JANUARY 2021

Protecting Democracy in an Age of Disinformation

Lessons from Taiwan

AUTHORS

Jude Blanchette

Scott Livingston

Bonnie S. Glaser

Scott Kennedy

A Report of the CSIS Freeman Chair in China Studies, China Power Project, and Trustee Chair in Chinese Business and Economics

CSIS | CENTER FOR STRATEGIC & INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

JANUARY 2021

Protecting Democracy in an Age of Disinformation

Lessons from Taiwan

AUTHORS
Jude Blanchette
Scott Livingston
Bonnie S. Glaser
Scott Kennedy

A Report of the CSIS Freeman Chair in China Studies, China Power Project, and Trustee Chair in Chinese Business and Economics

CSIS | CENTER FOR STRATEGIC & INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

About CSIS

The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) is a bipartisan, nonprofit policy research organization dedicated to advancing practical ideas to address the world's greatest challenges.

Thomas J. Pritzker was named chairman of the CSIS Board of Trustees in 2015, succeeding former U.S. senator Sam Nunn (D-GA). Founded in 1962, CSIS is led by John J. Hamre, who has served as president and chief executive officer since 2000.

CSIS's purpose is to define the future of national security. We are guided by a distinct set of values—nonpartisanship, independent thought, innovative thinking, cross-disciplinary scholarship, integrity and professionalism, and talent development. CSIS's values work in concert toward the goal of making real-world impact.

CSIS scholars bring their policy expertise, judgment, and robust networks to their research, analysis, and recommendations. We organize conferences, publish, lecture, and make media appearances that aim to increase the knowledge, awareness, and salience of policy issues with relevant stakeholders and the interested public.

CSIS has impact when our research helps to inform the decisionmaking of key policymakers and the thinking of key influencers. We work toward a vision of a safer and more prosperous world.

CSIS is ranked the number one think tank in the United States as well as the defense and national security center of excellence for 2016-2018 by the University of Pennsylvania's "Global Go To Think Tank Index."

CSIS does not take specific policy positions; accordingly, all views expressed herein should be understood to be solely those of the author(s).

Center for Strategic & International Studies
1616 Rhode Island Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20036
202-887-0200 | www.csis.org

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Doublethink Labs for their assistance with background research. We also extend our gratitude to our colleagues on the CSIS External Relations team, led by Ali Corwin and Jeeah Lee, for their support in the production of this report.

This report was made possible by the generous support of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States (TECRO). All opinions expressed herein should be understood to be solely those of the authors and are not influenced in any way by any donation.

Contents

1

Executive Summary

- Taiwan has long defended itself from political meddling, including disinformation, by the People's Republic of China (PRC). Attempts to influence Taiwan's domestic politics have increased in both intensity and severity following the election of Tsai Ing-wen in 2016, with Beijing continuing to target the basic underpinnings of Taiwan's democratic system.
- The disinformation campaigns carried out by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) are often obscured by the secrecy and opacity of the CCP's "united front" approach, which makes it difficult to accurately diagnose and right-size the problem of disinformation, complicating efforts to craft effective solutions.
- Equally challenging is the constantly evolving nature of CCP disinformation activities writ large. Emerging technologies, new approaches to media and communication, and the opportunity to learn from the successful strategies of other malign actors such as Russia mean that the CCP's ongoing disinformation offenses are iterating new best practices and becoming increasingly adept at exploiting media and social media platforms in target countries.
- While CCP disinformation campaigns pose a clearly identifiable threat to the United States and Taiwan, they are only one part of a larger disinformation problem facing democracies in this era of instant and omnipresent communication technologies. Indeed, the experience of both Taiwan and the United States suggest that rival political parties are incentivized to exaggerate and weaponize charges of "foreign interference" against each other—charges which often are more damaging to underlying trust levels in a democracy than the original foreign disinformation attacks themselves.
- Taiwan's multilayered response to the problems of foreign-directed disinformation offers important lessons for the United States as it confronts the threat of disinformation attacks from the PRC, including:

- The willingness to utilize new digital tools to improve government information services and provide responses to disinformation efforts;
- Efforts to create more media-literate citizens through education and training; and
- Rooting these initiatives in a wider defense of free speech, democratic norms, governance institutions, and civil society.

2

Introduction

Disinformation and Democracy

While disinformation has long plagued political discourse, it has found a new foothold in the current era, with many democracies suffering from growing political polarization, an increasingly commercialized media environment, the rise of social media platforms to become the de facto public square, and historically low levels of trust in governing institutions.[1] Indeed, so pervasive is the problem of modern-day disinformation that researchers at the University of Oxford have identified governments and non-state actors in 70 countries carrying out organized social media manipulation worldwide, or what they call the "global disinformation order."[2]

The problem of disinformation has been particularly acute in the United States. Allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election and the resulting explosion in public awareness of digital disinformation have permanently altered understanding of how malign actors can use new technologies and social media to attack democratic politics and, more importantly, how susceptible free and pluralistic democratic societies are to this threat.

These concerns have recently spread to include disinformation attacks by China. In early September 2020, William Evanina, the director of the U.S. National Counterintelligence and Security Center, warned that China "is expanding its influence efforts to shape the policy environment in the United States, pressure political figures it views as opposed to China's interests, and counter criticism of China. Beijing recognizes its efforts might affect the presidential race."[3] During a May 2020 media briefing, Special Envoy and Coordinator of the State Department's Global Engagement Center Lea Gabrielle also pointed to Chinese disinformation activities surrounding the then emerging Covid-19 pandemic.[4] According to Gabrielle, "Beijing has engaged in an aggressive information campaign to try and reshape the global narrative around Covid . . .. It's doing this in attempt to make the world see China as the global leader in the response rather than the source of the pandemic."

The United States is no stranger to foreign disinformation campaigns, having been on the receiving end of a sustained and powerful effort by the Soviet Union during the Cold War and a fairly adept practitioner itself.[5] However, profound technological, social, and political changes have occurred subsequently that present important new challenges in both accurately identifying the origins of disinformation as well as for designing effective responses that avoid damaging the integrity of democratic institutions, or the values that underpin them.[6]

The challenge of disinformation, including foreign disinformation attacks, is exacerbated by features inherent in open, democratic, and market-based political and economic systems. These characteristics offer malign actors, both foreign and domestic, a multitude of vectors through which to attack and exploit structural dynamics that are widely considered to be inherent goods (e.g., pluralism, openness, and tolerance for dissenting speech). So pronounced is the problem that some are now suggesting curtailments of free speech in order to limit the space for disinformation.[7]

Given the rising tide of domestic and foreign disinformation, including the likely threat of future PRC-directed disinformation attacks, it is paramount that the United States begin to take serious and innovative steps to limit, if not reverse, the damage. Fortunately, there are comparative case studies which offer important lessons on how to combat disinformation (and, equally as important, how *not* to). In this regard, few societies have been subject to as many direct disinformation campaigns as Taiwan, which for decades has been under nearly unceasing information warfare attacks from the PRC, owing to its long-held goal to "reunify" the island under Beijing's control. After the election of Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) presidential candidate Tsai Ing-wen in 2016, China's efforts to disrupt Taiwan's political system and degrade popular support for its government reached new heights, culminating in the lead-up to the January 2020 presidential election. In response to these attacks, Taiwan adopted unprecedented—and highly innovative—measures to minimize the damage from external disinformation without restricting free speech of individuals or the media.

