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Dateline Taipei: Foreign Journalists' Coverage of Taiwan's First-Ever Presidential Election

Edward Neilan, Mine-ping Sun,
and Ven-hwei Lo

The 23 May 1996 Presidential election in Taiwan was historic and so was the size and nature of foreign media coverage. Among the significant factors revealed by a National Chengchi University survey of the visiting foreign correspondents was that Beijing's missile threats added to the news interest and provided an extra dimension to the coverage activities; the large number of Western news agency bureau chiefs accredited to Beijing who came to Taipei for the election campaign; the large number of Chinese media members coming from Hong Kong and Southeast Asia; the strong commitment of world television outlets to the event; and the generally favourable assessments on Taiwan's level of democracy and press freedom given by respondents to open-ended questions. Inadvertently, China's intimidating tactics put the elections on more front pages around the world, and put Taiwan on the "map" in terms of international name recognition.

The Presidential election in Taiwan of March 23, 1996 was historic and dramatic. Never in 5,000 years of history had so many Chinese voted in a direct election for their leader. It was a culmination of transition by Taiwan from authoritarian rule to democracy.

By comparison, the People's Republic of China, or mainland China, lags behind in political reforms and clings to an authoritarian, communist organization and a tightly-controlled press. Mainland China staged a psychological propaganda offensive along with 'missile exercises' aimed at intimidating the democratic expression generally and the victory of President Lee Teng-hui, specifically.

The sending of two US aircraft carrier battle groups into the area further internationalized the situation. Media reports placed the election campaign, voting, results, and missile crisis on the front page of virtually every newspaper in the world and as the lead item on virtually every international television and radio news programme at least once during election week.

The story's drama was heightened by the fact that Mainland China's efforts turned out to be counter-productive: The Taiwanese voted in record numbers and elected President Lee overwhelmingly.

The events themselves were historic and the numbers of media members involved reached record numbers. Likewise, this survey by National Chengchi University's Department of Journalism of foreign media performance during the election and missile crisis broke new ground; foreign correspondents at work in Asia have never been so closely profiled during a major Chinese political event.

The numbers were stunning in themselves: more than 690 journalists came to Taiwan or were Taiwan citizens working for foreign media to cover the election, representing at least 271 media outlets in 29 countries (Table 1). The previous largest number had been 190 foreign journalists in Taiwan for an earlier parliamentary election.

For an Asian comparison in 1996, the 16–18 April summit between US President Bill Clinton and Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto drew 350 accreditation requests plus 100 from the White House Press Corps for a total of 450.

The Taiwan record will be short-lived, however. Hong Kong authorities says 2,200 media representatives have already requested accreditation for the 1 July 1997 handover of Hong Kong to Mainland China. Other estimates have the press corps for that event reaching 6,000! China has expressed its interest in selecting who may or may not cover the event—a request turned down by the Hong Kong government.

There have been several surveys conducted by Taiwanese universities on election content analysis in the Chinese-language press and other aspects of domestic press performance. But this survey conducted in the spring of 1996 was the first-ever of the performance and attitudes of foreign journalists covering a Taiwan election. The specific research questions which this study sought to answer were:

1. Who are the foreign journalists covering the presidential campaign?
2. How do they do their work?

3. What are they most interested in for coverage of the presidential campaign?
4. How satisfied are they with their election coverage?
5. What's their impression of the degree of democracy and freedom of the press in Taiwan observed in their coverage of the presidential campaign?

■ Literature Review

Earlier studies about foreign journalists (most of them were foreign correspondents) and their work covering elections are scarce and mostly general in nature. But they provide some broad brush strokes on the general background of foreign correspondents, correspondents' work experience, relationships with their head offices, methods of reporting, access to information resources, and linguistic knowledge.

