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Television News is Government News in Taiwan Patterns of Television News Sources Selection and Presentation

Based on a content analysis of evening newscasts by the three television stations in Taiwan, this study examines the patterns of news sources selection and presentation in television news. The results of this study show that television news relies heavily on government officials who are primarily middle-aged men in executive positions located in the capital city of Taipei. These findings suggest that the central government officials in Taipei appear to be the primary definers of social reality. TV news portrays only a very limited view of the society. In conclusion, this study suggests that with the management and content tightly controlled by the state, Taiwan's television news consists primarily of official rituals.

WWhile the media set the agenda for the public, it is the power structure that sets the agenda for the media. Media coverage symbolizes, reproduces, and even dramatizes the distribution of social power. News, as Sigal writes, is 'not what journalists think, but what their sources say'. (Sigal, 1986, p. 29) Although mass media perform a crucial transformative role, Hall argues, the primary definers of social reality are those to whom the media turn to: their accredited sources in government and other determinant institutions. The media play in Woollacott's term, a role of 'structured subordination' to the 'primary definers', reproducing the "primary definitions" that come from the authorities (Woollacott, 1982). Structural-functionalists regard the media as an integral part of the overall social system in which powerful organizations, strata, groups and individuals have privileged

access to the media (Tichenor et al, 1979). Gramscian Marxists see the media as the central loci of struggle for ideological hegemony waged both between and within unequal classes in society (Gitlin, 1980; Williams, 1977). The media may be relatively, even substantially, autonomous in democracies but they are ultimately bounded by the larger structural relations of power.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the patterns of news sources selection and presentation in Taiwan's television news. In what follows, we shall first describe the structure and function of Taiwan's television and then review the literature, which will be followed by research procedures and data analysis.

■ The Structure and Function of Taiwan's Television

'Mr TV' is Taiwan's 'most influential figure', according to public opinion polls (Global View, 1987). Covering the complete geographical area and penetrating 95 per cent of the households, television is a crucial cultural and ideological arm of the state. Television was first inaugurated in 1962 as a showcase of Taiwan's commitment to a private, free-enterprise system, a commitment consciously worked out to put the mainland Communist system in a bad light. From the outset, Taiwan's television has been unashamedly commercial, built around the bureaucratic-business complex. The triple alliance of the government, the military, and the ruling Kuomintang (KMT) monopolizes political power and co-opts private commercial interests. Altogether they form Taiwan's dominant power structure (Lee, 1980).

Fulfilling this showcase mission, Taiwan Television Company (TTV) was established in 1962. TTV is owned by the Provincial Government (49 per cent), four Japanese television companies (20 per cent) and private commercial interests. TTV made so much profits that others aspired to take some shares of it. China Television Company (CTV) came into being in 1969 with the KMT acquiring the controlling interests (60 per cent) and other private radio stations sharing the remainder. Finally, a small-scale instructional television was expanded into a full-fledged Chinese Television Service (CTS) in 1971, 72 per cent of whose interests are being controlled by the Ministry of Defense. CTS had proclaimed to be educational in its intent but became blatantly commercial as soon as it went on the air. Benefiting from Taiwan's three decades of economic growth, all three stations have made lucrative profits year after year. While entertainment fares fill up much of the airtime, news and editorials toe the official line.

Acquiring the controlling interests, the state oversees the industry's major appointments, finance, and content. All those who serve on the board of directors bear conspicuous political credentials: retired or incumbent generals, ministers, party functionaries, or major business-industrialists. Six of the 13 general managers appointed to head the three stations were ex-military men, including aides to the late President Chiang Ching-Kuo. Almost all television reporters are members of the KMT. Two-thirds of them are mainlanders or are their offsprings, compared with the Taiwanese who constitute an 85 per cent demographic majority on the island (Cheng, 1988).

Under the 37-year rule of martial law (lifted in July, 1987), media content had been subjected to high-handed surveillance by the tight-knit network of the Government Information Bureau, the KMT Cultural Work Committee and the Taiwan Garrison Command. Politically sensitive subjects were avoided while dissenting views were internally defused. Television reporters have described themselves as 'mouthless' and their stations as 'propaganda bureaus'. (*Global View*, 1987). Media elites, highly overlapping with political elites, are so ingrained with the dominant value and ideology as not to offend the regime. The state even passed laws to suppress cultural and linguistic localism on television (Lee, 1980).