This report examines Taiwan's experience in combatting foreign and domestic disinformation and draws out lessons and implications for the United States. The methods and tools employed by Taiwan's government to combat disinformation and foreign interference highlight the strengths of its governing institutions but also the emergent challenges other democracies will confront if they are to effectively govern the public square while preserving the open and pluralistic nature of their underlying political system.

3

Beijing's Approach to Political Warfare in Taiwan

> "In broadest definition, political warfare is the employment of all the means at a nation's command, short of war, to achieve its national objectives." – George Kennan, 1948[8]

> "Anyone wanting to overthrow a political regime must create public opinion and do some preparatory ideological work." – Mao Zedong, 1962[9]

To contextualize Beijing's disinformation efforts in Taiwan, it is helpful to first briefly review the CCP's long-standing use of political warfare in general, as well as its well-developed system of "united front" work, its primary tool for coopting members of society outside the CCP and influencing foreign political outcomes. As Toshi Yoshihara explains, the CCP utilizes political warfare to "deflect hostile narratives abroad, stifle international dissent against Beijing's domestic and foreign policies, encourage overseas support to China's positions, sow divisions within the political systems of competitors in order to weaken them or tie them down, and minimize blowback against Chinese assertiveness, revanchism, and aggression."[10] In this discussion, it should be made clear that "disinformation" is only a subcomponent of China's overall political warfare tool kit, and one that should not be conflated with other specific tools or approaches. Furthermore, it is also important to point out that neither political warfare, nor disinformation, is unique to the CCP.[11]

One of the most potent (and prominent) tools used for political warfare is the ecosystem of individuals and organizations, known as the "United Front," working through heterodox and hybrid means to support and achieve the goals of the CCP. Dating back to the early history of the CCP, united front is a system and a doctrine that emerged from the party's asymmetric weaknesses compared to its domestic (and, later, international) rivals and thus arose out of a need to develop means to realize political outcomes without significant financial or military strength. Through various means related to

cooption, influence, pressure, and suasion, the CCP has developed an increasingly refined system for utilizing non-CCP members to pursue the CCP's own goals. Beijing's efforts to expand and strengthen the united front (called "united front work") are, according to one analyst, "designed to bring a diverse range of groups, and their representatives in particular, under the party's leadership."[12]

The United Front Work Department (UFWD), which reports directly to the CCP Central Committee and acts as a traffic cop for the various domestic and global united front exertions, has long been active in, and focused on, Taiwan and its political dynamics. Traditional channels of influence, including domestic political parties, overseas Taiwanese businesspeople and their extended families, and proliferating ownership of domestic media outlets have allowed the CCP to slowly and methodically build up its influence network in Taiwan since the early-1980s.

Utilizing and exploiting this robust network of "compatriots" on both sides of the Taiwan Strait to actively promote "one China," the UFWD and the larger ecosystem of United Front actors have become an important conduit and messaging channel for Beijing's preferred narratives and for active efforts to *disinform* Taiwan citizens, especially as public discourse has shifted onto digital and social media platforms and become increasingly commercialized.

China's united front work against Taiwan and others has also drawn from the evolution of Beijing's domestic propaganda system and media. Beginning in the late-1990s, there was a great expansion of publications and media outlets. The rise of the internet magnified this trend. Although there has been some pluralization of voices and perspectives, in the last decade the CCP has effectively brought the new media under its control and mobilized it for the party's own purposes. Not only have traditional official media outlets gone online and innovated how they reach their audiences, outlets, which appear at least partially independent, such as WeChat, Sina Weibo, Zhihu, and DouYin, in fact, serve the CCP's aims to reach audiences in the format, language, and style with which they are accustomed.[13]

Traditional channels of influence, including domestic political parties, overseas Taiwanese businesspeople and their extended families, and proliferating ownership of domestic media outlets have allowed the CCP to slowly and methodically build up its influence network in Taiwan since the early-1980s.

Given the explicit goal of the CCP to politically absorb Taiwan under the banner of "reunification" and its long commitment to control information and shape narratives, it is unsurprising, if still troubling, that such efforts against Taiwan are underway.

4

Taiwan's Disinformation Challenge

While UFWD activities in Taiwan constitute one source of disinformation, Taiwan's domestic information environment is influenced by a range of actors both domestic and foreign. At the international level, as referenced above, Beijing has long carried out information warfare offensives against Taiwan in pursuit of its goal of "national reunification." These pressures have increased in recent years in line with rising CCP confidence and assertiveness, the relative ease of internet-enabled disinformation offensives, and, in particular, the ascension to power since 2016 of Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen, a leader whom Beijing deems as supporting Taiwan independence and, therefore, hostile to the CCP's reunification mission and China's broader interests. In addition, Taiwan's very existence as a democratic rebuke to the socialist authoritarian model offered by Beijing has likely further strengthened China's resolve to degrade and erode domestic faith in the durability of the island's democratic institutions.

Domestically, Taiwan enjoys a healthy yet fractious political environment. The ruling DPP and its rival Kuomintang (KMT) have dominated for the last 70 years, but a host of smaller parties have arisen, often centered around a specific issue or individual, adding to the variety of political voices. At the same time, Taiwan maintains a lively online sector protected by constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech, publishing, and assembly. According to Freedom House, which ranked Taiwan as the second-freest country in Asia in 2020, the island's "private discussion is open and free, and there were no reports of the government illegally monitoring online communication in 2019."[14] The government also does not restrict internet access.[15] Much like in the United States, the resulting open information environment provides fertile ground for rumor, conspiracy, and innuendo to take root and spread.

The risk of domestic disinformation activities is accentuated by the aforementioned existence of CCP-friendly interests located in Taiwan, including both major entrepreneurs with significant

business in China as well as national media companies that are sometimes influenced or financed by China.[16] These individuals and entities provide further conduits and legitimization for CCP messaging activities in Taiwan.

This varied landscape complicates efforts to attribute disinformation campaigns to any one actor, and while there has been an explosion of recent research on PRC disinformation campaigns targeting Taiwan, there remain critical gaps in understanding of the ecosystem of state- and non-state actors employed to influence Taiwan's domestic politics.[17] Such gaps lead to vague assertions that a given instance of disinformation is "Beijing-backed" or "China-linked" when in fact no specific or verifiable evidence exists. This also leads to false-positives, where an assertion of a Beijing-backed campaign is more likely explained by domestic partisan politics or actions taken by individual "patriotic" netizens.

In summary, while it is certain that Beijing is behind a rising number of disinformation attacks, it is not true that they are behind them all. Local Taiwanese play their own part in originating, disseminating, and amplifying domestic disinformation.

5

Disinformation Efforts during the 2020 Presidential Campaign

In May 2019, eight months before Taiwan's 2020 elections, Taiwan's Political Warfare Bureau of the Ministry of Defense and its National Security Bureau delivered a report to the Legislative Yuan entitled *Countermeasures Against Chinese Disinformation Psychological Warfare*.[18] The report stated that the CCP had begun to copy Russia's operational model for annexing Crimea and was utilizing the freedom of Taiwan's democratic society and information networks to disseminate "disputed information" and conduct "cognitive warfare," with the aim of splitting Taiwan's military strength and consuming the energy of Taiwan's government and national security teams.[19]

The report listed four Chinese disinformation methods, four tactics and objectives, and five potential countermeasures from Taiwan (summarized in Table 1).