In terms of background and work experience, some earlier studies showed that foreign correspondents generally comprised an elite class, experienced in journalism, and highly regarded by their superiors in terms of potential. In one of the earliest studies, Lambert (1956) found that foreign correspondents in the US were not only predominantly male, but also were highly educated (at least university education). Later studies underscored that finding, no matter where those journalists came from Ghorpade (1984a); Knight (1995); Mowlana (1975); and Peng (1990). Those studies also found that all these international journalists were experienced in their professional careers. The average years working as journalists was 12–20 years.

Language ability is revealed in all the studies as an important tool for foreign correspondents. In Lambert's study, respondent journalists could speak 3.5 languages on the average and just few found language a major difficulty. Mowlana's respondents had studied an average of almost three languages. Ghorpade indicated that foreign correspondents in his study could speak at least one foreign language. Compared to the journalists based in Western countries, language knowledge was more important to foreign journalists based on oriental countries. In his survey of Australian foreign correspondents based in Southeast Asia, Knight (1995) found that most could not speak the local language of the country they were visiting. They relied heavily on the Western-style English media and Western information sources such as diplomats

while researching their stories. Knight sought to determine if Australian foreign correspondents 'wrote within a cycle of their own preconceptions', a charge levelled earlier by Said (1978) against Western historians. Knight wrote, 'I questioned whether such preconceptions, translated into news agendas, implicitly limited the issues covered and, in doing so, contributed to a self-perpetuating series of stereotypes.'

Foreign correspondents' heavy reliance on the media, especially the domestic media, as main news sources, was also noted in earlier studies. Ghorpade (1984b, p. 35) commented that it 'enlarges the primarily news-gathering role of the foreign correspondents by incorporating a gatekeeping function as well'. Eventually, this may be reflected in the nature of the news that was transmitted.

In terms of coverage, Lambert (1956) found that most foreign correspondents in the US were interested in straight news, interpretative news, or news analysis. Almost 20 years later, Mowlana (1975) found foreign correspondents in the US were mostly interested in politics and public affairs in their reporting.

In the 1990s, under more fierce competition in foreign coverage, news presentation of individual media organizations became more varied and showed more depth, as seen by Kirtz (1990). Peng's study also demonstrated this phenomenon, with her focus on the US presidential election in 1988. Peng (1990) surveyed correspondents stationed in Washington DC. In terms of coverage, the study indicated that there were differences in the perception of election coverage between foreign correspondents and the America media. Foreign correspondents were more concerned with substance, while the US media were more interested in horse-race type coverage.

Foreign correspondents generally, including quotations from and observations on those working in Asia, were examined more recently worldwide by Rosenblum (1993), in Japan by Neilan (1995), and in the US by Hess (1996).

The earlier studies' findings from respondents based on the US and Australia and Peng's focus on the US presidential election were generally reiterated by Rosenblum, Neilan, and Hess, but the latter also took into consideration the phenomenon of shrinking news holes, particularly in American newspapers, diminishing numbers of foreign correspondents based abroad, and lowered amounts spent on foreign coverage due to budget considerations.

Moving to Asia, our 1996 study attempted to glimpse coverage habits, style, attitudes, and results of foreign journalists covering a historic event to present a modern picture against a backdrop of the few earlier, and very general, studies available. The Taiwan election.

itself is assured a place in record books and, so too, are the aspects of coverage. Also, there can be comparisons between this group of correspondents and those profiled in earlier cited literature.

For its Taiwanese people and government, it was the first time so many important international media were covering a local event since World War II. Some background notes on preparations were provided in a Taipei-published monthly bilingual magazine (Wang, 1996), giving considerable space to the activities of the American television network CNN.

Based on the Government Information Office (GIO) estimation of two earlier parliamentary and mayoral elections in 1994 and 1995, some 250 media personnel were expected to come from abroad to cover the 1996 presidential election campaign. In actual fact, not only did many international media people descend on Taipei in the beginning of March, but also many large international news organizations which had originally planned only to dispatch people from their Beijing or Hong Kong bureaus ended up sending staff from the home office to provide support. This was due to the inadvertent hyping up of the proceedings by Beijing's missile tests. Editorial pages around the world were opened to pundits' analyses of what might happen, ranging from a tense election to an all-out war. There were such emotional exchanges as a mainland Chinese official threatening a 'missile attack on Los Angeles' and US Secretary of Defense William Perry boasting that the US Navy was the 'best damned navy in the world!'

