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Media Outlets in the People's Republic of China

Pachedzhieva, Teodora

Citation

Pachedzhieva, T. (2023). *Media Outlets in the People's Republic of China*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Teodora Pachedzhieva

Student no.: s2778971

Word count: 7979



Universiteit Leiden

Bachelor Project – Political Science: International Relations and Organizations

Theme: National Identity in East Asian International Relations

Supervisor: Drs. S. Hofstede

Second reader: Dr. F. Bakker

26/05/2023

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Introduction

The established view on the People's Republic of China (PRC) is that it is one of the least democratic states in the world with an efficient censorship machine that heavily censors opinions that go against the established national and political agenda. The state censoring machine, run by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which is known to persecute and arrest citizens who express dissatisfaction with the regime, or openly critique the regime and the CCP and its political agenda online or protest in the streets (Reporters Without Borders, 2023). Between the years 2021-2022, there was an emerging trend that the media in China was displaying improvement in terms of Press Freedom. Back in 2021, China was ranked 177th out of 180 states, and in 2022, China was ranked 175th out of 180 states (Reporters Without Borders, 2023). The trend was that Chinese media would improve and China would continue to advance in the media freedom rankings, however, in 2023, China's inertia ceased, and the PRC dropped down in the rankings. In fact, according to the Press Freedom Index, the PRC media scores for 2023 are one of the lowest in the world, with China being ranked 179th out of 180 countries, with only North Korea ranking lower (Reporters Without Borders, 2023). It is fair to acknowledge that the statistics report on and compare the freedom of media in both democratic and non-democratic states at the same time. In this case, the PRC would always be on the extreme side of the statistical analysis when compared side to side with democracy. Therefore, this bachelor thesis is interested in studying the extreme case of the PRC and its media's coverage of news.

This bachelor thesis will aim to answer the following research question (RQ): *Why is there a similar narrative in state-owned media outlets in Mainland China and privately owned media outlets in the Macau autonomous region of the People's Republic of China on news coverage concerning Taiwan independence?*

To answer the RQ this thesis will be divided into chapters: *Background*, where a summary of the Chinese claims over Taiwan will be explained through the lens of national identity, and a brief history of Macau will be presented; *Theoretical Framework*, where existing literature on national identity and media will be discussed; *Research Puzzle*, where the puzzle that this thesis aims to solve will be explained; *Case and Data Selection*, where the logic behind the selection of cases and data will be presented, *Operationalization, Coding, and Coding Frame*, where the methodology of this thesis will be explained; *Results*, where results of the coding will be briefly summarized; *Analysis*, where this thesis will aim to explain the results; and *Conclusion and Discussion* with concluding remarks.

Background

Before this thesis begins discussing the literature, it must first briefly introduce the China-Taiwan problem through the lens of national identity, and provide some historical background on the autonomous region of Macau.

Mainland China and Taiwan have had a long history of difficult relationships. Ever since the remnants of the Kuomintang (KMT) fled Mainland China and settled on the island of Taiwan in 1949 the Mainland has adopted a mentality that Taiwan belongs to the Mainland and that there is only one China that must be reunified (Hook & Neves, 2002, p. 110). After an easing in tensions under President Ma Ying Jeou of the KMT between 2008 and 2016, in recent years, however, the relationship between Taiwan and China has become more complicated, again, as Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) has made attempts to establish diplomatic relations with the United States of America (USA); in addition, the Taiwanese nation is rebelling against the PRC's one-China dream, something which Mainland China strongly advocates (Coffin, 2017).

The complicated relationship between China and Taiwan began right after World War Two (WWII) when the Japanese occupiers were forced to return Taiwan to Mainland China in 1945. However, starting in 1946-1947, China once again fell into civil war. The war ended with the victory of the CCP in 1949 and the escape of the KMT leader, Chiang Kai-shek, and his followers to the island of Taiwan. There they rebuilt a state on top of the old Japanese colonial government using the structure of the old Republic of China (ROC) from the Mainland while claiming it still was the old (ROC) (Simmons, 1973, p. 112). This created the issue of the two states competing simultaneously for recognition as the representative of 'China' - one being the People's Republic of China on the Mainland, while the other being the Republic of China on Taiwan.

