidisation prompted by Jimmy Lai’s launch of *Apple Daily*. As Hong Su-ching (interviewee No. 16, see Appendix 1), a reporter on the *Liberty Times* in Taiwan, recounted in interview:

*I feel that since the *Apple Daily* came into Taiwan in the past one or two years, the whole environment of the Taiwanese media has undergone a big transition. The change in the media structure, it has impacted particularly on traditional print media. In terms of a medical journalist like me, I think most of chiefs would respect the journalist’s specialty before,….Nevertheless, at present they feel other media often cover the tabloid news, so they also expect the medical journalist to follow their steps.*

This tabloidisation of expertise moves journalism further away from the ideal of supplying audiences with the information and analysis required for full citizenship. As Colin Sparks (2000c: 29) argues, “there is no doubt that the successes of the tabloid form demonstrate very clearly that it can address the individual as consumer,
but there can be equally little doubt that it has little or nothing to contribute to the life of the citizen.”

Casting the audience simply as consumers is over simple however. They are also increasingly encouraged to be producers, casting them in the hybrid role of ‘prosumers’. Journalists are no longer the only or even the primary source of story ideas. The tabloid media and even the traditional quality papers in Taiwan have set up free telephone lines and E-mail boxes and invited readers to contact them with information about possible scandals or stories with a sensational element. These efforts to involve audience members as co-producers of content can be seen as part of a commercial populist strategy designed to dissolve the barriers between the paper and its readers and reinforce its claims to be ‘the people’s’ voice. But they have contradictory potentials. One the one hand, they open channels that all ‘whistle blowers’ in government agencies or commercial organisations to alert journalist to genuine instances of corruption and malpractice. On the other, they fuel the trend towards ‘vigilante justice’ by encouraging readers to settle old scores or activate pre-existing prejudices towards minorities. For a professional news worker, using readers as sources is a double edged sword. It might lead to an exclusive but in the process it reinforces a culture of distrust and popular surveillance. As the writer in chief and convener of the social news team at the *China Times Weekly*, Lin Chao-hsin (interviewee No. 19, see Appendix 1) pointed out in interview:

**Before the Next Magazine and the Apple Daily landed in Taiwan, Taiwanese news media did not often highlight the exposure but just had so-called ‘scoop’ which came from the interviewees with sources like the police or the victim's lawyer. Since the two tabloid media came over to Taiwan, however, they always emphasised disclosure….also urged ordinary people to pursue exposures or to dig out others’ privacy.**
The arrival of Apple Daily also altered the relationship between the press and television. In his fiercely critical commentary on US commercial television Neil Postman (Underwood, 1993: 68) argues that “We have been corrupted by the ‘entertainment’ orientation of television….In presenting news to us packaged as vaudeville, television induces other media to do the same, so that the total information environment begins to mirror television.” This argument conflates the sourcing of stories with their presentation. In terms of sourcing, the tabloid print media in Taiwan more often than not set the agenda for television news. As the Apple Daily reporter Wang Zhao-bin (interviewee No. 17, see Appendix 1) recounted:

Concerning the trend of sensational news or snatching the news faster, Apple Daily has certainly got its responsibility for this since it is an influential newspaper. However, you will see, for instance, after we published a piece of news on the front page or the second page, then television stations might think it should be a good story and started following up, keeping chasing over, as well as adding some seasoning to the story.

In terms of presentation, however, it is the visual techniques of television that have helped to reshape press presentation and intensify the emphasis on using dramatic imagery.

As Pierre Bourdieu (1998: 50-51) has pointed out, however, the rise of television as the pivotal popular medium has also helped to redefine the news environment in more fundamental ways: “through the increased symbolic power of television overall, and, among the competing kinds of television, the increase influence of the most cynical and most successful seekers after anything sensational, spectacular, or extraordinary, a certain vision of the news comes to take over the whole of the journalistic field. Until recently, this conception of the news had been relegated to the tabloids specialising in sports and human interest stories….They depoliticise and reduce what goes on in the
world to the level of anecdote or scandal. This can occur on a national or international scale.”

This normalisation of sensation has arguably generated new kinds of audience demands and expectations. As Ben Yu (interviewee No. 09, see Appendix 1), the chief reporter of Phoenix Satellite Television Limited Taiwan Branch, observed in interview:

The role of Taiwanese media, particularly television journalism nowadays, is like the European tabloid newspapers. It means some people are satisfied with this kind of tabloid desire which did not exist in Taiwan before.

More than that, sometimes so-called ‘pseudo-event’ or ‘pseudo-condition’ would be made up in TV journalism to stimulate the viewer’s emotion and the rating up. If the unreal event has convinced the audience, the journalist would conjecture or predict the event what going on. Confronting the worsened quality of TV journalism, a given this shift in popular tastes, the Taiwanese lawmaker Lee Ching-an (interviewee No. 27, see Appendix 1) argues that the negative impacts of tabloidisation an only be fully addressed by changing audience demands.

With the open society, plenty of moral concepts have been changing. Plus a massive amount of commercial TV channels have become involved in the media industry, so that most of the news content is saturated with sensation and pornography. If we want to improve the phenomenon, I think the major point should be associated with our consumers, which means audiences. They are really a key people to determine if a programme or a news could be lasting or raising its rating up.

In an attempt to prompt change, a number of intellectuals and parents conducted a passive boycott by switching their television sets off but attracted only limited popular support.
Defences

Not all commentators or reporters see the development of tabloidisation in negative terms. Some take a more positive stance arguing that all media workers need to grasp the core market concept of knowing and responding to audience demands. A journalism professor at Fu Jen Catholic University, Hsi Hsian-de, (Publication Annual 2005) sees Apple Daily as having introduced much needed innovation into the press market and argues that its success with audiences, particularly among young people, demonstrates that it is addressing a genuine gap in the market. Figures produced by AC Nielsen show that the main consumers of Apple Daily are aged between 12 to 39 and that the proportion between 30 and 34 is 21.8% which is some way ahead of the second placed title, the Liberty Times with 18%, whose readership profile is significant biased towards older age groups with the majority being aged between 40 and 60 (ibid.). As Wang suggests, “Although associated with negative connotations, tabloid newspapers have attracted a large amount of readership worldwide and the popularity of tabloid journalism has caused a trend of tabloidisation” (2009: 750). In Europe, it is argued that this new element of competition “is one of the main mechanisms that is forcing journalists to think more carefully and flexibly about how to reach people who would be otherwise indifferent to news media” (Sparks, 2000c: 9). The need for this rethinking is confirmed by the apparent shift in the motivations for readership. Whereas Liberty Times readers are more inclined to choose it for its political stance, and support for the DPP. Young Taiwanese are more attracted to the life style and entertainment orientation of the tabloids.

As Colin Sparks (2000c: 3) notes, “For most commentators, it is not so much the existence of the tabloid press proper that is seen as the problem.” Indeed, some tabloid reporters argue that “they are running more stories that qualify as serious journalism” (ibid.). This is certainly the case with Apple Daily, with my interviewee there, Mr
Wang, forcefully pointing out that although the paper is controversial, people admire its record on exposing governmental and corporate scandals. Nor is this an empty boast. For example, its exclusive ‘The inside story of unconscionable TV set company’ in 2004, not only prompted other media to follow up the story, but was instrumental in getting the owner of TV company sentenced, an achievement that resulted in Apple Daily being awarded the ‘Journalism Award of the Mr. Tseng Shu-bai Foundation.’ Other journalists point to the legal constraints that tabloid journalism operates under and their disciplining effect. As Mr. Shao (interviewee No.3, see Appendix 1) explained:

As a tabloid journalist, in fact, he absolutely never wants to make chaos on purpose but just wants to make a living. Normally the tabloid journalist has a good relationship with showbiz and knows loads of celebrities. Some of star’s desire to be well-known makes them dependent on tabloid news. Nowadays, however, the more competitive pressure we have, the more sensational the news we cover. But when the coverage goes too far, the celebrities will resort to the law to accuse the tabloid journalist. This makes the journalist tend to verify the truth and to deal with it accurately. Otherwise, he or the company will be accused and fined. This sort of reaction and learning is a good thing actually.

This defence echoes the claim by British tabloid papers quoted earlier that “they are more concerned with getting it right than their more august colleagues: they have to be, because the sort of things they write about are more likely to land them in court” (Sparks, 2000c: 9 cited in Engel, 1997:303).

**Journalists vs. Proprietors**

When talking about tabloidisation, however, it is important to separate the interests of journalists from the interests of media owners. They do not always coincide and may be in conflict. As Bagdikian (1990: 5) notes, the major motivations of proprietors are
likely to be profit maximisation and influence. The imperative to maximise returns puts a premium on audience maximisation which in turn exerts pressure on journalists and programme producers to emphasise sensation. As Ben Yu, mentioned earlier, noted in interview, this pressure is not welcomed by television journalists, many of who have a different conception of reporting as a professional craft to their proprietors. However, given their subordinate position in the organisational power structure they may feel that they have no choice but to comply with demands from above. Lin Yi-jun (interviewee No. 14, see Appendix 1), a reporter for the Chinese Television System (CTS), recounted in interview how once her director assigned her to carry out a work that required her to employ a secret video camera to shoot the footage. Although this was illegal, she felt she had to do it in order to prove the truth of the story. We can suggest four possible reasons for the relative lack of autonomy enjoyed by television journalists.

Firstly, the market competition is fiercer than in the press sectors due to the rapid growth of cable and satellite channels. Secondly, the practice of complying with their directors or senior managers may be a legacy from the days of military management in Taiwan’s TV culture, that has carried over. Thirdly, journalists have adapted to the increased commercial pressures by partially disengaging and regarding their work as a job rather than a vocation. This is certainly a view current among media managers. As the deputy supervisor of news gathering at Sanlih E-Television, Hu Siao-cheng, argued in interview: “many Taiwanese reporters today lack of the sense of mission. They think this is just a job. Ok, when they have got the money and then go back home or take holidays.” Fourthly, up until very recently, television journalism in Taiwan has lacked the counter ethos (and alternative source of employment) provided by a strong public service broadcasting.

In contrast, print media proprietors, of the old school, in charge of non tabloid titles,
like the chairman of *The Journalist* Mr. Chou Tian-rui (interviewee No. 12, see Appendix 1) and the chairman & Publisher of the *Common Wealth Magazine* Yin Yun-peng (interviewee No. 13, see Appendix 1) are more likely to share the sense of journalism as a mission despite the escalation of competition.

My interview evidence suggests that reporters enjoy relative autonomy and control over their everyday activities even on the tabloid titles. Both Lee Hsien-li (interviewee No. 18, see Appendix 1), deputy editor in chief of *Next Magazine*, and the *Apple Daily* reporter Mr. Wang, claimed that they never experienced any direct pressure from their proprietor Jimmy Lai and that their editors will respect reporter’s opinions. Ms. Lee specifically pointed out that every week, after each edition had been published, the entire newsroom team would meet for discussion and critique. Everyone would have an opportunity to contribute his/her ideas and evaluations and to criticize others’ articles. Conversely, she argued that reporters working for traditional papers or magazines were more likely to be asked to follow the editor’s instructions without the chance for wider discussion. If this account is correct, it appears that the tabloid titles operate with a more ‘horizontal’ management structure based on collective discussion, whereas the more traditional titles continue to operate with a more ‘vertical’, top-down structure. The effects of this difference on journalists’ motivation and morale merit further investigation.

**Ratings and Advertising**

Most of journalists, editors and media proprietors face a major pressure to maximise ratings (or the rate of readership) in order to maintain and increase advertising revenue. The journalists and editors I interviewed, particularly those who are working for commercial TV news channels, all the stress imposed by the imperative to produce attractive news that would maximise ratings or readerships. As the TV reporter Ting
Yuan-kai mentioned above explained in interview, this shapes journalistic decisions and careers in crucial ways.

If a certain TV station has reported a freak spiritual news, other stations would follow its lead. If someone met a ghost exposed by a reporter, another reporter would also find some news about ghosts. What main point does a chief reporter value first? The rating! ....You know, as a reporter on a commercial station, I am living by the ratings which will affect the sources of the advertising. Basically if I want make a living, I have to exclude journalistic morals and ethics. The same as applies to a chief reporter. If the ratings are getting worse, perhaps the chief reporter will be fired and another one placed in the post.

He went on to say that “the boss does not know what journalism is. He just cares about the ratings. Bad ratings mean bad revenues. Then he is definitely unhappy because he does not obtain the returns.” Miss Lin, the reporter from CTS quoted earlier, claimed that the same basic dynamics also applied to the popular press.

Apple Daily has a so-called ‘reader meeting’ once a week or once a month. The proprietor Li Chi-ying (Jimmy Lai) would come to Taiwan to host the meeting. In fact, it is an investigation for readership. Undoubtedly, in a capitalistic and profit-oriented age the financial source of the media depends on advertising. Yet, a strange point in Taiwan is that most of advertisers (or media buyers) rely for the TV ratings on reports from AGB Nielsen which is an internationally investigative institution for ratings. But the technology for selecting the sample and the accuracy of the ‘people meter’ have been questioned. Nowadays Taiwanese advertisers not only get involved in the media market, but dominate the journalist, producer and even the owner indirectly.

A Chengchi University journalism professor Pan Jia-ching (interviewee No. 22, see Appendix 1) adds that:

The most ridiculous thing is that there is an TAA (Taiwan Advertiser’s
Association) in our society, which never exists in other countries. Whether the advertiser is willing to advertise, depends on their judgment of the medium. It means that if the advertiser thinks a certain medium is not good, he/she will not put his/her advertisement in it.

Indeed, the consolidation of marketisation has strengthened the links between the news media and advertisers prompting Liu Hsu-feng, a journalistic producer at the TVBS channel news centre in Taiwan, to lament that:

What news channels offer tabloid news has become normal condition. Although intellectuals constantly accused of this sort of behaviour, this subject matter not only lifted up the rating but drew the revenue of advertising. For instance, from time to time in the meeting of news editing someone might say, “Oh, this piece of news is too boring. No one would like to watch it. We should search more attractive news.” Is it a paradoxical thing? No one likes watching dull news but sensational, stimulant, and disgusting stories. Yet, advertisers just love this kind of viewers. This is a symbiosis logic that advertisers buy the advertising time by the rating, and news channels cooperate to produce tabloid news (Liu, 2006: 67).

Ben Yu, the chief reporter of Phoenix Satellite Television Limited Taiwan Branch, concurred, arguing that:

Basically the business transaction of Taiwanese media advertising is controlled by the media buyer, and it cannot be easily broken. This has formed a situation whereby if the media want to stay in business, they have to put great stock in the ratings performance. For a commercial TV station, its turnover comes from advertisers, and advertisers care about the rating....That is to say, the food chain has been formed and is going around, hard to cut off unless a big conflict has occurred.

As he went on to argue, breaking the current ‘food chain’ would require changes on three fronts.
The first thing is to reduce the number of news channels. Secondly, the advertiser needs to change the mode of advertising business transaction. Thirdly, the audience needs to think that they have been watching enough this kind of tabloid news and now need more serious media.

Problems of Media Policy

As we saw in the previous chapter, although commercial television stations were established in the 1960s and 1970s, the whole media market was tightly supervised and competition was limited. This restrictive regulatory regime ended in 1987, to be replaced by a more open and permissive system. Mr. Wilson Shao (interviewee No. 3, see Appendix 1), the former editor in chief of the First Hand Report Magazine, speaks for many older media professionals in seeing the resort to relatively ‘light touch’ regulation as a dereliction of the government’s responsible to ensure a stable media environment.

I think the government should be responsible for this matter. Regardless of the attention on the media industry, regardless of the norms of the media development; or the emphasis on its progress, I feel that the government has responsibility to deal with it. As I know, there is no country like Taiwan, where the density of the media is so high whether TV channels or the print media. The result caused a situation that on account of the large prime costs for investment, some media must create different strategies for living so that they would like to report the sensational news. In practice, an obvious example is that the TV media has experienced more stress on trying to survive than any other media.

In the 1990s the government legitimated the cable and satellite TV sector and over 100 channels went on air with the majority being operated by two big multi-system operators (MSOs)—Eastern Media Group (東森) and Multi-Media Group (和信) (Liu, 1997:14). The intense competition between the six news channels is a direct result of this open policy. As professor Weng Shieu-chi (interviewee No. 23, see Appendix 1)
notes, it may now be too late to intervene to alter the situation significantly:

I think it is difficult to achieve the effect. I never saw any country which is like Taiwan, such a small place that has so many channels. Probably other people are envious of the Taiwanese who are very lucky as we have got diverse programmes. However, a large number of channels do not represent diverse information.

6.5 Summing-up

Apparently, through this chapter, the mode of ‘soft news’ emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s, but the current rise of tabloid journalism was influenced by ‘Appleisation’ in the 2000s alongside the proliferation of the media and market-driven climate. Consequently, media proprietors paid much attention to the maximised profit by the ratings, and journalists lost their original professional core and viewed journalism as a job rather than a vocation. At the same time, the ‘food chain’ has solidly formed between the media and advertisers.

In the general debate on tabloidisation, while many commentators suggest that tabloid journalism is of poor quality others argue that its vivid and eye-catching reporting style has not only been successful on two counts. Firstly, it has maintained readership, particularly among young people (while the circulation of many ‘quality’ papers has been falling). Secondly, it has articulated the concerns of ordinary people in ways that broadsheet titles have failed to do. This, it is argued, is true not only of public anxieties in areas such as crime that are open to sensationalism, but also of deep seated popular suspicions of power holders which provide the basis for trenchant attacks on inefficiency, hypocrisy, and corruption. On the issue of quality, it is worth noting that Apple Daily has won the prestigious Journalism Award of the Tseng
Shu-bai Foundation. On the issue of holding power to account, the Taiwanese tabloids have exposed a number of political scandals employing either paparazzi techniques or anonymous sources, including ‘whistleblowers’ working within the corridors of power. Notable instances include: the expose of the former legislator, Yan Ching-piao, who served a sentence of three and a half years for illegal use of firearms in 2006 and the corruption and forgery charges lodged against the former President Chen Shui-bian, his wife and some of his relatives in 2008. At the same time, the revelation, in 2009, of the extramarital affair between legislator Wu Yu-sheng and a lady of note, continues to raise questions about the legitimate boundary between private and public life.

Having sketched in the general context within which the tabloidisation of the Taiwanese media has developed and indicated some of the issues this process has raised, I want now to turn to a selection of concrete instances that illustrate different key dimensions of tabloidisation in contemporary Taiwan. I have selected three controversial issues for intensive study in the following chapters. They are:

(i) The Chu Mei-feng’s VCD scandal, as a case study in the exposure of the private lives of politicians and the handling of scandal.

(ii) the SARS epidemic event, as an instance of the tensions between the drive to expose official mismanagement and the creation of unwarranted levels of public fear in situations of risk and crisis, and

(iii) the suicide of the popular comedian Mr. Ni Min-ran, as an example of the sensational reporting of celebrity.
Part III

Case Studies and Further Thinking
CHAPTER SEVEN

Case Study 1

Privatising Politics: The VCD Scandal of Ms. Chu Mei-feng

Over the last two decades, in an increasing number of countries, politicians have come to be seen more and more as celebrities. Taiwan is no exception. On the one hand, the intensified competition for popular support and political office has led politicians to devote increasing amounts of time and effort to building and projecting positive images of themselves. On the other hand, public interest in the private lives behind the public faces has fed a thriving paparazzi culture devoted to catching them off guard. The resulting tension between engineered and clandestine images, controlled and uninvited publicity, is at the heart of tabloid journalism.

One of the most notable instances of this tension in action in Taiwan in recent years concerned the prominent journalist and politician, Ms. Chu Mei-feng. Through her work as a press reporter and television personality she had established a strong public image as a tough but controversial social commentator and was well known for employing hidden cameras in her reporting. It was, therefore, particularly ironic, or fitting, depending on your point of view, that it was the publication of clandestine video footage of her having sex in her own room that destroyed her career. The open distribution this footage, by one of the leading tabloid weeklies, Scoop Magazine, shocked Taiwan’s political and journalistic communities and raised hard questions about the acceptable limits of tabloid reporting and the appropriate balance between holding public figures to account and gratuitous sensation. In another ironic twist, it was Scoop Magazine, that had earlier published one of Ms. Chu best known
investigative stories, an exposure of the illegal financial dealings of a well known religious foundation. Drawing on original interviews with key participants, this chapter reconstructs the course of the VCD scandal and the reactions to it.

7.1 Introducing Ms. Chu

Ms. Chu took a first degree in Chinese Literature at National Chengchi University, one of the island’s elite higher education institutions, and went on to specialise in China Border Area Studies for her Master’s degree. She then moved to the United States to take a Master’s degree in Public Administration at the Metropolitan State University in Minnesota. On her return to Taiwan, she worked for two newspapers—the *China Morning Post* (中國晨報) and the *Independence Evening Post* —where she specialised in reporting social news. She then moved into television working as a journalist and news presenter at TTV (mentioned in Chapter 4).

As a journalist she became very well known as the first reporter to use a covert video camera to acquire material. In 1993 in the course of an investigation into the life of a famous star widely thought to be a lesbian, she recorded clandestine footage in a lesbian bar which she later included in a television programme. As a consequence, the bar was closed, and one of the women shown in the footage, reputedly fearing that she would be recognised by her family and friends, and not being able to bear the social pressure, committed suicide. Chu’s use a hidden camera provoked widespread public debate and criticism, and damaged her professional reputation and image. Obtaining information without the consent or prior knowledge of participants was widely considered to be a breach of journalistic ethics. In reply she claimed that journalists had a right to expose the private lives of celebrities to public scrutiny where they
involved contentious issues and that the audience has the right to know the truth.

Following this controversial episode, she became involved in party politics and stood as a candidate for the NP (New Party) in the elections for Taipei City Councilors in 1994. She deployed her celebrity status and networking relationships with the media to good effect, winning the election with the highest recorded vote and becoming the youngest councilor. At the same time, while still holding office, she accepted a position as Director-General and presenter of News at Huawei TV, a channel controlled by the Dongfeng Satellite Network Company. This decision again attracted criticism on the grounds that there was a clear and permanent danger of conflicts of interest arising from her dual role as a party politician bound by certain policy decisions and her responsibility as a journalist to subject all political programmes and actions to independent scrutiny.

She was not above using her political position to manufacture news events which would increase her own visibility and which her station could capitalise on. On one occasion, in a regular Taipei council convention, the mayor of Taipei City, Mr. Chen Shui-bian, a member of the DPP (Democratic Progressive Party) and later the Taiwanese president, was invited to present a report. She had brought a national flag with her, and approached Mr. Chen, asking him to receive it. He refused. Other councilors in his party defended him provoking an angry response from a member of her own party which in turn provoked a fight between the two sides. The incident generated a great deal of media attention but a number of NP’s members were critical of her behaviour arguing that it had damaged the party’s reputation. She denied any fault and angrily disputed with them. Since then, however, she came to be seen within the party as self seeking and unpredictable.

At the same time, her reputation as a hard-hitting investigative journalist was growing. In 1996 she exposed the illegal wealth collection activities of the Song
Chi-li religious association publishing her findings in *Scoop Weekly* which, as we saw in the last chapter, is one of Taiwan’s leading tabloid magazines. As part of the investigation she disclosed that Mr. Hsieh Chang-ting (Frank Hsieh), then the DPP mayoral candidate for Kaohsiung city (and a presidential candidate in the 2008 general elections), had accepted so-called ‘political money’ from the Song Chi-li association in return for support and favours. It was widely thought at the time that this story was politically motivated and that Chu wanted, in fact, to destroy Hsieh’s political career. In the event, he mounted a robust response to her accusation drawing on his abundant knowledge of the law. This seemed to frustrate Chu. Then, in 1998, in a move no one had anticipated, the mayor of Hsinchu City, Mr. Tsai Ren-jian, invited her to become Director of the Cultural Bureau. Later, it was widely reported in the media that they were romantically as well as professionally involved. The prelude to her public humiliation had begun. In a supremely ironic twist of fate, as mentioned earlier, it was covert video footage that was to be the instrument of her downfall.

**7.2 The Context of the VCD Scandal**

The relationship between mayor Tsai and Chu was not always stable, and she was often depressed. Noticing this, in 2000 the deputy mayor, Mr. Lin Cheng-jie, introduced her to a spiritual teacher, Kou Yu-ling, who embarked on a therapeutic programme. Chu treated Kou as a close and trusted friend and confidant, and gave her free use of her office and car together with the keys to her flat and access to her bank account records. She also introduced her to mayor Tsai, an act that was later to lead to a complicated triangular relationship between the three of them.

Despite the trust Chu had placed in her, Kou was increasingly critical of Chu’s
behaviour and often reported her activities to mayor Tsai. Chu’s relationship with him was steadily deteriorating and while she was out of the country participating in an event in the United States in July 2001, Kou approached a media technology company specialising in surveillance recommended by mayor Tsai. Using a false cover story she successfully persuaded the company to set up a covert video camera in Chu’s lounge and bedroom (see figure 7.1) and place bugs in her car, office and mobile. During August, the camera captured Chu having sexual relations with two men. One of whom (according to the later court written judgment) was a married man, Mr. Tseng Chung-ming (see figure 7.2, 7.3 and 7.4).

When Kou recovered the original video tapes from the house, she not only asked a company to copy them for her but also clandestinely handed copies to a television production company. These were then subsequently offered to television stations and press media. Most rejected the offer outright fearing the possible illegal consequences.
Next Magazine, which as we saw earlier had arrived in Taiwan from Hong Kong in 2001 and was pioneering a new tabloid style in the weekly magazine market, was a partial exception. While the editor in chief, Mr. Peir Woei (interviewee No. 01, see Appendix 1), declined to issue the tape it did publish Chu’s diary recording the details of her relationship with mayor Tsai. Later, at the beginning and in the middle of December 2001 respectively, a Hong Kong tabloid magazine Dong Weekly and Jade Magazine in Taiwan published still images captured from the tape.
In practice, even before the incident was reported in the mainstream media, Taiwanese people could obtain pirated editions of VCD on the black market or download it from the Internet. Copies also achieved wide circulation in mainland China, Singapore, Malaysia, Japan and New York. Reportedly at schools, universities or offices, people would ask one another, ‘Have you seen it?’ or ‘Which version did you see?’

Faced, for the first time, with publicity that she had not initiated or orchestrated, Chu repeatedly denied having had a sexual relation with Mr. Tseng claiming that another woman, a look-a-like, had been paid to impersonate her. The strength of her denial won her some support but the general negativity of the commentary around the incident cast a long shadow of doubt and played a substantial role in the failure of her attempt to be elected to the legislature. Then unexpectedly, towards the end of December, Scoop Weekly not only revived the story of her adultery but sold the entire VCD with the magazine. Long-term subscribers wanting to see it had to pay additional money. This move on the part of the magazine generated harsh condemnation from the public and attracted the attention of the prosecutor. Chu’s political career was totally destroyed.