Among 697 international journalists, as shown in Table 1, the greatest number of media people were from neighbouring countries in the Asia-Pacific region (354, or 51 per cent of the total number of international media people), followed by European and African media journalists (208, or 30 per cent), and Americans (135, or 19 per cent). Some foreign journalists were less familiar with Taiwan than others, for example, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Portugal, and Turkey. Some media were sending reporters to Taipei for the first time.

Some journalists 'neither knew what Taiwan is, where it is, nor could they pronounce the president Lee Teng-hui's name', said a British journalist.

'They just knew that there was a possible war story in Taiwan, so they came', James Kyngé, the ex-bureau chief of Reuters in Taipei, said in a speech to communication students.

Based on GIO's data, Japan (148 persons), Hong Kong and Macau (135), and the US (117) were the top three countries or areas to send media people to Taiwan in March. This seems to indicate that the

news organizations of Japan, Hong Kong, and Macau (representing 80 per cent of the Asia-Pacific region's media persons attending, or 41 per cent of the entire international media registrants) were the most concerned about democracy and the safety of Taiwan—most concerned about the story.

Table 1
International Journalists Covering Presidential Election in Taiwan

<i>Area</i>	<i>Countries</i>	<i>No. of Media</i>		<i>No. of Journalists</i>	
		<i>electronic</i>	<i>print</i>	<i>no.</i>	<i>per cent</i>
America	4 countries: USA, Canada, Mexico, Brazil	18	39	135	19
Europe & Africa	18 countries: Britain, Germany, French, Holland, Portland, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, Finland, Belgium, Portugal, Austria, South Africa, Turkey, Italy, Spain, Norway, Nigeria	36	78	208	30
Asia- Pacific	12 countries: Japan, Korea, HK, Macau, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, Russia	40	86	354	51
Total	34 countries	94	203	697	100

Source: Government Information Office, 1996, 4, 11

Of individual TV media, Japan's TBS (40 persons), Britain's Reuters TV (34) and America's CNN (33) were the top three headcounts of media personnel to cover the Taiwan election campaign. Not only did the Japanese media prepare well to cover the election, they also 'have planned very well how to retreat from Taiwan if the war were to break out during their coverage in Taipei', said Tom Mintier, the Bangkok bureau chief of CNN at an election post-mortem seminar sponsored by Tamkang University in April, 1996.

The American Broadcasting Corporation's Hong Kong bureau chief Jim Laurie, speaking at the same seminar, said the fact that his 'takes' on the election which did not even mention the names of opposition candidates showed that ABC was aiming at the average US audience which had very little sophistication about Asian politics.

One Chinese-language newspaper (*United Daily News*) editorial wondered how so many foreign correspondents 'parachuting' into Taipei for a few days could hope to file thorough, balanced reports to their newspapers or magazines overseas. Part of the answer was a variety of background papers in English provided by GIO, plus the availability of dozens of overseas English-language and Japanese-language newspapers sold in the Taipei market. The two local English-language dailies, *China News* and *China Post*, carried extensive wire service reports of the election campaign and missile crisis, and on their editorial pages had a sampling of international pundits' views plus contributions from visiting academics.

Some visiting correspondents stayed on even after the election to report on the aftermath and take part in various seminars and analyses. Melanie Kirkpatrick, assistant editor of the editorial page of the *Wall Street Journal*, was granted an interview with President Lee Teng-hui the day after the election. Japanese multi-million circulation newspapers *Nihon Keizai* and *Asahi Shimbun* were granted presidential interviews a few weeks after the election and *Newsweek* magazine (editor Maynard Parker) and CNN (Beijing bureau chief Andrea Koppel) were granted presidential interviews on the eve of the 20 May inauguration.