Table 1: Summary of *Countermeasures against Chinese Disinformation Psychological Warfare*

FOUR METHODS OF DISINFORMATION		
1.	**"Create – Spread – Absorb"**	The CCP creates content about Taiwanese news events and spreads it throughout state, social, and independent media, such as WeChat, where it is absorbed by Taiwanese media platforms.
2.	**"Edit – Disseminate – Influence"**	Mainland media selectively edits controversial events and floods social media with their biased version via "50 centers" and cyber shills in order to alter public perception.
3.	**"Falsify – Plant – Harvest"**	Mainland media creates false content and uploads it to content farms, then waits for it to be picked up by social media groups in Taiwan.
4.	**"Guide – Legitimize – Conform"**	The CCP directs mainland media and Taiwanese pro-CCP media to publish their content, which legitimizes its claims and prompts other outlets to follow suit.
FOUR TACTICS AND OBJECTIVES		
1.	**Altering Truths**	Exaggerate or embellish a regular news item to make it more controversial.
2.	**Falsification**	Knowingly and deliberately disseminate falsehoods.
3.	**Sowing Division**	Push partisan narratives and cherry-pick facts to extremify public opinion.
4.	**Intimidation**	Project authority and downplay the strength of Taiwan's institutions.
FIVE COUNTERMEASURES		
1.	**Adhere to Principles of Law**	Leverage human rights, freedom of speech, and administrative neutrality.
2.	**Increase Network Defense**	Enlist the aid of defense and tech industries; educate the public on disinformation awareness; launch real-time counter-messages to dispel fake news.
3.	**Learn Adversary's Tactics**	Understand the CCP's disinformation tool kit.
4.	**Form Global Coalition**	Establish an alliance of open democracies to fight against false information and cyber-warfare.
5.	**Develop Offensive Strategy**	Leverage big data technology to monitor internet activity of CCP-backed disinformation agents and proactively strike.

This framework provides a useful comparison for the disinformation activities observed in Taiwan's January 2020 presidential elections. These activities include numerous personal rumors levied against incumbent President Tsai, allegations of voter fraud, and false claims about the DPP's political activities. While not all of these activities can be directly attributed to China—indeed, some may have originated domestically—they offer a sense of the developing disinformation tool kit used by both domestic and international actors in Taiwan.

- **Content Farms:** Throughout the election cycle, content farms mass-produced "clickbait" articles to influence public opinion against the ruling DPP party. Foremost among these is the Taiwan-based Mission content farm, which circulated fake stories alleging that the Tsai administration spent $102 million erecting social housing in Paraguay and billions more on outdated U.S. fighter jets.[20] Mission is important because its content is widely shared on Facebook in Taiwan.[21] But much of it appears to be disinformation: a sample review of 39 Mission articles by the fact-checking group Cofacts found that only 4 of the 39 stories were true.[22] Although there are no official links between Mission and the CCP, Mission's owner, Lin Cheng Kuo (林正國), has been photographed attending events held by China's state-owned Hai Xia Dao Bao (海峡导报) news station and is an active member of Taiwan's Beijing-friendly New Party.[23] In January 2018, the New Party published a letter stressing that "Taiwanese independence in any form is illegal, and the time has come to face unification."[24]
- **Social Media Campaigns:** At 21 million users in Taiwan, Line is Taiwan's most popular messaging app and a potent vehicle for disinformation. According to Puma Shen, an assistant professor at National Taipei University and director of DoubleThink Labs, half of the fake news circulating in Line groups prior to the election originated in China.[25] Shen claims that much of this is related to united front activity, with not only Chinese operators but also ethnic Han Chinese in Malaysia and Taiwan accepting funding from the UFWD to set up content farms and fan pages to disseminate pro-CCP content.[26] In early 2020, cyber-social analytics company Graphika identified a cluster of pro-Beijing Twitter accounts that turned highly active in the run-up to the presidential election. In total, these accounts produced 109,954 tweets that protested Taiwan's recently passed Anti-Infiltration bill (more on the bill below), disseminated PRC-sourced disinformation claims relating to Taiwan and Hong Kong, and claimed the DDP's "Green Terror" was "scarier than China."[27]
- **Influencer Campaigns:** In a 2020 report, the cybersecurity firm Recorded Future stated that it had identified "Chinese provincial governments recruiting 'mainland-friendly, pro-unification' Taiwanese influencers through Facebook posts, with the aim of 'training a group of Taiwanese influencers with distinct political affiliations.'"[28] According to Recorded Future, these listings are often posted on behalf of the government by a Taiwanese local, with reported salaries ranging from $730 to $1,460 per month.[29] That compares to an average monthly wage in Taiwan of approximately $1,780. While it is unclear what specific content such influencers would promote, it can reasonably be expected that pro-Beijing messaging would be one element of their communications, which could include disinformation.
- **Defamation Campaigns:** In addition to these broader social media campaigns, a large percentage of disinformation efforts have focused on disparaging President Tsai personally. For example, in a seeming re-invocation of the Obama birth-certificate conspiracy, various sources, including Zhang Xida (张希达), host of Beijing broadcaster China National Radio, have questioned the legitimacy of President Tsai's doctoral degree from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE).[30] The conspiracy gained so much traction that in October 2019, LSE issued a statement

confirming Tsai's credentials.[31] On YouTube, an account called Jianghu Bai Xiaosheng (江湖百晓生) published a video in October 2018 alleging that President Tsai was the mistress of Lee Teng-hui, Taiwan's first democratically elected president.[32] The video eventually reached over 1 million viewers.[33] According to a source from Taiwan's National Security Bureau, Jianghu Bai Xiaosheng derives most of its content from the Chinese state-owned tabloid newspaper *The Global Times*.[34]

The examples above demonstrate Beijing's willingness to leverage all forms of modern social media—YouTube, Line, WeChat, and Twitter—to transmit disinformation. Likewise, the CCP relies on a wide range of disinformation agents, from ethnic Chinese to Taiwanese citizens, as well as overseas Chinese operators in Malaysia and other countries. This outsourcing further blurs disinformation attribution efforts when, for example, pro-CCP content is traced to a company in Southeast Asia.

6

Disinformation Efforts during the Covid-19 Pandemic

Disinformation efforts linked to Covid-19 provide additional insight into the Taiwanese information environment and how nominally independent online trolls both contribute and factor into CCP-backed disinformation efforts.

In Taiwan, the onset of the pandemic coincided with the presidential election. On January 10, 2020, the eve of the election, unattributed rumors began to circulate on Taiwan's social media claiming that Taiwan had confirmed Covid-19 cases and recommending that voters wear masks to the polls. The rumors were quickly quashed by independent and government fact-checks that afternoon and the morning of January 11, respectively.[35] In the end, this first round of Covid-19 rumors did not have their intended effect: overall voter turnout was 74.9 percent, compared to 66.3 percent in 2016, resulting in the re-election of Beijing's disfavored candidate Tsai Ing-wen.[36]

As Covid-19 evolved into a global pandemic, Taiwan witnessed a steady increase in disinformation efforts centered on the disease. In late February, a barrage of similarly worded posts appeared on Facebook claiming that the Covid-19 outbreak was out of control in Taiwan and that the government was actively suppressing national case counts.[37] These posts employed an "appeal to authority" approach whereby the publisher claimed that they or a close family member had heard from some government insider about the truth of the contagion. (Figure 1). Others claimed to have directly witnessed suspicious deaths concealed by the government (Figure 2). As the campaign developed, additional messages used forged government documents to suggest that certain cities would go into lockdown, that the global internet would be shut off, or that various localities were hiding large numbers of cases (Figure 3).