After a long investigation, Ms. Kou was sentenced under statutes relating to offenses governing both the Protection of Secrets and Forging Instruments or Seals, the later charge arising from the forgeries she committed which enabled her to withdraw Chu’s money from the bank. The publisher of Scoop Weekly Ms. Shen Rong who took the decision to publish the VCD, the editor in chief Mr. Lin Chia-nan who had failed to prevent publication, and Shen’s assistant Mr. Wei An who had obstructed searches of the magazine’s offices authorised by the prosecutor and the investigator were all sentenced under acts relating to the Protection of Secrets and to Interference with Public Functions and given varying sentences. Ms. Shen was imprisoned on 9th
March in 2007 and released on 26th February in 2008. Wilson Shao (interviewee No. 03, see Appendix 1) who was, at the time, the deputy editor-in-chief of *Scoop Weekly* was found not guilty.

7.3 Going Beyond the Bottom Line

In spite of the growing and very visible trend towards tabloidisation in the Taiwanese press examined in previous chapters, no Taiwanese commentators had predicted this kind of scenario. They had assumed that while editors would cover the affairs and sexual misbehaviour of politicians, they would draw the line at publishing photos and video footage. So why did the magazines make this decision? In tackling this question we can usefully divide the possible influences and pressures into those that originate inside the organisation and those coming from outside.

7.3.1 Internal Factors

(1) Gatekeeping

In the standard accounts of the way everyday journalistic practice is organised a central role assigned to the figure of the ‘gatekeeper,’ the person who decides which news stories will pass into the production process. Normally this role will be filled by the chief reporter or the editor in chief. In weighing up which material should go forward, and which should be ‘spiked’ they are expected to exercise their professional judgment and take account of the possible longer term repercussions of a decision for the news organisation as well as its immediate impact on sales. Their first duty is to verify the truth and accuracy of the information or other material on which the story is
based. Their second obligation is to balance gains against harms. It is the Tabloid titles’ failure on this second count that is most often voiced by critics, leading to accusations that they place sales above professional ethics and privilege the organisation’s bottom line over the possible social harm a story might cause.

In the case of the VCD of Ms. Chu, despite her claims that she was not the woman shown, the clarity of the footage and the voice recording placed its veracity beyond doubt. So why did different editors make different decisions on what to publish? As noted earlier, Peir Woei, now the publisher of Next Magazine, obtained a photocopy of Chu’s diary and confirmed its accuracy with her. The long standing rumours surrounding her relationship with mayor Tsai made it highly newsworthy. He therefore decided to publish it in October 2001 in order to demonstrate the nature and extent of their relationship. However, he did not release the content of the tape. Why?

In personal interview with the author, he offers an explanation which insists that there is a strong line dividing the private and public realms, a principle which is central to the Confucian value system has traditionally governed Taiwanese society.

First of all, the tape was shot in Chu’s room which was her private place and not in a public place. What is more, no matter whether Chu was married or not, if I have disclosed the content of the tape whatever the footage or dialogue, it would seem to impose a personal penalty on her. Thus, I decided not to report the content of the tape at that moment. That was not only my personal concept but also my company’s principle.

This principle was, for him, given added weight by the fact that the footage was shot clandestinely.

I think when a journalist is going to report an item as news, he must hold a criterion. In this case I think, of course, we could cover the fact that Chu’s real image was at some distance from people’s impression. However, because the video tape came from someone who set up a covert camera in Chu’s room on
purpose, we did not expose it.

In contrast, according to Tian Cheng-chung (interviewee No. 02, see Appendix 1), the senior editor in chief of *Jade Magazine*, the fact that *Next Magazine* had gained a scoop by publishing Chu’s diary placed him under pressure. He knew Peir Woei had the tape as well, but suspected that the reason he did not use it was because Chu was a politician, and Peir thought there could be a possible breach of the law. Tian also considered this possibility but assumed that because the content related to Ms. Chu’s personal morality rather than to her public position there was less chance of litigation. However, as a precaution he copied a segment of the tape and gave it to a correspondent working for the Hong Kong magazine, *Dong Weekly*. He reasoned that if *Dong Weekly* published the captured photos first and he then followed up, he could plausibly argue that he was simply using material that was already in the public domain rather than initiating action independently. As a further defense he reactivated Chu’s claim that she was not the woman in the VCD.

I did consider the offense of privacy at that time and certainly knew the issue would become much greater. I believe fire cannot be wrapped up in paper. Although I published some sex photos, I inserted a question mark and did not say directly that it was Chu Mei-feng. To be honest, at that moment each medium wanted to grab the exclusive. Even if I did not snatch the news, others did. Consequently, as I said, the news reporting was in a terrible mess. Frankly, it was not a matter of individual morality any more. The main point was out of focus, which means Chu’s political life was killed by the media.

Wilson Shao of *Scoop Weekly* recalled that although certain electronic media had got the tape earlier, they were very wary of breaching the law and did not broadcast it. Initially, Shao did not intend to cover the tape issue, even though a journalist gave him a copy of the VCD bought by the office assistant Wei An, because *Scoop Weekly* had a good relation with Chu and (as we saw earlier) had run one of her best known
journalistic investigations. What is more, Shao had contacted Chu and attempted to help her deal with the problem. Why then did *Scoop Weekly* eventually give away copies of the VCD to its readers? According to Wilson Shao, it was the fact that Chu had lied about the affair and the veracity of the footage that made her a legitimate target:

The day we decided to publish it was the deadline for all contributions. We had arrived at the rush hour. Of course, we had thought about the problem with the law. As I said, however, in the beginning the media dealt with the issue as a piece of tabloid news. It did not seem to be a real truth. Also, Chu repeatedly denied it. Thus, we insisted that a politician should be overseen by higher moral standard and made a decision to uncover her big blot in morality. After our judgment, we thought that since the sex scandal was true and it should be exposed but how to convince people of its truth? Therefore, we decided to copy the VCD as news evidence and gave it away with the magazine.

Although Shao supported the principle that in normal circumstances individual privacy should be respected he insisted that the news media have a duty to call public figures to account for their mistakes and misdeeds. However, he readily conceded that this drive to expose was driven by commercial considerations and particularly by the market power of *Next Magazine*.

Our perception of journalism was that a public person’s behaviour, including politicians the like president, should be under the scrutiny by the public for 24 hours a day. I must say before the arrival of the paparazzi culture of *Next Magazine*, the alertness and cognition of the Taiwanese media on respecting individual privacy was very different in the past than at present. Actually this kind of 【tabloid】 culture is a serious infringement of privacy. That is why *Next Magazine* has lost a few suits in court, which demonstrates that our laws still respect privacy. It also led the celebrities to think that if the media infringe their privacy, they are able to protect themselves by resorting to law. You know, employees of tabloid magazines feel much pain. Yes, we know we should conscientiously verify the truth before we cover it, but it is, in fact,
difficult to do that and to get the real evidence. If we take the time to do it, the tabloid magazines will not survive. Next Magazine, on the other hand, can do it since they have their specific methods, channels, as well as financial resources. Through my observation, apart from the Next Magazine, other tabloid magazines certainly have learned the lesson from the case of Chu. As an editor in chief and a gatekeeper, I think I will pay much attention to verification and balanced report in the future.

These statements confirm that the interviewees claim to operate with a concept of ethics and have a clear idea of where to draw the line. They insist that they had considered issues of privacy, over and above the threat of possible legal action, but they are also quick to shift their blame for their lapses elsewhere, pointing their fingers at Next Magazine for introducing the tabloid style into Taiwan and initiating an escalating competition for paparazzi photos. As Mr. Peir claimed, this search for candid images of celebrities fits uneasily with his magazine’s conception of its role.

Employing ‘gou zhai’ (interpreted in Chapter 6) is only a method but not our final goal. Many celebrities or politicians would tell lies, so this is a method to prove the truth. Normally if we want to take pictures, we will not let the subject know what we are photographing. We think entertaining news is just like political news. It is all news and if it is true we are going to cover it. But the public likes to call it tabloid. In the past tabloid news perhaps would not harm anyone, but currently a true tabloid story can. I can not help but say that we might start practicing this sort of tabloid mode in Taiwan, but somehow we still have our principles. I do not know what principles TV stations or other media have. We do not just focus on exposing celebrities’ scandals. That is not our goal. Actually we have uncovered plenty of abuses in financial and economic affairs which have been in the public interest. We will tag along behind those who hold political power or perform major policy making roles, such as legislators and government officials. But we only took their photos in public place. We will only get into one private space to take pictures, which is the ecstasy pub. You know, most young people suffer profoundly from the drugs. That is why we would assign journalists to get into the ecstasy pub to take pictures which demonstrated that the pub sold the drugs to high school students and other young people. We hoped that the pub
would attract concerted attention from the police.

Although the broadcasting media were not involved in the initial exposure of the VCD, a daily TV phone-in programme on political commentary called ‘National Talk 2100’ broadcast by the TVBS station from 21:00 to 23:00 did organise a series of sensational discussions on this issue during the case. According to the editorial in the ETtoday e-paper on 24th December 2001, a journalist on the Taiwan Daily, Yan Chia-tong, criticised the presenter Mr. Lee Tao, who was a senior reporter and had been the manager of TVBS, arguing that as a senior journalist and manager Lee should have understood the importance of professional discipline. He was particularly concerned by Lee’s telephone interview with Chu’s mother who, when asked about her daughter, broke down in tears.

On the question of balance, professor Chang Chin-hwa, a senior journalism lecturer at the Graduate Institute of Journalism of National Taiwan University, suggested in the Taiwan Epoch Times (Vol. 39) that although the Chu case could just as well be seen as an incident of matrimonial infidelity and betrayal the coverage focused, instead, on the unmarried female protagonist rather than her male partner. Suggesting that Taiwanese society is still much more inclined to censure women for ‘loose’ behaviour than to severely criticise men.

(2) The abuse of press freedom and the right to know

In accordance with the written judgment, Ms. Shen Rong defended herself in court claiming that the press should have the freedom to uncover the truth about those in positions of power and that the public have the right to know. Added to which she criticised Chu personally, arguing that as an official she did not work hard enough and that had betrayed the high ethical standards expected of a public figure by having a
sexual relationship with a married man. However, the judge indicated that Article 315 of Section one and two of the Criminal Code explicitly protects the privacy of the general public and insists that people have the right not to be spied on, pried into or have their private lives made public. The core of the Article prohibits the public dissemination of any content recorded covertly. He further stated that the media cannot ignore the Article’s provisions on protection in privacy for the sake of press freedom. Unauthorised images of action in domestic space, above all in the bedroom where Chu was filmed, falls squarely within these provisions and cannot be publicly circulated by the news. Obviously, Shen had breached that regulation and the journalists that had published the covert material had abused the agreed definition of the freedom of the press.

Historically, the struggle for ‘the right to know’ originated with journalistic organisations in the late 1940s in the United States with the aim of securing the right to publish non-confidential files from central and the local government. It was on this basis that media practitioners and journalistic professionals actively persuaded the Congress to support it. As a consequence, they won of the argument and the general principle was enshrined in a number of Acts in the 1940s and 1950s. The most important of these is the ‘Freedom of Information Act, FOIA’ adopted in 1966. This stipulates that apart from nine exceptions relating to national security all other government files can be published in public. In 1977 the American Congress adopted a further Act called the ‘Government in Sunshine Law’ which stipulated that apart from specific circumstances, American citizens are publicly permitted to participate in and understand meetings of the federal government commissions and the institution (Liu, 2002 cited in Emery, Emery & Roberts, 2000:532-533). This expanded concept of ‘the right to know,’ together with the ‘First Amendment’ offers a practical definition of both freedom of speech and of the press and the public interest and a
legal barrier to the American’s government extension of inappropriate control over information.

This concept was introduced to Taiwan in order to oppose the authoritarianism of single party rule and promote the development of Taiwanese democracy in the late 1980s. At the same time, the rapid commercialisation of the media in the mid 1990s (described in earlier chapters) meant that news became more and more a commodity to be traded in an increasingly competitive marketplace. As a result, the private interests of media companies are in constant tension with the public interest in having access to the comprehensive and accurate news coverage and diversity of debate required for the full exercise of citizenship. In these circumstances, ‘the right to know’ all too easily becomes a shield behind which commercial media practitioners shelter while selecting news on the basis of its ability to maximise income. In relation to the Chu case, a number of female lawmakers strongly criticised the behaviour of *Scoop Weekly* not simply as immoral and sensational but as a distortion of the social right to responsible freedom of the press; and as an attack on the political space of the main female participant.

As Sanders (2003:69) states, “Freedom’s scope has been thought to stretch to the point where one can cause harm to others.” However, journalists cannot appeal to press freedom to report the news which will knowingly occasion harm unless a convincing case can be made that disclosure is the public interest as in cases of professional or political malpractice or corruption. As Frost (2000: 27) notes, “when we talk about a free media we are not necessarily talking about the media’s right to publish anything they like, but that people, including journalists, should have the right to spread information and ideas which can be justified morally in order to support the public’s right to know. In other words, information published in the public interest, not merely information to sate the public’s curiosity or desire to be entertained.”
(3) Owner control

In his path-breaking study Breed (Lee, 2003: 35-36 cited in Breed, 1955) argued that a new journalist on a newspaper gets to know the company’s policy from the informed process of being socialised into its working routines rather than from formal channels or instructions. According to this account it is the prevailing newsroom culture that exercises effective control over the professional practices of journalists and editors and will comply. Why? Some of factors that have been suggested include: (i) the authority of the institution and the prospect of censure or punishment, (ii) appreciation and respect for the boss or chief, and (iii) the desire of promotion. In these circumstances journalist may come to care more about the good opinions of his superiors and colleagues than the audience. Bagdikian points out in his book The Media Monopoly that although most media proprietors do not let their workers know explicitly what their likes and dislikes are the policy of the institution is continually communicated indirectly through a dismissed or demoted journalist or a revoked news story or TV programme. Even though media proprietors did not make an order explicitly, they seemed to have commanded something. Consequently, although invisible on a day-to-day basis they act as the most powerful gatekeepers in the newsroom with the chief reporter, editor in chief and director of newsgathering translating their preferences into concrete decisions (Weng, 1996:107-108 cited in Bagdikian, 1983).

According those who worked there, the newsroom of Scoop Weekly operated in this way the magazine’s founder, Mr. Shen Ye, was a distant figure. At the level of day-to-day dealings direct control over the editor in chief, Lin Chia-nan, was exercised by his daughter Shen Rong and he did not dare to prevent her from giving away the VCD. Likewise, even if the deputy editor-in-chief Mr. Shao did not want to cover it originally, he had no essential power to stop what she was doing. Although in
interview he was unwilling to explicitly indicate who really made the final decision there was an implication that it came from higher up and that it was informed primarily by commercial considerations.

In practice, initially the highest chief did not know we had got the VCD already and even did not discover that other media had covered what had happened with Chu. Furthermore, we had not seen the VCD before we decided to publish it. When the journalist talked to me about this issue, I just thought that it could be a rumour as this event had not fully broken out. Afterwards, my boss Mr. Shen Ye knew the news by accident, and then we had a meeting with other chief editors to discuss whether we had to trace the scandal since the China Times Weekly, the Next Magazine as well as other media had reported it. While some chiefs argued that we had to keep pursuing the scandal, they were also thinking of how we could surpass other media in the competitive market. Particularly since the Next Magazine arrived in Taiwan in that year (2001), the whole Taiwanese news competition became very intensified.

This account by Mr. Shao suggests that he was not a key decision-maker. The publisher of the Scoop Weekly Shen Rong seemed not to have cared about violating an individual’s privacy and assumed that she could rebut any legal challenge by appealing to the freedom of the press and the immorality of the act being exposed. The Taiwanese sociologist, professor Hsueh Cheng-tai, commenting on this event in the United Evening News on 30th December 2001, points out that although the headlines and the phone-in contributions to programmes on televisions all discussed details of the case in the course of the exposure of the VCD, none of the channels broadcast any footage from the VCD. Nevertheless, this concentrated coverage added to the pressure on the tabloid magazines to respond to the competition by going a step further.

Based on the court judgment, the publisher Shen Rong admitted in court that not only had she written five articles on Chu’s sex scandal in person under different
pseudonyms but had also given the order to attach the VCD with the magazine and that the editor in chief Lin Chia-nan did not dissuade her from doing this. However, statements from Tian Cheng-chung confirm that definitely assumed that the idea of giving away the VCD with the magazine came in practice from the owner Mr. Shen, not his daughter. He knew Mr. Shen well since he had been working with him for five or six years and was convinced that Shen Rong was acting on his behalf and carrying the can for him. Mr. Shen himself had been accused but was found not guilty since he claimed in court that he had not been responsible for the magazine’s day-to-day affairs for quite some time. Since I was not able to secure an interview with Mr. Shen, I am not able to offer a firm conclusion on this issue.

It is, however, worth noting that _Next Magazine_ which is also a leading tabloid magazine seems not to have an interventionist proprietor. The journalists I interviewed who worked for the magazine and for _Apple Daily_ (the major daily title in the same group) unanimously pointed out that their boss Mr. Li Chi-ying (Jimmy ‘Lai’ in Cantonese) never got involved in the newsroom or applied any direct pressure to them.

_Since the Next Magazine has been established, certain government officials would utilise their religious power to lobby us illegally and request us not to publish this or that. Whereas, as long as an event is true, we will still expose it. That is why we had had reported a number of religious people whom some media would not dare to cover. This is our crucial principle. Once someone asked my boss Mr. Li Chi-ying to publish something for him. However, he said that is editor in chief’s responsibility but not his business. He never knows what we will cover, and we also never tell him what we are going to cover. He is like a general reader. When we published the newest magazine, we would send a copy to his office._
7.3.2 External Factors

(1) Market competition

We now turn to the issue of the intensified media competition in contemporary Taiwanese media marketplace that has already been mentioned several times in preceding chapters. There is no direct ratio between Taiwan’s geographic area and the volume of media. As mentioned in Chapter 4, although the total land area of Taiwan is only 35879 square kilometers, since the onset of the present wave of commercialisation broadcast channels and print media have proliferated. As against this background of intense competition for audiences and advertising Tian Cheng-chung and Wilson Shao speak for many journalists when they claim that they have no choice but to cover the sensational and tabloidised news.

In the record of the written judgment in the Chu case, Shen Rong claimed that giving away the VCD with the magazine was intended to provide concrete evidence of the allegations being made and had not been done for the purpose of maximising profits. The judge, however, argued that since Shen had already printed the captured photos in the magazine, it was unnecessary to give away the VCD. Moreover, he asked why were the attached VCDs only sold at retail shops but not to long-term subscribers unless they paid extra money? He suspected that Shen intended to promote circulation and the claim that the VCD was evidence cloaked her desire to increase revenues.

The Chu case also seems to bear out the general argument that when it comes to commercial media in restricted market, more means worse. Ms. Lin Zhao-chen (mentioned in Chapter 5), who was a senior reporter and is now a journalism lecturer at National Chiao Tung University, suggested that the last two decades had seen a fundamental transition in Taiwan’s media with political control gradually but steadily
giving way to the power of commercial conglomerates. Not only had the number of media outlets increased sharply, the number of the media practitioner had also drastically increased. More and more courses in Journalism Studies or Mass Communication were being established in the universities but the demands of employers were still outstripping the supply of qualified personnel producing a pool of new recruits who had never trained as professional journalists. Typically they would be young and enthusiastic and eager to get themselves noticed. Some media proprietors are happy to employ them because they are willing to work for low wages and will do their best to dig out the sensational news. When I interviewed him, Tian Cheng-chung sighed with emotion and spoke of many ‘old hands’ when he claimed that journalistic standards were declining in the new competitive environment.

I could not accept what Scoop Weekly had done. I did not understand why Mr. Shen would allow the VCD to be copied and given away with the magazine. Frankly, the idea would be taken account by each medium, if it were not against the law, as the cost of the production was pretty low. Whereas, what they had done was a sort of circulation in public, so I did not know what Mr. Shen’s thought at that moment. I supposed he possibly had a bet on the issue. To be honest, I have been engaged in journalism since 1985 until now and experienced the transition of the media environment: from the simple media culture to the complicated media culture and then the sensational news, disclosing scandal and extreme coverage coming out. Under the intensified competition, I felt bloody pain. We are confronting the living problem. Ok I can make the legitimate news, but I cannot survive. We publish two magazines. I admit one of them is restricted and pornographic. Why? The restricted one just caters to the retail market. We do not have another way. You know tabloidisation on TV channels is more serious than print media. Not only do they report tabloid news but show up the sensational footage to stimulate the audience’s vision. I feel the audience’s appetite (request) is bigger and bigger. General tabloids cannot satisfy them since Next Magazine and Apple Daily have been established in Taiwan. Frankly, most media proprietors’ attitudes are that they want to snatch the exclusive and obtain the information faster than other media but not really care about the content. The attitude is difficult
to change because most Taiwan’s media aim at commercial benefits. They are commercial and regard the industry as business for earning money. As far as self-discipline goes we are concerned, that is easy to say but most media remain in tabloidised mode. I think this bad climate is not easy to resist.

(2) Overflow of the political controversy

In a context where multi party democracy is still a relatively recent introduction it is perhaps not surprising that politically controversial events occur often in Taiwan and attract substantial media coverage and debate among both politicians and the public. Professor Lin He-ling (interviewee No. 024, see Appendix 1), who teaches sociology at National Taiwan University, argues that there is too much of a concentration on political news. Why? We can suggest two explanations. Firstly, most chief editors started their careers as political reporters and are apt to push news coverage towards political affairs. Secondly, with the arrival of democratic government (examined in Chapters 4 and 6) politicians are obliged to compete for support and legitimacy. This leads them to court favourable coverage by providing a constant stream of news releases, photo-opportunities and leaks and their opponents to counter with their own publicity offensive. In the Chu case, Ms. Kou, Chu’s close friend, did not directly ask the Scoop Weekly to publish the VCD content. Rather she dropped a pebble into the pool and waited for the ripples to spread. Initially, Shen Rong defended herself by claiming that she did not know that the VCD had been recorded by a covert video camera but had heard that it might have been shot by Chu herself because the footage was of very good quality. However, after examining two of the articles she had written for the magazine, the judge concluded that she had known that the footage was recorded covertly, a fact that Chu herself eventually admitted.
(3) Popular reactions

Although tabloid news around the world plays to a desire to peep behind the stage of public performance and catch people in their off stage moments, professor Hsueh (mentioned earlier) has argued that in the case of Taiwan it may be further underpinned by the repression of talk about ‘sex’ within the traditional family and school systems. Hence being granted access to the intimate private lives of public figures is all the more attractive since it breaks a taboo deeply ingrained since childhood. These dynamics, and the tensions around them, were illustrated in the contributors to the discussion of Scoop Weekly’s decision to release the video footage.

The editor of Woman’s Voice set out her views in a contribution to the Female E-Paper on 24th December 2001, arguing that we live in a society in which our basic human rights are often infringed. The police may check on people at will. The investigatory bureau may randomly monitor telephone calls. The marketing company may feel free to collect people’s addresses, telephone numbers, and ID numbers. Whereas the problem lies in our not recognising the seriousness of these intrusions and our willingness to protest against infringements and learn to protect ourselves.

She cited a radio call-in programme on privacy which was broadcast a couple of days away her editorial published. One listener (or a guest) expressed the view that he thought the society was hypocritical and supported what the Scoop Weekly did. He said further that if the protagonist of the VCD had been his daughter, he would have been willing to disclose it to the public. In reply, she questioned why he took his daughter as a comparison but not himself and if he thought ‘desire’ was a stain on a woman but not a man. Moreover, she wanted to know if the recorded protagonist were him, would he be still willing to let the public know?

According to a report published in the newspaper Jin Bao by a journalist, Hsu Li-mei, on 26th December 2001, the Director-General of Gender/Sexuality Rights
Association Taiwan, Wang Pin, who had condemned Ms. Chu’s earlier coverage of lesbianism (mentioned earlier), objected strongly to what Scoop Weekly had done, declaring that the release of the VCD infringed the privacy of a single woman and illustrated the unequal politics of gender prevailing in society. She saw it as a matter of human rights, arguing that she would voice the Association’s condemnation of double standards and defend the private sexual rights of any woman who has the right to participate in politics in the public sphere.

In another intervention, professor Chang (mentioned earlier) raised the issue of the audience’s behaviour noting that during the course of the VCD scandal her colleagues, students or friends often joked about it and that people seemed proud of their curiosity and did not care about respecting others’ privacy. This stance she argued served to reinforce the media’s argument that they were simply responding to audience’s taste.

(4) The risk of litigation
According to my three interviewees and other documentary sources, most tabloid media and media focusing on political comment have had experiences of being accused or fined. Mr. Shao told me that as a result he now knows what questions prosecutors are likely to ask in court, such as whether they attempted to construct a balanced report, whether they made every effort to verify the facts, and whether they confirmed that the item met the relevant legal requirements. These rehearsed defences often proved necessary since power holder were quick to resort to the law to discourage investigative reporting. Mr. Lin Chao-hsin (mentioned in Chapter 6), the chief writer and convener of the news team of the China Times Weekly, claimed that they would spend considerable sums of money and time to look into the truth of an event, but that if the investigated person was a powerful figure, even if they had plenty of evidence to support their coverage, they were still likely to be accused of
7.4 Summing-up

At first sight, the VCD incident seemed to be a purely sex scandal, but it raised a number of more general issues.

First of all, Ms. Chu herself was subject to an ironic twist of fate. Although she was a victim in this case, during her professional career as a journalist she had subjected others to similar unwanted exposure. She unexpected subjection to the same process, and the circumstances in which the footage was shot and obtained, sent a warning to other politicians to assume that their behaviour is under constant scrutiny and even in the confines of their own homes they can never be sure that they are entirely safe from outside surveillance.

Secondly, although the media claim the right to freedom of expression they cannot justify infringing others’ rights to privacy by evoking the public’s ‘right to know’ unless the material disclosed can be clearly demonstrated to be in the ‘public interest’. While a case can be made for material that relates to a public figure’s execution of their public office and duties it is more difficult to justify where the material relates solely to their private lives.

Thirdly, viewed as a social phenomenon, the incident points up various features of contemporary Taiwanese society. It suggests that the concepts of ‘equal rights’ and ‘respect’ have made less headway than many commentators had thought and that traditional and conventional thought remains at the core of popular thinking. As a consequence, women remain a disadvantaged minority and people continue to judge their behaviour by different criteria from those they apply to men.
Fourthly, the incident points to a high level of popular hypocrisy. When a finger is pointed at those who are seen as immoral, there are still three fingers pointing at the accuser. Consequently, even if Chu’s behaviour merits condemnation, the widespread viewing of the VCD raises the question of how far audiences should be condemned, for at the very least colluding with covert surveillance undertaken for personal rather than public reasons.

Fifthly, normally tabloid journalists or editors impressed us that they might not have concepts of journalism ethics and social responsibility. However, in practice most of them still have a criteria ruler in their mind but they simply submit themselves to the market-driven phenomenon and go beyond the bottom line sometime, like *Scoop Weekly* in this case.
CHAPTER Eight
Case Study 2

Investigation and Sensation: Covering the SARS Epidemic

In 1918-19 an influenza epidemic swept across the globe, carried mainly by troops returning from the conflict zones of World War I. The eventual death toll was variously estimated at between 21 and 50 million, 2% of the human race. It was the first truly global pandemic. Since then, the increased density and mobility of the populations living in major urban centres coupled with the relative ease of transcontinental air travel have massively increased the possible speed with which a pandemic might spread. This intensification of hazards has, according to Ulrich Beck, created what he calls ‘a risk society.’ “To live in the risk society, he suggests, is to live in the ‘hazardous age of creeping catastrophe’” (Allan, 2002: 100).