New York Times Beijing bureau chief Patrick Tyler was a speaker at a seminar 'Beyond the Finish Line', sponsored by *China News*. Tyler said he could not be optimistic about 'China's ability to manage its own growth in the future'.

■ Method

The study was based on a sample of 94 international media personnel who were composed of two kinds of individuals: (1) journalists who applied for their Taipei trips to overseas offices of GIO, and (2) both Chinese and non-Chinese workers for foreign news agencies in Taiwan.

A four-page English questionnaire was delivered to international media people by three methods: (1) Placed with other literature at the GIO's office; (2) mailed to correspondents based in Taipei; (3) hand-distributed by graduate students at some press conferences for international media reporters.

With GIO's assistance, some 200 questionnaires were left to be taken freely in the reception room of the Division of Information and Protocol of GIO, to catch journalists as they appeared to pick up press accreditation materials.

The second batch of questionnaires was mailed to 59 correspondents (both Chinese and non-Chinese) of 37 foreign media outlets listed in GIO's roster with domestic addresses during the first week of March. A second mailing went to those who had not responded to the first after a four-week interval, followed by a personal phone call to remind and a follow-up mailing to those who said they did not get questionnaires. A third phone call and fax were made two weeks later.

The third group of the survey were the international journalists not encountered at GIO or through domestic representatives. It was impossible to know where they resided in Taipei or to distribute questionnaires to these journalists one by one randomly at hotels on such a rushed schedule. The only way to catch them was to meet them at or following press conferences sponsored by three presidential candidates and by the Mainland Affairs Council of Executive Yuan where large numbers of journalists were expected.

A total of 94 valid questionnaires was returned out of some 650 distributed in various ways. It was assumed that one reason for the low response rate was that everyone was busy with the task of covering the election on a daily deadline. Another reason may be that a large number of the foreign media spoke only Chinese or Japanese while the questionnaire was in English. Only a very few Chinese newsmen answered the questionnaires in English or Chinese, and only a few Japanese responded, and in those cases used English to reply.

■ Results of the Study

▣ *Profile of the foreign journalists*

The foreign journalists in the study are predominately male, 76.3 per cent are men and 23.7 per cent are women. The average age of the foreign journalist is 39.2 years. As shown in Table 2, the foreign journalists tend to be under 45 years of age, with most (60.7 per cent) falling between the ages of 25 to 44. The largest age group (33 per cent) is 35 to 44-years-old and (27.7 per cent) between 25 and 34, there are very few foreign journalists over the age of 55 (4.3 per cent).

The foreign journalists were very well educated. A total 31.9 per cent said they had earned bachelor's degrees and 14.3 per cent indicated they had pursued some graduate studies. Surprisingly, 41.8 per cent indicated they held graduate degrees. Only 7.7 per cent did not attend college and 4.4 per cent indicated they received some level of college education.

The greatest number of foreign journalists came from Europe (37.2 per cent), Asia (32.6 per cent) including 3.5 per cent from Taiwan) and the US (22.1 per cent). Very few foreign newsmen (8.2 per cent) were from other areas. A great majority of foreign journalists were based in Asia (77.2 per cent) including 8.7 per cent of those who were based in Taiwan. About 14.1 per cent were based in Europe and only 5.4 per cent were based in the US.

Of those completing the questionnaire, 35.6 per cent worked for daily newspapers, 14 per cent worked for television stations, 14.4 per cent worked for news agencies, 12.2 per cent worked for magazines, 7.8 per cent worked for radio stations and 11.1 per cent worked for two or more news organizations. As for their job titles, 45.1 per cent identified themselves as reporters, 19.8 per cent as correspondents, 8.8 per cent as editors, another 8.8 per cent as photographers or cameramen.

The foreign journalists had considerable professional experience in journalism with an overall average of 14.2 years as professional journalists. Male foreign journalists had greater experience than females in journalism, an average of 15.5 years for men compared to 10 years for women.

