

On Monday last week, Taiwan Democracy Watch released the results of a poll on the top 10 democracy-related events, which showed that the primary concern among those polled was the continued threat to freedom of expression. The results also contained a list of five influential factors on democracy and third on this list was the “China factor.”

This deserves further exploration.

Recently, the perennial question of whether Chunghwa Telecom will renew New Tang Dynasty Asia Pacific Television’s (NTDTV) broadcasting contract has once more hit the headlines, suggesting that the decision to renew is more than a simply commercial one.

When asked to comment on the matter, Youth Alliance Against Media Monsters spokesman Wu Hsueh-chan (吳雪蟾) said: “NDTV is able to broadcast ideas about freedom within China. The government in Taiwan is basically getting in the way of this happening, it is obstructing attempts to help China become more democratic and free.”

In the past few weeks, the public was informed by legislators that Great Wall Asia Television — a satellite TV package featuring 11 Chinese channels — has arrived in Taiwan through a back door. A worrying development that has the fingerprints of Chinese officials all over it.

According to the Act Governing Relations between the Peoples of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area (臺灣關係法) and the Satellite Broadcasting Act (衛星廣播電視法), local branches of overseas satellite broadcasting companies require a license to operate in Taiwan.

The law states this very clearly, it is just that the government is not listening, whether it be the National Communications Commission, the Mainland Affairs Council or the Ministry of Culture.

According to this year’s Freedom of the Press report — compiled by non-governmental organization Freedom House — even though Taiwan’s media environment is one of the freest in Asia, the polarization of politics, media self-censorship and the indirect influence of Beijing all

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conspire to constrain the diversity of ideas within mainstream media.

According to Karin Karlekar, the project director responsible for the report, the new generation of leaders in China have strengthened their grip on China's media since the handover of power earlier this year.

For example, a report in Hong Kong's Chinese-language Mingpao News, has revealed how the Chinese authorities have given professors at universities in Beijing and Shanghai a list of seven banned topics, which include universal values, press freedom, judicial independence, civil rights, civil society, historical errors committed by the Chinese Communist Party and the powerful capitalist elite.

The move caused a stir among the online community.

An article entitled "Keeping the doctor away," published last month in The Economist, reported that President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) China-friendly policies are giving rise to concerns about press freedom in Taiwan. The article said that despite the acquisition deal of the Next Media Group's print outlets having been abruptly stopped, "surprisingly few are satisfied by this apparent triumph for press freedom."

This turn for the worse in the nation's media environment is, of course, related to the wider environment and the agents working within it, but even more than this, the decline in press freedom is related to the "China factor."

Taiwan is in dire need of an anti-monopoly media law, which is crucial for the maintenance of press freedom.

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Translated by Paul Cooper

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