Attention is currently focused on the possibility of a global outbreak of avian flu. In thinking about and planning for this eventuality governments and their advisors have taken account of the lessons from the most recent incident of the rapid spread of infection across borders; the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome or SARS that occurred between November 2002 and July 2003. The infection originated in China but rapidly spread throughout Asia eventually affecting twenty six countries. SARS is not necessarily fatal but over the course of the outbreak the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimated that around 9.6% (774 people) of the total of 8098 recorded incidents of infection resulted in death by July 2003 (Chiang and Duann, 2007: 579, 597; Beaudoin, 2007: 509; Huang and Hao, 2008c: 94; WHO, 2004).

These included not only ordinary people who had come into contact with the disease
but also a number of the medical staff who had treated them.

Pandemics pose particular problems for government. The first duty of government is to protect its citizens from avoidable harm. Unlike floods and earthquakes where damage is localised, pandemics can potentially affect anyone at any time. Consequently, the adequacy, timeliness and effectiveness of official efforts to prevent outbreaks where possible and to monitor and control them when they do occur offers a crucial test of government performance. Pandemics also pose problems for media coverage. On the one hand, the ubiquity of their possible effects places a high premium on relaying accurate information on the course of events and the actions being taken to address the situation. On the other hand, the experience of sudden death and the uncovering of inadequacies in official responses offers a potent combination of human interest stories and exposes of government failings. At the same time, escalating public fear could provoke panic reactions that might increase the problems faced in addressing the situation effectively. The question then is where best to strike the balance between investigation and sensation, provoking fear and offering reassurance. In this chapter, we examine how the tabloid media in Taiwan negotiated these choices.

8.1 The Start of SARS

8.1.1 The Itinerary of the Spread

Prior to discussing the details of the event, it is necessary to provide some essential context by briefly recounting the progress of the outbreak. According to the subsequent investigation, the outbreak can be dated back to at least 16 November 2002, when an initial case was reported in Foshan City, in Guangdong Province, China. There were, in fact, about 300 people infected by that time and more than one
hundred had died in the epidemic in a single week. Nonetheless, the Hygiene Department of Guangdong did not immediately inform the public confining themselves to delivering a notification to hospitals that an unknown contagious disease had been identified that infected patients had to be isolated, and that medical staff should take adequate precautions (Liu, 2005:257; Davis, 2005:69; Heymann, 2003). Generally speaking, 94% of SARS infections begin with a high fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or more. Other symptoms may include dizziness, chills, headache and muscle aches. Some patients also have mild difficulty in breathing at the outset. About 10% to 20% of patients also have severe diarrhoea. After 2 to 7 days, patients may develop a dry cough. Most go on to develop pneumonia. In around 10% of cases the illness may rapidly progress to respiratory failure requiring intensive medical care. However, elderly patients may have more variable symptoms (CUHK; Medical News Today; UCLA-LOSH; MedicineNet). Because the symptoms of SARS appear very similar to common flu in the initial stages, most people will underestimate its seriousness. But how did the disease spread? The pattern later established was a classic two-step transmission flow. A Chinese lung-specialist, Dr. Liu, who was already infected, travelled to Hong Kong from Guangzhou to attend his nephew’s wedding on 21 February 2003. He was staying on the 9th floor at the Metropole Hotel on the Kowloon Peninsula and had had contact with 16 other guests on the same floor. He then felt difficult breathing and was sent to Guanghua Hospital. Because he knew that many people in his hometown had already died from what was thought at the time to be a new strain of pneumonia, he immediately asked for the hospital staff to put him in isolation. However, he died on the 4th of March (Davis, 2005:70; Lin, 2003; Lin, 2006: 1; Chiang and Duann, 2007: 579, 598).

The other line of transmission was via the 16 guests at the hotel that had infected including airline crew. As they travelled onward to other destinations, they “quickly
transformed the Guangdong outbreak into an embryonic global pandemic.” As a WHO scientist later noted, “A global outbreak was thus seeded from a single person on a single day on a single floor of a Hong Kong hotel” (Davis, 2005:70-71). Among the 16 guests, 8 including three Canadians, three Singaporean women, a Hong Kong citizen and a Chinese-American businessman, brought the virus to different countries. An elderly Canadian died in hospital in Toronto, and 5 members of her family were soon hospitalised. After returning to Singapore at the end of February, the three Singaporean women were admitted to different hospitals respectively at the beginning of March. One of them, in the parlance of epidemiology, was a ‘super spreader’ and infected over at least 90 other people at the hospital. She eventually recovered from the illness but her parents died with SARS (Davis, 2005:71; Lin, 2003).

8.1.2 Anatomising the Virus

Having explored the cause of the epidemic for two months since the first reported case in Asia in February 2003, researchers discovered that SARS is caused by a coronavirus (冠狀病毒) called SARS-associated coronavirus (SARS-CoV) which was first identified in April 2003 and is a member of the coronaviridae family. Coronaviruses are a group of viruses that are named after the halo or crown-like (corona) appearance they have when viewed under a microscope (see figure 8.1 and 8.2).

These viruses have been found in many different animal species, including birds and mammals. Coronaviruses can survive in the environment for as long as three hours (MDH; Russell Kightley Media; Medical News Today; MedicineNet). The primary way that SARS seems to spread is by close person-to-person contact. Most
cases of SARS have occurred among people who cared for, or lived with, an infected person or among people who had direct contact with infectious material such as respiratory secretions from someone with SARS. Infection can also spread by touching the skin of people or objects that are contaminated with infectious droplets and then touching the eyes, nose or mouth. The most common mode of transmission, however, is through droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes from a short distance (generally up to 3 feet).

8.1.3 Successfully Containing the Epidemic: The Case of Vietnam

Three days after the Chinese-American businessman arrived in Hanoi in Vietnam, his temperature rose sharply. On the 26th of February he fell into a coma and was sent to a private local hospital, the Vietnam French Hospital. Medical staff there correctly suspected that the illness was linked to an avian flu and asked the local WHO representative, Dr. Carlo Urbani, an Italian expert in infection diseases, to oversee the patient. He recognised immediately that the hospital was facing a tense and unusual
situation and alerted the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific on 28 February. He then decided to work with the medical staff of the hospital to strengthen morale, arranging for samples to be sent for testing, and reinforcing infection control. In the meantime, the businessman’s wife arrived at the hospital from America on 4 March and insisted that her husband had to be transferred to a Hong Kong hospital. The businessman eventually died in hospital in Hong Kong on the 13th. Unexpectedly, five of the medical staff who had treated him at French Hospital developed the disease, and only one survived. After discussing with Dr. Urbani’s WHO colleague from Manila, the capital of the Philippines, they suspected that the mystery disease was connected with the atypical pneumonia outbreak that had occurred in Guangdong earlier. The Director of National Institute for Clinical Research in Tropical Medicine at Bach Mai Hospital, Dr. Le Dang Ha, an authority on infection diseases in Hanoi, thought that the epidemic might be being spread by air not by food or the digestive system as originally thought in the case of the businessman. He pointed out that most established infections in Vietnam were carried by food and few by respiratory tract but that this case appeared different (Davis, 2005:71; Chao, 2003; Reilley et al. ‘NEJM’, 2003; Lin, 2003).

Although the exact nature of the virus was still unknown at that point, Dr. Urbani was aware of the severity of the disease threat and suggested establishing an isolation ward that was kept under guard. A number of staff members including some health care workers at the hospital made the difficult decision to quarantine themselves to protect their families and community. Simultaneously, the WHO requested an emergency meeting with the Vice Minister of the Health of Vietnam on 9 March. After a four-hour discussion, the Vietnam government took the unusual steps of quarantining the hospital, introducing new infection-control procedures to other hospitals, inspecting all transit passengers, and appealing for international assistance.
The critical factor informing these measures was that Dr. Urbani was trusted by Vietnamese authorities. On 11 March the Vietnam French Hospital was closed temporarily, and patients with SARS transferred to two wards in the public Bach Mai Hospital. Two groups of international experts, from the WHO and the United States Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), were sent to Hanoi, and the WHO also issued a Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network on 12 March. Additional aid and support was provided by Doctors without Borders (or MSF) who issued the medical staff dealing with the cases with infection-control suits and kits. As a result of the effective cooperation among Vietnamese government officials, specialists, Vietnamese citizens and medical staff in the hospital, no new cases among health care workers were reported, and the SARS outbreak was contained at the beginning of April (Chao, 2003; Lin, 2003; Hsu, 2008: 181; Reilley et al. ‘NEJM’, 2003).

Sadly however, Dr. Urbani (see figure 8.3) himself fell victim to the disease. During a flight to Bangkok, the capital of Thailand, he began to exhibit symptoms on 11 March. On his arrival, he asked a colleague from the WHO who greeted him at the airport not to approach him and to send him to a hospital immediately. His colleagues from Germany and Australia arrived to treat him. An Australian pharmaceutical merchant donated supplies of Ribavirin, a virus-resistant medicine. But these efforts were in vain and having fought SARS for 18 days in a makeshift isolation room at a Bangkok hospital, Dr. Urbani died at the age of 46 on 29 March 2003 (Reilley et al. NEJM, 2003; Lin, 2003; Davis, 2005:71). Without his swift reaction, however, Vietnam would not have become the first country to successfully contain its outbreak of SARS, and the worldwide spread of the virus may...
have been accelerated.

8.2 The SARS Outbreak in Taiwan

In recounting the course of the outbreak in Taiwan I will draw on Fink’s model of crisis management which, following models for the spread of diseases, identifies four phases: (i) the prodromal stage, (ii) the acute stage, (iii) the chronic stage, and (iv) the crisis resolution stage.

In many illnesses, the duration and intensity of the symptoms will be a function of several variables, such as the strain of the virus, the age and medical condition of the patient, the potency of the medication or treatment, and the skill of the physician. Sometimes, all four phases may occur within a very short space of time, as in the case of the 24-hour flu. At other times, there is an extended, long-fused prodrome. The same is true of crises......Not all crises have all four of these stages, but they can’t have any more. By dissecting a crisis and taking a closer, microscopic look at each phase, you may be better able to spot these stages in the future (Fink, 1986:20-21).

8.2.1 The First Stage—Prodromal Crisis

This stage is the warning stage occasionally referred to as a “pre-crisis stage.” Generally speaking, it is also a turning point. If the emerging situation is managed appropriately, movement to the next stage- the acute stage- can be averted and the crisis brought under control. However, the warning signs during a prodromal stage may be oblique and hard to recognise, as in the case of SARS. But even where signs are recognised, if no effective action is taken, movement to the next phase will occur (Fink, 1986: 21).
(1) Embryonic discovery of SARS cases

From the early stages of the SARS outbreak in 2003, the Taiwanese government had been keeping an eye on the progress of the disease. According to Lee Shu-zen (interviewee No. 04, see Appendix 1), a journalist on the United Evening News, at the beginning of March one of his colleagues, thinking that a possible story might be developing, went to Taiwan’s leading teaching hospital, the National Taiwan University Hospital (台大醫院) to obtain more information on SARS. While there he saw number of officials from the CDC (Centre for Disease Control in Taiwan) including the Director of Infection at the hospital, Dr. Chang Shang-chun. He was curious and decided to pursue his inquiries further.

In the meantime Mr. Lee approached the CDC to find out why all the major officials had gone to the hospital. After more chasing he established that the first SARS case had been confirmed and the paper reported it. The story was that a man, Mr. Chin, had been travelling in China with his wife and was sent to the emergency ward of the hospital on his return. On 14 March 2003, he was officially identified as a SARS patient by the Department of Health (DOH), Executive Yuan. Later, his wife was also sent to the hospital. One of doctors who treated her became the first medical staff member to be infected. Additionally, four employees working for the CTCI Corporation-Engineers & Constructors (中鼎工程股份有限公司), who had flown with Air China, were admitted to the hospital as emergencies at the end of March and confirmed as SARS patients.

(2) The political struggle with China

During this early phase of confirming the outbreak of SARS in March, the Taiwanese DOH immediately reported the situation to the WHO and asked for help. But they did not receive a response as the WHO had excluded Taiwan from membership since the
government on the mainland had replaced the Nationalist government on Taiwan as they officially recognised representative of ‘China’ at United Nations in 1971. As a result of this still active political decision Taiwan was unable to acquire aid from the WHO during the crucial initial stages of the outbreak. Compare this with the case of Vietnam mentioned earlier, the outcome was entirely different. However, on the 16th of March the American CDC did send two specialists to Taiwan to assist the DOH in preventing the spread of the disease.

Not only did the WHO include Taiwan in the list of epidemic but also areas Thailand and Canada followed suit. The DOH and Ministry of Foreign Affairs lodged a strong protest with the WHO, and legislators called on Taiwanese people not to travel the two countries as an anti-restriction. Taiwanese officials and President Chen Shui-bian argued that everyone in the world should have the right to be protected from the disease that medical treatment should move freely across borders and that the WHO should not exclude Taiwan from membership. Following concerted efforts to open constructive communication with the WHO, at the end of March Taiwan eventually received a positive response and was distinguished from mainland China, Hong Kong and Singapore in the list issued in mid April. At that time Taiwan was placed on the same level as the United States and the United Kingdom by the WHO, as a country where the threat from SARS was not too serious.

(3) The preventive policy of the Taiwanese government

In response to the threat government officials introduced a series of measures aimed at preventing the epidemic from expanding. The whole transportation system was disinfected, and every visitor from outside the country was obliged to have their temperatures taken. At the beginning of April the Chinese Medical Association invited Taiwanese medical specialists to Beijing to help them look into the SARS disease
while an international SARS symposium held in Taiwan in middle of that month confirmed that the number of deaths, of exported cases of the SARS virus, and of community infection all stood at zero. The Taiwanese government was proud of this achievement, but the system of prevention was already showing signs of leakiness.

Despite the introduction of quarantine measures their implementation was inconsistent. For instance, although Vietnamese labourers were required to isolate themselves for 10 to 15 days before entering Taiwan to work, these restrictions did not apply to Taiwanese passengers coming back from Vietnam. Further, when officials from the CDC discovered the first SARS case appearing at National Taiwan University Hospital, they should have drawn up a realistic strategy to strictly isolate suspected SARS patients coordinated with labour union and social welfare bodies to protect SARS patients’ rights in relation to their jobs and wages, introduced measures to take care of their families, and alerted other hospitals to the danger of SARS spreading, as a matter of urgency. Add to which, without adequate safeguard like surgical masks and protective clothing, as well as efficient operating procedure, patients, families and hospital staff were, not surprisingly, reluctant to report their real situation to the CDC. As a consequence, both the numbers who had SARS disease and how contagious it were seriously underestimated. Medical staff who had not been alerted to the conditions of SARS incubation still visited their relatives or friends. Even when the facts were known they were not always made public. In order to protect its business interests, for example, one hospital deliberately concealed the extent of infection. Yet, at that moment the government was still parading their proud record of ‘three zeroes’ and was totally unprepared for the escalation of the crisis.

(4) The interaction between the government and the media

Because in the early stages the exact nature of the disease was still unclear, the
Taiwanese media desperately looked for sources of reliable information on SARS. But the government’s performance fell some way short of their expectations. My interviewees indicated that when SARS approached neither the CDC nor the DOH were able or willing to answer their questions. Mr. Lee’s experience was typical.

When I recalled the course of SARS outbreak, I merely thought that even if I had heard some SARS message, actually I did not know where I could check out the genuine truth. For instance, if today I had been suddenly told by a doctor that somewhere has become infected, then I would verify the truth. However, when I went to the CDC to inquire about the details, I felt their efficiency was slower than the journalists. That is to say, they have not yet got the message. On the other hand, in fact, they did not want too much information to be disclosed publicly lest it provoked the public into a big panic. The Deputy Director of CDC was appointed as spokesman and other officials were advised against communicating with journalists. You know, as a reporter, I certainly wished I could acquire updates every day. Like how many people have been infected? What was the exact statistic? How was a SARS patient treated? So, if they did not provide us with further details directly but only via the authority’s announcements, of course journalists would pursue other stories from different sources which could be inaccurate. However, we were condemned by officials for inaccurate reporting. At that time, the media and Health bodies seemed to be on opposite sides. I thought that, possibly, CDC officials had never confronted such an epidemic in Taiwanese medical history and did not have the experience to deal with it, so that they did not build good relations with the media in the beginning nor release reliable information to the public. But the situation did improve after the new Director of CDC and of DOH replaced the old one.

As Miss Chang Ya-hui (interviewee No. 05, see Appendix 1), at the time, Deputy Section Chief of News Gathering at Sanlih E-Television, recounted the failures of the government information machine in the early stages of the outbreak fuelled the search for alternative sources and generated tensions between the desire to keep the public abreast of events and the fear of causing panic.
At that time, the information sources every journalist obtained were different, so that it was difficult to judge what information was accurate or false. In addition, many rumours were circulated. People just knew that the SARS disease was horrible and that there was a blockaded community called the Amoy Gardens in Hong Kong. But how dangerous it was, no one knew for sure. Therefore, journalists maintained a cautious and wary attitude. Take an example, if we received a message about a man with a respiratory problem who was sent to a hospital by ambulance, we would worry if he was a SARS patient and pursue him desperately. As a result, after inquiries we figured out that the patient had not contracted SARS. Our pursuit was always in vain. The government did not issue timely public announcements during that time, which was a terrible problem. That opened the way for people to feel panic as everyone always conjectured what on earth SARS could be. Plus the journalists were tempted to make guesses and produce sensational stories that would have a major public impact. Because of this, officials did not trust the journalists and the journalists did not trust officials. When the new Director of CDC took over the post, however, conditions improved a bit.

Tseng Wen-che (interviewee No. 06, see Appendix 1), a chief reporter of the Next Magazine, also pointed out that:

At that time officials paid much more attention to the hospitals and did not care about the media. The media, nonetheless, needed to get information. I think officials should have taken much more responsibility on the issue. They should have prevented the epidemic systematically on the one hand, and released updates to the media on the other, but they did not.

From these comments it is clear that the relationship between government officials and the media was extremely tense at that time. They did not trust each other. Government officials blamed journalists for not reporting the information they announced and for relying on other channels. Journalists often complained that the government did not hold regular press conferences to provide them with specialised and transparent information in a timely manner. The major losers from this professional stand-off were the Taiwanese people who were unable to obtain adequate
and reliable information on SARS and how to prevent it.

(5) The impact of media coverage on government policy

Despite the lack of information sources, the media had to cover SARS news since it was their duty so that the issue became what Birkland (1997) has called a “focusing event” that triggered increased attention to the problem and wide discussion in the media contributing a critical element to the agenda setting process and its impact on public policy.

A large event occurs—an oil spill, a plane crash, or a natural disaster—and the news media converge on the scene of the accident or disaster. Dramatic footage is aired and photographs are printed of property damage, visible environmental damage, homeless victims, and grieving families. Soon thereafter, the media’s attention (and our own) turns to people who can explain why the event happened: corporate officers, government officials, experts, and community leaders. When society seems to have formed a consensus that the event was an ‘act of God,’ such as a natural disaster or freak accident, our attention turns to what we can do to help the victims. But when the disaster is the result of human failings—poor design, operator error, ‘corporate greed,’ or ‘government neglect’—our attention turns to the voluntary acceptance of responsibility for an event or to the more coercive process of fixing blame. Boards of enquiry are formed, legislatures hold hearings, and reports are issued, all in hopes of ‘learning something from this incident’ to ensure that something similar does not happen again or, in the case of ‘unavoidable’ disasters, in hopes of improving our preparation for and response to disasters (Birkland, 1997:2-3).

The SARS outbreak in Taiwan was seen primarily as the result of human neglect and mismanagement rather than an ‘act of God’. Consequently, it provoked mounting criticism and the long-term consideration by the media, which put pressure on the authorities to introduce new regulations or laws and to punish those who had neglected their duties. Take an example, in mid March of 2003 the Taipei City
Government had suggested that the DOH of the Executive Yuan should categorise SARS as No. 4 in the list of designated communicable diseases (第四類法定傳染病) under the Communicable Disease Control Act (傳染病防治法) adopted in 1999. This stipulates that ‘known communicable diseases or syndromes other than those mentioned in the preceding three subparagraphs (categories) that are deemed by the central competent authority necessary to be prevented and controlled in accordance with this Act are so announced’ (DOH). But the DOH did not finally comply with this request until two weeks later, on the 27th of March. At the same time, public officials were not permitted to go to epidemic areas such as mainland China, Hong Kong and Vietnam.

8.2.2 The Second Stage—Acute Crisis

If the early warning prodromal phase has not been coped with well, the crisis will move to the second phase, the acute stage. In Fink’s schema, “if the prodromal phase alerts you to the fact that a hot spot is brewing, the acute crisis phase tells you that it has erupted” (Fink, 1986:22).

(1) The eruption of collective infection in hospitals

According to Mr. Lee (mentioned earlier), one of the journalists I interviewed, and supporting accounts from other newsmen, a traveller who lived in the Amoy Gardens housing estate, a blockaded SARS community in Hong Kong, came to Taiwan to visit his relatives and had taken a short train journey. A woman, Ms. Tsao, who had been on the same train, was admitted for emergency treatment at the Taipei Heping Hospital, a municipal hospital, on the 9th of April. DOH officials suspected that she
had been infected by the visitor from Hong Kong but they did not understand how. Since they had not been travelling in the same coach, they had not been in close contact. Reportedly, Ms. Tsao pointed out that when she was on the train, a passenger sitting beside her had a serious cough. But after investigating, officials did not find any other passengers who had SARS symptoms. Another suspicious point was that a laundry worker at the Heping Hospital, Mr. Liu, also became feverish and had to be admitted to the emergency ward on the 9th. They wondered whether Ms. Tsao had transmitted the virus to the worker or whether he had contracted SARS earlier from other workers since they were employed by a laundry agency not by the hospital and some of them were from mainland China. On the 12th, Mr. Liu exhibited the symptom of vomiting but then seemed to recover. After that, he continued working in the hospital and moving between different floors. It later transpired that he was a super-spreader but nobody suspected this at the time. On the 16th, however, his condition worsened, and it was arranged for him to stay in ward 8B (on the 8th floor and block B in the hospital).

By that time, some patients in 8B had already fallen ill with SARS together with some from wards 6B and 7B. So why was this critical circumstances escalation of the outbreak allowed to occur? The answer was that two key members of the medical staff place the protection of their professional reputations above the protection of their staff and patients. In an effort to conceal his initial mistaken diagnosis, Dr. Lin Rong-di, the Director of Infection and Control at the Heping Hospital, did not report the situation to the DOH promptly on the one hand. At the same time, Dr. Wu Kang-wen, who was in charge of the hospital, deceived his staff and patients by claiming that they had not admitted any SARS patients. This had the effect of encouraging the medical staff and patients to reduce their alertness to SARS. As a result, they were not swiftly quarantined and allowed to move around the hospital.
without restriction.

This negligence had serious consequences. On the 16\textsuperscript{th} April seven members of the medical staff together with a number of patients’ families and employees began to exhibit the same symptoms as the laundry worker. Faced with this escalation, Dr. Wu had no choice but to report it to the Department of Health of Taipei City Government which he did on the 22nd. Taiwanese CDC officials and American CDC specialists went to the hospital immediately to investigate the situation. After discussion, the Executive Yuan and the Taipei City Government hurriedly announced on the 24\textsuperscript{th} that Taipei Heping Hospital was closed isolating 1000 people within the building. No Chinese specialists from epidemic areas in mainland China were permitted to enter Taiwan. The former Director of the DOH of the Executive Yuan, Lee Ming-liang, urgently recruited medical volunteers to look after SARS patients at the Heping Hospital. Dr. Ye Jin-chuan, the former Director of the DOH of Taipei City Government, also contributed his professional experiences.

Faced with this sudden and unexpected forced quarantine people confined in the hospital began to panic and pleaded to be allowed to leave the building. A group of medical staff hung a white cloth with the sign ‘S.O.S.’ (for help) in the window or threw slips of paper asking for help into the street. Several employees confronted with the guard and threatened to jump out of the window if they were not allowed to out. These emotional reactions placed the deputy mayor of Taipei City, Ou Jin-de, under considerable pressure but he maintained that municipal (medical) officials had to hold their positions firmly and cooperate with the government.

In the event, 63 SARS patients from Heping Hospital were transferred to the Taipei Mackay Memorial Hospital (台北馬偕紀念醫院), an elite private hospital. 27 died including 7 medical staff. In addition to the Heping Hospital, the Taipei Jen-chi Hospital (台北仁濟醫院), a historical and private hospital, was also blocked for 14
days. But these measures did not prevent the outbreak from spreading. There was collective infection at both the Taipei Municipal Gan-dau Hospital (台北市立關渡醫院) and the National Taiwan University Hospital. The Chang Gung Memorial Hospital (長庚紀念醫院) in Kaohsiung, another elite private hospital situated in the southern part of Taiwan, also had SARS cases because some nurses from Taipei Heping Hospital had travelled to Kaohsiung, the second largest city, to visit their relatives who became infected. The expansion of the outbreak over almost the whole island made it the most serious epidemic event in the past 50 years in Taiwan.

(2) External and internal stress on journalists

With the sudden outbreak of collective infection in a number of hospitals the media desperately searched for more details about this unexpected storm. Journalists were caught between the very real consequences of the escalating epidemic for their own personal situation and the pressures from their news organisations to come up with impactful stories. Chang Ya-hui (mentioned above) recalled the difficulties of this time.

My boss and chief did not give me any instruction and pressure. I just tried my best to report it. Nevertheless, not to mention residents, all of us who were responsible for the SARS coverage were isolated and not allowed to get in the office. My boss rented a few rooms in a hotel for us as he would worry in case of infection in the office, that would be a big scare. Also we could not go back home as our families worried about infection. You know a chief reporter would bring a number of journalists to run the news every day; even all film editing equipment was carried into the hotel. We lived at the hotel anonymously and did not let the hotel staff know we were going to report SARS news. Unfortunately, later on they found out who we were and drove us out. Additionally, reporters have become, frankly, stressed in writing the scripts every day. Somehow even if I do not have any inspiration today, anyhow I will still be asked by the chief reporter to make one or two pieces of news. In other
words, if I have a message of only one word, I have to develop it to be a piece of news. That is why many journalists would report like this, “According to the hearsay…..” or “A story is going around that…..”

This account of conditions was confirmed by Lee Shu-zen.

My chief and boss did not give me any instruction about my coverage. To be honest, they were no more aware of the medical information than me. Even without instructions, however, they would compare our coverage with other newspapers. For instance, if the China Times Express covered a piece of SARS news and I did not cover it, the chief would wonder if I had the ability to pursue the progress of the epidemic situation or to look for patients’ stories that other media had not discovered. But the only thing I definitely had to obey was that those who were responsible to running SARS news were not permitted to go back to the office as they were afraid that once one of us got SARS and infected others in the office, that would be pretty horrible. Even the publishing could be shut down. Thus, I had not been back to my office for several months. If I needed something, I just asked my colleague inside to bring it out for me.

Tseng Wen-che also confirmed that he and his fellow reporters were given no explicit instructions ‘from above’ on how they should cover the story but that there was demand for photos to run alongside the text.