Analysis of their language ability shows that only 21.3 per cent of the foreign journalists surveyed claimed they were proficient (able to conduct interviews) in Chinese. Most foreign journalists had to rely

on English-speaking sources or on interpreters in their coverage of the presidential campaign. The results reveal that 39.4 per cent were proficient in English, 13.8 per cent were proficient in French, 9.6 per cent were proficient in Spanish and 6.4 per cent were proficient in German.

Table 2
Profile of Foreign Journalists

	<i>Fre</i>	%
Sex		
Male	71	76.3
Female	22	23.7
Age		
Under 25	16	17.0
25-34	26	27.7
35-44	31	33.0
45-54	17	18.1
55 or over	4	4.3
Education		
High school	7	7.7
Some college	4	4.4
Graduate from college	29	31.9
Some graduate studies	13	14.3
Graduate degree	38	41.8
Geographic Distribution		
Europe	32	37.2
Asia	25	29.1
US	19	22.1
Pacific	4	4.7
Taiwan	3	3.5
North America	2	2.3
Others	1	1.2
Journalism Base		
Asia	63	68.5
Europe	13	14.1
Taiwan	8	8.7
US.	5	5.4
Others	3	3.3

Table 2 (cont.)

	<i>Fre</i>	%
News Media		
Daily Newspaper	32	35.6
News Agency	13	14.4
Television	13	14.4
Magazine	11	12.2
Two or more organizations	10	11.1
Radio	7	7.8
Weekly Newspaper	2	2.2
Freelance	1	1.1
Others	1	1.1
Job Title		
Reporter	41	45.1
Correspondent	18	19.8
Editor	8	8.8
Photographer or cameramen	8	8.8
Columnist	3	3.3
Producer	3	3.3
Writer	3	3.3
Director	1	1.1
Others	6	6.6
Language Ability (Able to Conduct Interview)		
English	37	39.4
Chinese	20	21.3
French	13	13.8
Spanish	9	9.6
German	6	6.4
Other European languages	5	5.8
Other Asian Languages	3	3.2
Russian	2	2.1
Japanese	1	1.1

■ *Some of the work patterns*

Respondents were asked to characterize the types of stories they produced in covering the presidential campaign. Some 14.6 per cent indicated analysis and commentary, 11.2 per cent were working on features, 11.2 per cent on spot news, and 4.5 per cent on interviews. A substantial majority (58.4 per cent) mentioned other types of stories indicating that our categories of story type were inadequate.

Respondents were also asked to indicate their main sources of news about Taiwan and China. The results of the analysis show 88.3 per cent mentioned newspapers, 48.9 per cent wire services, 47.9 per cent television, 45.7 per cent magazines, and 30.9 per cent radio.

Our survey also asked the foreign journalists to disclose how they would be filing their reports from Taiwan to their news media. The results indicate that 51.1 per cent used the computer, 27.7 per cent used the telephone, 22.3 per cent used fax the machine, 17 per cent used television feed, 13.8 per cent used air couriers or air mail.

■ *Most interested topics in presidential election coverage*

The foreign journalists were asked to indicate the topics in which they were most interested concerning the presidential election, ranging from 'highly interested', 'some interest' to 'not interested'. The results reveal that three topics drew 'highly interested' responses by more than 90 per cent of the respondents: China's missile tests and military exercises (95.5 per cent), Taiwan-China relationship (94.4 per cent) and presidential election results (90.8 per cent). Another two topics were also seen as of high interest by a majority of the respondents: international implications (US, Japan, or Hong Kong implications) (64 per cent), and candidates' policies (52.9 per cent).

It is obvious that the foreign journalists tend to view the 'China's missile tests and military exercise' and 'Taiwan-China relationship' as most newsworthy.

■ *Levels of satisfaction in election coverage*

Our survey asked the respondents to indicate their levels of satisfaction in covering the presidential campaign. The results reveal that all things considered, 25 per cent said they were very satisfied, 51.1 per cent said they were fairly satisfied, 14.8 per cent said they were somewhat dissatisfied and only 1.1 per cent said they were very dissatisfied.