As time progressed, the descendants of the 6 million Taiwanese who had been on the island when the Chinese Nationalists brought 1 million Mainlanders to Taiwan were slowly allowed into positions of power as the first generations of descendants from the Mainlanders also grew up in Taiwan (Simmons, 1973, pp. 113-114). These generations began to challenge the KMT dictatorship's notion that Taiwan is part of Mainland China. The newer generations increasingly identified themselves as Taiwanese, unlike their predecessors who identified themselves as Chinese, or Taiwanese and Chinese (Simmons, 1973, pp. 113-114). The creation of Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in 1986 - the main opposition to the Chinese KMT - was an indicator of the Taiwanese nation's desire to practice independent politics that do not necessarily align with the political agenda of Mainland China (Coffin, 2017, p. 5).

However, the clearer separation between Taiwan and Mainland China was not an option for Beijing - Taiwan is a strategic island for the PRC, but also the PRC has been claiming Taiwan as a “sacred” Chinese territory since 1938 after the KMT declaration stating that Taiwan shall become part of Mainland China after the end of WWII (Simmons, 1973, p. 111). The Chinese mentality that Taiwan belongs to the Mainland explains why the PRC initiated the 1996 Taiwan Missile Crisis, which voiced China’s opposition to the visit of then-President Lee Teng-hui to the United States and tried to sway the first democratic presidential elections (Moore, 2016, p. 221). Taiwan, however, refused and is still refusing to give up on its separate national identity and embrace the reunification that Mainland China is pushing for. As a response to Taiwan’s independence movement, Mainland China has intensified its one-China reunification policy and is using all of its media and political resources to propagate against Taiwanese independence and the Taiwanese national identity (Moore, 2016, pp. 215-216). What is more, Mainland China has also been utilizing its resources - political and economic, in the realm of international politics, and media in the domestic realm - to oppose any foreign interference in the Taiwan question that may disrupt the one-China dream and the forging of the two national identities into one - the Chinese national identity.

The port city of Macau has also been historically important for the PRC. Macau is one of the largest and most important ports not only for the entire PRC but also for the world (ShipHub, 2022). As a previous European colony, Macau was returned to the PRC after the end of Portuguese colonial rule and was granted special administrative powers by the PRC in 1999 (Hook & Neves, 2002, p. 108). Those special administrative powers consist of separate political and economic systems; independent press, protected by the Basic Law and Press Law - two laws guaranteeing the freedom of the press; rights to the independent formulation of the educational system guaranteed by the Basic Law of Macau (Edmonds & Yee, 1999, pp. 813-815). These special rights are part of the one country two systems principle, marked in the PRC constitution (Edmonds & Yee, 1999, p. 801). The autonomous administrative region may have separate governing and economic systems from Mainland China, however, the government in the Macau region is appointed and approved by the State Council of the PRC (Hook & Neves, 2002, p. 113). What is more, the region remains an essential trading partner to Mainland China, and the Macau autonomous region is under the protective wing of Mainland China when it comes to national and military defense. In addition, the autonomous region serves as one of the main hubs for foreign investors, thus reinforcing the Chinese economy.

Theoretical Framework

One cannot explain the concept of national identity without discussing nationalism. The two concepts are intertwined and do not exist separately from one another. Before this thesis dives into the literature on national identity, it will first discuss literature on nationalism and trace the connections between the two - how nationalism helps shape the notion of national identity.

There are two main ways to approach nationalism. The first is the primordial approach popularized by scholars like Smith, Hutchinson, Shills, and Geertz. Primordialism argues that the nation exists outside the realm of the “imaginary” - there are pre-existing elements that physically create the nation and thus form nationalism (Bellamy, 2003, pp. 7-10). Those primordial elements are specific characteristics like ethnicity, religion, and language, as well as shared culture, traditions, and history (Hale, 2004, p. 467). Drawing from the definition of primordialism, concepts such as nation and nationalism are fixed and non-transcendent. This implies that nations are homogenous and nationalism can exist only in homogeneous states. Logically, it would follow that national identities are fixed and uniform. However, one main problem of this approach is that homogeneous nations do not exist, therefore uniform national identities do not exist either. For example, the Chinese state is widely perceived to be homogeneous, however, this is an error. On its territory exist hundreds of minority groups that have not received official recognition (Gladney, 1998, p. 108). If this thesis is to conceptualize national identity from the primordial approach, then the definition would be fixed and limited. National identities are not fixed, they are constantly changing, and historically this is visible, especially in times of war, the dissolution and creation of nations (Miscovic, 2001, pp. 216-218). In more recent history, for example, the notion that the United States is the ‘melting pot’ of the world, the primordial argument about nations and nationalism fails to explain why is there a phenomenon in which national identity is becoming an “associative group” with open membership to others (Dahbour, 2002, p. 30). In the conceptualization of national identity, the primordial argument that nationalism, respectively national identity, is created by shared history and culture will be considered, however, lightly.