■ Media Access and Social Power

News is hierarchically structured. Roshco (1975) observes that those of higher social standing are deemed more newsworthy because their attitudes are more influential and their actions more consequential. Tuchman (1978) argues that centralized institutions capture much of the facts that make up raw materials of the news. Therefore, media coverage gravitates towards those who have the authority, wealth, or capability to organize social actions; consequently, women, minorities, and the poor tend to be ignored or disparaged (Cohen and Young, 1973; Shoemaker, 1984). Sigal notes that the White House and the State Department are the primary definers of national and international news for the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* (Sigal, 1973).

Television news is highly concentrated, with a few cities receiving the bulk of the coverage and most cities being ignored (Epstein, 1973; Gans, 1979). Foreign news is generally so arranged that the dominant nations are at the nexus of communication and they dominate media attention at the expense of those on the periphery (Larson, 1984). American media tend to rely on official sources and official vantage

points to report other nations in a reductive fashion (Said, 1981; Paletz and Entman, 1981).

In Japan, it was found that media coverage of the Japanese Diet highlights party leaders and overlooks junior members (Feldman, 1985). Studies conclude that news visibility of US senators is related to such factors as the population of the state being represented, the size of legislative aides, seniority, and the importance of their committee and subcommittee assignments (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1980; Wilhoit and Sherrill, 1968). Brown et al. (1987) found that top executive officials in government outrank their spokespersons as main sources of both national and local news. Berkowitz (1987) shows that government officials account for nearly half of the radio news sources and a similar pattern holds for television. Hackett (1985) reveals that government officials are most frequent direct speakers in the Canadian television news, followed by special interest groups, the public, and the opposition leaders.

News sources are presented in different modes, depending on their sociopolitical advantages. Male and younger sources are quoted more often and depicted more favourably, according to studies by Davis (1982) and by Porteous (1981). The Glasgow study reveals that television news tend to interview managers in the office but cast workers in the background of chaotic streets (Glasgow University Media Group, 1976). Hackett (1985) shows that political figures tend to appear on television as public speakers, scholars and specialists are interviewed at home or in the office, labour leaders are portrayed in strikes or demonstrations, and the public appear at street corners.

Research conducted in Taiwan found that middle-aged males, executives and government officials were the main sources of television news (Huang, 1985; Cheng, 1988).

Although many previous studies have examined who the news sources are and how and why they became news sources, few have examined how news sources are presented in the news. This study was designed to fill the gap in the news sources literature and help to show that personal characteristics of news sources can help explain differences in the presentation of news sources in the television news.

■ Hypotheses

Based on the above discussion, the following hypotheses are formulated:

1. Television news will use more middle-aged males, government officials, executives and people from the capital city Taipei as news sources than other kinds of news sources.

2. Middle-aged males, government officials, executives and people from Taipei will be quoted more frequently in the television news compared with other kinds of news sources.
3. Middle-aged males, government officials, executives and people from Taipei will be more likely to be presented in a favourable mode in the television news compared with other kinds of news sources.

■ *Methods*

This study is based on a content analysis of evening newscasts by the three television stations during the weeks of February and March, 1987. Although the data are somewhat dated, they still properly reflect current television news in Taiwan because Taiwan's television structure hasn't changed much since 1987 (See Lee, 1993; Cheng et al, 1993).

To draw a sample of TV newscast for analysis, we taped the TTV newscast in the first week (seven days a week), CTV in the second week, and CTS in the third week ;then taped all three stations in the fourth and fifth weeks;and finally, taped TTV in the sixth week, CTV in the seventh week, and CTS in the eighth week. An overall of 12 sampled weeks, or four weeks (28 newscasts) per station were taped for analysis. Each newscast ran 20 minutes exclusive of commercials, weather, and foreign news. A total of 560 news items and 1,059 news sources were analyzed.