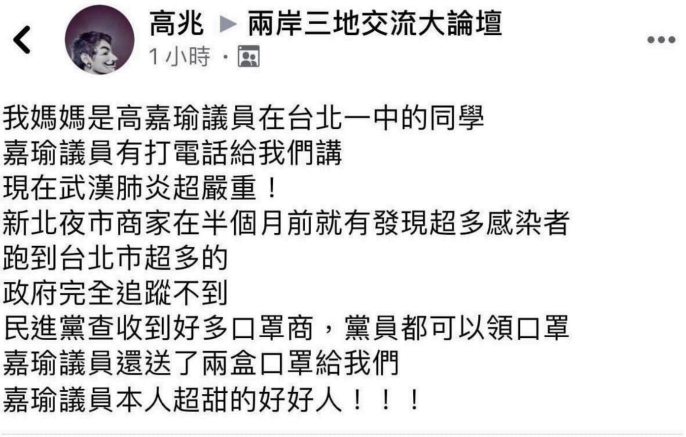

Figure 1: "Councilor Kao was a high school classmate of my mom, she informed us the outbreak of COVID-19 is out of control."

Source: Screenshots - research by Doublethink Labs.

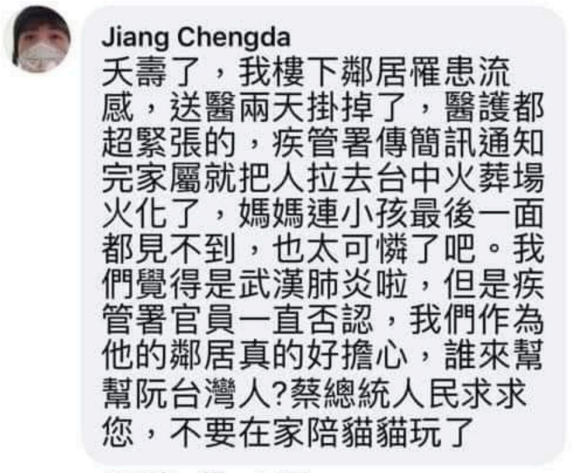

Figure 2: Claiming that a neighbor was diagnosed with the flu, died, and was quickly cremated by the government. The poster believes it to be Covid-19. [From a Facebook discussion thread]

Source: Screenshots - research by Doublethink Labs.

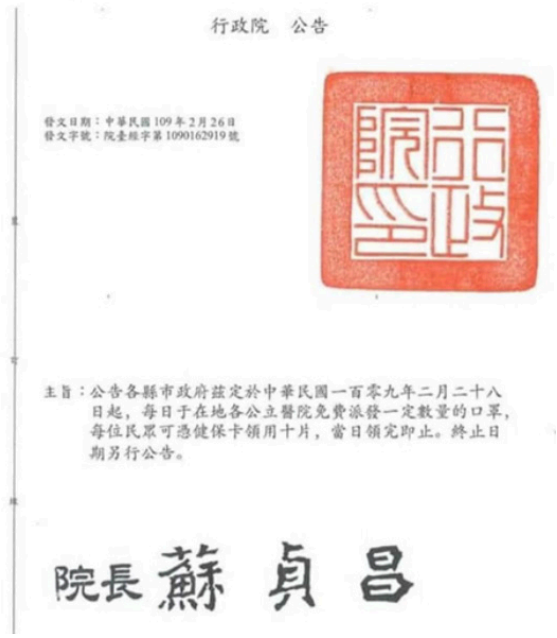

Figure 3: Forged official document from Executive Yuan, stating that 10 free masks would be provided for each NHI card holder."

Source: Screenshots - research by Doublethink Labs.

Forged official document from Taoyuan city government, stating that Taoyuan will go into lockdown.

Source: Screenshots - research by Doublethink Labs.

On February 29, the Ministry of Justice Investigation Bureau released a statement which concluded that most of the disinformation targeting Taiwan had originated from social media platforms in China.[38] According to the statement, these efforts were intended to "create a panic" and had "seriously jeopardized Taiwan's social stability."[39] Analysts later attributed these rumors to China's voluntary army of "little pinks" (小粉红), a loose coalition of nationalistic netizens.[40] Other reports suggested that some aspects of the campaign also bore the hallmarks of the Chinese troll collective Diba (帝吧), which frequently engages in large-scale pro-CCP online "expeditions" on popular Taiwan and Hong Kong websites.[41] Although these "little pinks" are not formally associated with the PRC state or the CCP, they have often been praised by state media, and some news report have suggested that the CCP feeds them content.[42]

Overall, the impact of their campaigns appears to have been limited. Many of the posts made sloppy mistakes, often lapsing into mainland linguistic conventions which revealed their true origin.[43] For example, online netizens used the mainland term bao'an (保安) for "security" instead of baoquan (保全), which is more commonly used in Taiwan.[44] Some posts mixed up traditional and simplified characters: for example, one spelled the Chinese word "corpse" (shiti) using the simplified "shi" (尸) rather than the traditional character (屍) used in Taiwan.[45] On Weibo, Chinese users openly bragged about spreading false rumors in Taiwan.[46]

Notably, the "little pinks" efforts in Taiwan may help expose larger global messaging campaigns linked to the Chinese government. In March, the *New York Times* reported on a mass text message campaign in the United States that claimed a national lockdown or quarantine was soon to be implemented in the United States.[47] Like the "Covid is out of control" narrative spun in Taiwan, these messages relied on an "appeal to authority" approach claiming that some friend or close family member had heard from an insider government source that the United States would soon implement such directives.[48] In April, U.S. intelligence agencies confirmed that this messaging campaign was amplified and promoted by Chinese operatives.[49] While it is likely the actors in Taiwan were unaffiliated with those targeting the United States, it is possible the tools and narratives developed by China's "little pinks" in the earlier Taiwan campaign were subsequently adapted by state actors and applied in the United States.

7

Taiwan's Disinformation Response

To combat China's growing disinformation campaign, Taiwan has responded with several tools designed to limit the impact of such attacks. This section details the approach adopted in Taiwan to mitigate disinformation efforts through: (1) innovative new tools, (2) strengthened legal prohibitions, and (3) the influence of a robust and healthy civil society.

Innovative New Tools

Many of the central problems relating to disinformation stem from the existence of powerful new distribution tools that not only challenge an individual's ability to digest multiple conflicting narratives but also simultaneously interfere with—and to a certain extent destroy—the attention required for such analysis. Writer Nicholas Carr calls this chronic state of distraction the "shallows" of comprehension.[50]

In light of this reality, the government of Taiwan has relied on its civil servants to respond to disinformation efforts by utilizing the language of the modern internet to craft their response. In a modern-day version of "using the barbarian's technology to control the barbarians," Taiwan's administration has developed several new and innovative techniques to quickly respond to identified disinformation efforts and push back with equally engaging and memetic content.[51]

For example, at a December 2019 speech at Pingtung University, Taiwan's digital minister, Audrey Tang, noted that Taiwan had installed "meme engineering" teams in each government department to quickly respond to disinformation efforts and respond within 60 minutes with messages "packaged in such a way that you can't help but want to share it."[52] Minister Tang has labelled this the "humor over rumor" approach.[53] At an October 2019 online presentation, Tang explained that each department had adopted a "2-2-2" system to respond to rumors trending on social ministry. According to Tang, within

an hour, each department should create a clarifying meme with no more than 20 words in its title, utilizing less than 200 characters in its text, and containing only two images.[54] In Tang's own words:

> We have evidence to show that everybody who have seen this clarification through the community will never share the original disinformation again. In a sense, it acts as an inoculation, as a memetic vaccine, so that when we phrase something as very funny instead of correcting people's mistakes, then people would actually, naturally, voluntarily share our disinformation counter-clarification message.[55]

In May 2019, as part of its report on disinformation countermeasures, the Political Warfare Bureau of the Ministry of National Defense announced a similar effort, noting that it had established a "rapid handling team for false information" to respond to disinformation based on the principle of "fighting every false message" and "clarifying every false message."[56] According to the announcement, Taiwan's National Security Bureau would also utilize big data systems analysis to understand and analyze CCP disinformation tactics in real time and "strengthen countermeasures."[57]

Taiwan's efforts to ensure the quick dissemination of authoritative content is not limited to the digital space. Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, Taiwan's Central Epidemic Command Center (CECC) held daily briefings between January and June (and weekly since June) to keep the public informed and respond to disinformation.[58] These daily press conferences allowed the government to consolidate its public messaging around one official source.

Strengthened Legal Prohibitions

While Taiwan's innovative digital tools focus on rumor debunking, the government has also strengthened penalties against those spreading false information through legal amendment. A summary of major disinformation laws and regulations is contained in Table 2.

Table 2: Notable Disinformation-Related Legal Measures

TITLE	DATE	SUMMARY
Civil Servants Election and Recall Act (公職人員選舉罷免法)	Date Promulgated: May 14, 1980 Latest amendment: May 6, 2020	Article 104 of the act (revised in 2016) provides for punishment of up to five years in prison for those who cause others or the public at large to suffer losses by disseminating false information through text, images, videos, audio, or speeches.
Presidential and Vice- Presidential Election and Recall Act (總統副總統選舉罷免法)	Date Promulgated: August 9, 1995 Latest amendment: May 6, 2020	Under Article 90 of the act (inserted in 1995 and revised in 2003), anyone who spreads rumors or false sayings by text, picture, audio tape, video tape, speech, or other method for the purpose of influencing the election or recall prospects of a particular candidate and thus causing damages to the public or others shall be condemned to fixed-term imprisonment of not more than five years.
Social Order Maintenance Act (社會秩序維護法)	Date Promulgated: June 29, 1991 Latest amendment: December 31, 2019	Under Article 63.5 (since 1991), anyone spreading rumors in a way that undermines public order and peace shall be punished by detention of up to three days or a fine maximum of NT$30,000 ($1,068).
Anti-Infiltration Law (反滲透法)	Date Promulgated: January 15, 2020	Under Article 3, anyone who receives funding, instructions or donations from "external hostile forces" to organize political activities, contribute political donations, or lobby lawmakers will be penalized. The crimes carry a maximum sentence of a NT$10 million ($334,688) fine and five years in prison.[59]
Special Act for Prevention, Relief and Revitalization Measures for Severe Pneumonia with Novel Pathogens (嚴重特殊傳染性肺炎防治及紓困振興特別條例)	Date Promulgated: February 25, 2020 Latest Amendment: April 21, 2020	Under Article 14, anyone spreading misinformation regarding the epidemic is punishable by imprisonment for up to three years, a fine of up to NT$3 million ($106,815), or both.

However, as a technique for responding to disinformation, legal measures have their limitations. First, although the presence of the law may have some deterrent effect on domestic actors, it does little to stop a determined campaign from a nation-state. Closely related is the problem of attribution. The multitude of actors involved in disinformation activities, some of them foreign, complicates efforts to resolve the problem in domestic courts. There is also the question of timing. Formal legal actions simply do not provide the rapid-response time necessary to mitigate the immediate influence and effect of most disinformation campaigns. Therefore, while legal prohibitions are a necessary general defense, they must be supplemented with more immediate disinformation countermeasures.

Finally, current legislation does not clearly differentiate between disinformation and innocent or unintentional misinformation. For example, Article 104 of the Civil Servants Election and Recall Act provides for fixed-term imprisonment of up to five years for anyone who causes damage to the public or others by "disseminating rumor or spreading false sayings" for purposes of supporting or damaging a candidate or a political proposal. However, the article does not clarify that the individual must *knowingly* spread false content, a key criterion for most accepted definitions of disinformation. As it stands, Article 104 views misinformed users and deliberate disinformation agents as legally equivalent.

Civil Society

Just as the freedoms inherent in a democratic society make it uniquely vulnerable to disinformation, so too does a healthy and robust democratic civil society empower volunteer citizens, companies, and organizations to unite and respond to disinformation attacks. In this respect, Taiwan provides a number of examples for the United States to draw on.

The Taiwan FactCheck Center (TFC) is a non-profit organization jointly founded in 2018 by the Association for Quality Journalism and Taiwan Media Watch.[60] The TFC selects various items to fact-check at its daily meeting, which are then reviewed by three fact-checking personnel before publication. When posted, the fact-check will include the overall review process and provide references for each factual assertion. To avoid political bias, the TFC refuses donations from the government, political parties, and politicians. It also states that while it does not aim to achieve "absolute balance" between fact-checked political positions, it regularly reviews the statistics of fact-checked cases to ensure that a range of political voices are represented.[61]

The group g0v ("gov-zero") is a "decentralized civic tech community" in Taiwan working to foster better information transparency and promote greater citizen participation in governance.[62] Close links between Taiwan's hacker community and the Taiwanese government allow g0v-like initiatives to rapidly respond to disinformation efforts. For example, to prevent a run on medical-grade masks in the early days of the pandemic, Taiwanese hackers worked with live maps, distributed ledger technology, and chatbots to locate and quantify the mask situation in area pharmacies and update this inventory data in real time.[63] Digital Minister Audrey Tang then compiled all the digital maps onto one website for easy access.[64] According to news reports, more than 10 million citizens have used the Covid-19 mask apps as of June 2020.[65]

Civil society organizations, the government, and social media companies also work together in Taiwan to combat disinformation. The popular Line app, for example, hosts a fact-checking bot called Cofact, developed by g0v, which provides users a place to report and check on spam and misinformation. Line also collaborates with TFC to verify information and in September 2019 launched a global campaign to educate users on how to better identify fake news.[66] Facebook has also partnered with TFC to carry out fact-checking activities on its platform and conduct disinformation education campaigns among its Taiwan users.[67]

Taiwan's multifaceted approach to disinformation would not be possible without the high levels of public trust that exist in the country. A poll released by TVBS Poll Center on May 17 found that 91 percent of respondents approved of the Tsai administration's response to the pandemic.[68] A February poll by the Taiwanese Public Opinion Foundation graded the CECC's performance as 84 out of 100.[69] According to Puma Shen, "there is a high degree of trust in public officials in Taiwan, even those who identify with the opposition party."[70] While this reality seems inapposite to the United States, it is worth mentioning that just eight years ago, Taiwan experienced a "Sunflower Movement," which involved occupation of the national legislature and a 100,000+ strong protest against a trade deal with China.[71] That the Tsai administration was able to recapture public trust in so short a time speaks to the underlying strength of democratic nations for course correction in a time of public need.

Taiwan's multifaceted approach to disinformation would not be possible without the high levels of public trust that exist in the country.