Table 3
Foreign Journalists and their Work Patterns

	<i>fre</i>	%
Types of stories		
Analysis/commentary	13	14.6
Spot news	10	11.2
Feature	10	11.2
Interview	4	4.5
Others	52	58.4
Main sources		
Newspaper	83	88.3
Wire Services	46	48.9
Television	45	47.9
Magazine	43	45.7
Radio	29	30.9
News Transmission Channel		
Computer	48	51.1
Telephone	26	27.7
Facsimile	21	22.3
Television feed	16	17.0
Air courier or air mail	13	13.8
Radio feed	5	5.3
Telex	1	1.1
Levels of satisfaction		
Very satisfied	22	25.0
Fairly satisfied	45	51.1
Somewhat dissatisfied	13	14.8
Very dissatisfied	1	1.1
No opinion	7	8.0

Table 4
Topics Foreign Journalists Were Most Interested in During the Presidential Election Coverage

Topics	highly interested		some interest		not interested	
	fre	%	fre	%	fre	%
China's Missile tests, military exercise	84	95.5	4	4.5	0	0.0
Taiwan-China relationship	85	94.4	5	5.6	0	0.0
Presidential election results	79	90.8	6	6.9	2	2.3
International implications	55	64.0	27	31.4	4	4.7
Candidate policies	45	52.9	34	40.0	6	7.1
Qualification of candidates	13	15.7	45	54.2	25	30.1
Responses of Taiwanese 'man-in-street'	35	40.7	40	46.5	11	12.8
Campaign activities	28	33.7	41	49.4	14	16.9
Candidate images	24	27.9	47	54.7	15	17.4
Assembly election results	14	16.5	41	48.2	30	35.3

No significant difference was found between male and female journalists in their levels of satisfaction in election coverage. And language ability (proficiency in Chinese or English) seemed to make no difference in election coverage satisfaction.

▣ *Impression of the degree of democracy and freedom of the press*

Respondents were asked to indicate their impression of the degree of democracy and freedom of the press in Taiwan through two open-ended questions: 1) What is your impression of the degree of democracy in Taiwan as observed in your coverage of election campaign and voting itself? 2) What is your general impression of the degree of freedom of the Taiwan press observed during your stay here?

Most respondents gave brief positive statements like 'Very good' and 'Very free', respectively, to the questions, while others said 'Acceptable level of democracy' and 'pretty free media'.

Among those with more critical replies were correspondents who spend more time in the region on a regular basis. Sandra Burton, Mandarin-speaking Hong Kong-based correspondent for *Time* magazine, said the state of democracy 'was very impressive, notwithstanding such continuing problems as KMT domination of the three main TV networks, political corruption and vote-buying at local and county levels'.

She said the press was 'free in principle if not in fact. Broadcast networks still dominated by the ruling party president; Taipei newspapers slanted toward KMT and New Party; cable TV slanted toward DPP; News and analysis is therefore contradictory in the eyes of a foreigner who does not know the bias of each media outlet'.

Three foreign correspondents based permanently in Taipei gave the most critical assessments, as might be expected. Margaret Dawson, a two-year resident correspondent for *Business Week* magazine, said 'Taiwan cannot reach full democracy until there is truly a separation of party (KMT) and government. Also, there remains a problem with vote-buying and other elements of corruption'.

On the press question, Dawson said 'Taiwan has improved vastly in this area in the past five years. I personally, am under no threat of censorship. I think, however, local media still suffer from self-censorship and some, such as CTV, CTS, TTV are heavily influenced by the government'.

Leslie Chang, based in Taipei for *The Asian Wall Street Journal*, said the democratic framework is 'mostly in place, with the exception of government/party control of the three television networks. People need more time to develop the idea that things can change not only when government wants it to, but when people want it to'.

Chang said the press is 'pretty free and opinionated. Added to sloppy reporting is a lack of courage or mental discipline that would let them bring stories to their logical conclusion (which might be controversial)'.