Only one request was that as long as we had evidence and got the truth, we would report what we wanted. Also our magazine (Next Magazine) paid much attention to the photos. It is impossible that we could simply cover a whole story without any photos as they are like evidence.

Mr. Tseng also recounted how some medical staff they knew at the Heping Hospital had covertly phoned them in the early days of the outbreak claiming that they suspected that the hospital had contracted a collective. Mr. Tseng then assigned journalists to the hospital to ascertain what was happening. They were quarantined in the hospital and not permitted to get out. Therefore, they personally witness the
inadequate measures taken by the hospital, like the lack of the medial equipment for preventing SARS, the absence of restrictions on movement between block A and block B, and the failure to report the situation swiftly to the DOH. They also discovered that the head of Taipei Heping Hospital, Dr. Wu, and the Director of Infection and Control, Dr. Lin, had concealed the seriousness of the collective infection in the hospital. Having journalists on the ‘inside’ allowed Next Magazine to publish a series of SARS stories in its weekly issues during the course of the outbreak. For those on the ground however the situation was difficult.

Basically, after Taipei Heping Hospital was closed down, some supplies provided by the government were only distributed to medical staff and patients but not to journalists; such as food, protective clothes and masks. Nevertheless, the medical staff helped us very much as I was familiar with them. Thus, I sent some portable noodles to the hospital for my colleagues but forgot to bring the chopsticks. That was funny. Thankfully, patients also offered some stuff to them, so that they could eat and sleep there. To be honest, at that time the situation was extremely messy. Cleaners still came and went between block A and block B and were not quarantined. That is why in our weekly we wrote that the hospital looked like a Jewish concentration camp.

(3) The media coverage

The coverage of the outbreak illustrated both dimensions of tabloidisation. The exposes and commentary on official deception and incompetence sat alongside stories that focused on personalisation and human interest angles and employed sensationalism.

A study from the Foundation for the Advancement of Media Excellence (FAME), a local media organisation, identified three major failures in news performance: false reports, sensational and exaggerated news, and violation of SARS patient’s human rights (Hsu, 2008c: 182 cited in Lu, 2004). “Other studies found that political rather
than medical and scientific forces dominated the framing of the SARS news discourse (Yang, 2003), and that marginal social groups such as the homeless, working class (e.g., Liu, 2004), and foreign labours (e.g., Lin and Chen, 2003) were stigmatised in the local news” (Hsu, 2008c: 182-83).

Two sets of findings reported in Hsu Mei-ling’s study (Hsu, 2008: 182) on SARS suggest that this coverage played an important role in structuring public attitudes. According to a survey conducted on 2 May 2003 by the Taiwanese Broadcasting Developing Fund, nearly 40% of the sample were not satisfied with SARS news coverage. Of those who were dissatisfied, 65% considered the SARS coverage too sensational, 29% thought it too negative, 17% believed the news media had failed to provide necessary information, and 16% mentioned that there were too many inaccurate reports (Hsu, 2008: 182 cited in Lin, 2003). Similarly, a study of public opinion on SARS in Taiwan and Hong Kong conducted in late May by the Academia Sinica, found that 44.4% of the Taiwanese sample attributed the perceived seriousness of the disease to the sensationalism of the news, but only 18.6% of the Hong Kong sample did so (Hsu, 2008: 182 cited in Chu, Y. Chang, L. Chang, Lin & C. Chang 2003).

When the first SARS patient died, for example, the China Times on the 28th of April carried the headline “Death! The first SARS case” which was both eye-catching and likely to fuel public fear. Another example is the E-paper of the China Times’ headline on 29th April, “What on earth was the Taipei Heping Hospital doing? Two persons died again!” The former Director of Department of Health of the Taipei City Government, Chiu Shu-ti, was promoted to ask journalists why they always emphasised the number of dead but failed to place the course of the epidemic in context.

In one case it was claimed that the media disclosure of a patient’s name had led
them to commit suicide, I asked Mr. Tseng whether the report was true. He replied that he did not think it was true but conceded that the circumstances were not at all clear.

The case was that a patient had been ill and suspected himself of contracting SARS. He could not bear the stress and committed suicide. You know a man died, and the journalist might think it could be another SARS death. Honestly, the cause of his death was a bit confusing at that time, but I am sure that his death was not because his name was revealed to a newspaper. I believe that the media should know the Article in medical regulations which stipulates that journalists cannot disclose any patient’s name; even his/her health history. I think it should be after his suicide that the media covered it. Certain media suspected that he probably had SARS. Other media demonstrated, however, that he had committed suicide but not because of SARS.

In addition to the coverage of deaths, the Liberty Times, a Pan-Green oriented paper (explained in Chapter 4), highlighted the political aspects of the situation, emphasising the discrepant views on strategies of dealing with the SARS outbreak between the DPP (ruling party at that time) and the KMT (the opposition party) and the obstruction by mainland China of Taiwan’s urgent efforts to involve in the WHO.

To establish the overall frequency of stories focusing on fatalities or political issues, 443 calculated items of SARS-related news coverage in the three Taiwanese mainstream papers, the China Times (CT), the United Daily News (UDN), and the Liberty Times (LT), over the period from 24 April to 23 May in 2003 which was the peak period of the SARS eruption. The results are shown in the following three figures (see figure 8.4, 8.5, 8.6).

From these results it is clear that the coverage of fatalities in both the CT and UDN is higher than in the LT, with the UDN publishing the most items. In contrast, the attention given to the political issues surrounding the outbreak is considerably higher in the LT than in other two papers. The mainland Chinese government’s obstruction of
Taiwan’s efforts to apply for a membership in the WHO at the regular meeting held in Geneva in May, was particularly intensively covered. The relative emphases in the coverage of the three newspapers analysed is summarised in Table 8.1.

Figure 8.4 The frequency on the death and politics coverage shown in the China Times

![China Times Frequency Graph](image)

Figure 8.5 The frequency on the death and politics coverage shown in the United Daily News

![United Daily News Frequency Graph](image)
Table 8.1 The Incidence of each referent in the three dailies from 24 April to 23 May 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Referent</th>
<th>CT</th>
<th>UDN</th>
<th>LT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>News no.</td>
<td>Incidence(%)</td>
<td>News no.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>74.436</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>25.564</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>100.000</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the analysis of the press coverage produced by the SARS Media Watchdog Online which consisted of sociologists, media scholars, research assistants, and students, in the rush to print saleable coverage normal journalistic standards were sometimes short circuited. One newspaper, for instance, cited a message from an article published on a university BBS (Bulletin Board Service) website, claiming that “There are at least 6 SARS cases in our University.” The source was anonymous and
no attempt was made to interview the university authorities to check its validity. Alongside the print media, almost every TV station assigned its SNG (mentioned in Chapter 4) vehicle to get to the scene in order to broadcast live news. On the one hand, live broadcasts have the strength of visual images that place the report at the heart of the story as it unfolds. On the other hand, the constant pressure to find something to say to camera means there is little or no time to check facts and leads to corners being cut. In search of the human face of the crisis many TV journalists endeavored to secure interviews with members of patients’ families or their relatives when they were at their most vulnerable. They neglected to obscure the faces of SARS patients or relatives reporting cases at the DOH using mosaic and relayed clear shots. For example, some TV journalists pursued and door-stepped the bereaved with little regard to their feelings, asking a family member of a SARS victim, “Your mum has died. What do you think of it?”

Mr. Lee, a journalist of the old school, objected strongly to the constant broadcasting of footage of people crying, shouting and protesting.

I live in the Younghe area which is in Taipei county. In the Chunghe area of the same county, there was a poor family whose house was near mine. One day, a TV station assigned its SNG vehicle and journalists to approach the family and report that a grandpa and a grandson had SARS. This caused the residents living there to be angry since they thought why have the journalist exposed the patients in public. That would have a big impact on their community. You see, virtually all TV stations covered SARS news by SNG during the period, which means TV journalists in turn reported SARS news on live all day long. I think lots of news items were rough and ready, and had not been verified carefully.

This way of operating conforms to the general pattern of risk reporting outlined by Allan and his colleagues.

While risk analysis indicates that not all risks are alike, news media coverage
of a variety of hazards and disasters tends to follow predictable patterns. Neither the unpredictability nor the high degree of complexity of hazards fits neatly into a news gathering process that places a high priority on meeting deadlines. Therefore, news about hazards often is moulded to the medium. A day-long debate about the location of a toxic dump is reduced to 30-second ‘sound bites’ from each side and footage about angry demonstrators staging ‘pseudo-events’ for the benefit of the cameras. In the end, the audience is entertained by the hazard without being informed about it (Allan, Adam and Carter eds., 2000: 8 cited in Wilkins and Patterson, 1990: 13).

(4) The similarities and differences in the management of the crisis between Taiwan and China

Owing to its on-going but uneasy relations with China (mentioned in Chapter 4), the SARS eruption on the mainland was a particular point of reference and comparison in Taiwan. When collective infection broke out in Taiwan, some government officials and media supportive of the governing party pointed fingers at the Chinese government’s concealment of the true situation of SARS infection there, claiming that this made it easier for it to be transmitted worldwide. If we take a wide view, however, and compare the way the SARS epidemic was dealt with by the Taiwanese and Chinese government and reporting by the media in two countries, we find both similarities and differences.

(i) Concealing the truth

According to Liu (2005: 249, 261), because SARS has potentially life threatening consequences, everyone has a right to be fully informed of the risks they may face and how to manage them. As we noted earlier, however, the Chinese government failed to report the full extent of the situation in Guangdong to the WHO when it first became apparent, because of concerns about its possible negative impacts on the economy and worries that making the full facts public might trigger social panic. As a consequence,
as Davis notes, they lost the opportunity to contain the epidemic at its initial phase.

SARS had become a test of China’s international credibility, with Health Minister Zhang Wenkang continuing to antagonise the world public-health community with his perfunctory and reliably inaccurate reports on the epidemic. Since early February, WHO experts had urgently wanted to visit Guangdong to investigate conditions there, but the Health Ministry obstructed the mission until the beginning of April—by then, SARS had set Beijing ablaze as well.....Although officials continued to assert that the epidemic was contained, on 16 April WHO took the unprecedented step of chastising the Chinese government for ‘inadequate reporting’ of SARS cases (Davis, 2005: 73).

While the Chinese Health Minister announced that SARS had been contained and that south China was fully safe for travellers, a 72-year-old retired military surgeon, Dr. Jiang Yanyong, sent an email accusing the minister of bald-faced lying. In this communication of the 4th April, he revealed that 60 SARS patients were being treated at 301 Hospital, a People’s Liberation Army Hospital located in Beijing, and that 6 of them had died on 3 April. Time magazine then took up the story, prompting a political shake in Beijing (Davis, 2005: 74; Liu, 2005: 260; Huang and Hao, 2008c: 94-95). Following this, “President Hu Jintao and his supporters now took firm command of the situation: bureaucratic duplicity and inaction were replaced by an almost Maoist display of party-state willpower...Health Minister Zhang Wenkang and Beijing Mayor Meng Xuenong—both Zemin loyalists—were purged, and other officials were bluntly told that their survival depended upon extirpating SARS” (Davis, 2005: 74). Because Hu Jintao recognised that containing SARS required both the Chinese people’s support and the application of coordinate diplomacy, the possible spread of the epidemic was addressed relatively quickly and effectively.

Compare this with Taiwan’s situation, although Taiwanese DOH officials had promptly informed the WHO when the first SARS case was discovered in mid March
and had not attempted to conceal the fact, the WHO did not respond until the end of March. At the same time, no one anticipated that a collective infection would break out at the Taipei Heping Hospital or predicted the concealment and duplicity of both the Head of the hospital and the Director of Infection and Control. This incident does, however, conform to the Chinese saying that a single neglect will lose a hundred, and there is strong case to be made that the lack of adequate protection equipment and a sound prevention procedure revealed a level of both incompetence and inefficiency within the government. Nevertheless, because they did not want to lose ‘face’ officials refused to admit any wrong-doing when the Taipei Heping Hospital was eventually forced to close. The situation was exacerbated by the strained relations between central government and local government. The national governing party, the DPP, condemned the Taipei City Government which was at the time controlled by the KMT, the main rival party, for the delay in providing information about an old man who was a vagrant veteran and who had died of SARS some time before. In response, the Taipei City Government argued that the central government should have taken on the responsibility for investigating the incident.

In Benoit’s model of image restoration (Benoit, 1995:9-12), the most important asset owned by both individuals or institutions is reputation. Once a favourable image is undermined by unpredictable crisis, wrong-doing or mistaken judgment, they will make every effort to repair the damage. Following the work of the social psychologist Abelson (1959), Ware and Linkugel (1973) identify four rhetorical strategies in rhetorical self-defense. The first strategy is denial. Employing this framework to the present case we can argue that the efforts made to conceal the truth or deny management failings were aimed at restoring and repairing image and reputation.
Questions of media freedom and restriction

The mainland Chinese media have no legally guaranteed right to independently cover the outbreak of infections so as to protect public welfare. They are, however, bound by a requirement to keep official secrets. Before initiating coverage, journalists must first submit their reports for inspection and confirmation that circulating the intended information will not adversely affect the basic interests of the Party and the State. This general expectation that the media act as the ‘mouth and tongue’ of the party-state operates with particular force times of potential risk and crisis. That is why the Chinese media failed to cover SARS news in the early stages. They could not disclose information on the issue without permission from the relevant departments of the Party and the government. In an effort to further control the flow of information ordinary people were prohibited from using text message systems to transmit material that the Chinese government classified as ‘rumours’. Even so, according to the Xinhua News Agency, 117 people in 17 provinces were arrested and charged with disturbing social order by circulating SARS-related rumours. With the sharp increase in SARS cases in late April, however, a turning point was reached and the Chinese media breached the restraints on covering the issue. The increased volume of public coverage had the effect of reducing the popular circulation of unsubstantiated ‘rumours’ and fostering cooperation with the government (Liu, 2005: 251-252, 257, 262-263 266).

In contrast, the Taiwanese media enjoy full freedom of the press, in the Western definition of that term, together with the expectation that they will act as a watchdog on official abuse and malpractice. Hence, during the course of SARS outbreak, most media attacked the government for failing to prevent the spread of SARS and provide reliable information on the course of the epidemic. Government officials, in their turn, would attempt to save face and to repair their reputation by denying that they had
made wrong decisions and by shifting the blame onto others. At the same time, they were dissatisfied with tabloid-trend in reporting and urged the media to build their coverage around official announcements. That is why the relationship between the media and the government was adversarial in the early period of the outbreak. However, there is a strong argument to be made that if the media had not uncovered the facts of the infection at the Heping Hospital, the consequences for public health may well have been worse than they were. At the same time, critics who have objected to the fact that journalists entered the Hospital clandestinely have a point.

(5) Public reactions

According to an article published on the Taiwanese Study of On Front News (Liu, 2003), the general public opinion in Taiwan was that the course of the SARS outbreak had revealed serious defects in both the administrative system of the government and the medical system. Criticisms embraced the sectionalism of cross-departmental relations in the government, the lack of a standard procedure and plan for establishing specialised SARS hospitals, opaque epidemic information, the snail-paced identification of SARS cases and the lack of a strict reporting system, the failure of the medical administration in dispatch, the benefit-driven medical industry, defiance of medical ethics, improper exercise in quarantine, and neglect of public sanitation.

Regarding the behaviour of the public, there were repeated concerns expressed that some people lacked an appropriate sense of social responsibility, a supposition often constructed on the basis of well publicised incidents. One high school student who came from a home that had been isolated, for example, continued going to classes. A Taiwanese doctor who had travelled to Japan became ill and was diagnosed as a suspected a SARS patient on his return, prompting an angry response from the Japanese government. A taxi driver drove around the city as usual before he died of
SARS. Some medical staff at the Taipei Heping Hospital who had not been alerted to the possibility that they might be incubating SARS still visited their relatives or friends.

There was also a degree of scapegoating. Victims of SARS from disadvantaged minorities, such as the elderly and migrants, were commonly labeled as ‘others’ and seen as constituting a social problem and threat to the majority when in fact they were victims, of both the disease, and the absence of appropriate social resources, support and knowledge that would have allowed them to avoid infection more effectively.

Travel was also a bone of contention. Two DPP legislators, Chiu Yong-ren and Hsieh Ming-yuan, suggested that the government should defer completely from issuing visas to Chinese and Hong Kong residents lest they turned out to be carriers of infection who would exacerbate the state of the epidemic. The Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) refused wanting to maintain the level of cross-strait cultural, social and economic exchange. They did, however, promise to keep the situation under review. In addition, they appealed to the Chinese government to reinforce its quarantine system so as to reduce the risk of transmission.

In spite of the evident flaws in the government’s handling of the SARS outbreak, the media’s handling of the crisis continued to attract condemnation from some journalism scholars. They claimed that the coverage confirmed the decline in standards of both journalistic writing and ethics. They condemned journalists from certain TV stations entering the Heping Hospital in secret and recording clandestine footage of conditions inside. They argued that the pressures of maintaining round-the-clock broadcast coverage had fuelled a search for sensational footage that had, in turn, heightened public tension and fear, and encouraged a more individualistic, every person for themselves, response that weakened social solidarity. They also maintained that if the media had reported that as long as everyone took proper
prevention measures and found out what the period of ‘First Class’ treatment was, panic would have been reduced and the proportion of infected patients recovering higher. In response, journalists covering the outbreak argued that for them to do this it first of all necessary for all officials of the DOH or CDC to them with the relevant information, otherwise they did not know what information should be covered and were obliged to fall back on what they heard or conjectured.

These general tensions are well illustrated by the major controversy that erupted when the former Director of Department of Information Taipei City Government, Mr. Wu Yu-sheng, censured two journalists from Next Magazine for secretly entering the closed Heping Hospital to interview medical staff and patients, in breach of journalistic ethics. Afterwards, photos and recorded tapes were confiscated, and two journalists were taken to a military camp to be isolated. At that time, the editor in chief of the Next Magazine defended the journalists’ action in entering the hospital as a necessary step in uncovering the truth and asked why they should be accused? This argument between journalists and officialdom generated considerable public discussion. Some contributors maintained that exposing the flaws in the Taipei City Government’s tackling of the crisis in the hospital had damaged the City Government’s image, so the Director’s wish to punish the two journalists was motivated by an institutional and personal desire to retaliate. On the other hand critics asked, why did he not punish the journalist from the SETN (Sanlih E-Television News) who had clandestinely given the hospital guard a video camera and asked him to shoot the meeting of the medical staff at the hospital? Why did he apply different criteria to the two cases?

Those at the sharp end of the media coverage, however, tended to condemn it. A letter written by one of the quarantined staff at the Taipei Heping Hospital which was sent via the internet, described her discontent. She asked why the media always
covered negative and sensational news but not positive and helpful information. The following extract from the letter described part of what she saw and her feelings about the media coverage.

After having my lunch, I saw some staff leaving for home and heard a message that CDC officials would come to take over the hospital and close it down. My heart was in a great conflict, and I was considering either staying at the hospital or leaving. Finally, I decided to stay because I knew the hospital needed us to take care of patients although we looked like a small ‘screw’ (screw is small but it is very important in its function).

Afterwards, the Head of the hospital, nearly crying, gathered all staff together to apologise for what he has done and told the whole story of what was happening in the hospital. I felt very sad. Nonetheless, he asked us to start preparing everything for nearly one thousand people. We were busy moving chairs, beds and the like but ignored how to arrange for our families and children. That is why there was a conflict with the guard next day. Through the coverage of the media, all over the world almost knew this fighting footage. It seemed to let the world see our embarrassment. Yet, after the conflict, we returned to our positions and kept working. Possibly everyone has remembered the footage but who would cover our working hard?

I knew we were not alone as officials of Taipei City government and other bodies always encouraged us and provided for our needs. By contrast, how about the media? They always phoned us and attempted to find out the flaws of the hospital and more details or used sensational words to stimulate our mood; even covered the exaggerated report. I did not mean to offend the media and just wanted to let them know when a person was closed in a fixed room, wearing the masks and protective clothes, and could not feel free to go around, would he/she have a good mood? I thought if the media knew what wrong-doing we have done or who had feeling torment or misunderstood to the hospital, they could let us know, and we were able to improve. That probably could avoid an unnecessary conflict.

Tonight, I am sleepless and asking why the Director of DOH Ms. Chiu did not call the regular press conference, so that the media did not report some important news. They seem to be only interested in sensational information
but not the positive and accurate material. Why did a 48-year-old person commit suicide? Because the media did not tell him how many people have been cured but just emphasized the number of the dead.

8.2.3 The Third Stage—Chronic Crisis

This phase is sometimes called the clean-up stage or post-mortem. “If there is to be a congressional investigation, or an audit, or a newspaper expose, or a long period of interviews and explanations and mea culpas, this is when such lingering malignancies settle in. This is also a period of recovery, of self-analysis, of self-doubt, and of healing” (Fink, 1986: 23-24).

(1) The reformation of the government

In order to restore public confidence and trust in the government, President Chen Shui-bian dismissed Mr. Tu Hsing-che from the Directorship of the DOH, Executive Yuan, and Mr. Chen Zai-jin from the Directorship of the CEC in mid May 2003. Those posts were taken respectively by Dr. Chen Chien-ren and Dr. Su Yi-ren. Their specialised experience and good cooperation and communication with the WHO, who had eventually sent two specialists to Taiwan, went some way towards repairing the situation. Later, Ms. Chiu Shu-ti (mentioned earlier) also resigned her commission and the Head of Taipei Heping Hospital Dr. Wu was dismissed. Further, President Chen appointed the former Director of the DOH, Dr. Lee Ming-liang, as General-Director of Prevention for Epidemics in charge of coordinating resources for the prevention of future outbreaks. A specific budget about 5000 million NT dollars for tackling SARS was adopted by the Legislative Yuan. Mobile stations for taking temperatures were set up all over Taiwan, and the government promoted a movement
of taking temperatures across the whole nation. At the same time, Dr. Chen also
designated 14 specific SARS hospitals for the treatment of SARS patients. By means
of these new policies, the circumstances that had promoted the spread of SARS were
gradually contained.

(2) The improved relationship between the government and the media

By this stage, officials were holding regular press conferences every day with the
media and providing the latest SARS information to journalists. As a result, the
relations between the two parties became markedly less suspicious and hostile.
Government officials had changed key personnel and altered their media strategy, and
the media for their part were more willing to present positive news. For example,
some medical staff who had stayed at the hospital to look after the patients were
presented by journalists as deserving respect and encouragement. As a result, people
gathered on the pavement outside to applaud and register their appreciation (see figure
8.7).

Having worked through the outbreak, my interviewees offered some reflections on
their experiences. Lee Shu-zen suggested that it is crucial in the early stages of a
gathering crisis to interview experts with specialised knowledge.

I thought at the time that if the media had interviewed some specialists such as
the researcher of Academia Sinica, Ms. He Mei-hsiang, Dr. Chang Shang-chun
who is teaching at the National Taiwan University College of Medicine and
professor Su Yi-ren who has been working for National Health Research
Institutes, people would have known how to reduce the risk of getting the
SARS through certain channels because all those experts are Taiwan’s top
scholars in the infection field. More specifically, giving realistic example of the
most helpful methods, like often washing hands, wearing the masks as well as
measuring the temperature every day. In terms of the TV stations, it is
necessary for them to review themselves. I thought they did not have to spend too much time to make live news programmes as most of them were segmental footage and coverage. People were simply able to see the scene of conflict, crying and shouting, and could not acquire the more useful information on SARS. Although CDC had offered the public a handbook and CD afterwards, in fact, the effect was not good. I could imagine that the proportion people who would watch the CD was pretty low. Instead, if CDC have cooperated with TV drama producers to put some SARS information into the plot of a popular series, that perhaps would have achieved the effect of preventing the epidemic.

Figure 8.7 The Medical Staff at Taipei Heping Hospital waved to people outside to thank them for their support, Source: http://www.gov.tw

Miss Chang focused on government failings arguing that was concerned, officials should have set up an urgent and cross-department group to deal with the situation as soon as the first SARS cases appeared, but they did not.

This sort of group came out in the late period of SARS outbreak. Government officials would regularly announce the SARS update in the morning and afternoon every day and explain what the latest condition was. So I think the interaction between officials and the media is very important during the period of the serious epidemic. But I know this point is hard to weigh properly. Normally, from officials’ standpoints they prefer sorting everything out first before announcing. They are afraid that the media talk too much, which would make people scared. On the contrary, if the media do not provide the public with enough information, people will know nothing.
Mr. Tseng added that:

Government officials had to play the leading role to let people know what SARS was and how they coped with the condition at Taipei Heping Hospital. Also they had to regularly hold the press conferences every day and to let the media realise the course of prevention but they did not do it.

8.2.4 The Fourth Stage—Crisis Resolution

In the final phase, the patient is well and whole again. In this case, SARS is contained, and the situation eventually returns back to normal. But as Fink cautions, “Beware and be advised: crises historically evolve in cyclical fashion, and a crisis sufferer almost never has the luxury of dealing exclusively with one crisis at a time” (Fink, 1986: 25).

On 17 June, Taiwan canceled its warnings about travel and on the 5th of July it was officially removed from the list of epidemic area maintained by the WHO. In order to prevent SARS from returning in the fall and winter, the DOH introduced a strategy of comprehensive prevention in November 2003. In December all students in school and all staff in institutions had have their temperatures taken.

As for the media, would they behave with greater social responsibility if a similar disaster happens in the future? Professor Chang Chin-hwa (mentioned in Chapter 7), writing in the United Daily News's public forum on 30th Arpil 2003, outlined her recommendations for future coverage. First of all, the news coverage should avoid invoking unnecessary anxiety and disquiet. Thus, journalists have to provide accurate, complete and balanced reports and display a cautious and compassionate attitude which would reassure victims or the bereaved. Secondly, the media should offer the public more information such as basic advice on facing the crisis together with
moral support to assist them in reconstructing their lives. Thirdly, in the course of disaster journalists may become a comforter, reporting more positive, brave and loyal stories to encourage people to face and cope with their fears and worries. Fourthly, the news coverage should avoid regarding victims or the disadvantaged minority as ‘others’ who caused the problem, labeling them with negative images which exacerbate divisions within the society.

Yet, is this just wishful thinking? If a similar epidemic occurred again, would government officials and the media establish more cooperative relations given the fierce economic competition in the media marketplace and the equally fierce party competition in the political arena? On the basis of the preparations then being made for a possible outbreak of avian (bird) flu, my interviewees were pessimistic. Mr. Lee argued strongly that a more cooperative outcome was unlikely.

You know after SARS had been constrained, the head of the DOH, Dr. Chen, and head of the CDC, Dr. Su, both resigned their posts and returned to academia. I think the situation might be repeated. In other words, in the beginning the chaotic condition could be happening again but the lasting period would be shorter than before. Every reporter still attempts to obtain the exclusive which might only last 24 hours, then it would be updated. Likewise, TV stations will assign journalists to report the live news by SNG. For myself, of course I wish I could cover the newest and accurate information for the public. Certainly, I hope that the officials of the DOH may openly announce the information and not conceal it. You know the chaotic period of SARS was very long, around one or two months. According to the CDC’s warning, in case of bird flu next early year (2006) in Taiwan, I would assume that the messy condition is likely to exist but for a shorter of time.