News sources were defined as persons who spoke or were quoted in the television news. News sources were categorized according to the following attributes:

- a. Sex: News sources were coded as male or female.
- b. Age: News sources were categorized as young, middle-aged or old.
- c. Occupation: News sources were coded into six main categories, i.e. government officials, scholars and professionals, social educators, business persons and general public. The six main categories were further coded as either government officials or non-government officials.
- d. Organizational Status: Each news source was coded by position in an organization. Categories included executive and non-executive.
- e. Area: News sources were categorized as either from the Taipei area or from outside the Taipei area.
- f. Frequency of quotation: News sources were coded as either high or low according to the frequency to which they were quoted in a news story. The 'low' category referred to those (a) quoted by reporters indirectly, (b) who spoke once directly and (c) who spoke

- once directly and were quoted once indirectly; and 'high' being those who (d) spoke directly more than once, and (e) spoke directly more than once and were quoted indirectly more than once.
- g. **Mode of Presentation:** The situation or mode in which a news source was presented in a news story was also coded. Five modes of presentation were adapted from Hackett's study of Canadian television news sources (Hackett, 1985). These modes of presentation were coded as either favourable or unfavourable. The favourable mode of presentation included formal public speeches, news conferences, formally arranged interviews because they conveyed greater authoritativeness and provided news sources with greater opportunities for advance preparation (Hackett, 1985). The unfavourable mode of presentation included unrehearsed interviews, and overheard conversations.

News sources were coded in accordance with TV news captions and the announcer's report. If any of the categories could not be readily identified, the coders jotted down the names and relevant information for follow-up investigation.

Each news story was also coded in terms of its level of controversy. This variable, found to be most difficult to code, was used to test the reliability coefficient. The four-point scale includes 'very controversial', 'controversial', 'not very controversial', and 'not at all controversial'. The dichotomous scale includes 'controversial' and 'not controversial'.

Six graduate students worked in teams of two, each team coding one station. Coding was double-checked. Two coders coded 69 randomly chosen items on their level of controversy, resulting in 74 per cent of agreement on a four-point scale and 97 per cent of agreement on a dichotomous scale.

■ **Results**

■ ***Test of hypotheses***

The first hypothesis predicted that television news would use more middle-aged males, government officials, executives and people from Taipei as news sources than other kinds of sources. As shown on Table 1, this hypothesis was supported. The news sources tend to be middle-aged (59.5 per cent) males (90.2 per cent) with occupations as government officials (45.3 per cent) or executives (68.5 per cent) in an organization located in the capital city of Taipei (74.4 per cent).

The second hypothesis predicted that middle-aged males, government officials, executives and people from Taipei would be quoted more

Table 1
Television News Sources by Personal Characteristics

<i>Personal Characteristics</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Sex		
male	955	90.2
female	104	9.8
Age		
young	252	23.7
middle-aged	630	59.5
old	168	15.9
Occupation		
government officials	478	45.3
legislators	159	15.1
scholar/professionals	148	14.0
socials educators	73	6.9
business persons	81	7.6
general public	117	11.1
Area		
Taipei	788	74.4
non-Taipei	271	25.6
Organizational status		
executives	594	68.5
non-executives	273	31.5

frequently than other kinds of sources. The data provide partial support for the second hypothesis. Table 2 sums up the results of the Logistic Regression. In these logistic regressions, the coefficients can be interpreted in a manner similar to linear regression coefficients. The odds ratio is simply the probability of an event occurring versus the probability of it not occurring (Hosmer and Lemeshow, 1989).

As shown in Table 2, occupation and area are significant predictors of the frequency of quotation. However, contrary to expectation, sex, age and organizational status fail to obtain statistical significance in predicting the frequency of quotation. The odds ratios show that government officials are just over two times more likely than non-government

Table 2
Logistic Regression of Frequency of Quotation
on Sex, Area, Age, Occupation and Organizational Status

<i>Variable</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Wald</i>	<i>Sig</i>	<i>Odds Ratio</i>
Sex	-.05	.47	.01	.91	.95
Age	-.07	.20	.10	.75	.94
Occupation	.77	.25	9.71	.00	2.15
Organizational status	.23	.28	.68	.41	1.26
Area	1.12	.32	12.28	.00	3.08
Constant	-3.17	.53	35.38	.00	

Table 3
Logistic Regression of Mode of Presentation
on Sex, Area, Age, Occupation and Organizational Status