Annie Huang, resident correspondent of The Associated Press, took a sharply different view. She said 'we noted a high degree of democracy in Taiwan. People were free to express their views and the political system works freely'.

She also gave the media good marks, 'the media have been very free in their coverage. Even the often-criticized TV networks had given fairly equal coverage to all candidates'.

Stephen Hutcheon, *Sydney Morning Herald*, visiting Taipei from his Beijing base, said there was a 'high degree' of democracy 'tempered by the fact that the KMT still has control of many of the news outlets and has money to burn'. He characterized the media as 'free but biased—the mainstream media, that is'.

'Casey' Ko Kim-ching of Hong Kong's Wharf cable TV called the degree of democracy in Taiwan 'unbelievably high, but vote-buying is a very big problem yet to be solved'. As for the press, he said, 'CTV, CTS and TTV are still controlled by an invisible "black hand" at various degrees, but the situation is improving. There is a need for TVBS and other cable TV stations to improve their accuracy.'

Tokyo-based British freelancer Peter Hadfield, said of Taiwan's democratic progress, 'They're not quite there yet but I'm encouraged'.

He said the press seems to give too much attention to President Lee. 'I know very little about the situation but it appears the press is gaining its freedom', he added.

Toeti Kakialatu, of the Indonesian news magazine *Gatra*, said democracy 'looks smooth above the water. However, there was no time to see the bottom of the river—rough, smooth or boiling'. On the press, he said Taipei's English-language newspapers are 'better than in my country'.

Nobumitsu Nagai is based in Manila for Japan's Mainichi Broadcasting System. He said, 'It seemed like much money was spent on the election campaign, such as banquets, flags and so on. I admit democracy exists here but they should think more about "non-commercialized" democracy'. As for freedom of the press, 'I didn't have any difficulty during coverage. It seems like freedom of the press is already well-established,' he concluded.

Ken Davies, senior economist with the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) based in London, said 'Taiwan has obviously progressed rapidly from a one-party dictatorship to a multi-party parliamentary system. But it still has a long way to go before it can be called "fully democratic".'

'There still seems to be a strong government bias in the media in general. But it is worth noting that the same comments could be made about some European countries'.

■ Conclusion

The record numbers of foreign correspondents and workers for foreign media covering the election were mostly from Europe, Asia, and the US. Nearly 36 per cent represented daily newspapers. They were

relatively well-prepared for the task in terms of seniority, education, and language capability, although most had to rely on English-language briefings and sources.

Journalists' covered the events according to their own outlets' needs, but certain aspects of the story attracted the most attention. China's missile tests, the Taiwan-China relationship and presidential election results were the topics of overwhelming interest, mentioned by over 90 per cent of respondents in each case. Two other topics—international implications (impact on the US, Japan, or Hong Kong) and candidates' policies—were mentioned by a majority of respondents.

A majority of the respondents said they were satisfied with their coverage of the election. In the open-ended responses, most gave good marks to Taiwan's progress in democracy and the high level of press freedom although some indicated that 'there was still some way to go' towards improvement in both categories.

Because this was the first direct election for the Chinese in selecting a leader, the most heavily-covered event ever in Taiwan, and among the most heavily-covered elections in Asian history, each category covered by this survey represents a benchmark of sorts against which future surveys of election coverages may be measured.

This includes future Taiwan elections for there is no guarantee that future democratic exercises and press coverage of elections will be as exemplary.

The gaps and shortcomings in this survey may themselves be bases for improvements in future research endeavours. One problem identified incidentally is the difficulty in getting busy journalists to sit still long enough to fill out a questionnaire while in the midst of covering a major story and before rushing off to the airport for the next assignment. Ideally, any such future survey would be in languages besides English—Japanese and Chinese together with English would have covered a majority of the foreign correspondents.

Most importantly, in assessments of democratic progress and development of press freedom, as was the case earlier in economic reforms, Taiwan is creating a model against which progress in Mainland China may be measured in the future.

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