The second is the modernist approach popularized by scholars like Miller, Gellner, Anderson, and Hobsbawm. The modernist approach argues that nations and nationalism are created through “imagined communities” that exist outside the borders of a state (Anderson, 2006, pp. 6-7). Nations and nationalism are forged by invented traditions and an officially recognized language (Hobsbawm, 2012, pp. 4-5). This particular aspect of the modernist approach is similar to the primordial one. Drawing from the similarities in both approaches, one could take away that shared traditions and shared language create a national identity.

Additionally, nationalism is reinforced by the notion of “print media” that, especially in the past, provided information about the surrounding world (Anderson, 2016, pp. 18-19). Print media allowed ordinary people to have topics to discuss with one another during the day, or simplified, print media provided the main source of common communication between people of the same state, thus reinforcing the notion that the entire nation is participating in an event or problem. The modernist approach to nations and nationalism is more flexible than the primordial approach, however, this approach too has its limitations. For example, Smith criticizes the modernist approach for neglecting the importance of ethnicity. To Smith, ethnicity is important because, in a society, and a nation is a society, ethnicity is not only the dominant biological characteristic of the nation, but it also has unifying powers that strengthen the common national identity (Smith, 1986). Smith’s critique is a valid one, as with the example discussed above, China has hundreds of minority groups that have not received official recognition, and most likely, this is so because it would contradict the already established Han Chinese national identity (Duara, 1993, pp. 4-7). National identities are formed based on nationalistic practices that are adopted by the dominant identity in a nation (Chatterjee, 1991, p. 32). The South African Apartheid regime and the British colonial rule over India are examples of Chatterjee’s argument - the dominant white group dictated the norms and practices the oppressed group had to follow, thus, shaping national identities.

In this sense, the modernist approach may be more flexible in its definitions than the primordial approach, however, it is not inclusive enough to define national identities solely based on it. This is why this thesis will now look at more philosophical literature on national identities.

This thesis argues that national identity should not be discussed in strict terms, therefore it will consider looser philosophical arguments. Ross Poole is a philosopher whose definition of national identity is worth discussing. To him, national identity is a complex phenomenon that consists of multiple diverse elements that coexist at the same time. The elements that constitute national identity are: “conception of personal identity”, “a view of what constitutes political community”, “moral commitment”, and “certain standard of social life” (Dahbour, 2002, p. 21). The “concept of personal identity” is an interesting one as it suggests that the individual must decide for themselves whether or not they belong to the national identity. The “view that constitutes political community” suggests that there is no national identity without a political identity or the notion that national identity is a conscious choice that can be made by nations that are sovereign, independent, and politicized. Politicization implies that national identities do influence politics and the political course a sovereign state chooses to follow

(Bilgrami, 2006, pp. 6-7). Considering the above-discussed primordial and modernist approaches to nationalism and national identity, the dominant identity in a state has immeasurable power in terms of how the state conducts its domestic policies. Poole's "moral commitment" element suggests that the conscious decision of being part of a national identity implies that the individual is also morally committing to that national identity that presents certain obligations to the individual at hand. Finally, the element of "standard of social life" implies that national identities are created based on the interactions between people who share similar living conditions. For example, the Han Chinese are the established national identity in China, whereas the Uyghur Muslims are a minority group that resides in the Xinjiang region (Gladney, 1998). The Han Chinese and the Uyghur Muslim identities in China have different experiences of social life, thus, the two ethnicities either do not share the same national identity or, if they do, they experience it in fundamentally different ways. The observation leads to the assumption that national identity is created through social discourse and social differences that denote the differences between "we" and "them" (Dahbour, 2002). National identity becomes more complicated when one considers the distinction between "we" and "them". The established national identity in a state is usually the one that is economically most dominant, whereas all other identities are considered minorities (Benson, 1999, p. 464). In this sense, national identities are a product of the system of relations and representations between groups in a state (Poole, 1992, p. 16).