8

Conclusion and Implications for the United States

Taiwan's experience confronting and combatting both foreign-directed and domestically produced disinformation provides important lessons for the United States as it confronts the prospect of Beijing-backed political interference. As the United States enters a period of intense and likely prolonged geostrategic rivalry with China, it is all but certain that the CCP will look for new means of influencing domestic politics and opinion.

Some key lessons from Taiwan's successful efforts to combat Chinese disinformation that the United States can learn from include:

- **Adopt fact-checking mechanisms.** The development and deployment of fact-checking "chatbots" on open platforms as well as invited onto closed platforms, is an effective way to combat both misinformation and disinformation. Chatbots can be used in real time and applied during political debates or on social media to rebuke false narratives.
- **Develop rapid response teams within government agencies to quickly correct the record and "fight disinformation with information."** Ideally, these efforts should take place at multiple levels and fora, including remarks by government spokespersons, the regular media, and social media. Identifying a false narrative quickly and providing factual information on the same platform on which the disinformation is spreading is an effective tool. Use of mainstream media or government press releases is likely to be less effective because they may be ignored by the public.
- **Coordinate among government, private sector, and civil society organizations.** By providing information to civil society organizations, government agencies can help get reliable information to the public. Increased intelligence sharing about the source, scope, and

attribution of disinformation where possible enables civil society to use means at its disposal to raise public awareness. Public access to government intelligence and private sector data is likely to lead to better academic research on disinformation as well as innovative solutions.

- **Promote media literacy.** Citizens should be educated to differentiate between fact and opinion. Media literacy requires time and resources but is likely to pay dividends in the long run. Educational curriculums should include media literacy training.
- **Appoint young civil servants familiar with technology to design and implement new tools to respond to disinformation challenges.** Just as the CCP's tools are continuing to evolve, so too should America evolve its governance processes to integrate new digital tools and techniques to better disseminate public information, improve public services, and develop new ways to push back on disinformation. The increased hiring of young coders, graphic designers, and data analysts within government departments could play a crucial role in upgrading government capabilities and services.

The "whack-a-mole" approach of combating individual cases of disinformation does not mean that democratic systems should simply throw up their hands and accept the inevitably of foreign disinformation attacks. But at the same time, it must be recognized that open, pluralistic systems will necessarily *and unavoidably* confront the problem of disinformation. Therefore, the question is not "what steps can be taken to completely eliminate disinformation?" but rather "how can democratic systems limit the spread and blunt the impact of disinformation while remaining free and open?" This, in turn, means a corresponding acceptance of some amount of foreign-induced disinformation as the price for maintaining open political systems.

Taiwan's success in combating disinformation points to a larger added advantage the island has over the United States. As noted above, there is a high degree of trust in the government by Taiwan's citizens, so efforts to have the government directly combat disinformation face relatively less resistance than in the highly polarized and low-trust environment in the United States.[72] Many of the strategies deployed there will likely be less effective in the United States under present conditions, with the partisan fragmentation of the media, the existence of domestic disinformation campaigns, and broader decline in social trust. That said, just as Taiwan responded to citizen discontent with new tools promoting citizen knowledge and participation, so too can America begin to work to repair its fractured body politic and put in place the necessary building blocks for an effective disinformation response. Just as countering Chinese mercantilism requires the United States to revitalize its workforce and infrastructure, the same is true in this space. Getting its "democratic" house in order is central to countering disinformation efforts by China, Russia, and others.

Just as Taiwan responded to citizen discontent with new tools promoting citizen knowledge and participation, so too can America begin to work to repair its fractured body politic and put in place the necessary building blocks for an effective disinformation response.

Finally, it is clear that effectively responding to Beijing's disinformation campaigns will require extensive international cooperation. Just as there is a need for greater coordination to respond to Chinese mercantilism and military aggression, the same applies in information and media. Democracies need to exchange intelligence about Chinese efforts and share best practices on how to reduce and counter disinformation campaigns. The efforts should include government agencies, media leaders, and civil society groups. Effectively resisting Chinese disinformation, whether directed at Taiwan, the United States, or elsewhere, will require sustained initiative involving governments and stakeholders.

9

About the Authors

Jude Blanchette holds the Freeman Chair in China Studies at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). Previously, he was engagement director at The Conference Board's China Center for Economics and Business in Beijing, where he researched China's political environment with a focus on the workings of the Communist Party of China and its impact on foreign companies and investors. Prior to working at The Conference Board, Blanchette was the assistant director of the 21st Century China Center at the University of California, San Diego.

Scott Livingston is a former fellow for the Freeman Chair in China Studies at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Bonnie S. Glaser is a senior adviser for Asia and the director of the China Power Project at CSIS, where she works on issues related to Asia-Pacific security with a focus on Chinese foreign and security policy. She is concomitantly a nonresident fellow with the Lowy Institute in Sydney, Australia, and a senior associate with the Pacific Forum. Ms. Glaser has worked for more than three decades at the intersection of Asia-Pacific geopolitics and U.S. policy. From 2008 to mid-2015, she was a senior adviser with the CSIS Freeman Chair in China Studies, and from 2003 to 2008, she was a senior associate in the CSIS International Security Program. Prior to joining CSIS, she served as a consultant for various U.S. government offices, including the Departments of Defense and State. Ms. Glaser has published widely in academic and policy journals, including the *Washington Quarterly*, *China Quarterly*, *Asian Survey*, *International Security*, *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, *American Foreign Policy Interests*, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, and *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, as well as in leading newspapers such as the *New York Times* and *International Herald Tribune* and in various edited volumes on Asian security. She is also a regular contributor to the Pacific Forum web journal *Comparative Connections*. She is currently a board member of the U.S. Committee of the Council for Security

Cooperation in the Asia Pacific and a member of both the Council on Foreign Relations and the International Institute for Strategic Studies. She served as a member of the Defense Department's Defense Policy Board China Panel in 1997. Ms. Glaser received her BA in political science from Boston University and her MA with concentrations in international economics and Chinese studies from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

Scott Kennedy is senior adviser and Trustee Chair in Chinese Business and Economics at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). A leading authority on Chinese economic policy, Kennedy has been traveling to China for over 30 years. His specific areas of expertise include industrial policy, technology innovation, business lobbying, U.S.-China commercial relations, and global governance. He is the author of *China's Risky Drive into New-Energy Vehicles* (CSIS, November 2018), *The Fat Tech Dragon: Benchmarking China's Innovation Drive* (CSIS, August 2017), and *The Business of Lobbying in China* (Harvard University Press, 2005). He has edited three books, including *Global Governance and China: The Dragon's Learning Curve* (Routledge, 2018). His articles have appeared in a wide array of policy, popular, and academic venues, including *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy,* and *China Quarterly*. He is currently writing a book tentatively titled, *The Power of Innovation: The Strategic Importance of China's High-Tech Drive*.

Endnotes

1 Throughout this report, the authors use "disinformation" in line with the definition offered by Wardle and Derakhshan, "information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organization or country." Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan, *Information Disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making* (Strasbourg, France: Council of Europe, September 2017), https://rm.coe.int/information-disorder-toward-an-interdisciplinary-framework-for-researc/168076277c. While it is beyond the scope of this brief report, it is important to note that the topic of "disinformation" more generally is plagued by vague and loose definitions, attribution without evidence, and the conceptual murkiness. Misinformation, disinformation, and influence operations are often used as synonyms or otherwise conflated, while the narrower topic of foreign-directed disinformation is incorrectly extracted from the larger discussion of disinformation, within which it belongs.

