

## **The State of the Field: Studies of Media and Communications in Taiwan**

Ming-yeh T. Rawnsley

Centre of Taiwan Studies, SOAS, University of London, &  
China Policy Institute, University of Nottingham, UK

### **Abstract:**

This paper will survey and critically engage in the studies of media and communications in Taiwan, with a particular focus on publications during the 2000s. In the context of Taiwan's dramatic process of liberalisation and democratisation since the 1980s, to research the content and the structure of the media in Taiwan is, to echo Yuezhi Zhao's frustration in her study of the Chinese media, like shooting 'at a target that appears easy to focus on at first sight, but is in actuality rather elusive'.

On the surface, the ways the media are organised and function seem to remain largely similar over time: broadcasting (television and radio), print media (newspapers and magazines) and the so called 'new media' (from cable, satellite to internet and social media). However upon closer examination, the roles of the state, the market, the journalists/media producers and the audiences have all been experiencing serious transformation in relation to the changing domestic environment and to other stakeholders. For example, the increasing deregulation has allowed the media in Taiwan to be ranked one of the most free in the world by Freedom House. Meanwhile the media practitioners often succumb to the pressure of the market and compromise professionalism. Consequently many media watch groups are established among the civil society to first monitor the performance of media professionals, but have more recently become involved in social movements and amateur media productions, such as citizen journalism.

Moreover, the multi-directional flows of information, culture and communications within the contexts of globalization and regionalization, the media in Taiwan inevitably realign its geopolitical relations with other media markets and streams of flow in the global media universe. In addition, the advancement and convergence of communications technologies and platforms have added further challenges to the methods of media and communications studies in Taiwan. In response to the highly unstable and rapidly evolving national and international media landscape, what types of research questions have been addressed by media scholars in Taiwan especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? How are the concepts of media political economy, public sphere and cultural imperialism interpreted and applied onto Taiwan's media and

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communications? What lessons have we learned from these approaches? What are the emerging topics and paradigms in the field and why?

An overview of Taiwan media research places us in a privileged position to explore the social and political changes on the island. It not only reaffirms that media both reflect and is shaped by the society in which it is situated, but also further reminds us of the fact that Taiwan is very much a part of the regional and global media and cultural flows. Therefore as Li-yun Lin has observed, the two major camps of media studies in Taiwan – localization vs. internationalization – are both heavily influenced by global trends. Yet the two camps seldom engage in interdisciplinary dialogues, which is certainly a serious weakness of the field and requires immediate attention of the scholars to seek common solutions.