Miss Chang argued along similar lines, emphasising that competition among the media would be intensified and officials would continue to be defensive.

After the SARS event, I do not think the situation would be better if this sort
of serious disease occurred again. Let me take an example. Like the issue of bird flu, Taiwan has started preventative action. The media is also about to ask some questions on this. But I find the attitude of both DOH and CDC officials is defensive. They do not transparently offer enough information to the journalist. I think as long as a new disease comes out and people do not know what it is, their attitude is always ambiguous. If they were willing to explain clearly, they would answer the questions about what they have known and not just say, ‘Oh, sorry! We cannot answer your questions.’ As I said before, we have become stressed in writing the scripts for midday and evening news every day. For instance, if we asked an official some questions in the morning, he told us sorry he did not have enough information and would not say anything until afternoon or evening, even the following day. Well again, hearsay (rumour) would be circulated. That is why I do not think the condition will be better. Probably they might think what they have done is better but it is not enough for us.

Mr. Tseng stressed that the most important thing was that the truth should be released by the government to the media, in a way which did not cause the public to panic.

Let me take current bird flu as an example. In practice, the case of an infected patient with bird flu has not happened in Taiwan but it has let people feel horrible. Why? Because the government official warned that the disease might be spread next early year and statistically many people will die. Some doctors indicated that the official could not conjecture how many people will die with bird flu. I think the duty of officials is that they are able to call on people to advise about the flu and have regular press conferences to announce what the current situation is and what kind of information the WHO has got. In order to warn people of paying much attention to the issue, the official should not say that possibly 14000 people will die because of bird flu and that there will not be enough coffins, which of course will provoke the public into panic. Knowing that the media like reporting sensational information, they should not have presumed how many people will die. Plus I was told by a doctor that the vice-president called on people not to enjoy watching birds, which provoked the Taiwan International Birding Association to protest. You see, maybe due to the lessons of SARS, the governing party is afraid of censure from the media. Its worry goes beyond a bit. Certainly, the government and
the media should take responsibility. Particularly, government officials have to stand out and play a leading role once the epidemic is happening. At the same time, they must provide the public with clear information and let the media know how to cooperate. If the government cannot play the leading role and always follows in the steps of the media, that might cause trouble.

### 8.3 Summing-up

According to the statistics released by the DOH, Executive Yuan, 141 people in Taiwan possibly died from SARS. They included 81 who were positively identified as having contracted SARS and the remainder who were suspected SARS patients. Dr. Wu and Dr. Lin were not only charged with negligence but sentenced to serve eight years in goal based on Article 130 of the Criminal Code, relating to Offenses of Malfeasance in Office by a public official.

Overall, this case study confirms that political and commercial factors are the key influences on the performance of the media. Even if the government and the media have learned lessons, history might still repeat itself. As interviewees noted, governing and opposition parties are unlikely to work together harmoniously in the near future and the convention of saving face will still be uppermost in the minds of officials. As Benoit notes, “Human beings frequently must attempt to restore their reputations after alleged or suspected wrong-doing” (Benoit, 1995). This is not simply an issue for Asian culture but a universal problem.

From another political standpoint, obviously Taiwan was excluded by the WHO in the initial stage of SARS outbreak as it is not a member of the WHO but mainland China is, so that the epidemic was out of control without international rapid aids. Compare this with Vietnamese case, Taiwan has been situated disadvantage under the powerful shadow of the Chinese government.
The media for their part will still be under pressure to pay sustained attention to the economic and commercial returns on coverage. Owners did not instruct the journalist on how to cover the news in this case, but arguably they did not have to. By constantly comparing their journalists’ performance with their rivals, they send a powerful and constantly reiterated message about what kind of coverage merits approval and promotion. Faced with this pressure, the journalist has no choice but to pursue the exclusive, impactful story even during a disaster. This may be an expose of the inadequacies and failures of official systems, structures and procedures but it is equally, if more, likely to be a story generated by the deceptions and errors of individual functionaries or the suffering of victims caught up in events or the heroism of those battling to care for them in difficult and sometimes impossible circumstances. These foci on personalities, drama, and human interest are the core elements of tabloid reporting. However, this case seems to be seen as slightly positive in that tabloid such as *Next Magazine* indeed served the public interest by disclosing medical and official failures.
CHAPTER NINE
Case Study 3:

Suicide Contagion: A Tragedy of the Comedian

Mr. Ni Min-ran

The possible links between the incidence of suicide and its popular representations have been in dispute since the apparent rash of youthful suicides that followed the suicide of the romantic hero of Goethe’s best-selling novel, *The Sufferings of Young Werther*, published in 1774, an alleged causal link that became known as the ‘Werther effect’. On the one side there are those who argue that media reporting may increase the incidence of suicide, particularly “among people who are already predisposed, those who are ambivalent about the value of life over death” (Stack, 1992: 255). On the other side there is body of research evidence challenging this alleged link. Celebrity suicides, however, present a special case due to the intense bonds formed with fans, particularly young fans. This chapter explores these dynamics through a case study of a particularly well publicised Taiwanese incident, the suicide of the popular comedian, Ni Min-ran. But before moving on to the details of this case it is necessary to briefly review the general debate around the possible links between news reporting and suicide rates.

9.1 Debates on Suicide and the Media

A study of the *New York Times*, entitled *Suicide and the Media: The New York Times’s*
Presentation of Front-Page Suicide Stories Between 1910 and 1920, concluded firmly that “suicide is a private event that is usually not examined by The New York Times on the front page and that media coverage of suicide is unrelated to the incidence of suicide in the real world” (Wasserman et al. 1994: 64). According to Stack, however, this blanket conclusion ignores two key factors. Firstly, he argues, responses will differ depending on who the suicide is, whether they are a celebrity or prominent figure or an ‘ordinary person’, and what causes/motivations are mentioned, such as chronic or terminal illness, financial losses, loss of a loved one through death or divorce and other crises. These features will impact on both identification and imitation. People may be more inclined to copy the behaviour of celebrities. Secondly, peoples’ interactions with media symbols will vary depending on their own situation, whether they are themselves suffering difficulties or crises. As a result, Stack concludes, “only under certain conditions will they have a presumed effect” (Stack, 1992:256).

Despite these caveats, a number of commentators have continued to work with notions of ‘contagion’ and ‘imitation’. In their study correlating the incidence of suicide stories in the Israeli press (1955-1990) with measures of real suicide events, Weimann and Fishman (1995: 551-554) demonstrate that in a competitive media market a growth in suicide reports can be predicted, which may, in turn, lead to an increase in suicide news featuring more violent modes, such as shooting, hanging and jumping from high buildings. This suggests that the main impact of suicide reporting may be on forms of suicide rather than on the overall incidence. This supposition is supported by Berman who found, “no evidence for increased numbers of suicides after the broadcast of three television films depicting fictional suicide, but did find imitation effect specific to the depiction of a suicide method in one of these films (presenting suicide by carbon monoxide poisoning)” (Weimann and Fishman, 1995:
Recent research has focused on the impact of suicide clustered reporting in the news media rather than in fiction, focusing particularly on young people where the relative risk of suicide is appreciably higher than in the general population. This focus was supported by some scholars in the United States where suicide rates are 2 to 4 times higher among 15-19 year olds than among other age groups (Gould et al., 2003: 1270 cited in Gould, Wallenstein, Kleinman, O’Carroll et al., 1990). The general conclusion is that “vulnerable youth are susceptible to the influence of reports and portrayals of suicide in the mass media” and that “the evidence is stronger for the influence of reports in the news media than in fictional formats” (Gould et al., 2003:1269). Research on news coverage has also added weight to arguments for a ‘Werther effect’ “in which exposure to another’s self-inflicted death elicits imitation in susceptible individuals” (Jamieson et al., 2003: 1643 cited in Gould & Davidson, 1988; Velting & Gould, 1997). The systematic work of Phillips has found “a strong relationship between reports of suicide in newspapers or on television and subsequent increases in the suicide rate” (Gould et al., 2003: 1270 cited in Bollen & Phillips, 1981, 1982; Phillips, 1974, 1979; Phillips & Carstensen, 1986, 1988). What is more, “the imitative effect of press reporting appears to increase with the prominence and frequency of the story” (Jamieson et al., 2003: 1644 cited in Gould, 2001; Phillips, Lesyna & Paight, 1992).

The celebrity comedian Ni Min-ran’s sudden decision to take his own life which shocked both the Taiwanese public and his colleagues in the entertainment business in Taiwan in 2005 offers a useful case study of the dynamics of news coverage under conditions of intensified competition.
9.2 A Comedian’s Sorrow Behind His Joy

The idea that the clowns or comedians who bring joy to everyone keep their sorrows and loneliness to themselves is firmly established in contemporary folklore. The public mask is seen to conceal private anguish. Ni Min-ran a versatile Taiwanese TV comedian, a veteran Chinese comic (dialogue) talker, and for some, a comic genius, was just this sort of tragic figure. Having been an actor for nearly 40 years, his private life had gone through a number of twists and turns. By the age of 20, he had already made 48 disk records, including comic dialogue shows and entertainment programmes. In 1968, he moved to TTV and became an actor. His acclaimed portrayal of a eunuch in a popular series made him into a prominent figure. Later, he was involved in a popular television entertainment consolidating his career and his popularity playing a stupid husband in a long running series in the 1970s.

In 1975, he married the singer Ling Fei. They had a son Ni Jia-heng, but divorced in 1978. Then, together with four other entertainers, Chang Fei, Chang Kui, Ling Feng and Hsia Yun-fei, he created an entertainment show group called ‘Wen Na Five Mice’ (溫拿五鼠) though not all the responses were positive. Once he was slashed with a sword by three gangsters after the show. From 1984 to 1988, a TV show, ‘Golden Partners’ (黃金拍檔), in which he was one of hosts and played a character named ‘Mr. Seven’, pushed his career to a new peak. In 1987 he married again, to another singer, Lee Li-hua, and had two children, one girl Ni Ting-nuo and one boy Ni Jia-sheng. Lee Li-hua gave up her singing career and concentrated on bringing them up.

Ni began to pursue other business interests alongside his show business career, investing in the coffee industry and launching the first easy-to-open coffee can, Hi Coffee, in Taiwan. It was not a success. The thinness of the can meant that it cracked
easily and he lost over 10 million NT dollars on the venture.

After the long run of the ‘Golden Partners’ television programme ended his entertainment career began to decline and his other ventures also floundered. He failed in his attempts both to enter the political field and to run a restaurant. Arguably, these failures were partly due to his inability to adapt to the rapid changes taking place in Taiwanese politics and in economic life. In the entertainment business more and more young performers were attracting attention and edging older stars out. Faced with this new situation Ni dropped out of making television shows and turned to traditional arts and the stage. Meanwhile, his marriage was in a crisis and he and his wife Lee Li-hua decided, eventually, to live separately. She then worked for a communication company and brought up two children.

Then, in 2000, his professional fortunes began to revive. Lai Sheng-chuan (Stan Lai) a celebrated playwright, stage designer, director and professor had formed a drama group called ‘Performance Workroom’ (表演工作坊) in 1984. In addition to performing on stage, they also produced films, comic dialogue shows and TV series, work that had earned a number of national and international awards. In 2000 he invited Ni to join the group and perform a dialogue show called ‘The Millennium Night, Let’s Talk a Dialogue Show’ (千禧夜，我們說相聲). Unexpectedly, the show was a hit in both Taiwan and mainland China, and Ni became a popular focus again. The following year he hosted an entertainment programme, ‘Have Fun Very Much’ (搞笑 Very Much), on MUCH TV, in which he did impressions of famous figures, including the Taiwanese Vice-President Ms. Lu Hsiu-lian. His performance earned him a nomination as best entertainment presenter in the prestigious Golden Bell Awards which are awarded for both radio and television broadcasting. Simultaneously, he was nominated as best actor in a TV drama. At the beginning of 2004, he recorded a dialogue show with his 11-year-old son Ni Jia-sheng but soon afterwards he sent
him to join his daughter in the US, and his wife, who was responsible for their care, officially immigrated. At the end of 2004, he performed in a comic dialogue show called ‘Lost Behind the Door’ (大宅，門都沒有) which attracted great acclaim in Taiwan. At the same time, a report disclosed that he was having an extramarital relationship with a stage actress, Hsia Yi, from Shanghai, whose ex-husband was a Taiwanese. The following year 2005, the Ju Ying Culture and Communication Limited Company in Nanjing in mainland China invited Ni and other actors to perform there in June. Despite a favourable reception, Ni’s mood was said to be depressed as reportedly he had had a serious quarrel with Hsia Yi. At the end of March, he had a traffic accident in Taiwan when his car hit a gully in a mountain area after he had taken sleeping tablets. He was also reportedly feeling guilty for having ignored his family, particularly his mother who was ill with cancer at the time. After the accident, he phoned his apprentice, Hong Cheng-yang, and said, “Should I go to die? Should I go to die?” Before his disappearance, Ni had visited his mother in hospital on 15th April and faxed a letter to Hsia Yi at night indicating that he could not perform on stage in ‘Lost Behind the Door’ in Nanjing in June due to his mother’s condition. Hsia then phoned him and talked with him for 3 hours but later fell asleep. Next day, the 16th, Ni was seen by witnesses, a passenger and a lunch box seller respectively, on the train and at Toucheng (頭城) railway station in Yilan County (宜蘭縣). On the night of the 17th he called one of his best friends in showbiz, Yu Tian, to ask him to lend him some money. On 1st May Ni’s partially decomposed body was found by the police hanging from a tree in an orchard on the mountainside. Scattered around the scene were a deep-blue suitcase, a jacket, cigarettes, a newspaper dated 16th April, his watch, cash, driving license, and health card. In the police’s estimation, he had been dead for over 10 days.

Ni’s disappearance and suicide prompted a flow of reporting and commentary that
lasted for nearly a month raising questions about intrusions into the family's grief and more generally about the possible impact of such a high profile case on suicide rates.

9.3 News Media Beyond the Bottom Line

There is a Chinese proverb that water can carry boats, but it can topple them, too. This metaphor can be usefully applied to the news media reporting of suicides. As Gould et al. (2003: 1277) argue, “the media can play a powerful role in educating the public about suicide prevention. Stories about suicide can inform readers and viewers about the likely causes of suicide, its warning signs, trends in suicide rates, and recent treatment advances. They also can highlight opportunities to prevent suicide. Media stories about individual deaths by suicide may be newsworthy and need to be covered but they also have the potential to do harm.” As some argued in earlier chapters, with the increasing pressure of market competition and the growing trend towards tabloidisation, journalists in Taiwan now make every effort to pursue the inside story as long as the object of the event is attractive. In this case, Ni became the story’s protagonist. The resulting coverage was defined by four main characteristics: a tendency towards speculation, a focus on detail and a taste for the bizarre, invasiveness, and longevity.

9.3.1 Speculative Coverage

In terms of journalism principles, reporters covering stories should be both impartial and accurate and support any assertions with the fullest available evidence. As we have argued, few news media in Taiwan now conform to these principles as each, with
the possible exception of the PTS (mentioned in Chapter 4) competes to splash exclusives and sensationalised events. In terms of Ni’s case, in the absence of any posthumous letters or other clues left behind, his death became a riddle to his family, friends and the public. Consequently, it offered journalists ample opportunities to speculate on different possibilities using the guesses and hunches offered by those who knew him, spiced with gossip.

The first speculation centered on Ni’s financial difficulties. As mentioned above, the earlier failure of his business ventures coupled with the drying up of offers to appear on TV at that time, had led him to accumulate considerable debts. His friends, however, stressed his resilience in the face of professional set-backs and did not think that financial problems would lead him to kill himself. The second speculation was that another major possible factor was his personal depression. As Ni’s friend Feng Yi-gang, the founder of a Taiwanese dialogue show group, argued on People Online News on the 4th May, most Taiwanese entertainers assumed that Ni’s suicide was associated with his tendency to depression, and the fact that Ni was not a happy man, having recently experienced heavy pressure in his business and difficulties in his personal relations. An entertainment TV show presenter, Deng Chi-hong, stressed that contrary to the outside impression Ni gave of humour and amusement, his inner world was extremely gray and lonely, confirming that he had a long-term habit of taking tranquilizers and sleeping pills and that the traffic accident that had occurred at the end of March 2005 might have signaled an intention to commit suicide.

Nonetheless, the most controversial gossip centred on the ambiguous relationship between Ni and the actress Hsia Yi. Reportedly, they fell in love with each other since they had worked together. Although Ni had never admitted their intimate relationship in public, afterwards his close friends found out his extramarital feelings with Hsia; even Ni’s wife Lee Li-hua as well. As the E-newspaper of the Da Ji Yuan on the 3rd of
May reported, during Ni’s disappearance, a popular TV show presenter and also Ni’s good friend, Chang Fei, speculated promptly that Ni’s behaviour was a response to his deteriorating relationship with Hsia, claiming that she was a woman who did not get along well with others. He also declared that he knew they had had a dispute over money problems on performing rewards because Ni had complained to him about this matter on the telephone about ten days away from his suicide. According to the coverage of the Liberty Times on 5th May, another friend Cheng Ping-zheng, the manager of Infinity International Limited Company and the producer of ‘Lost Behind the Door,’ was even more adamant that Hsia was the major factor in Ni’s suicide, telling journalists that he had personally witnessed her threatening Ni over his failure to divorce his wife with a kitchen knife and asking him to chop off his fingers. In fact, he had promised her to deal with it when he went to the US to visit his family for the Chinese New Year in 2005 but in the heated atmosphere of the quarrel, he had cut his wrist with the knife but to avoid the incident being reported in the press, he had not gone to a hospital for treatment but had privately asked a fellow actor to put a special medicine on his wound.

Another widely circulating rumour was that Ni did not want to divorce his wife and had asked Hsia to be his mistress, and she had refused. In terms of this point, based on the E-newspaper of Chunghua Online on 9th May, Hsia was extremely emotional and sad when she heard the adversity of Ni’s death. She mentioned that he gave her a ring before his missing to negotiate the matter of being his mistress. She felt regretful for refusing his request. Whereas, in Ni’s last interview before his disappearance he had complained that Hsia originally agreed with him in the unmarried relationship and later on forced him to marry her or she would threaten to disclose some evidence before the media. Since then he just realised his mistake in this sort of perplexed feelings and thought he could not let his family feel ashamed.
After Ni’s funeral had taken place on 12 May, his friends decided to say nothing about Hsia any more. However as the *Liberty Times* covered on 16th May, Hsia, for her part, strongly denied that Ni’s death was related to her behaviour in a press conference taken place on the 15th when her return to Taiwan from Japan, particularly stressing that the relationship between Ni and her was only like master and apprentice or performing partners, and claiming further that she did not even know who Lee Li-hua (Ni’s wife) was and discontented accusations from his friends and distorted news from the media. Her unfriendly attitude and inconsistent talk provoked Ni’s friends and the media tending to investigate the real truth and to get rid of her from the showbiz. They indignantly declared that she was a liar and still did not clarify her genuine relationship with Ni in public.

Under the increasing criticism and stress, Hsia almost broke down and tended to commit suicide. But after having a sincerely and deeply long talk with Ni’s good friends, Yu Tian and Lee Ya-ping, a couple in the showbiz, she secured, eventually, their understanding based on the fairly private documents between Ni and her provided by her. In an effort to repair the damage Hsia made a decision to hold another press conference on 18th May. According to the *Liberty Times* and *TVBS Online News*, accompanied by Yu Tian, Lee Ya-ping, some entertainers and Hsia’s broker Wang Wei-chung she apologised in sob to the public, the media and Ni’s family and clarified some rumours, saying that she knew Ni was very ill at that time and now regretted not encouraging and comforting him more but falling asleep on the 15th April during their telephone conversation. Additionally, she promised to return the copyright of ‘Lost Behind the Door’ made over to Hsia by Ni to his family. The discord has ended finally since then but her professional career in Taiwan has never recovered from her reputation as ‘the scarlet woman’ until she played a character in a popular TV drama ‘Time Memory’ in 2008.
In terms of the criticism to Hsia in the news media, a friend of Hsia, Chiang Hsih-fang who has been a reporter, put his argument in the blog, saying that through several interviews with Hsia, as he has known, Hsia was not a woman as cold-blooded, insidious, astute, incisive, and dominative as others’ judgement. He recalled a story of an interview with Hsia when she was invited to come to Taiwan having a performance at a drama school. He was impressed by her jovial, expansive and frank personality, which also won a number of reporters praises. He did not understand why a private incident would become as a sensational series, arguing that if a man committed suicide for his feelings, which was his choice. Likewise, a woman refused to be together with a married man, as a mistress, which was also her choice. Regardless of Ni’s illness, most Ni’s friends and media pointed fingers at Hsia’s immorality. Ni did not kill Hsia but his suicide seemed to give her a death penalty for her behaviour.

A comment published in the *China Times* on 7th May argued that the majority appreciated Ni for his versatile entertainer and felt miserable of his death. Before verifying the truth, however, people could not randomly judge that Hsia was guilty and Ni’s suicide was definitely associated with her. A series of coverage seemed to assume that Hsia had to be responsible to his death but did not criticise his disloyalty to his wife. The question was did he has the right to request her to be a mistress?

**9.3.2 A Focus on Detail and a Taste for the Bizarre**

In addition to re-circulating rumours and speculations, the search for novel material that could boost circulations and ratings led journalists working on the Ni case to report dreams and premonitions. For instance, ETTV recounted how Ni’s wife claimed to have dreamed of seeing him separated by gauze, as if he was standing
between ‘this’ world and the nether world. Ni’s apprentice, Hong Cheng-yang, also claimed that he had often dreamed of Ni sitting by his bed and performing with him on stage without his lower limbs, an image which he interpreted as referring to the stage script which Ni had written for them but had left unperformed. Yu Tian said that he seemed to feel Ni’s soul around them every day when he heard the bark and whistle of the neighbour’s dog, which he felt indicated that Ni was reluctant to give the world up. What is more, Ni used to worship a four-faced Buddha at home and had experienced two accidents after he sent the statue back to a Buddhist temple. The first time was the traffic accident and the second was his death. The staff of the temple interpreted his giving away the Buddha as a sign that his doom was inevitable.

A reporter for the TVBS channel interviewed Ni’s friend Hsu Feng who claimed that he had called Ni on his mobile phone after he had disappeared but that a mysterious woman answered it and said he had got a wrong number. In Hsu’s account this incident coincided with the time that Ni took his own life. The reporter then asked Hsu to ring the number again. This time a man answered and said he had changed the number a long time ago and that was not his number. The so-called mysterious woman could have been a member of the man’s family or a friend or someone who had picked up the phone when it had been left in a room or elsewhere. The journalist could have made some basic checks to verify the story but he chose not to, opting instead to report the event as an unexplained happening with spiritual overtones.

The spiritual angle on Ni’s suicide was pursued with particular vigour on the GTV channel which invited the entertainer Chin Wei and other guests to take part in a traditional Taiwanese religious rite called ‘Guan Luo Yin’ (觀落陰), a variety of hypnotism. In traditional practice, if a person wanted to contact deceased family members or relatives, they could go to a Taoist priest at a temple who would cover their eyes with a black cloth and murmur incantations in front of an altar until the
deceased person ‘appeared’ to the subject. In the programme, under the impact of hypnosis, Chin Wei claimed to have seen Ni and asked him why he committed suicide. Chin then claimed that he heard Ni saying something and felt his hand caught by Ni and drawn down by the white god of hell whose speciality, according to legend, is catching demons. Ni’s two most popular roles then came to Chin’s mind and he inferred that Ni possibly felt increased stress after his success. Later, he claimed to hear Ni expressing his regrets to his wife and children. Finally, Chin claimed to witness the details of how Ni had hung up himself on the tree, which made him feel uncomfortable around his neck and eyes and wanting to vomit. This lurid performance was judged by the regulators not to be in the public interest and to be a step too far. Accordingly, the GIO (Government Information Office), using the provisions of the Satellite Broadcast Law, fined GTV 100 thousand NT dollars for the programme.

But was this judgement shared by the journalists covering the suicide story? In interview, Ting Yuen-kai (interviewee No. 07, see Appendix 1), a reporter for *Sanlih E-Television*, claimed to speak for many in the profession, arguing that although they personally wished to avoid such sensation, commercial imperatives, transmitted down the management chain, made it inevitable.

If you asked ten reporters whether they liked to keep reporting this sort of news, they would say ‘No, I did not, and we should not do it.’ But they have to keep doing it because their editors require them to do. If you ask the editor why, he might tell you that he cannot help but to do so since other stations have already done it and if he has not followed suit yet, he would ‘die’ (be dismissed). It has become a vicious cycle. If a certain TV channel has covered a piece of news about freak happenings and the spirit world, other channels then would follow. If a reporter exposed a ghost story, another reporter would find more ghost stories. What is the major asset a chief values first? The ratings. If you have covered ghost news, your rating will rise. However, I did not do it,
which made my own ratings drop down, and Ok would be going to make it the next day.

Tsai Yi-ling, a reporter on the United Evening News, reinforced the point about the supremacy of the ratings.

The chief always kept an eye on each period of rating. If, during the period of the spiritual and mysterious news, the rating was the highest, the news would be repeated again and again. Like the ETTV, most people would be impressed by its frequent coverage on surreal news on the grounds of the high ratings it attracted. You know, everything is for the ratings. I think this sort of news is not good for the public and society.

Alongside the spiritual and surreal reports, certain news crews not only relayed the details of how Ni had killed himself, showing the rope tied around the tree, but also revealed graphic details from the scene, his body being removed on a stretcher, and his portrait on his driving licence. (see figure 9.1, figure 9.2 and figure 9.3).

According to Gould et al. (2003: 1277 cited in Fekete & Macsai, 1990; Sonneck et al., 1994), “Exposure to suicide method through media reports can encourage vulnerable individuals to imitate it. Clinicians believe the danger is even greater if there is a detailed description of the method. Research indicates that detailed descriptions or pictures of the location or site of a suicide encourage imitation.” An incident from Hong Kong offers an interesting concrete demonstration of this process in action. In November 1998, a suicide involving carbon monoxide poisoning by charcoal burning occurred. Through the front-page headlines and highly publicised coverage by the media, the case was presented as an easy and painless method for committing suicide in the face of financial difficulties (Lu and Lin, 2006). A study by Chung and Leung (2001: 836-837) found that between January 1998 and December 1999, there 56 suicides by charcoal burning of which 22 (39%) occurred in the nine
weeks after the first case was exposed. Over the following months, the number of cases fluctuated between zero and four, but rose to seven in December 1999. Another instance occurred in Vienna where following graphic and extensive coverage of the deaths of individuals who had jumped in front of trains in the subway system, suicides by the same method rose (Jamieson, 2002). Despite the results of these studies, 57 journalists interviewed in the research conducted by Jamieson et al. (2003: 1643) claimed that they were unaware that their suicide coverage could cause imitation. The phenomenon is worthy of our notice.

Figure 9.1 Ni’s driving licence

Figure 9.2 Ni’s hanging rope

Figure 9.3 Ni’s body carried on a stretcher


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9.3.3 Invasiveness

A family suicide is particularly traumatic for the bereaved and particularly difficult to come to terms with. This difficulty is compounded if the suicide is a celebrity since his/her family will become the focus of intense news interest and its attendant pressures.