<i>Variable</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Wald</i>	<i>Sig</i>	<i>Odds Ratio</i>
Sex	.37	.36	1.03	.31	1.44
Age	.44	.17	6.90	.01	1.55
Occupation	-.11	.18	.39	.53	.89
Organizational status	.64	.20	10.11	.00	1.89
Area	.42	.19	4.89	.03	1.52
Constant	-2.10	.39	28.78	.00	

Note: All Variables were dummy-Coded 0 and 1. Sex was coded: 1 = male; 0 = female. Area was coded: 1 = Taipei; 0 = non-Taipei. Age was coded: 1 = middle-aged; 0 = other age groups. Occupation was coded: 1 = government officials; 0 = non-government officials. Organizational Status was coded: 1 = executives; 0 = non-executives. Frequency of quotation was coded: 1 = high; 0 = low. Mode of presentation was coded: 1 = favourable; 0 = unfavourable.

officials to be quoted more frequently in the television news while controlling for sex, age, area and organizational status. People from Taipei were about three times more likely than people from other cities to be quoted more frequently with other variables being controlled.

The third hypothesis predicted that middle-aged males, government officials, executives and people from Taipei would be presented in a favourable mode in the television news than other kinds of news sources. As shown in Table 3, this hypothesis gained basic support. All variables except sex and occupation are significant predictors of

the mode of presentation. As anticipated, middle-aged people, executives, people from Taipei were presented more favourably in the television news than other kinds of sources. However, government officials were not presented more favourably than non-government officials because most of them (63.4 per cent) were interviewed on site which was coded as an unfavourable mode of presentation in this study.

■ Conclusions and Discussion

The main objective of this study was to examine the patterns of news sources selection in Taiwan's television news. The results of the study show that television news sources tend to be government officials who are primarily middle-aged men in executive positions located in the capital city of Taipei.

These findings, although consistent with most of the previous studies, suggested that source concentration in Taiwan's television news is much worse than in the United States or Canada. For example, Berkowitz (1987) found that 49.3 per cent of local news sources and 48.6 per cent of network sources were affiliated with the government. Hackett (1985) found that 51.5 per cent of the speakers on Canadian television news were politicians and government officials. In contrast, the present study found that 61.4 per cent of the news sources were government officials and legislators.

Another objective of this study was to show how personal characteristics of news sources could help explain the differences of presentation of news sources in the television news. The results demonstrate that television news is biased in favour of senior government officials and executives. As anticipated, middle-age executives in Taipei were presented more favourably in the television news. Government officials were quoted more frequently, but they were not presented more favourably.

The results were similar to a study by Hackett (1985) in which he found that while government officials had more access to television news, they were less likely to be presented in a 'higher' mode. As he puts it:

Politicians appeared less frequently in face-to-face interviews. When they did so, such dialogues tended to be 'on site' rather than at a studio or office location. One can speculate that given their hectic schedules, politicians themselves choose not to participate in extended formal interviews. Rather, in an arrangement of mutual convenience with journalists, they grant brief 'on site' corridor interviews. . . (Hackett, 1985, p. 261).

Under Taiwan's capitalist 'dependent development', the cultural apparatuses are oriented towards profit-making and market consumption with entertainment fares forming the main television staple. Against this backdrop, however, the state is intent on harnessing television to preconceived ideological ends and to the regime's legitimacy (Lee, 1980). Television news is mainly controlled by the government. This study shows that TV news is lopsidedly concentrated on senior male government executives in Taipei. In so far as they appear to be the primary definers of social reality, television news portrays only a very limited view of the society.

Since martial law was lifted in 1987, powerful opposition parties with grass-roots support have been formed and the press has gained a greater breathing space. But television control remains rigid. Television news indiscriminantly denounced social movement groups that sprouted in the post-martial law era as a threat to social stability and even as part of a 'conspiracy'. (Hsieh, 1988) The opposition has organized protests against TV stations—calls for television reform have been echoed by the press, liberal politicians and intellectuals. As the literature suggests, no matter where, political elites always define the agenda for television. But with democracy in progress, we anticipate that Taiwan's TV news will be broadened to include leaders of the opposition and other social groups. Government officials will retain preponderant TV attention but will no longer hold exclusive monopoly. Many people are resorting to small media (e.g. videocassette devices) and big media (e.g. satellite transmission) to subvert the officially sanctioned television. Television is, after all, not the final answer to ideological control. Future inquiries should be directed at the changes taking place.

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