Poole and Dahbour's arguments that national identities are constructed through interactions, discourses, and representations between groups are nonetheless true in the case of the port city of Macau. For centuries, Macau has been subjected to interactions with foreign national identities mainly due to trade. Due to its geographic location, the region was not isolated from the rest of the world. Locals were forced to interact with foreigners, mainly Portuguese settlers, to communicate and trade with them (Hook & Neves, 2002). For comparison, Mainland China has vast territories that, in the past, were difficult, if not impossible to reach. What is more, because of the language barrier between the local Chinese population and the foreigners, communication with the Mainland was extremely difficult. Foreign settlers were not allowed to trespass the border marking the Mainland because the then-ruling Chinese elite feared the spread of foreign national identities that could have threatened the established Chinese national identity (Hook & Neves, 2002, pp. 108-113). What is more, in Mainland China, the Chinese national identity was fully protected from foreign influence, such as different religions and perceptions of the world. The established Chinese national identity has not been challenged in the same way and for the same duration as it was

challenged in the region of Macau. The majority of Mainland locals, historically, have never interacted with foreigners as much as in the port city. Therefore, the Mainland Chinese national identity has not changed or evolved as much through interactions and discourse with other identities than through political narratives. On the other hand, Macau was inhabited by foreign settlers for centuries and the local Chinese national identity had to co-exist and adapt to the foreign national identities and the settlers' religious practices (Porter, 2009, p. 65). In this case, the national identity in the region was shaped and evolved more from interactions and discourses with other identities than through political reforms as was the case in the Mainland. Stemming from this, one can argue that the Mainland national identity is the “older”, whereas Macau’s national identity is the “newer” one. Old in this case is used to describe a more traditional and closed national identity, whose priority is to protect itself from any foreign influence. New in this case is used to describe a less conventional and more open national identity to its surrounding environment and the rest of the world.

This thesis will therefore consider national identity as “imagined communities”, the dominant identity, the inescapable distinction between “we” and “them”, reinforced by social interactions, internal consistency of identity, and commitment to the values of the national community.

Before this thesis discusses literature on media, the thesis will position national identity in relation to the process of globalization. The process of globalization is discussed as it has drastically accelerated and facilitated the flow of information and ideas across states.

Globalization is the process of growing interconnectedness between sovereign states worldwide through the increasingly free movement of information, goods, capital, and people (Kennedy, 2014, p. 7). One of the main consequences of globalization is the emergence of a more broad and fluid identity - the globalist identity (Kennedy, 2014, p. 10). The globalist identity is oftentimes perceived as a threat to established national identities and states.

Contrary to the fear of the emerging globalist identity, national identities are far from decaying, on the contrary, due to the aggressive nature of globalization, national identities and nationalistic feelings are on the rise again (Grotenhuis, 2016, p. 126). Through globalization the quality of life of most people has improved - the free exchange of goods, including daily used products that otherwise cannot be found or produced in a given state (Dixon, 2019). Such massive improvements in quality of life are welcomed by most, if not all, however, where the process of globalization becomes problematic to most nations is when their national identity is threatened by the flow of foreign information, ideas, and identities (Dixon, 2019).