2 Samantha Bradshaw and Philip N. Howard, *The Global Disinformation Order: 2019 Global Inventory of Organised Social Media Manipulation* (Oxford: Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford, September 2019), https://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/93/2019/09/CyberTroop-Report19.pdf.

3 "Statement by NCSC Director William Evanina: Election Threat Update for the American Public," Office of the Director of National Intelligence, August 7, 2020, https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/press-releases/item/2139-statement-by-ncsc-director-william-evanina-election-threat-update-for-the-american-public.

4 "Briefing With Special Envoy Lea Gabrielle, Global Engagement Center Update on PRC Efforts to Push Disinformation and Propaganda around Covid," U.S. Department of State, May 8, 2020, https://www.state.gov/briefing-with-special-envoy-lea-gabrielle-global-engagement-center-update-on-prc-efforts-to-push-disinformation-and-propaganda-around-covid/.

5 Megan Ward, Shannon Pierson, and Jessica Beyer, *Formative Battles: Cold War Disinformation Campaigns and Mitigation Strategies* (Washington, DC: Wilson Center, August 2019), https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/cold_war_disinformation_campaign.pdf.

6 For a useful overview of the current day disinformation crisis, see Nina Jankowicz, *How to Lose the Information War* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2020). For historical context on the topics of disinformation and political warfare between great powers, see Thomas Rid, *Active Measures: The Secret History of Disinformation and Political Warfare* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020).

7 For a good overview of these debates, see Emily Bazelon, "Freedom of Speech Will Preserve Our Democracy," *New York Times Magazine*, October 18, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/13/magazine/free-speech.html.

8 "Policy Planning Staff Memorandum," U.S. Department of State, May 4, 1948, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945-50Intel/d269.

9 *Mao Tse-tung Unrehearsed, Talks and Letters, 1965-1971*, Stuart Schram, ed. (London, UK, 1974): 195.

10 Toshi Yoshihara, "Evaluating the Logic and Methods of China's United Front Work," *Orbis* 64, no. 2 (2020): 230–248, https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/04/evaluating-the-logic-and-methods-of-chinas-united-front-work/.

11 For a comprehensive and comparative overview of political warfare, see Linda Robinson et al., *Modern Political Warfare: Current Practices and Possible Response* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2018), https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1700/RR1772/RAND_RR1772.pdf.

12 Alex Joske, "The Party Speaks for You: Foreign interference and the Chinese Communist Party's United Front System," Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Report No. 32/2020, https://www.aspi.org.au/report/party-speaks-you.

13 Maria Repnikova, *Media Politics in China: Improvising Power under Authoritarianism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017). A helpful source closely tracking this space is David Bandurski's China Media Project, https://chinamediaproject.org/.

14 "Freedom in the World 2020: Taiwan," Freedom House, https://freedomhouse.org/country/taiwan/freedom-world/2020.

15 Ibid.

16 In May 2019, the Chinese convened 70 Taiwanese media leaders in Beijing and asked them to help cross-trait reunification efforts. The conference was co-hosted by Taiwan's Want Want China Times Media Group, which is "long suspected of taking direction from the Chinese government." Aaron Huang, *Combatting and Defeating Chinese Propaganda and Disinformation: A Case Study of Taiwan's 2020 Elections* (Cambridge, UK: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, July 2020), https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/combatting-and-defeating-chinese-propaganda-and-disinformation-case-study-taiwans-2020. In 2019, Reuters identified a variety of signed contracts between mainland Chinese government entities and Taiwan media groups. For example, China's Taiwan Affairs Office paid 30,000 yuan ($4,300) for two feature news stories about China's efforts to attract Taiwanese businesspeople. Yimou Lee and I-hwa Cheng. "Paid 'News': China Using Taiwan Media to Win Hearts and Minds on Island – Sources," Reuters, August 9, 2019, www.reuters.com/article/us-taiwan-china-media-insight/paid-news-china-using-taiwan-media-to-win-hearts-and-minds-on-island-sources-idUSKCN1UZ0I4.

17 Puma Shen, "China's Disinformation Campaign in Taiwan about Covid-19," National Bureau of Asian Research, July 24, 2020, https://www.nbr.org/publication/chinas-disinformation-campaign-in-taiwan-about-covid-19/; Casey Corcoran et al., *Disinformation Threat Watch: The Disinformation Landscape in East Asia and Implications for US Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, May 2019), https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/disinformation-threat-watch; Joshua Kurlantzick, "How China Is Interfering in Taiwan's Election," Council on Foreign Relations, November 7, 2019, https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/how-china-interfering-taiwans-election; and Insikt Group, *Chinese Influence Operations Evolve in Campaigns Targeting Taiwanese Elections, Hong Kong Protests* (Somerville, MA: Recorded Future, April 2020), https://go.recordedfuture.com/hubfs/reports/cta-2020-0429.pdf.

18 "To counteract China's false information, the Ministry of Defense established a rapid processing team" [反制中國假訊息 國防部成立快速處理小組], CNA News, May 1, 2019, https://www.cna.com.tw/news/aipl/201905010229.aspx.

19 "Countermeasures Against Chinese Disinformation Psychological Warfare" [中國假訊息心戰之因應對策], National Security Bureau, May 2, 2019, https://lis.ly.gov.tw/lydbmeetr/uploadn/108/1080502/01.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0ApykPJIB6pBcxpuIIepNTCN3JXWMH6vektu7PIHvTo8SvVjk2dLFbJfM.

20 William Kung et al., "Uncovering the Money and China Factor behind 'Mission' – Taiwan's Most Controversial Content Farm," *Taiwan Gazette*, July 24, 2020, https://www.taiwangazette.org/news/2020/7/22/uncovering-the-money-and-china-factor-behind-mission-taiwans-biggest-content-farm.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., The authors used traditional characters for Taiwan-based terms and simplified characters for PRC terms.

24 Ibid.

25 Brian Hioe, "Fighting Fake News and Disinformation in Taiwan: An Interview with Puma Shen," *New Bloom*, January 6, 2020, https://newbloommag.net/2020/01/06/puma-shen-interview/.

26 Ibid.

27 Nick Monaco, Melanie Smith, and Amy Studdart, *Detecting Digital Fingerprints: Tracing Chinese Disinformation in Taiwan* (Washington, DC: Institute for the Future's Digital Intelligence Lab, Graphika, and International Republican Institute, August 2020), https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/detecting_digital_fingerprints_-_tracing_chinese_disinformation_in_taiwan_0.pdf. "Green Terror" is a pejorative used against the DPP (whose political color is green) and a play on Chiang Kai-shek's "White Terror," which involved the suppression of political dissidents over decades in the Republic of Taiwan.

28 "Chinese Influence Operations Evolve in Campaigns Targeting Taiwanese Elections, Hong Kong Protests," Inskit Group, April 29, 2020, 7, https://www.recordedfuture.com/chinese-influence-operations/.

29 Ibid.

30 Raymond Zhong, "Awash in Disinformation Before Vote, Taiwan Points Finger at China," *New York Times*, January 6, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/06/technology/taiwan-election-china-disinformation.html.

31 "LSE statement on PhD of Dr Tsai Ing-wen," London School of Economics and Political Science, October 9, 2019, www.lse.ac.uk/News/Latest-news-from-LSE/2019/j-October-2019/LSE-statement-on-PhD-of-Dr-Tsai-Ing-wen.

