

Taiwan's press freedom and freedom of expression have begun to show signs of being "Hong Kong-ized" (香港化) as a result of China's political and economic pressure, a report by a legislative agency said.

Self-censorship among Hong Kong and Macau media outlets has increased and press freedom has sharply deteriorated since the two territories signed Closer Economic Partnership Arrangements (CEPA) with Beijing, the report by the legislature's Organic Laws and Statutes Bureau said.

The report, *A Study on Mainland China's Post-ECFA Political and Economic Strategy Toward Taiwan*, was written after a delegation from the bureau and the legislature's Budget Center traveled to Hong Kong in May to study a number of issues.

The report said Hong Kong's ranking in surveys conducted by Reporters Without Borders and Freedom House have dropped since the CEPA was signed in 2003. Journalists and other media workers in Hong Kong also feel that self-censorship has become a "boorish tacit agreement" that permeates their industry, the report said.

Although the CEPA has led to intensifying contacts between Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta, the report says Hong Kong media must apply for permission to set up operations in the delta, and reporting has become "more red." For outlets that might want to report on free markets, the rule of law and human rights concepts "have no chance whatsoever to wield any influence," the report said.

Although Taiwan is different from Hong Kong and Macau, the current situation in this country — following the signing of the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) with China — nonetheless "seems to show changes in the media similar to those in Hong Kong prior to [the return of Hong Kong to China in] 1997," the report said.

China is adopting the same methods in Taiwan that it used to deal with the media in Hong Kong, the report said. Major Taiwanese business leaders are becoming more intimate with the top leadership in Beijing and are beginning to buy up Taiwanese media.

The report cited the concerns expressed by the US-based Freedom House about Beijing's power to influence freedom of expression in Taiwan following the purchase by the Want Want Group (旺旺) — which also invests in China — of the China Times Group (中時) and its resulting change in editorial direction and softening of criticism of the government and cross-strait issues. Whether Taiwanese media are following the "Hong Kong mode" (香港模式) has become a growing concern, it said.

Because President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) government is throwing open the doors to Chinese investment, it is becoming difficult to prevent Chinese capital from entering the Taiwanese

Media freedom threatened: report

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media sector, the report said.

The report concludes that while Hong Kong media outlets had gained some economic benefits from the CEPA, gradual sinicization had led to strong self-censorship and the loss of press freedom.

Taiwan should learn from this and be wary of Beijing's "united front" tactics, while the media should avoid self-censorship and be aware of the problems that Chinese capital investments in local media outlets can cause, the report said.

In response to the report, the Executive Yuan said the government has spared no effort to ensure freedom of speech in Taiwan. The media industry was booming, which is the embodiment of freedom of speech, it said.

Democratic Progressive Party spokesperson Tsai Chi-chang (蔡啟芳) said it was hard to see how the trend toward growing Chinese pressure could be reversed, given the government's China policies.

"The Chinese Nationalist Party [KMT] doesn't take China's attitude seriously, so we expect that Chinese influence in Taiwanese media will continue to increase," he said.

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