

Influence of cyber/political warfare by China upon Taiwan

Dr. Yisuo Tzeng

Former Director of the Cybersecurity Division, INDSR

Abstract

After Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) returned to Presidential Office in 2016, China's influence campaign, in ways of united front work(統戰), towards Taiwan turns to walking Taiwan's public into distrust of democratic regime and thereby drifting away from anti-China independence orientation. China's influence campaign is not new except for its growing reliance on cyber warfare, working via hacking, cyber espionage, cyber attacks, and disinformation campaign in ways explicit as well as clandestine.

China's traditional political warfare now takes on an innovative initiative through social media influencing targeting either mid-to-southern Taiwan, low-to-medium level income household, small-to-medium enterprises entrepreneurs, and youth groups(三中一青), or lining up young generation and grassroots(一代一線). Old school rules—covert, corruptive, coercive in practicing united front work—are still at work, only that there is not much to live up to such thing as a success story. There might be students, local leaders, and scholars taking tours to China by invitation, with no lack in price tags on these targets. Yet a divided society like Taiwan would not turn a blind eye towards the activities of the kind and simply stand idly by in silence.

Partly thanks to the beauty of the dividedness of Taiwanese society, and partly as a result of China's explicit resort to *Parvenu*-style acquisition of lion shares of specific Taiwanese TVs, newspapers, and some online social media to brainwash Taiwanese, China's conventional united front work invite mounting backlashes from Taiwanese and thereby urgent calls for legislation on the transparency in foreign agency registration.

What makes China's united front work's principle of unifying the enemy's enemy work is China's spread of disinformation via popular social media in Taiwan, which generated echo chamber effect, with an intention of reinforcing divided society in Taiwan. Owing to its roughness, the sort of information operation by no means wins hearts and minds of Taiwanese but indeed places wedges between segments and groups on the island.

Massive dissemination of fake news and videos brings forth dichotomous debates along the party line. Yet rough disinformation by China in Taiwan ultimately gets trapped in echo chamber. What is of Taiwanese security sector's top concern is to grapple with China's current state of AI application in generation deep fake to disrupt Taiwan's election security in January, 2020 and beyond. For that matter, Japan could consider closer cooperation with Taiwan, along the line of the US counter-interference coalition, to fight against cyber attacks and influence campaign by China.