When the police found Ni dead in Yilan County, they immediately asked his family to come to identify the body. When his wife Lee Li-hua and his two children arrived at the District Prosecutors Office there were at least fifty or sixty journalists waiting for them. The TV reporter Ting Yuan-kai recalled the scene.

That day impressed me very much. While Ni’s wife and the two children were arriving at the District Prosecutors Office to identify the body, I was the first person standing in front of the entrance of the office. You know at that moment there were over 20 video cameras plus SNG vehicles and reporters all surrounding them and blocking their way from getting into the office. Because every reporter wanted to do live news, each just made his effort to push forward. I then shouted behind them, “Please don’t push forward! Let them squeeze through! Let them squeeze through!” Actually, I heard someone shouting as well but it was useless. I felt Ni’s family were pitiful and saw they just kept weeping. If a reporter wanted to ask them some questions, basically they would not make any response and simply said, “Excuse me! Let us get in!” I thought why had the reporters made such a terrible mess of it. However, there was no way out. I could not stop the crowd surging forward by myself since there were around fifty or sixty reporters pushing one another and trying to interview the bereaved. I felt the reporters did not respect the family. But they had no choice. Each camera reporter had to snatch the best position to have a good shoot and each written reporter also attempted to grasp a good interview, so that this sort of chaotic phenomenon would emerge.

When the news of Ni’s suicide first broke, Hsia Yi was in Japan. As mentioned above, she became the main person blamed by both Ni’s friends and the media. After Ni’s funeral, journalists were told that Hsia would be returning to Taiwan on 15th May.
Even though she was protected by 40 security guards, nearly 50 reporters followed her every step when she arrived at the airport making it difficult for her to move through the crowd. Some joked that the scene looked like major criminal was being forcibly repatriated. Hsia lost her temper and shouted abuse at journalists expressing her anger at the barrage of negative coverage she had received.

Intrusive behaviour had also continued during preparations for the funeral. The former GIO minister Yao Wen-chi indicated that when he paid homage before the catafalque, he wanted journalists to focus on Ni’s accomplishments as a performer and to respect the family’s right to privacy. Directly after he made this request a journalist interviewed Ni’s younger son about his thoughts on Hsia Yi, asking him how a young boy could bear the burden of adults in interview. Tsai Yi-ling recalled the news climate at the time.

I remember at that time chiefs would read the daily newspaper first and know what news items have been covered. They then would instruct me to keep inquiring whether Hsia Yi has shown up. Or they found Ni’s daughter has written a piece of diary on her blog and asked me to take a look quickly, which means whether I could get some new information. Actually, I thought perhaps I didn’t have to report more information as I have had written too much about this case every day and don’t want to encourage vulnerable individuals to imitate Ni’s act. Still, the chief would say, “No way! You have to get other new material today.”

For Ting Yuan-kai, questions of journalistic ethics had been rendered redundant by the commercial climate set in motion by the arrival of the new tabloid titles. They were costs that had to be reduced or eliminated in the interests of competitiveness.

You know what? If you draw much attention to journalism moral and ethics nowadays, the TV stations will close down; print media as well. Why did this happen? The big turning point was that since the Next Magazine and the Apple Daily have come into Taiwan, the entire media environment started changing.
9.3.4 Longevity

Media reporting of the Ni suicide incident was not only extensive, it was of long duration, lasting from Ni’s disappearance to his funeral and its immediate aftermath. A study undertaken by the Broadcasting Development Fund (Lin and Chuang, 2005: 108-109), recorded both the number of Ni related news items and the total space they copied each day for 9 major newspapers (Great Daily, China Times, Min Sheng Daily, Liberty Times, Taiwan Daily, United Daily, Apple Daily, China Times Express, United Evening News) from 2nd May to 8th May (see table 9.1), and on 11 TV stations (TTV, CTV, CTS, FTV News, TVBS-N, CtiTV, ETTV, Sanlih News, ERA News, GTV, Unique Satellite TV ) between 1st May and 7th May (see table 9.2).

Table 9.1 The number of news items and total space occupied by Ni related news

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Source: from Suicide of the Leading Entertainer: A News Observation and Records on the Suicidal Incident of Ni Min-ran (Lin and Chuang, 2005)
Table 9.2 The amount of news items and total seconds each day on TV stations

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</table>

Source: from *Suicide of the Leading Entertainer: A News Observation and Records on the Suicidal Incident of Ni Min-ran* (Lin and Chuang, 2005)

There are several points to note. First of all, the number of news items initially peaked at 87 directly after the police first found Ni’s body on 1\textsuperscript{st} May, dipped and then peaked again on the 4\textsuperscript{th} possibly reflecting the intense competition between journalists searching for follow up stories with new angles.

Due to the extensive use of SNG and Live reporting most TV journalists began to cover Ni’s suicide as soon as the police discovered his body on the 1\textsuperscript{st} May with the amount of coverage rising dramatically, from 49 to 75 items, the day afterwards. Except the dip on the 3\textsuperscript{rd}, in days between the 4\textsuperscript{th} and the 6\textsuperscript{th} Ni related items amounted for 15\% or more of the total coverage.

The story stayed in the news for a month until the end of Ni’s funeral. Some commentators criticised this attention as excessive, arguing that it significantly reduced the space available for reporting other major domestic and international
stories. This view was shared by some journalists, including Ting Yuan-kai.

From my viewpoint, I think it was a fairly boring thing and actually I felt bored to get involved in it. In the light of the entire TV ecology and the audience’s needs however, every journalist tended to keep digging out more information on this incident. You know the main factor was the ratings. The more the story was exposed deeply, the more the rating was rising. In this sense, even if some severely blamed the media, the majority remained fond of watching. The chief just thought that the event has become a story and deserved to be covered, which would stimulate the rating up. Hence, the journalist had to look for the new material constantly. Well, the most important thing is that Ni was a public figure.

Tsai Yi-ling agreed:

Most reporters, in fact, did not think it deserved to be exposed for a month. But we had no choice since the chief would order us to do it. Possibly he/she thought other media have been covering it, if we did not, we seemed to fail to report something.

The Government certainly saw the amount and nature of the coverage as problematic. The GIO minister Mr. Yao invited the heads of TV channels to attend a press conference on 11th May 2005 and required them to obey the WHO guidelines for the coverage of suicides. These guidelines specify seven principles: (i) Sensational coverage of suicides should be avoided. (ii) Detailed descriptions of the method used and how the method was procured should be avoided. (iii) Suicide should not be reported as unexplainable or in a simplistic way. (iv) Suicide should not be depicted as a method of coping with personal problems such as bankruptcy, failure to pass an examination or sexual abuse. (v) Reports should take account of the impact suicides on family or other survivors. (vi) Suicide victims should not be viewed as martyrs, instead, the emphasis should be on mourning the person’s death. (vii) Describing the physical consequences of non-fatal suicide attempts (brain damage, paralysis) can act
as a deterrent (WHO, 2000: 7). He further stressed that any news organisation that failed to comply would be fined under the provisions of the Satellite Broadcast Law.

At the same time, he also stressed that while press freedom should be valued journalists should respect every single person’s life equally. Given the studies by domestic and international scholars suggesting that undue reporting of suicide can provoke imitation. He expressed the hope that every TV channel would obey the WHO’s seven principles in managing the suicide issue, and not cross the ‘red line’. Media proprietors and chiefs admitted that they may have paid undue attention Ni’s suicide but argued that in the case of a celebrity’s death or a suicide they had a responsibility to the public to cover it since a celebrity’s death would generate public concern in any country. The media chiefs, nevertheless, supported the official calls for propriety in the coverage of suicide issues and anticipated improving their practice in the future.

According to the basic ideal of journalistic freedom, the government should keep interference in the media to a minimum, yet in this case government officials felt that they had to reign in the coverage in the public interest. A number of reporters, uneasy about the direction and intensity of the coverage, agreed. As Tsai Yi-ling explained in interview:

In my opinion, I think what the official did was correct. Emphasis on the freedom of the press neglect the question of self-discipline. I even think the GIO is too democratic to restrain the self-indulgent acts of the media. The official should manage some specific circumstances from time to time as no doubt a number of news items were more uncomfortable than the restricted programme. You see, the Ni story had lasted for a month, the GIO official then intervened. I think it was a bit late actually. From my viewpoint, the GIO should also review its way of dealing with this sort of issue every week. Furthermore, the media should possess not only the freedom of the press but the ability of self-discipline. If a reporter has journalistic freedom but hinders
others’ freedom, that is not the genuine freedom of the press.

However, Ting Yuan-kai spoke for a different view:

From the standpoint of the freedom of the press, I think the intervention of the minister was not correct. Nevertheless, I must say that reporters did not want, in fact, to keep pursuing the news but they had no choice. Yes, after the intervention of the GIO each TV channel had restrained itself a bit, perhaps 30 percent, but going through the wave, I think the same problem might still come out as before. It is difficult to avoid the cycle.

9.4 Lessons from the Case Study

According to the *Taipei Times* reporter, David Momphard (2005: 17), suicide is the ninth leading cause of death among Taiwanese. “Suicide has been one of top 10 causes of death in Taiwan for the past nine years. Over the past ten years, the nation’s suicide rate has increased from 7 out of every 10000 persons to 15.3 out of every 10000 persons. While once the largest age bracket was those between 45 and 64, it is now those between 25 and 44. For people between ages 15 and 24, suicide is the second leading cause of death” (ibid.). Further, as we noted earlier, there is a considerable body of research suggesting that news coverage of deaths by suicide are associated with a statistically significant rises in subsequent suicides over a 10-day interval (Romer et al., 2006: 253, cited in Bollen & Phillips, 1982; Gould, 2001; Hassan, 1995; Sonneck, Etzersdorfer & Nagel-Kuess, 1994). Added to which, as we also noted earlier, “suicides based on real suicides in contrast to fictional stories were 4.03 times more likely to find an imitation effect” (Gould et al., 2003: 1271 cited in Stack, 2000). Moreover, “the effect of the suicide of an entertainer or political celebrity were 14.3 times more likely to find a ‘copycat’ effect than studies that did not” (ibid.).
According to the print media, 14 ‘copycats’ took their lives in the day after the exposure of Ni’s suicide (Lin and Chuang, 2005: 19). An apparent example was the case of an old man who had been suffering from stomach ulcers and mental problems who told his family that he wanted to commit suicide following a string of reports of Ni’s suicide on TV. Sadly, he was found dead by his son in the early morning on 19th May 2005, a bottle of pesticide beside him.

Romer et al. (2006: 253-254) argue that there are at least two potential mediating mechanisms underlying suicide contagion. One of them is ‘disinhibition’ discussed by Bandura (Jamieson, 2002), “in which a media depiction reduces preexisting restraints on a behaviour that is already available. Because suicide, like other aggressive acts, is generally seen as proscribed behaviour, restraint on its use tend to be strong. Seeing others engage in suicide releases those who are contemplating the act from those restraints. In addition, news reports tend to focus on the victim’s recourse to suicide as a response to immediate problems, such as a failed business or relationship, thereby giving vulnerable persons the impression that suicide may be an effective solution to their own problems” (Jamieson, Jamieson & Romer, 2004). From this perspective, we can suggest that the coverage of Ni’s suicide may have disinhibited the restraints that had previously prevented the old man from seriously considering suicide as a solution to his condition.

A study subsequent to Ni’s incident probed by Cheng Tai-an (2006), a researcher at the Institute of BioMedical Sciences of Academia Sinica in Taiwan, he acquired 270 samplings who were reported suicide attempters and defined by the deliberate self-harm: self-poisoning and self-injury, happening between 2nd May and 30th June 2005, to do questionnaire interviews. The interviewees percentage was 65.9% (n=139). The non-interviewees comprised unable contact (21.9%) and refusing interview (26.7%). He found that 89.2% interviewees had seen Ni’s suicide news.
Among them, nearly one forth (23.4%) people claimed that they attempted to commit
suicide after seeing the coverage. 13.7% people were the first time having the acts of
suicide and 9.7% were the second time. Particularly in the modeling effect the male
incidence (37.5%) was notably higher than the female (18.5%). At the same time, the
figure of the relative danger to the suicide attempters, after three weeks subsequent to
the exposure of Ni’s death, rose up 55%, comparing with other weeks.

In addition to the figures, according to the analysis in the impact of the news
content to the suicide attempters, there were four crucial points found: (a)
imitation—suicide might become a glorious behaviour like Ni, all miseries gone (b)
rationalisation—people would be concerned about you after you have committed
suicide, why not do it (c) hopelessness—I would follow his step sooner or later, the
outcome of depression (d) suicide method—I have been noticing how he hung himself
from the tree.

In spite of the substantial body of general evidence in support of theories of suicide
contagion following news media depictions, some remain skeptical about the
existence and extent of the phenomenon. The decision to classify a suspicious death
as a ‘suicide’, by coroners and other agencies, is highly variable and contingent,
raising questions about the extent to which the official statistics can be relied on as a
true index. It may be that deaths that some coroners have classified as ‘accidents’ or
‘deaths by misadventure’ would be recorded as suicides by others. What is more,
different cultures make it difficult to generalise results from one country to another
(Romer et al. 2006: 254). Nonetheless, when suspected suicides occur in public places
or involve a public figure, journalists will be obligated to cover them. In the study
conducted by Jamieson et al. (2003: 1648-1653), all the interviewed reporters noted
that they do not generally write about suicides unless they involve a celebrity, a public
official, or well-known persons often in the news. In the case of Taiwan, however, as
my interviews with journalists confirmed, the inherent newsworthiness of a celebrity suicide is significantly reinforced by the pressure to maximise profits in an increasingly competitive market and tabloidised environment. As we have seen, even though individual journalists may be committed to journalistic responsibility and reporting guidelines, they have no choice but to submit to the realities of working in a context dominated by maximising audiences. As one former senior journalist (Lin, 2006: 18) has wryly noted, the Taiwanese journalist is no longer ‘watchdog’ but a ‘lapdog’ whose first duty is to fulfill the demands of their editors, who in turn, are required to internalise the interests of their proprietors and to place company interests above the public interest.

During the coverage of Ni’s suicide, a number of civil society institutions, such as the Modern Women’s Foundation, the Broadcasting Development Fund, the Open-Minded Heart Association and the Foundation for the Advancement of Media Excellence, held press conferences or symposiums one after another. Not only did they strongly voice their discontent over the way the media were behaving, they also provide plenty of research information on suicide contagion and raised the issue of suicide prevention. At the same time, they appealed to the media to exercise self-discipline and accept social responsibility.

On 6th May 2005, for example, a symposium reflecting on the news reporting of Ni’s suicide was held at the offices of the Broadcasting Development Fund. One speaker, Lu Hsih-hsiang, an executive of the Prevention from Journalism Pollution Fund, argued strongly that in dealing with suicides journalists should avoid intruding into a person’s privacy and accord dignity to the dead and respect to the bereaved. He complained that Taiwanese journalists do not generally seem to pay much attention to the question of how to handle footage and reporting of the bereaved and he called on them to refrain from interviewing or taking close-up photos and from conducting
interviews at the victim’s funeral without the family’s permission. He further suggested that journalists should have devoted more space to positive ways of treating melancholia alongside the reporting of Ni’s suicide.

Another speaker Lin Jing-jing, a lecturer teaching ‘Medical Science and the Media’ at Chung Shan Medical University, questioned whether Taiwanese journalism is short of specialist in medical matters. Ideally, a professional medical journalist should try to consult the case reports in order to verify the medical account of the cause of death. However, since medical ethics forbid doctors to make the case records public, journalists might have to fall back on opinions provided by doctors not directly involved in the case. She argued that in Ni’s case, the lack of concrete information produced a more than usual amount of speculative coverage, but she blamed the senior editors for this more than journalists and urged media chiefs to adopt a more responsible attitude towards their organisations’ coverage.

An inspector from the Department of Health (DOH) at the Executive Yuan, Hsi Chun-mei, expressed strong support for the establishment of the National Suicide Centre for Prevention at the Department of Health and anticipated it providing the public with more adequate information on the prevention of suicide. She also suggested the media should publicise this service so that people could access reliable psychiatric information that would assist those with depressive or other mental problems to obtain appropriate treatment. The researcher Cheng Tai-an (mentioned above) suggested referring to the British experience of a psychiatrist at Oxford University, professor Prontom, who had been involved in research on how to improve relations with the media. He had considerable time with journalists in an attempt to ensure that they understood what constituted good or bad coverage on the suicide issue. Consequently, he found that a large number of journalists had been surprised by the information in his talks and had improved their reporting on suicide. Mr. Cheng
argued that this positive experience suggested that improving communication between specialists and reporters could be a useful way forward.

Another symposium was hosted by the Modern Women’s Foundation on 10th May 2005. At this meeting, professor Chang Chin-hua (mentioned in preceding chapters) argued that through their sensationalised coverage of Ni’s suicide they had effectively acted as executioners of nearly 9 people who took their lives every single hour when the story first broke in Taiwan. Professor Chai Song-lin, a national policy advisory counsellor, pointed out that the incidence of melancholia was considerably higher in Taiwan than the global average and that its occurrence among patients who had attempted suicide was 24%. He argued strongly that the media should draw more attention to this problem and carry more features on prevention and treatment and devote less space to suicide news with graphic photos. He also approved of having the National Suicide Centre for Prevention but stressed the need to collaborate with other social bodies to prevent suicide.

Other scholars contributed to the general public debate by referring to available studies and media guidelines on the reporting of suicide elsewhere. For instance, “following a rash of subway suicides in Vienna from 1984 to 1987, a press embargo on coverage of subway suicides was adopted and the subway suicide and attempt rate dropped 80%” (Jamieson et al., 2003: 1644 cited in Etzersdorfer & Sonneck, 1998; Sonneck, Etzersdorfer & Nagel-Kuess, 1994). In the United States, “several government agencies and private health organisations, including the CDC, the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, and the Annenberg Public Policy Centre (APPC), developed consensus recommendations to help reporters and editors produce stories on suicide that minimise the potential for contagion” (Jamieson et al., 2003: 1644 cited in CDC et al., 2001).

These interventions had little impact however, and it was only after the GIO
required news channels and other media to abide by the seven guidelines set out by
the WHO, that the media began to exercise a measure of restraint and to talk seriously
about reaching a consensus on reporting suicide news in the future. As we have noted,
however, in the current competitive news environment, good intentions are always
likely to be trumped by the requirement to maximise ratings.

As Tsai Yi-ling argued:

It is really difficult to require media proprietors or chiefs to exercise self-discipline. The proprietors would ask reporters to expose the sensational or attractive news since the Apple Daily and the Next Magazine did so and got a good sales volume. As a result, today most reporters tend to cover the tabloid. Regarding the TV media, they always emphasise the ratings. A couple of days ago, they talked about the statistics problem of the AGB Nielsen which is a company for compiling ratings. The ETTV once suggested that if each medium wished to make good news and have no pressure, the only way was to stop publishing the ratings. Nowadays the news channels are deeply affected by the ratings since it is the basis of the benefit sold to advertisers. That is why most news channels would rather make sensational news than superior news as the former may make it easier to attract the audience and to rise the rating. Some media suggested if the GIO could set up a rule to reject the publication of the ratings, probably news stations would make superior coverage without any stress. Otherwise, it is really difficult to require the media proprietors to be self-regulating because they always take account of their profit.

The centrality of the ratings was underlined by Ting Yuan-kai:

You know what? In the TV industry, an ordinary thing is that a manager who is charge of newsroom is dismissed within half a year or a year. Like my manager, he has just been working for half a year and was fired by the boss because he did not make the rating rise up. Ok, a senior and famous news manager was employed, still, he somehow could not get the rating up. The boss would doubt why the manager did very well at the previous channel and did not help here. It should be the problem of the manager. Well, the boss would look for another manager to take over his post.
From the perspective of working journalists then, depending on the restraint exercised by moral norms or written guidelines, appears to be pure wish fulfillment given the commercial environment in which Taiwan’s news channels operate today.

9.5 Summing-up

Ni’s suicide is now widely regarded as the most controversial incident of suicide reporting in Taiwanese journalistic history, characterised by the longest duration, the most extensive use of gossip and rumour, and the most concerted resort to the bizarre, involving ghosts, dreams and hypnotism. On the basis of the available research evidence on the relation between media coverage and suicide contagion a number of countries have developed reporting guidelines or consensual recommendations. As Jamieson et al. have suggested (2003: 1644-1645):

These recommendations encourage journalists to cover suicide responsibly by avoiding prominent placement of the story, sensational headlines that will draw undue attention to the act, and overly detailed descriptions of the method. In addition, the recommendations sensitise journalists to the potential for imitation if the suicide victim’s act is described as noble, romantic, or an effective solution to a life problem. The recommendations encourage journalists to provide information about likely precursors to suicide that can be treated, such as depression and substance abuse. The aim of the recommendations is not to discourage reporting of suicide but to use the opportunity to educate the public about treatment and help options and to dispel myths about suicide that discourage help seeking.

The analysis presented here, however, suggests that while these interventions may be workable in mature media markets with strong regulatory traditions, they are unlikely to be effective in Taiwan’s transitional market where the intensification of competition has outstripped the ability of a political system, still in the process of
formation, to adequately defend the public interest.

Another finding concerns the relationship between media proprietors, chief editors, and journalists. Interviewee’s accounts repeatedly stress both the power of the editors (or producers) in chief to compel reporters to measure success in economic rather than journalistic terms, and their dependence, in turn, on their ability to advance the interests of owners. In this situation, journalism ethics or codes are unlikely to play a significant role in organising everyday news practices.

This case study also underlined the centrality of the ratings, particularly the TV ratings, in shaping news strategies. Taiwanese advertisers rely on the statistics produced by AGB Nielsen (mentioned in Chapter 6) to place their advertising in slots with the highest audience rating. Broadcasters, in turn, set the fees they charge advertisers according to the ratings particular slots command. According to a report on NCC Watch Online in 2008, television remains the most popular medium in Taiwan and the major source of news for most citizens. Around 60% Taiwanese people prefer watching television more than either newspapers or the Internet. Faith in the reliability of television news is also higher than for other media. Consequently, producing news that will attract high ratings is a commercial imperative. One consequence of this is that whenever a major story breaks, journalists race to the scene to compile live coverage with SNG vehicles, in an effort to maximise the story’s immediacy and dramatic impact. This has major implications for both reporting styles and for intrusiveness.
CHAPTER TEN
Possibilities for Reform: Interventions and Debates

As we saw in earlier chapters, while marketisation has led to a rapid increase in the number of media outlets, the resulting intensification of competition for advertisers and audiences has produced an accelerated move towards the tabloid coverage of events and issues detailed in the three case studies. The result, in critics’ eyes, is a retreat from a conception of news as serving the public interest and a move towards sensationalism and political bias. In response to this trend, media reform groups and critical commentators on the media have made a number of suggestions for addressing the issues, often prompting discussion and debates.

10.1 Changing the Media System

10.1.1 Public Service Broadcasting: A Countervailing Force?

Faced with a media ecology that was increasingly competitive and tabloidised, an increasing number of commentators argued that Taiwan needed a public service television organisation to provide a countervailing force to the rapidly expanding commercial television system. This lobby was successful and the Public Television Service (PTS) was launched in 1998 to produce diverse programmes, safeguard freedom of expression and the right to know, promote the development of democratic society, and raise the standard of national culture and education. Its performance, however, fell some way short of these aims provoking a great deal of public
discussion and debate. With the benefit of hindsight, this perceived failure was not particularly surprising. PTS was introduced into a political context in which the transition to democratisation was still in its early stages and where the rapid rise of commercial channels offered tough competition for audience attention and loyalty. As the organisation’s former President and CEO, Hu Yuan-hui (interviewee No. 11, see Appendix 1), explained in interview:

The established background of Taiwan’s PTS is similar to American PBS but the time of its establishment was even later than PBS. As for European countries, British television is a typical model. British public broadcasting (refers to the BBC) already had an established base when television was first promoted Commercial television followed later. By contrast, the development of Taiwanese television system was partly deformed from the outset. At the initial stage, the organisational mode was like a sort of half private-run and half state-run system. You should know I refer here to “the old three TV stations”—TTV, CTV and CTS. Actually they were private stations but with government stakes at that time. Therefore, they were also responsible for the functions of public broadcasting. The consequence of this kind of deformed development led the Taiwanese broadcasting industry towards a deviant path. Afterwards, while cable television was increasingly booming in the 1990s, the circumstance of the Taiwanese media has looked like a runaway horse. It was not possible to hold it back by other powers; even the constituted law did not catch up with the trend. That promoted the old three TV stations to enhance their political and commercial relations (or operations) but not their commitment to public affairs, which produced a complicated and chaotic media market in Taiwan. You know PTS was born in dispute and compromise. At that time some argued that it was not necessary to set up a public television in Taiwan as we already had commercial channels. Others suspected that PTS would become a big monster which would engage in political profit. Thereby, the funds to support it granted by the government were limited and insufficient, probably just one third or one fourth of a wireless commercial television per year. Consequently, PTS did not achieve its ideal goals although its development has made a bit of progress today.

Lin Zhao-chen (interviewee No. 20, see Appendix 1), senior reporter and now
assistant professor at National Chiao Tung University, also pointed out that:

Concerning Taiwan’s PTS, it is not like the BBC and was launched after the media chaotic phenomenon had already emerged. What is more, its funding is not enough, so it cannot be mentioned in the same breath with the BBC which has its influence and standard to a certain extent, and plays a leading role in the British media.

Regarding the content of PTS programming, Ben Yu (interviewee No. 09, see Appendix 1), Chief Reporter of Phoenix Satellite Television Limited Taiwan Branch, offered the following critical assessment of PTS news.

To me, honestly, I flunk PTS. My journalistic background did not come from PTS but the commercial television. However, I think, first of all, the standard in its news interviews, either the level of depth or width, is not so good. Secondly, the attitude of the chief staff is like governmental officials. Originally, I thought if PTS had become a model of increasing profit and produced high quality news and raised its rating, the market economic logic could be led in a positive direction and good channels would drive off bad channels. In short, PTS must establish an image for good quality and accumulate its resources and actual strength in interviews. Certainly it needs to take time to improve its ability. But so far, it is a shame that it has not built up a good model yet.

A sociology professor at National Taiwan University, Lin He-ling (interviewee No. 24, see Appendix 1), who had supported the introduction of PTS, expressed her disappointment at its performance to date.

I agree with the point that PTS has not built up a good model yet. You see it was established against a highly distrustful and complicated political background, so its programme content dares not become involved in sensitive political problems. Let me take an example. I have been in the UK for a period of time. I once watched a drama about the trials of Prime Minister Mrs. Thatcher’s life. Within it, there was a footage of a nude. You know it is impossible for such a drama to come out of our PTS. Our PTS is fairly socialised and educational. Some would think when they switched to the PTS
channel, they might see either a violin or orchestra performance. What does it mean? It means that under the influence of political power PTS would seek the safest ground on which produce its programme. When audiences get back home from their work, they have different moods every day. In the UK, there are the BBC1, BBC2 and so forth. Therefore, only one PTS channel is not enough. I think we should have a public broadcasting group and provide audiences with plenty choices. We cannot wish that the programmes of other channels are bad, so audiences would choose PTS. I think PTS must satisfy different needs. For instance, some audiences are very interested in politics. Why can’t PTS make a political programme with a sort of amusing technique like the British drama I mentioned. Well, a programme called ‘The Public Pressure Cooker’ in Taiwan is very popular and often makes mock of politicians. It is very amusing and ironic and does not have any leaning to wards any particular political party. I think PTS can have this sort of programme, why not? It just dares not do that.

