

Comparing CtiTV and Deng Nan-jung wrong

Written by Paul Lei 雷

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Whether CtiTV fulfills its allotted role is a matter of government oversight and market forces, but to say that not renewing the station's license is tantamount to the government slamming a lid on freedom of expression is overly self-important and an insult to the judgement of the mainstream public.

Freedom of expression in democratic political systems is de rigueur in free societies, as well as a basic right guaranteed by constitutions.

As the British writer Evelyn Beatrice Hall wrote in *The Friends of Voltaire*, describing Voltaire's position on freedom of speech: "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it."

This has been quoted countless times as a rationale for fighting to uphold freedom irrespective of the personal cost. Democracy advocate Deng Nan-jung (鄧南雄) was the embodiment of this spirit in the fight for democracy and freedom in Taiwan.

How ironic it was for a certain Chinese-language newspaper to run an opinion piece equating CtiTV's license renewal bid with Deng's struggle for democracy. The editorial certainly raised a few eyebrows.

During the Martial Law era, when figures of the dangwai (黨外, "outside the party") movement founded the Democratic Progressive Party, which side of the fight to end martial law and bring democracy to Taiwan was this newspaper on? Was it not on the side of protecting the vested interests of the governing Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT)?

Whose side did this newspaper take in the aftermath of Deng's self-immolation? Responses to the incident are a matter of public record and Taiwanese can arrive at their own conclusions based on the facts.

The value of the media resides in their role as the fourth estate within a democratic system of

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government — that is, they can provide independent oversight to balance the powers within the system, above and beyond the executive, legislative and judicial branches.

In all things — whether corruption and abuse of the law within government, collusion between politics and industry or social injustice — an independent media can speak up as society's conscience.

Of course, the flip side is that an independent media can also be the bane of whoever is in power, but in a democratic society, public opinion is one of the market's most effective oversight mechanisms.

CtiTV — along with other Taiwanese media firms, including the aforementioned newspaper — attended a cross-strait media summit organized by the Beijing Newspaper Group in Beijing on May 10 to 12 last year, which was tacit acknowledgement and reverence for the dictates of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). By attending, they lost all semblance of being part of an independent media. In Beijing, they lived large in Chinese Communist Party leadership circles, while turning a blind eye toward its suppression of human rights in the Xinjiang region, Tibet and China itself. They returned to Taiwan singing the same song as the CCP.

It is difficult to imagine how someone could keep a straight face while comparing Deng's struggle for Taiwanese independence and democratic freedoms to CtiTV's situation.

While the US, the EU and other major democracies have come to regard the CCP as a strategic adversary, and are pushing back on national security and strategic grounds — even placing restrictions on technology exports — how can Taiwan not practice due caution, even as it tries to keep its free, democratic system of government intact?

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Translated by Paul Cooper

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