The notion of ontological security is connected to the attempt of a national identity to preserve itself. Ontological security is the confidence individuals have in the fixed state of their “self-identity” and their surrounding social and material environment (Giddens, 1990, p. 92). The preservation attempts of some states to protect their national identity are far greater compared to other states. For example, the PRC has adopted what Pye (1963) calls a “protectionist approach” to block the overwhelming influx of foreign ideas (pp. 3-5). In the Chinese case, the national identity is protected by the state’s adoption of provincialism of closure, or as defined by Hannerz (1992), this is a defensive isolation from foreign influence (p. 260). This provincialism of closure is notable in the state media, which censors all information and ideas that threaten the established national identity and the established ruling elite. However, this is not the only mechanism that the Chinese state uses to oppose the spread of foreign identities. Culture and religion are also utilized by the state in propaganda against foreign influence. The ruling CCP’s government has adopted cultural policies that strengthen the established Chinese national identity and undermine all other identities (Duara, 1993, pp. 2-9). Cultural policies reinforce the dominant national identity through the use of mythologization of national heroes, the creation of a sense of responsibility to the forefathers of the nation, and perceiving culture as a link to the motherland and the ones who fought for the land (Duelund, 2016, p. 5). On the other hand, all other identities that do not correspond with the established national identity are marginalized, stigmatized, and ghettoized (Duelund, 2016, p. 5). Considering the definition, one could argue that cultural policies impose national identities through an officially recognized culture. In the case of the PRC, all other identities - foreign or domestic - that do not coincide with the culturally established national identity are marginalized, overlooked, and attacked. This notion further reinforces the above-discussed Dahbour's argument about the separation between “we” versus “them” when it comes to discussing national identities. This is not only visible in the PRC’s attitude toward foreign influence but it is also visible in the way in which China is treating its minority groups, most of the time violating their human rights (Gladney, 1998).

Religion in the PRC has been heavily influenced by the ruling regime to the point where religion is entirely politicized to serve the interest of the dominant national identity and the party. The ruling party has created a religion that bears the nationalistic characteristics of the Chinese state patriotism, rather than a religion that is about faith in a higher entity (Kuo, 2017, p. 31). Here, there is no separation between state and religion. Instead, in China’s case, nationalism, and religion overlap: both serve the same purpose - to create a “cult” toward the established national identity through the glorified image of state bureaucracy, the educational

system, and national patriotism (Kuo, 2017, p. 16). An example of this is the Chinese Dream, an initiative started by President Xi Jinping in 2012 that promotes the idea of restoring the glory of the Chinese land (Mohanty, 2013, p. 34). Since religion is heavily politicized and aims to glorify the established national identity, all foreign identities, influences, and religions that do not conform to Chinese patriotism are suppressed because they pose a threat to the memories of the Chinese predecessors who have given their lives for the land to prosper.

This thesis will now transition to the discussion of the literature on media and its impact on national identity.

Ever since its creation, the media has had an important role in reinforcing existing national identities and this is no exception in today's globalized world. Print media has had an enormous role in shaping national identities by providing them with selected information that the members of a community, or the public, read and discuss throughout the day. The public is the people who gather to discuss the news (Carey, 1993, p. 5). The media can further reinforce, build, or diminish national identity through the tone of its reporting, the choice of words, and even more precisely, the constant insertion of "small" details that go unnoticed most of the time (Eiselen & Topper, 1976, pp. 117-118). Field theory in media studies further elaborates on the importance of the small details. According to the theory, the media creates an "objective" viewpoint through which the surrounding world is reported and understood (Benson, 1999, p. 466). To be "objective" in this sense means to make the conscious decision to accept someone else's subjectivism as the objective truth, or an attempt to present the objective truth (Benson, 1999, p. 467). This implies that a national identity is shaped, to a degree, by the media and its coverage of events, or more specifically, a national identity is shaped through the media's lens and perception of events. Then this implies that media outlets in a state would have a similar take on an issue and its reporting since media plays such an important role in the shaping and affirming of national identities. Further simplified, media outlets in a state, no matter how different they claim they are from one another, cannot completely differ.

A good illustration of the "subjectivity" of media is the Chinese newspaper *Libao* which revolutionized Chinese print media in the 1930s. The newspaper played on the Chinese anti-Japanese sentiments, thus, attracting more readers (Chin, 2014, p. 394). As long as the newspaper kept the anti-Japan tone and rhetoric in its news, the Chinese population was bound to keep on purchasing the next edition, consequently, making revenue for the newspaper. The accumulated capital allowed the newspaper to grow and evolve in its publications because *Libao* took advantage of a national identity sentiment and reinforced it (Chin, 2014, p. 394). The readers continued to purchase the newspaper because to them, the newspaper's identity

was coinciding with the Chinese national identity and sentiment, thus, the Chinese readership was more willing to believe and be influenced by the stories covered in the newspaper. As illustrated by the example, the media plays on nationalistic sentiments that the established national identity favors. It can be further argued that in their reporting of the news, media outlets mirror the established national identity, the core sentiments of that identity, and the degree and range of the national identity (i.e., ranging on the extremes - ultra-nationalism to denial of identity, or being somewhere in between).

