

## Taiwan is drowning in a flood of falsehoods

Written by Janet Hung 簡慧

Friday, 09 August 2019 06:09

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With the presidential election looming, the nation is almost overwhelmed with an onslaught of disinformation and misinformation. That is not news though. The same phenomenon indirectly cost a diplomat's life last year, created a widening fissure in society and interfered with the local elections.

Apparently, the government has learned its lesson and has been stretched thin clarifying endless falsehoods. It has also tried to reinforce punitive laws for the fake news deluge.

Unfortunately, once a false impression has been implanted in people's minds, it is not easily erased. Taiwan is not the only place struggling with a surge of falsehoods. Plenty of countries are in this together.

There are definitely "bad actors" operating behind the scenes, but it seems impossible that the shadow puppets will succumb to their conscience, so what can be done to stop this fierce penetration?

At the same time, people should reflect on why they are so incapable of critical thinking.

Freedom of speech and freedom of the press are the invaluable constituents of a democratic nation, but nowadays, they are used as the most powerful and cheapest weapons to harm democracy.

In Taiwan's case, the dark forces behind this activity are suspected of mainly emanating from China, which persists in its pursuit of unification with Taiwan.

Infiltrating Taiwan's media industry is one of the methods it uses. The so-called "red media" has been spreading pro-China, anti-Taiwan information for some time.

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In addition, it seems that the bad actors have recruited an army of trolls, who spread a cascade of memes that convey falsehoods with distorted content to harm officials' reputations or dismiss the government's achievements.

It is true that the Taiwanese government has begun to take some measures to tackle this issue, including enforcing laws, making clarifications on official Web sites, and appealing to the media and the public for morality.

There are also some civil groups dedicated to detecting and clarifying fake news. The mass rally against the red media in Taipei on June 23 showed that most people are no longer willing to stand by and let the red media influence politics and society.

However, it is not enough if individuals do not take responsibility. Taiwanese should dig into the sources of information and look for balanced reports before believing a story or passing it on to friends.

It is easy to recognize suspicious information if it is obviously out of the norm, but sometimes the information is a half-truth. In that case, if a person cannot conquer their unreasonable emotions and prejudice, they are highly likely to accidentally become accomplices.

The more hatred a person feels, the greater the need to understand the whole story. Otherwise, they become nothing more than pawns for the bad actors.

People tend to stay in their echo chambers, but if everyone always jumps to conclusions and takes the bait without a second thought, the fissure in Taiwanese society will never be healed — and that is just the ticket the bad actors want.

Everyone knows that the falsehoods not only come from the red media, but also people who hold a grudge against someone or the government.

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Victims are increasingly taking a more proactive approach, and dealing with the defamation through the courts. People should be educated that everyone must be responsible for whatever they say or do.

On the other hand, the victims of falsehoods also should stand up to fight the initiators of evil. It is especially true for the government.

*Janet Hung is a physical therapist.*

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2019/08/09](#)