32 "Why hasn't Tsai Ing-wen Married, what is her relationship with Lee Teng-hui, what is her secret she can't tell anyone!" [蔡英文为何不结婚，与李登辉是何关系，有什么不可告人的秘密!], YouTube video, October 22, 2018, 8:21, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iyaRcBpson8&ab_channel=江湖百晓生.

33 Ibid.

34 Keoni Everington, "China's 'troll factory' targeting Taiwan with disinformation prior to election," Taiwan News, November 5, 2018, https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3568146.

35 During this time, the virus was referred to as "Wuhan pneumonia" [武漢肺炎] by the Taiwanese government and public. "Web Transmission: 'Everyone must wear a mask on day of voting…Unidentified Wuhan Pneumonia…There are also confirmed cases in Taiwan?'" [網傳「大家投票當天記得一定要戴口罩哦…武漢那邊的不明肺炎…臺灣也有確診病例?」, Taiwan FactCheck Center, January 10, 2020, https://tfc-taiwan.org.tw/articles/1955; and "Don't mess around! Taiwan does not have any confirmed cases of the Wuhan China novel coronavirus" [別亂傳！臺灣並無中國武漢新型冠狀病毒確診個案], Taiwan Centers for Disease Control, January 11, 2020, https://www.mohw.gov.tw/cp-4343-50997-1.html

36 Ibid.

37 Matthew Strong, "Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen wins election with record 8.17 million votes," Taiwan News, January 11, 2020, https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3854958.

38 "In-depth analysis of China's false news flows by the Investigation Bureau" [大陸製假訊息流竄 調查局深入解析], Ministry of Justice, February 29, 2020, https://www.mjib.gov.tw/news/Details?Module=1&id=570.

39 Ibid.

40 Nick Monaco, "No rest for the sick: coronavirus disinformation from Chinese users targets Taiwan," Medium, March 5, 2020, https://medium.com/digintel/china-coronavirus-disinfo-targets-taiwan-2490d99ce6a9 ("we find it most likely that the main campaign was the work of Chinese netizens organizing messaging campaigns of their own accord. The Chinese term for such users is 'little pinks,' 小粉紅").

41 Craig Silverman, "Chinese trolls are spreading coronavirus disinformation in Taiwan," Buzzfeed News, March 5, 2020, https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/craigsilverman/chinese-trolls-coronavirus-disinformation-taiwan.

42 See, e.g., Yuan Yang, "China's Communist party raises army of nationalist trolls," *Financial Times*, December 29, 2017, https://www.ft.com/content/9ef9f592-e2bd-11e7-97e2-916d4fbac0da. ("The party also stokes the fire, arming the little pinks with memes — shareable images and video-clips — produced by state agencies as well as private studios.")

43 Monaco, "No rest for the sick."

44 Ibid. As the authors note, the differences between PRC and Taiwanese vocabulary is similar to that existing between British and American English.

45 Monaco, Smith, and Studdart, *Detecting Digital Fingerprints*.

46 Silverman, "Chinese trolls are spreading coronavirus disinformation in Taiwan."

47 Mihir Zaveri, "Be wary of those texts from a friend of a friend's aunt," *New York Times*, March 16, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/16/us/coronavirus-text-messages-national-quarantine.html.

48 Ibid.

49 Edward Wong, Matthew Rosenberg, and Julian E. Barnes, "Chinese agents helped spread messages that sowed virus panic in U.S., officials say," *New York Times*, August 23, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/22/us/politics/coronavirus-china-disinformation.html.

50 Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*, W. W. Norton & Company, 2010

51 In Chinese, "师夷长技以制夷."

52 Zheng Yangzhe, "'Memes Engineering' is a good way to deal with cyber armies! Audrey Tang: Clarify within the hour" [迷因工程」是對付網軍的好辦法！唐鳳：1小時內及時澄清], Newtalk, December 8, 2019, https://newtalk.tw/news/view/2019-12-08/337558.

53 Anne Quito, "Taiwan is using humor as a tool against coronavirus hoaxes," Quartz, June 5, 2020, https://qz.com/1863931/taiwan-is-using-humor-to-quash-coronavirus-fake-news/.

54 "2019-09-25 Finding facts in a world of disinformation," YouTube video, posted by PDIS, October 22, 2019, 20:20, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l0uR4_dctTg&t.

55 Ibid.

56 "To counteract China's disinformation, the Ministry of National Defense established a rapid processing team" [反制中國假訊息 國防部成立快速處理小組], CNA, May 5, 2019, https://www.cna.com.tw/news/aipl/201905010229.aspx.

57 Ibid.

58 Yen-Zhi Peng, "China's Disinformation Campaign in Taiwan about COVID-19," National Bureau of Asian Research, July 24, 2020, https://www.nbr.org/publication/chinas-disinformation-campaign-in-taiwan-about-covid-19/.

59 "External hostile forces" [境外敵對勢力] are defined as a country, political entity, or group that engages in war or a military confrontation against Taiwan or that advocates non-peaceful means to endanger Taiwan's sovereignty.

60 "About Us," Taiwan FactCheck Center, https://tfc-taiwan.org.tw/about/purpose.

61 Ibid.

62 g0v, https://g0v.tw/.

63 Kelsie Nabben, "Hacking the pandemic: how Taiwan's digital democracy holds COVID-19 at bay," *The Conversation*, September 11, 2020, https://theconversation.com/hacking-the-pandemic-how-taiwans-digital-democracy-holds-covid-19-at-bay-145023.

64 See the National Health Insurance Administration's website: https://mask.pdis.nat.gov.tw/?fbclid=IwAR0K7R4_14ztQ1bEY0UiQmwsfoA9e3iQhttowEkkMej647aOhIo_RfxvggA.

65 Shiroma Silva, "Coronavirus: How map hacks and buttocks helped Taiwan fight Covid-19," BBC, June 6, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-52883838.

66 Chun Han Wong and Phillip Wen, "Taiwan Turns to Facebook and Viral Memes to Counter China's Disinformation," *Wall Street Journal*, January 3, 2020, https://www.wsj.com/articles/taiwan-turns-to-facebook-and-viral-memes-to-counter-chinas-disinformation-11578047403.

67 "Defending Election Integrity in Taiwan," Facebook, August 2020, https://www.tca.org.tw/files/Facebook%20Taiwan%20Election%20Report%20ENG.pdf.

68 "Poll on satisfaction with President Tsai Ing-wen's Reelection" [蔡英文總統連任就職滿意度民調], TVBS Poll Center, May 17, 2020, https://cc.tvbs.com.tw/portal/file/poll_center/2020/20200518/6fd57ec6489e3f7a2b78fb8d0e909a35.pdf.

69 Yen-Zhi Peng, "China's Disinformation Campaign in Taiwan about COVID-19," National Bureau of Asian Research, July 24, 2020, https://www.nbr.org/publication/chinas-disinformation-campaign-in-taiwan-about-covid-19/.

70 Ibid.

71 Michael Gold and James Pomfret, "Over 100,000 protest in Taiwan over China trade deal," Reuters, March 30, 2014, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-taiwan-protests/over-100000-protest-in-taiwan-over-china-trade-deal-idUSBREA2T07H20140330.

72 See poll conducted by TVBS: https://cc.tvbs.com.tw/portal/file/poll_center/2020/20200518/6fd57ec6489e3f7a2b78fb8d0e909a35.pdf.

COVER PHOTO ADOBESTOCK

CSIS | CENTER FOR STRATEGIC & INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

1616 Rhode Island Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20036
202 887 0200 | **www.csis.org**