In response to the growing volume of criticisms from otherwise sympathetic scholars and reformers, the Taiwan Broadcasting System (TBS) was set up on 1st July in 2006. Consequently, the Taiwanese TBS system now consists of PTS, CTS (Chinese Television System), ITV (Taiwan Indigenous Television), Hakka TV (a dialect TV service), and Taiwan Macroview TV (a global Taiwanese media platform, serving overseas Taiwanese). This complex is state-run channels but independently administered. At the same time, it is also responsible for the promotion of a nationwide digital wireless transmission network and HDTV (High Definition Television). The major expectations of TBS are to foster ethnic harmony among different groups maintain autonomy in personnel matters and avoid intervention by government, to produce public value, to provide diverse but not rating-driven programmes, and to employ its funding efficiently and effectively.

Its establishment was greeted with considerable applause, and many scholars and activists expected that now it was organisationally more extensive and would exert a positive influence on Taiwan’s media. However, a number of TBS staff have begun to
voice complaints, and journalists have begun to look elsewhere for employment. The merger between organisations with different histories and aims has created problems. The five channels that now comprise the TBS ‘family’ have failed to agree on how best to work together or on resources should be distributed in the future. This has led to joke that TBS now looks like a deformed monster. It has not improved the chaotic state of the media but has generated much confusion inside itself.

At the end of 2007, Ms. Feng Hsian-hsian took over the post of President and CEO of PTS from Hu Yuan-hui. In 2008 when she attended a board meeting and proclaimed that she was hoping to raise PTS’s ratings and influence in two years, she provoked controversies. In response, the Chinese Communication Society (中華傳播學會) composed of scholars, researchers and journalistic practitioners organised a symposium in July to discuss the topic, ‘Does TBS need rating-driven evaluation?’. At the meeting, Ms. Feng argued that as a public medium charged with enhancing public value and responsibility, it is necessary to expand the range of audiences and to develop its social influence. Ratings, she argued, is one way to understand the audience’s needs so as to improve the quality of programming. Other attendees disagreed, arguing that since ratings have been designed to assess the value of broadcasting in the commercial terms required by advertisers, they are an inappropriate way to measure the success of public broadcasting. Ms. Feng, however, disagreed, arguing that ratings provided a valuable reception index showing the distribution of the audience by gender, age, and geographical area and that if only a minority of people watch PTS programmes, it would be unable to justify publicist value to the public.

A number of scholars, however, questioned the accuracy and impartiality of the ratings system and suggested that PTS should develop alternative measures. These might include reach (the percentage of the potential audience who access at least one
programme in an average week) and satisfaction (the percentage of the audience for a programme who give it a high score for quality and enjoyment). If a public broadcasting organisation can show that in an average week almost the entire population finds something they want to watch and that most viewers find the programmes they choose professionally excellent and personally rewarding, the organisation can plausibly argue that they are fulfilling their remit of meeting the needs of a diverse audience. Another option is to develop more and better ways of obtaining feedback and comment from audiences and to canvass their suggestions and ideas for improvements. This argument carries particular force since, arguably, the biggest failing surrounding the establishment of PTS was the relatively scant attention paid to public opinion. The project marked a notable success for the movement promoting it, but that lobby was led by critical scholars and activists, in alliance with sympathetic legislators, media practitioners, and government officials. It made little attempt to involve ordinary people. In contrast, the British government dealt with the controversy in the 1940s and 1950s over the BBC’s continuing monopoly by establishing a public inquiry into future broadcasting policy, the Beveridge Committee which drew on, among other sources, a series of investigations into public attitudes conducted by the British Gallup Poll (Lee, 1993: 252-53). There was no equivalent process before the Taiwanese government decided to merge the five channels and create the new TBS. Now it has been established, however, it is not too late to establish mechanisms for regularly consulting audiences. One possibility is to set up a body like the BBC Trust that not only protects the organisation’s independence but also invites people to express their views on key areas of output, such as children’s programming. Another option is to hold public meetings where audience members can question programme makers and managers. A third option and perhaps the most flexible is to use the organisation’s internet site as a space for
continuing debate on both particular programmes and overall performance. Another major issue concerns the licence fee. In Taiwan people are not required to pay the licence fee as they are in the UK, Japan and Korea. As a consequence, most people feel no sense of ‘ownership’. They do feel that belongs to them, that is ‘their’ organisation paid for directly by their contributions. Some commentators have suggested addressing this sense of disconnection by imposing a licence fee but the majority opinion is that it is both unreasonable and unrealistic given that people have had so few opportunities to express their views on services public broadcasting provides for citizens. There are problems too with the current financing. Although the government has expanded the budget for TBS when it started running, there is still a substantial shortfall in funding given the range of obligations placed on it. The major sticking point for legislators is that PTS is seen not yet to have completed the integration of the various component divisions on a satisfactory basis. This situation has been exacerbated by a leaked letter indicating that the newsroom of PTS will move back to its original location from the CTS building. Most journalists thought it was more convenient to conduct their work at CTS and were reluctant to move in the first place. So why that argued, do they have to move again? Has PTS wasted money on an unnecessary shift? In addition, PTS was scheduled to spend over 10 million NT dollars to purchase new type video camera which would mean discarding a batch of small video cameras which were still functional and which were widely used by newsroom personnel.

These issues reveal the inadequate nature of the internal channels of communication operating within the organisation. In order to minimise wastage and foster esprit de corps, senior managers not only have to convey their policy and rules clearly to staff, they also need to listen attentively to their views and opinions. Although the five channels comprising TBS look like a unified body from the outside,
the operate with a high degree of autonomy with their own managers. Additionally, CTS has become involved even though it is still a commercial channel. This is likely to generate additional internal tensions and conflicts. At the same time, the fact that Taiwan now has, for the first time, a substantial PSB system which is still open to internal reform, can be taken as a sign that a countervailing force to the logic of commercialisation and tabloidisation is not simply a proposal, but a concrete possibility.

10.1.2 Debating Legal Restraints

Creating an organisation with the potential to produce a wider range of cultural resources for citizenship is a major intervention in the struggle to secure a media system that meets the needs of a complex democratic polity, but it does nothing in itself to address the problems posed by the dynamics of the commercial system. It requires changes to the legal framework governing public communication, and it is in this connection that I want to return to three key issues raised in the previous chapter—content, licensing, and media ownership.

Controlling Content

As Professor Weng Hsiu-chi (interviewee No. 23, see Appendix 1), teaching Journalism at National Chengchi University, pointed out:

Basically the media industry is a sort of ‘content’ industry which is performed via the media. Thus, it is impossible to leave the content behind. Except regulations on the structure of the media institutes, I think the content should be also involved in the regulation. However, it is very sensitive. Many people would think it is not appropriate to restrain the content directly. I know the
Ofcom in Britain there are some committees under the Board of Directors. Within it, there is a Content Board which consists of 11 members. Its members are appointed by the Ofcom Board. Their duties are to realise and collect the data relating to the problems of the media contents. In accordance with its information, the Content Board has to submit a formal annual report to the Board and puts forward suggestions on the problems. But the way of how the Content Board manages practically the content problems does not have more details. It is necessary to find out further. I think the mode of the Ofcom could be as a reference.

The Director of Local Information Office at the Executive Yuan, Wu Shui-mu (interviewee No. 28, see Appendix 1), indicated that sometimes audiences would complain about the inappropriate news shown on TV and ask government to address the issue. Dealing with the content issue is difficult, however, since any intervention would attract rebukes from critics that the government was interfering in the freedom of the press.

Legislator Lee Ching-an (interviewee No. 27, see Appendix 1) spoke for a number of respondents when she argued that the law was a very blunt instrument with which to address issues of content.

As for the content of the media, the boundary between what is in the public interest or belongs private interests, what is moral or immoral, and what is sensational or just entertaining is difficult to demarcate. It is very subjective and also related to the function of the media. Actually it is hard to regulate programme content by laws. Now at least we have fundamental regulations on programme in the Radio and Television Act and Satellite Broadcasting Act. But the law is only the lowest bottom line of morality. You think a programme host’s language is indecent and filthy but others might not think so. In terms of quality, like Next Magazine, how would you restrain it? You cannot say it has breached the law. It has just caught the reader’s desire to peep behind the cover of celebrity’s privacy. Even though some have rebuked it, they read it as usual. So I think using law to regulate content is very difficult. The media must have professional morality and social responsibility.
Associate Professor Luo Chao-hua (interviewee No. 25, see Appendix 1), who is teaching in Media Law at Chinese Culture University and has long experience of amendments to the Media Acts at the GIO of the Executive Yuan, agrees that the law should be a last resort and that it is preferable for the journalistic profession to regulate itself so that detailed legal curbs are not required. The problem however, as we have seen, is that self-regulation is increasingly ineffectual in the face of commercial logic.

The evidence collected for the case studies presented earlier supports the argument that the intrusive coverage of celebrity lifestyles and false news are increasing. The former is associated with the right of privacy and the latter is related to issues of defamation. A number of countries, such as the United States and France, have Privacy Acts which aims to protect personal information except in connection with the defence of the public interest. Most democratic countries also have laws prohibiting libel. Taiwan does not have specific Acts in either of these key areas but the Criminal Code does offer a basis for prosecutions under the provisions relating to Offences Against Personal Reputations & Credits, Offences Relating to Protection of Secrets and the like.

Another conspicuous gap in the Taiwanese legal system is an equivalent of the Contempt of Court Act 1981 in the UK, which prohibits news organisations from relaying any comments which would affect the judgment while litigation is in process (Yang, 1996: 138). Without this curb on ‘trial by newspaper’ Taiwanese journalists are free to act as prosecutors and judges. Nor is this simply a one way process. Some prosecutors are only too willing to leak information on active cases to the media.

**Licencing**

As some argued in Chapter 4 and 6, as a result of concerted lobbying by the
opposition and media proprietors, the Taiwanese government adopted an open policy in the media market. In addition to issuing a large number of licences to new cable and satellite channels, it allowed foreign investment in Taiwanese media companies. This surge of new entrants led to intensified competition as media companies tried to carve out a viable niche in what was still a relatively small market. Those backed with substantial finance or enjoying good relations with government officials or politicians struggled to knock out or take over weaker media to consolidate their dominant position. Journalists were increasing pressured to make the ‘bottom line’ their first priority. Originally, most commentators and scholars had welcomed marketisation, assuming that under conditions of ‘free’ competition the good would drive out the bad. They were wrong. As we saw in Chapter 4, a number of newspapers have closed down over the past decade but their ‘failures’ have been economic rather than journalistic. In contrast, television news has seen a substantial expansion with a number of new channels coming on stream, but as we have seen, their performance has been the target of concerted concern. In attempt to discipline the worst excesses of tabloidisation, in August 2005, the GIO revoked the licences of seven cable and satellite channels. This move provoked heated controversy which came to centre of the case of the ETTV-S news channel owned by the EMG (Eastern Multimedia Group). The regulators considered its news too sensational and reprimanded it for occasionally relaying false information. Reportedly, the GIO Minister (a member of the DPP and the party of government) had originally intended to cancel the licence of the main ETTV news channel but eventually settled on the S channel instead. In contrast, the FTV news channel, whose political stance always inclined towards the DPP, quickly passed scrutiny and had its licence renewed. The KMT, who was in opposition at the time, accused the GIO of partiality, arguing that they had unfairly curbed media freedom and defiled Taiwanese democracy. In response, the GIO
Minister argued that the aim of revoking licences was motivated entirely by the desire to pressure the media to exercise greater self-discipline by demonstrating that persistent excesses had real material consequences. Following protests by the staff at ETTV, the news channel was re-licenced in 2006, changing its name to the ‘Finance and Life’ channel in 2007. Unfortunately, afterwards (in November 2005) an incident on TVBS licence broke out.

Further controversy occurred in November 2005 when the GIO attempted to revoke the licence of the TVBS channel claiming that its financing had broken the law. However, there was a strong suspicion that the real reason the GIO wanted to close it down was because its very popular political talk show continually exposed government scandals. Critics questioned the impartiality of the examiners, and eventually under mounting public pressure, the GIO Minister was forced to step down, and the programme continued broadcasting.

These examples reveal not only problems with the way the Act governing licencing is drafted but also the way the licensing system is caught up in the political competition between the two main parties, the KMT and the DPP. Addressing this issue poses major problems. As Professor Weng noted in the interview:

*How to institute a reasonable mechanism for revoking licences is a top priority. At the moment, the big problem is that the terms of changing the licence whether for wireless TV or cable and satellite channels are different. How to set up an appropriate term has to be sorted out first. Further, these channels cannot necessarily have a permanent right in operation if their financial structures are not transparent and sound or if they are running a 24-hour news channel but do not have enough staff distribution and technical equipment to manage a large amount of news.*

**Media Ownership and Proprietors’ Powers**

Because the market model of media is based on promoting competition, on the
grounds that the more producers there are the more likely it is that diversity of opinion will flourish, concentration of ownership has always been a particular regulatory concern. Argument has centred on three major issues:

(1) **Concentration within markets**, and the issue of limiting the total market share of any single company. Markets here can be local (within a single city) or national.

(2) **Cross-ownership between media sectors** and the question of whether a company with a major stake in one sector is permitted to hold major stakes in another. Is it permissible, for example, for a leading newspaper publisher to hold a controlling shareholding in a television or radio company?

(3) **Overseas ownership**. Should limits be placed on the holdings of non-nationals? The rationale for this is both economic and cultural. On the one hand it is argued that any profits from media enterprises should contribute to the national purse rather than being moved ‘offshore’. On the other it is assumed that national owners will have more knowledge of and more sensitivity to local political and cultural mores and will therefore be better able to serve a local audience.

The Taiwanese government does not impose strict limits on cross-ownership between media sectors. As a result, as we saw in Chapter 4, there are a number of major multimedia conglomerates operating in the country. There are, however, some limits to media ownership and curbs on overseas ownership. According to the current Laws of the NCC (National Communications Commission) on Cable Radio and Television Act in Article 19, “The organisation operating a cable radio and/or television system shall be a company limited by shares. Total direct and indirect foreign investment in a company operating a cable radio and/or television system shall be less than 60 percent of the total shares issued by the company. Direct foreign shareholding is limited to legal entities, and the total shares directly held by foreign shareholders shall not exceed 20 percent of the total shares issued. The minimum
paid-in capital of a cable radio and/or television system shall be stipulated by the central regulatory agency. The government and political parties, as well as foundations established with their endowments, and those commissioned by them, may not directly or indirectly invest in cable radio and/or television systems.”

In terms of Satellite Broadcasting Act, based on Article 9 “The government and political parties, as well as foundations established with their endowments, and those commissioned by them, shall not directly or indirectly invest in satellite broadcasting businesses…..Political party workers, political appointees, and elected public officials shall not invest in satellite broadcasting businesses. Total shareholdings by their spouses, relatives by blood within the second degree of relationship, and lineal relatives by marriage, shall not exceed 1 percent of the issued shares of a satellite broadcasting business. Existing situations involving satellite broadcasting businesses that do not meet these provisions prior to the implementation of the revision of this Act shall be corrected within two years of the implementation of the revision of this Act.” As for foreign investors, “The total shares of a satellite broadcasting business directly held by foreign shareholders shall be less than 50 percent of the total shares issued by the said business” proclaimed in Article 10.

**10.2 Reorganising Journalism**

**10.2.1 Debates on Journalism Education**

Observing the trend towards more sensational reporting, a number of scholars and senior reporters (or editors) have wondered whether there is something wrong with journalism education and that education in ethics has been neglected.

Initially courses on journalism ethics were an obligatory part of almost all
professional training programmes for aspiring journalists. Recently however, concern has been expressed that these courses in Taiwan are becoming more and more marginal and honorific, and that journalism teaching is becoming focused on the practical business of producing saleable products in an increasingly competitive market and digital technology. In some Journalism Studies programmes at some universities courses in ethics have become optional. But critics argue, even if journalism students have learned journalism ethics, they are not in a position to act of these ideals in Taiwan’s highly commercialised and competitive environment.

In order to find out what concept of journalism ethics current journalism students have, I conducted a small pilot study with 8 final-year journalism students, 4 male and 4 female, at four Universities in Taiwan (details mentioned in Chapter 5). Most had a clear concept of journalism ethics and believed that journalists had a social responsibility. The problem was the gap between ideals and practice. As Lin Yi-jun (interviewee No. 14, see Appendix 1) a reporter for CTS, who had been trained in journalism at National Chengchi University, recounted:

**When I was studying journalism, I was taught that a journalist must be objective. But finally I realised that when a journalist started writing the first word on a piece of news, he/she would be subjective but never ever be objective….Moreover, when journalists became a senior and no one dare to criticise their reporting, they would be more inclined to trust themselves and lost their initial objective stance and principle….As for what expectation of Taiwan’s media environment I have, it is a tough question. Well, I would like to suggest that those scholars who have no experience in the journalistic industry should come over and work for broadcasters. They will then realise the pressure because of the ratings. Reversely, those chief reports (or editors in chief) could teach in journalism at universities.**

Although her suggestion is intended ironically, the fact that some scholars teaching journalism have never practically experienced the stresses imposed by the media
market and have just encouraged students to follow principles in an abstract way is an important point. Graduated students, once they entered the journalistic field, discover very quickly that they have to adapt to the demands of a competitive media market and do not know how to exercise what they have learned. As professor Pan Jia-ching (interviewee No. 22, see Appendix 1), who had been a journalist in a commercial setting for some years and is now teaching in Journalism at National Chengchi University, argued, new entrants, tendency to bend to the prevailing wind simply perpetuates the problem. While they are making their way up the career ladder, they compromise their principles in the interests of advancement and by the time they reach position of influence they have forgotten what their principles were.

It is a pain. Actually I always remind my students when they work for a newspaper or television company, they have to remember what they’ve learned and often reflect what they’ve done. One day they are once promoted to a deputy editor or editor in chief, they have to think about how to keep the principles and produce good coverage, not sensational and bloody news. Although they cannot improve the current situation right now, they can do their best to take responsibility step by step.

The pessimistic view is that there is no point in struggling to ensure that ethics is a substantial part of journalists’ training unless the structure of the media market is changed and there is less intense competition. In the respect, the market structure has to be changed but journalism education cannot be absolutely ignored. Professional journalist must have both specialised knowledge and a commitment to responsibility. This last requirement can, however, easily be short circuited when graduates join media organisations directly from university and learn ‘on the job’ rather than having a systematic and reflective training. One way to address this problem would be to make professional training in journalism compulsory for all entrants to the profession. At the same time, there is a strong argument for adjusting the present approach to
training to address current defects. In thinking about how best to do this, systems in
other countries, such as those operated by the NCTJ (National Council for the
Training of Journalists) and the BJTC (Broadcast Journalism Training Council) in
Britain offer a useful starting point for both comparisons and possible lessons.

10.2.2 Creating a Stronger Journalists’ Association/Union

A culture of deference to authority has operated within the Taiwanese media with
journalists showing considerable reluctance to question the demands of their superiors.
In interview, a number of respondents used the metaphor of the armed forces to
describe the hierarchical structures they worked within.

The deputy supervisor of news gathering at Sanlih E-Television, Hu Siao-cheng
(interviewee No. 15, see Appendix 1), vividly remembered working under those
conditions.

In the press circle, its inner environment (newsroom) is entirely like an army.
Why is that? This is a kind of climate and culture remained from the earlier
times of the press. In that period of time, a reporter was requested to devote
himself to his job. That is, the boss asked you to go east, you wouldn’t go west.
If he asked you to do more work, you couldn’t complain or resist. Basically, his
order operated in an extremely centralised and arbitrary way. So you might
have some room against your boss but the room was very narrow. Because all
is rationalised, everyone thinks this sort of climate is normal, it’s ok.

Given this situation, some might ask why would they do not protest or ask for
help from the main professional organisation, the Association of Taiwan Journalist
(ATJ)? The answer is that the ATJ offers only a weak and ineffectual check on
proprietors’ power to dismiss a reporter and employ others. As Professor Hsu Jia-shih
(interviewee No.21, see Appendix 1), who had been teaching in journalism at
National Chengchi University, argued:

We have got the Association of Taiwan Journalist and the Association of Editors. But they are not very sound and do not have power. You know, plenty of newspapers, especially the mainstream newspapers, do not encourage their journalists to join. So I think news practitioners should make an effort on this point. They must awaken by themselves and hold together. In other words, they’d better think how to unite to organise a strong union (association). In the US or in the UK, they have powerful journalists’ unions and would strive for their welfare and rights of work by a strike or whatever. Our journalists are poor guys. If they have protested against the boss today, they would be dismissed tomorrow. Thus, acquiring personal autonomy does not depend on the benefaction of the boss but on journalists’ themselves having power. I think they should be able to accomplish it.

This pessimistic assessment of the current state of journalists’ collective organisation was echoed by Tian Cheng-chung (interviewee No. 2, see Appendix 1), senior editor in chief of the Jade Magazine.

Who would act as Jesus? Who would dare to carry the cross first? If you carried it you would need others to follow you. Who would do that? Basically, you are contending with your boss but not others. For a boss, he can change a batch of journalists easily and doesn’t care about the protest... To be honest, in terms of ATJ, I have never seen that it functioned effectively...You said, journalists can join it. Honestly, the association does not seem to have anything to do with me. I have also never seen its unity. If someday the Taiwanese media laid off all employees and the media disappeared, perhaps then the ATJ would hold together to strive for their living rights.

In the absence of a strong union or professional association, willing and able to uphold its members interests, the established hierarchical structure of control has persisted into the era of marketisation as the intensification of competition has placed added pressure of journalists to deliver what their superiors require as measured by circulation and ratings.
10.3 Cultivating Audience Activity

10.3.1 Civil Society and Social Responsibility

There is an ancient Chinese saying that we can learn the rise and fall of a country (or a society) through its history. Indeed, while the doctor is diagnosing the cause of the illness, he has to trace back the patient’s medical history.

As we noted in Chapter 1, the transition to democracy in the major Western societies took place in the context of a strongly developing civil society. As a consequence, governments needed to pay attention to public opinion with the news media acting a bridge between the state and the citizenry. Even though there is a long established tradition of tabloid journalism, dating back to the birth of the modern mass press in the late nineteenth century (mentioned in Chapter 3), media practitioners have by and large shared a common understanding of where the limits are. Those stepping over the line may find themselves in court or subject to popular boycotts, as The Sun did in Liverpool, following its sensationalised and inaccurate coverage of a disaster at a local football stadium at which a number of people were crushed to death.

In contrast, Taiwan’s history, before and after Japanese colonisation, links it closely to the history of mainland China, and to a tradition of thought profoundly affected by Confucianism which subordinates individual agency to the demands of loyalty to family and superiors. This has arguably inhibited the development of public opinion as ordinary people have usually kept silent or expressed only muted criticism in the interests of maintaining social harmony. Faced with this relative underdevelopment of civil society, it is not surprising that the Taiwanese press has not placed so much emphasis on providing a platform for public opinion as in the West. The dissenting voices that are heard in the public sphere tend to come from either media scholars or reform institutes. This is not surprising since within the Confucian tradition,
intellectuals have commanded respect on account of their learning and accredited expertise.

10.3.2 Promoting Media Literacy

If they are to be a concrete reality rather than simply a rhetorical ideal, democracies must be based on the active participation of their citizens. To achieve this, people need to be given not only the cultural resources but also the cultural competences to become involved and to make their voice heard. For many commentators, bringing this about requires a major investment in education. As the well known Chinese proverb has it, “Education is a big plan for hundred years (ages).”

As legislator Lee Ching-an argued in interview investment in education, undertaken as part of the modernisation process, has already made some difference.

I think raising up the level of the citizen is the most crucial point to improve those defects. Absolutely it is a big topic as it is associated with education, the whole national environment, and political climate, which will all influence the citizen's concept and morality. Certainly comparing the current level of the citizen with that of in the past, I must say it has raised up to a certain extent.

In addition to raising the level of general education so that people are better able to judge the relative importance of issues and evaluate competing accounts and proposals, strengthening civil society also requires more targeted education in both social responsibility and media literacy. They need to be given not only the critical ability to analyse and sift through the messages that inform, entertain and sell to us every day, but also the confidence and practical skills to take advantage of the new opportunities for expression opened up by the Internet. A number of advanced
countries, such as the UK, Australia, Germany and the US, have been developing media literacy education for a long period but Taiwan only started in the 2000s but it is still limited. There are courses on media literacy at some universities and some privately-run media literacy centres but in further thinking, there needs to be a concerted effort to reach the entire population, starting in primary school. This in turn will require a major effort in teacher training.

10.4 Summing-up

Since the late 1990s a number of scholars, media practitioners, and activists within social movements have established successive media reform groups and pressured the government to take measures to counter the trend towards tabloidisation. Some suggestions they have put forward had been acted on. The TBS has been set up, amendments to the major media Acts have been considered seriously by legislators recently, and the issue of journalism ethics and social responsibility has been increasingly moving up the agenda for discussion. A more comprehensive and concerted effort to develop education in media literacy has also been gathering momentum, signaled by the establishment of the Centre for Media Literacy at National Chengchi University. At the same time, many defects and difficulties with the present system persist, and it remains to be seen how far the present impetus towards reform will be able to address them effectively. As we have argued, the core problems are structural and arise primarily from the commercial logic set in motion by marketisation.

Apart from this, unharmonious and adverse political competition would also affect the positive development of the media. Different parties became the ruler of the
regime, in turn, they might change the media policy advantaged themselves for their parties. These are not reasons to do nothing but they do caution against overly optimistic projections of the possibilities for change.
CONCLUSION

This thesis has set out analysis and results designed to address the five research questions raised at the beginning: (1) How has tabloid journalism developed in Taiwan? (2) How is the process of tabloid reporting organised? What pressures do reporters and editors feel themselves to be under and how do they view their work? (3) What are the main characteristics and presentational devices of tabloid reporting as evidenced by the three case studies? (4) On balance, has tabloidisation helped or hindered the movement towards full democratisation and citizenship in Taiwan? (5) What options are there for reforms and interventions that address the negative aspects of tabloidisation?

Question 1: The tabloid trend in Taiwan

In order to contextualise the Taiwanese processes on tabloidisation empirically, the opening chapters on the western experience were followed by two chapters offering a general overview of developments in Taiwan. The first traced the overall evolution of the media system in the postwar period, focusing particularly on the period ushered in by the conjunction of political and economic transition. The second looked more specifically at the development of tabloidisation in Taiwan, drawing particular attention to the impact of the two tabloid titles brought to Taiwan by the Hong Kong based entrepreneur, Jimmy Lai, Next Magazine and Apple Daily which arrived in 2001 and 2003 respectively. One indication of his influence is the frequent use of the term ‘Appleisation’ (named after his daily title, Apple Daily) to describe the general features of the shift towards tabloidisation.
As we have seen, one of the major consequences of this movement has been the promotion of ‘commercial populism’, in which audiences are reconstructed as a unity around presentations that mobilise notions of an indivisible ‘people’ by appealing to popular ideas and preoccupations. The division between ‘us’ (the ordinary person in the street) and ‘them’ (the rich, famous and powerful) which lies at the heart of this construction generates contradictory potentials. On the one hand, it taps into popular distrust of politicians and feeds both an appetite for scandal and a drive to fulfill the classic ‘Fourth Estate’ role of the news media and hold power holders to account for their actions. On the other, it also focuses attention on the most visible incarnations of wealth and success, celebrities, and plays on the ambivalence that characterises their relations with fans. They are at the same time separated from ordinary people by their lavish life styles but no different from them in facing the same personal difficulties. This generates a relentless drive to probe behind the public face to expose the concealed private life, a move that is reinforced by the potential for exposes offered by candid and clandestine, paparazzi, photographs and video footage.

Furthermore, current audiences are more likely to be viewed as consumers. They are also encouraged to be producers, playing a hybrid role of ‘prosumers’ such as the sources of scandals or sensational stories by telephone lines and E-mail boxes for the tabloid media and even traditional quality papers.

**Question 2: The organisation of tabloid journalism in Taiwan**

The interviews conducted with journalists and editors who had been involved in the cases, together with participants’ more general comments on their working environment emphasised four key features of the current situation.
Firstly, under conditions of intensified market competition the drive to maximise audiences in order to maintain advertising revenues emerges as the central force shaping editorial priorities and decisions. The search of ratings is, in turn, the major force driving tabloidisation. There was general agreement among my respondents that this pressure was more acute in broadcasting than in the press, possibly because up until very recently there was no effective countervailing from a substantial Public Broadcasting Service organisation.

Secondly, although a number of journalists (particularly those with longer experience) expressed concern about this situation and saw it as weakening the news media’s ability to function effectively in the new democratic polity, they felt powerless to counteract it. This is partly because Taiwan lacks an effective union or professional association willing and able to defend the professional autonomy of journalists. But it was also arguably compounded by the recent influx of new entrants to the profession, many of whom had had no systematic training in journalism within higher education, and who had grown up in the new tabloid environment and had no other points of comparison.

Thirdly, although tabloidisation in Taiwan arguably takes a more extreme form than in most other countries, as evidenced by the decision to release the clandestine video footage of a female politician having sex, the punishment meted out to those responsible suggests that there are boundaries which cannot be crossed. At the same time, the amount of discretion allowed still leaves very considerable space for possible abuses, as shown by the intrusive and sensational coverage of the celebrity suicide we examined.

Fourthly, our examination of the coverage of the SARS outbreak confirms that alongside the potential to escalate public fear tabloid reporting also displays an impetus to probe official mismanagement and hold power holders to account. The
problem is one of balance between legitimate investigation on the one hand and sensationalism on the other.

**Question 3: What are the main characteristic of tabloid reporting as evidenced by the three case studies?**

In addition to illustrating different central aspects of tabloidisation, the three case studies which provide the core of the original empirical evidence offered here in support of my general argument can be usefully arranged on a continuum defined by varying mixtures of unwarranted intrusion and sensation on the one hand and legitimate critique on the other.

At one end of this continuum we can place the coverage of the comedian’s suicide. As we saw, this lasted for nearly one month and involved intrusive reporting and a focus on bizarre details which could have provided resources that encouraged already vulnerable people to contemplate taking their own lives, although there is no conclusive evidence that they did. Overall, this case illustrates the negative features of tabloid reporting and there is no possible public interest defence that can be offered to justify it. In contrast, we can place the SARS coverage at the other end of the spectrum. Here, although the focus on fatalities and some of the more sensational stories during the epidemic may have heightened levels of anxiety and panic in the general population, the tabloid approach of the news media also served the public interest by exposing medical and official failures and indicating areas where existing procedures could be changed to allow them to cope more adequately with future risks.

The scandal surrounding the female politician can be placed at a midway point. Although the action of the tabloid magazine in giving away the VCD showing clandestine footage of her illicit sexual encounter went some way beyond the line
demarcating acceptable journalistic practice and destroyed her career, it could be argued that the revelation of her affair was germane to assessing both her judgment and values, both of which are relevant in turn to judgments about her credibility and suitability for political office. Added to which, her own use of clandestine footage in her journalistic work, highlighted her own lack of scruples in pursuit of her personal interests.

**Question 4: On balance, has tabloidisation helped or hindered the movement towards full democratisation and citizenship in Taiwan?**

As we have noted, there are both positive and negative voices in the debate on tabloidisation. Some commentator see the arrival of *Apple Daily* as a much needed force for innovation in the press market, prompting journalists to think more carefully about how they addressed and engaged readers and increasing circulations, particularly among younger age groups who were alienated by the stuffy, establishment, image of the older titles. At the same time, very few interviewees saw the quality of *Next Magazine* or *Apple Daily* as matching the criteria for serious journalism that served democracy in the ways required by democratic theory. In advancing this argument they made four main points.

Firstly, they pointed out that tabloid journalism is normally seen as less accurate since in order to obtain the story in the minimal possible time, tabloid reporters were less inclined to check whether their initial sources were reliable and could be verified by independent evidence. Added to which, they were more inclined to manufacture pseudo-events in order to raise ratings.

Secondly, they complained that tabloid reporters and paparazzi photographers often
invaded the personal privacy of subjects, especially celebrities, in ways and to an extent that was not warranted by the demands of the story.

Thirdly, they argued that the tabloids’ commercial populism had recently been taken a stage further, and that audience members were increasingly becoming co-producers of content, taking part in exposes and shooting footage on their mobile phones. While under other conditions this increased participation could be welcomed as the arrival of ‘citizen journalism’, opening news media to a greater range of voices and first hand testimonies, in the current tabloid climate it was seen as more likely to foster a vigilante mentality.

Fourthly, some media scholars assert that in reporting political issues tabloid journalists, particularly those working in television, focus on the conflicts and disagreements within and between the two major parties, foregrounding personalities and their clashes, rather than providing a space for informed and rational deliberation on key domestic and international issues.

**Question 5: What are the options for reforms that minimise the negative impacts of tabloidization?**

Faced with the tabloidised phenomenon, as we have seen, critical political and scholarly voices have proposed a number of measures designed to address the situation. I want here, to draw attention to seven themes that have emerged from these discussions.

(1) Largely as a result of concerted lobbying by media reformers, a Public Television Service (PTS) was eventually launched in 1998. It was expected to produce diverse programmes, safeguard freedom of expression and the right to know, promote the development of democratic society, and raise the standard of national
culture and education to provide a countervailing force to the accelerated expanding commercial television system. Not surprisingly, these lofty ideals were not met for two reasons. Firstly, its launch coincided with the rapid increase in the mainly number of cable and satellite channels and PTS lacked the funding to compete effectively. Secondly, unlike countries like Britain and Germany where the tradition of public service, as state funded by operationally independent, was solidly established constitutionally, PTS was introduced into a system characterised by a tradition of state management.

In response to the growing lobby for change, a greatly expanded system, the Taiwan Broadcasting System (TBS), which combined five public service groups, PTS, CTS, ITV, Hakka TV, and Taiwan Macroview TV, was set up in 2006. TBS is charged with fostering ethnic harmony among different groups, to producing public value, providing diverse but not rating-driven programmes, and employing its funding efficiently and effectively. At the present time however, it is beset by major funding and personnel problems, and it remains to be seen if it will be able to operate as an effective counter to the commercial channels or avoid the temptation to tabloidise its own output in pursuit of audiences.

(2) Talking about the problem of tabloidisation inevitably involves talking about content. Some commentators argue that content should be subject to more extensive regulation and look to the Content Board operated by Ofcom in Britain as a model. However, critics argue that it is immensely difficult to draw a clear and consistent line between the moral and the immoral or to produce a conception of the public interest that will command universal support. Added to which, the equation of a ‘free press’ with a ‘free market’ that many Taiwanese thinkers have taken over from Western, and more particularly American thinking, militates against increased government interference, as does the recent, and still for many
practitioners, raw experience of the operation of state control of the media under *Martial Law*.

(3) In one area however, there is substantial support for a more proactive governmental role, and that is in relation to the issue of media licences and the rules governing media ownership. The result has been continuous debate on how best to limit the number so licences issued, in the interests of reigning in competition, and on what restrictions should be imposed on cross-ownership and foreign ownership. However, every time the NCC (National Communications Commission) has announced that a media organisation’s licence will revoked in response to breaches of the regulation they have committed, it has unleashed a storm of protest from commercial interests. Recently the NCC has been discussing possible amendments to the relevant Act which may or may not produce a more cogent regulatory framework and more effective implementation.

(4) The state of current journalism education has also attracted considerable discussion and debates. As we have seen, the interviewees in this study who had taken journalism studies at universities were of the opinion that the lessons in ethics and social responsibility they had had before entering full time work were impossible to implement in practice, a mismatch they saw as compounded by the fact that many professors and lecturers lacked practical experience of the day-to-day difficulties and pressures facing reporters. This led to a generally pessimistic view that there was no point in struggling to ensure that ethics is a substantial part of journalists’ training unless the structure of the media market is changed and there is less intense competition. I do not agree with this view. Although the market structure has to be changed, journalism ethics cannot be ignored or put on hold, and in thinking about how best to develop journalists’
training in this area in Taiwan other countries’ systems have much to contribute as points of reference and ways of approaching the problem.

(5) Interviewees also pointed to the culture of deference to authority that has operated within the media, with journalists showing considerable reluctance to question the demands of their superiors. Some compared Taiwanese newsrooms to the army in which junior reporters are normally expected to obey instructions without questioning, even if they may sometimes appear to be unreasonable. As we noted, Taiwan currently does not have a strong journalists’ union capable of defending its members against unfair treatment and upholding the principle of journalists’ professional autonomy. Developing such an organisation is, therefore, widely discussed as one way of addressing the current situation.

(6) Historically, the transition to democracy in the major western societies took place in the context of a strongly developing civil society. As a consequence, the news media acted as a bridge between the state and the citizenry, articulating and systematising public opinion on key issues and communicating the results upward to legislative bodies, in the way outlined by Jürgen Habermas in his discussion of the press as pivotal component of the public sphere. Hence, even though there was a long established tradition of tabloid journalism, many media practitioners retained a commitment to rational debate as against emotional appeals, and shared a common understanding of where the bottom line was drawn.

By contrast, Taiwanese culture has been profoundly influenced by Confucianism, which posits a rigidly hierarchical social order in which subordinate individuals are required to display loyalty to those above them, whether family members or superiors. This has arguably inhibited the development of public opinion as ordinary people have usually expressed only muted criticism in the interests of maintaining social harmony. This predisposition was reinforced in the decades of
Military Rule by the strong state policing of dissent. Given the resulting relative underdevelopment of civil society, it is not surprising that the Taiwanese press has not seen providing a platform for public opinion as a central role, as in the West. The dissenting voices that are heard in the public sphere tend to come from either media scholars or reformers. In the wider public arena the tabloid media’s mobilisation of emotional appeals further militates against the exercise of rational communication as required by Habermas’s model of a functioning inclusive public sphere.

(7) In response to this perceived deficit, a number of commentators have argued for more extensive and intensive education in media literacy both within the school system and beyond arguing that the government should help to integrate the existing resources, including the training courses offered at some universities and privately-run media literacy centres, and actively promote participation in media literacy across the entire population.

**The Thesis’s Wider Contribution**

The thesis contributes argument and evidence of value to scholars and researchers working in three main areas: the study of Taiwanese media; the analysis of tabloidisation and tabloid journalism; and the study of the role of media in political and economic transition.

**Taiwan**

In the recent years, although Taiwanese scholars have begun to conduct research on tabloidisation in Taiwan, they have tended to focus on particular issues such as gender, ideology, or the ‘appleisation’ effect. This present work offers a more comprehensive
approach that draws together four core themes. Firstly, it synthesises existing work on
the general conditions that have generated the present tabloidisation dynamics in
Taiwan. Secondly, through interviews with journalists and editors it examines the
impact of tabloidisation on journalistic practice and the ways practitioners understand
and negotiate the pressure they feel they confront. Thirdly, through the three case
studies it offers a detailed analysis of the organisation of tabloidisation as a system of
representations and explores its potentially contradictory effects. Fourthly, drawing on
models of media responsibility, it explores through interviews with commentators and
analysis of recent initiatives, possible options for addressing the negative aspects of
tabloidisation that may impede the development of a media system that serves the
process of democratisation more fully.

Tabloidisation
By developing a detailed empirical account practices of tabloidisation in
contemporary Taiwan, the present work provides valuable original empirical evidence
that can contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced analysis and understanding
of a process that is in the process of becoming globalised.

Transition
Finally, by offering a detailed analysis of the media as both a site and a force of
change in Taiwan’s double political and economic transition, the work provides a case
study that can be employed in comparative studies of transition in countries that have
undergone similar processes over the last two decades, identifying those features are
generic to the process and those that are specific and contingent on particular
historical and cultural conditions.
Further Research

Despite these potential contributions, the research presented here has necessarily been both preliminary and limited in scope. Nevertheless, it points to a number of areas which merit further attention and investigation.

In the light of the reflections on possible reforms mentioned above, I would like to put forward five major foci for further research.

(1) **Building a sound civil society**— In recent years a number of media watch groups have appealed to the government and the NCC to do more to encourage people to get involved in discussions and debates on media policy or media performance. To date however, little progress has been made. Identifying the barriers that prevent a more securely based civil society from emerging and developing strategies to address them is the first major topic for future research.

(2) **Promoting media literacy**— Extending popular participation in debates around the future of media and in everyday media performance requires a major extension of media literacy programmes. The aim would not simply be to provide people with the information and knowledge necessary to participate in policy deliberations but also the practical skills and confidence that enables them to become both critical consumers and active contributors and originators. Identifying the impediments to effective education and to the more optimum coordination of resources and initiatives, and developing practical strategies for implementing media literacy as a life-long and nation wide project, is the second priority for future investigation.

(3) **Developing professionalism among journalists**— There are two major areas to be addressed here. Firstly, it is clear from the interview data collected for this study that journalism education in Taiwan needs to be substantially overhauled
and training course and training institutes reorganised, at the level of both structures and curriculum. Secondly, it is equally clear that journalists would benefit considerably from having access to a strong union or professional organisation capable of underwriting their relative autonomy, resisting encroachments by government, owners, and advertisers, and encouraging self restraint, in line with a strong code of professional practice, in the interests of responsible reporting. Examining relevant models in other countries and devising workable models for the Taiwanese situation is a third urgent task for research.

(4) With the expanding impact of digital media, however, and the rise of citizen journalism, it is increasingly evident that journalism in the future must find productive ways of managing the relations between professional practice and amateur, vernacular contributions. More and more people are involved in digital networking, posting comments on Twitter, setting up Blogs or sharing their photos and accounts of events on sites such as Facebook and YouTube. This development was not a major focus of the present study since the three cases studies occurred before it has gathered its present momentum. But the questions of how it changes journalistic practice, whether or not it will reinforce the trend towards tabloidisation, and what impact it might have on the development of civil society and of a public sphere rooted in participatory deliberation are now urgent priorities of future research.

(5) Exploring public broadcasting as a counter force to commercial television news— The Taiwan Broadcasting System has been making a concerted efforts to improve the content of its programmes but how far it will be able to build a broadly based audience against the competition offered by the more tabloid oriented commercial channels remains an open question. The development of its news strategies, its response to competition, and the reactions of audiences are all
urgent tasks for research.

Beyond these immediate issues, all of which are central to Taiwan’s consolidation as a mature democracy, lies the more general question of the politics and economics of transition and their impact on the constitution of public culture. As noted above, my hope is that this study of one particular case of a society that has experienced rapid, extensive and simultaneous transitions in economic organisation, political systems, and cultural expression, will offer insights that may be of help to scholars studying other incidences, and that this effort might in time produce a more comprehensive comparative model.
# Appendix 1

## Interviewees list

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<th>Position</th>
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<td>Peir Woei</td>
<td>Next Magazine</td>
<td>Publisher &amp; Editor in Chief</td>
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<td>02</td>
<td>Tian Cheng-chung</td>
<td>Jade Magazine</td>
<td>Editor in Chief</td>
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<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Wilson Shao</td>
<td>First Hand Report Magazine</td>
<td>Editor in Chief (resigned in 2005)</td>
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<td>04</td>
<td>Lee Shu-zen</td>
<td>United Evening News</td>
<td>Reporter (National News Centre)</td>
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<td>05</td>
<td>Chang Ya-hui</td>
<td>Sanlih E-Television</td>
<td>(News Dept.) Deputy Section Chief of News Gathering (Now News Features Producer at ETTV)</td>
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<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>Tseng Wen-che</td>
<td>Next Magazine</td>
<td>Chief Reporter</td>
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<td>07</td>
<td>Ting Yuan-kai</td>
<td>Sanlih E-Television</td>
<td>Reporter</td>
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<td>08</td>
<td>Tsai Yi-ling</td>
<td>United Evening News</td>
<td>Reporter (Movie &amp; Television Section), resigned in 2008</td>
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<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>Ben Yu</td>
<td>Phoenix Satellite Television</td>
<td>Chief Reporter (now Director of News Gathering at Era TV)</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Chiang Hsia</td>
<td>Chinese Television System</td>
<td>President (Resigned in 2006)</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Hu Yuan-hui</td>
<td>Public Television Service</td>
<td>President &amp; CEO (resigned in 2007)</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Chou Tian-rui</td>
<td>The Journalist</td>
<td>Chairman of the Board</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Yin Yun-peng</td>
<td>Common Wealth Magazine</td>
<td>Chairman &amp; Publisher</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Lin Yi-jun</td>
<td>Chinese Television System</td>
<td>Reporter (now at ETTV)</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Hu Hsiao-cheng</td>
<td>Sanlih E-Television</td>
<td>(News Dept.) Deputy Supervisor of News Gathering (now at Cti-TV)</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Hong Su-ching</td>
<td>Liberty Times</td>
<td>Medical Reporter</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Wang Zhao-bin</td>
<td>Apple Daily</td>
<td>Reporter</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Lee Hsien-li</td>
<td>Next Magazine</td>
<td>Deputy Editor in Chief</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Lin Chao-hsin</td>
<td>China Times Weekly</td>
<td>Chief writer &amp; convener of social news team</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Lin Zhao-chen</td>
<td>Shih Hsin University</td>
<td>Assistant Professor (Senior Reporter)</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Hsu Jia-shih</td>
<td>Chengchi University</td>
<td>Professor (Retired)</td>
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<td>Pan Jia-ching</td>
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<td>Weng Shieu-chi</td>
<td>Chengchi University</td>
<td>Professor</td>
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<td>Lin He-ling</td>
<td>Taiwan University</td>
<td>Professor</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>Luo Chao-hua</td>
<td>Chinese Culture University</td>
<td>Associate Professor (Part-time)</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>Kung Wen-chi</td>
<td>Legislative Yuan</td>
<td>Legislator</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>Lee Ching-an</td>
<td>Legislative Yuan</td>
<td>Legislator</td>
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<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Wu Shui-mu</td>
<td>Government Information Office, Executive Yuan</td>
<td>Director of Local Information Office</td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>Shi Li-chin</td>
<td>Chengchi University</td>
<td>Senior Student</td>
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<td>Song Yu-chang</td>
<td>Chengchi University</td>
<td>Senior Student</td>
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<td>Lai Rou-chien</td>
<td>Fu Jen Catholic University</td>
<td>Senior Student</td>
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<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Zhao Yu-yun</td>
<td>Fu Jen Catholic University</td>
<td>Senior Student</td>
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<td>Chen Jun-yi</td>
<td>Shih Hsin University</td>
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<td>Hsia Jun-ming</td>
<td>Shih Hsin University</td>
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<td>Dong Yan-ting</td>
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<td>36</td>
<td>Wen Kai-cheng</td>
<td>Tamkang University</td>
<td>Senior Student</td>
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Appendix 2
Questions for the four interview groups

◎ The first group
For case 1 (the VCD incident of Ms. Chu Mei-feng)

1. When you got Ms. Chu’s scandal information, why did you think it deserved attention and reporting at that time? (the former chief editor of Scoop Weekly Ms. Shen Jun, if she is not able to make the interview, I will interview another journalist or editor who knew this incident in the magazine company)

2. After the VCD incident was exposed, there were different reports on your magazine. Some said the VCD was bought by your assistant at the arcade, and others said the VCD was provided from Mrs. Kuo. Well, whatever is correct or incorrect, why did you make a decision to allow the VCD to be sold with the magazine? Didn’t you consider you would intrude other’s privacy and it might be breached the law at that time?

3. Had you got any pressure from your boss or others on the issue?

4. After this incident (and you was sentenced two years in prison), what did you think of it?

5. I find in your magazine you have offered a special telephone line for those who provide private information to you. They are so-called anonym. When you got an information from an anonym, how did you do further investigation to prove the source accurate or not?

6. Nowadays due to fierce competition in the media field and the pressure of turnover sometimes, in the case whether journalists cannot help to report sensitive issues to provoke people to notice and buy magazines?
7. Do you think media ethics and social responsibility (or autonomy) are very important as well? What is your viewpoint on this matter?

___________________________________________________

8. About the VCD incident of Ms. Chu in 2001, I know “Next Magazine” also had reported Ms. Chu’s scandal not only “Scoop Weekly.” How did you get the information? (the publisher of Next Magazine Mr. Fei Wei)

9. Why did you decide to report it? Before reporting it, didn’t you think about when you covered it, the former legislator Ms. Chu might accuse you of nuisance (intruding privacy)?

10. According to the newspapers, you didn’t accept the VCD provided by someone (or Mrs. Kuo) but Scoop Weekly did, could you tell me why?

11. Even though your magazine belongs to a kind of paparazzi-style tabloid, have you still got any rules or principles (media codes) for editors and journalists to follow? If so, what are they?

12. If not, it means the media ethics and social responsibility are not important under press freedom; even someone got hurt through your coverage? What is your standpoint on self-discipline and media ethics (codes)?

For case 2 (the SARS event)

1. Let’s trace back the SARS event in 2003, how did you get the information that the head of the Taipei Ho Ping hospital and a doctor concealed the serious condition of infection?

2. When you got the information, how did you judge the accuracy? Did you look into it further?

3. Before or after reporting the news, did you have got any pressure from your boss or others? (If so, what was that?)
4. During the outbreak of SARS, what sort of difficulties did you confront on your coverage?

5. At that time, some people complained that accordingly the role of the media should perform their social responsibility to provide accurate SARS information for the public and to urge the government to take measures to combat the spread of epidemic. However, the coverage not only caused panic but also prompted few patients to commit suicide. As a journalist, what do you think of it?

6. Do you think this issue is also related to media ethics? Why?

7. You think what kind of delinquency did the government have got on SARS event?

8. If some epidemic would have broken out in the future, you think how to cooperate between the media and the government?

For case 3 (the comedian Mr. Ni Min-ran’s suicide)

1. You have got involved in reporting this suicide incident. Please tell me how long did your coverage last?

2. Do you think that a dead man deserved being reported nearly one month? Just because he was a famous comedian? Does it make sense?

3. Don’t you think the report was an unrespectable act to the dead and even would hurt his family and others?

4. In this case, not only did some journalists report the details of his suicide but also report the freak spiritual phenomena. Seriously because of the lasting report of this incident, it had caused other people to commit suicide. Do you think that has breached media ethics (codes)? Why?

5. I know after complaint of scholars and media watch, the minister of the Government Information Office eventually could not help to interfere this issue and declared that the media had to stop reporting and obey the seven principles
adopted by WHO on the suicide event. Otherwise, disobedient media would be punished. Do you think whether the interference of the GIO was correct or not? Why?

6. To be honest, as a journalist for covering celebrities’ news, have you got self-discipline rules in your company or in your mind? If so, what is that?

© The second group (for media proprietors)

1. How long have you been running the company?
2. What were your motive and goal for establishing the company?
3. What kind of difficulties have you ever confronted in running the company?
4. How did you sort it out?
5. What are your running policy and strategy?
6. Have you set up your own media codes for the journalists (editors or presenters)?
   If so, what are they?
7. Have you ever met some journalists (editors or presenters) breached the media codes?
8. How did you cope with them?
9. If someone (journalist, presenter or editor) put forward his/her ideas or suggestions on coverage, media codes, company’s strategy or whatever to you, how will you deal with this situation? Is it easy for you to accept their advice or to communicate with them?
10. Concerning current Taiwan’s media environment, what are the major factors impacting the Taiwan’s media development?
11. What are the consequent effects?
12. What is your point of view on the relationship between the media and the
government?

13. The government has adopted a regulation on classification of publishing but some media organisations protested. What do you think of it?

14. Undoubtedly we heard many people including audiences, scholars and media watch are dissatisfied the phenomenon of media turmoil in Taiwan. What is your viewpoint on this matter; particularly in the fierce competition age?

15. Do you think it is possible that you can adhere to the media codes (ethics) to avoid making the controversial issues and still keep your turnover growing up? Why and how?

16. As a media proprietor, what is your most anticipation to the development of future media in Taiwan?

The third group (for journalists)

1. How long have you been as a journalist (editor)?

2. Why did you want to be a journalist?

3. Being a journalist, what is your biggest challenge in your job?

4. Honestly are you satisfied your job and Taiwan’s media environment? Why?

5. How do you get along with your boss?

6. If you confront some difficulties in your job, basically how will you cope with it?

7. Did your boss set up any rules for all of journalists? If so, what are they?

8. Normally will you obey the rules or not? Why?

9. What is your own principle for reporting a news?

10. The majority said that the source of turmoil phenomenon in Taiwan’s society is the media, which indirectly refers to journalists. Do you agree or disagree this viewpoint? Why?
11. Do you think it is possible that you can adhere to media ethics on one side, and report a positive and attractive news on the other? Why?

12. Have you got any anticipation for yourself and Taiwan’s media environment? What are they?

© The fourth group (for commentators)

1. Are you satisfied the Taiwan’s media environment? Why?

2. What on earth can the media problem be? Could you interpret your viewpoint?

3. What kind of realistic methods should we practice to improve this tough problem?

4. Do you think the government might be able to help to deal with the problem? But how?

5. Except the government, do you think the audience also can do something? What would that be?

6. Actually this problem is very complicated and is related to many phases. However whether the basic problem is that we gradually didn’t take media ethics into account? What do you think of it?

7. What phases do Taiwanese media deserve learning from western media on media ethics?

8. You think is it possible to rebuild the concept of media ethics into Taiwanese journalists’ mind; even the media proprietors’? If so, how to do that?
# Appendix 3

## Interviewees’ background record

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*Note*
Appendix 4

Three News Scenarios

Scenario 1
Assume an official’s daughter was kidnapped by three teenagers. Their aim is to blackmail the girl’s parents, and they have warned if anyone goes to the police station to report it, they will kill the girl. Now you have received this message, and the police are chasing the criminals. Are you going to report this event? If so, how and why? If not, why not?

Scenario 2
Assume you have received a message that an important official of the Ministry of National Defense has divulged a confidential map of the military base and got a high remuneration. Are you going to report it? If so, how will you report it? If not, why not?

Scenario 3
Assume you are working for a commercial television station. One day you are told about a scandal from an anonymous person about one of your company’s managers who has a dubious relationship with a celebrity. However, this manager is married. Unfortunately the manager is also your distant relative. Are you going to cover it? If so, how will you cover it? If not, why not?
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