Historically, however, the media has played an important role in the preparation of nations to change their established national identities (Benson, 1999, p. 467). When national sentiments had to be changed to fit a newly established political narrative, with its influence, the media contributed to the process of change to occur faster. As Eiselen and Topper (1976) argue, it is the constant “small” implicit and subtle messages that the media sends to its readership that are most impactful (pp. 117-118). If the media propagates “small” and implicit messages for an extended period of time, then the readership will unconsciously accept the change without much opposition and hesitation (Eiselen & Topper, 1976, pp. 117-118). The implicit propaganda messages are heavily utilized in the Leninist propaganda and party systems, which is relevant in the case of the PRC, as the CCP is a type of Leninist party that relies on the CCP Central Propaganda Department to control the flow of information (Shambaugh, 2007, p. 29). A key characteristic of Leninist propaganda is that it utilizes “slogans” and “watchwords” to transcribe in simple terms the important objectives of the ruling party and its current agenda (Shambaugh, 2007, p. 26). Every slogan has to coincide with the “mass consciousness” of the nation (Domenach, 1951, pp. 267-268). Propaganda messages have to resonate with the people that constitute a nation - in most cases, those are people from different paths of life, who do not share the same economic, political, or military interests. However, Leninist propaganda plays on national sentiments that directly affect the established national identity and in such a way the propaganda manages to spread to all people in a nation. Another characteristic of Leninist propaganda is the propagandist and the agitator actors (Domenach, 1951, p. 268). The propagator is the one who creates the propaganda, whereas the agitator is the one who voices and spreads the ideas, or the one who has the mission to bridge the gap between the elite and the masses (Shambaugh, 2007, p. 26). In the case of the PRC, the propagator is the CCP, whereas the Chinese media outlets are the agitators. However, Leninist propaganda is only effective if the slogans are supported by the action (Domenach, 1951, p. 270). The CCP understands this minutia and frequently organizes a display of military, economic, and political power not only in the East Asia region but also in the world.

Print media does have its downside, one of which is the media's heavy dependence on capital to exist. As discussed above, the established national identity is usually the economically dominant one. Stemming from this, one must acknowledge that prior to the media revolution of the 20th century, media outlets were loyal to the dominant national identity and were only willing to report on sentiments that went along the established norms, ideas, and obligations. With the emergence of the 20th century, the media underwent a revolutionary change that led to the emergence of the term Fourth Estate (Bayne, 1948). The revolution was characterized by the media, i.e. the Fourth Estate, breaking its ties with the economically dominant identities, allowing more freedom in the selection of materials to report and the tone in which the text is delivered (Carey, 1993, p. 13). The media moved from a source for reporting one-sided information to a source whose means are to present different perspectives in order to encourage communication among the readers (Carey, 1993, p. 10). Another consequence of the media revolution is one of the main premises of the Media Anthropology theory, namely that media is responsible to the society in which it exists (Eiselein & Topper, 1976, p. 113). Simplified, this theory implies that the media is positioned in the social system of a nation, thus for the media to exist, it has to respect and consider its environment, or in the case of this thesis - the national identity of its readership. This again reinforces the notion that the role of the media is to mirror the existing national identity, and the degree to which the media reflects nationalistic sentiments is determined by the degree to which the national identity is exercised.

Research Puzzle

Considering the above-discussed *Theoretical Framework*, it would follow that media outlets in Mainland China differentiate from the ones in the Macau autonomous region because the two systems have different approaches to the freedom of the press, stemming from the different political systems: in Mainland China, there is no alternative press coverage to the established narrative by the CCP, whereas, in Macau, press freedom is protected by law, therefore, it is encouraged. However, what explains the similarities in media coverage from both regions on a topic that is heavily politicized by the CCP but not Macau - the Taiwan independence question? This thesis will aim to explore and provide an answer to the research puzzle relating to the unexpected similarities between media outlets in Mainland China and the Macau autonomous region.

Case and Data Selection

This thesis will explore China-based news outlets and their coverage of a relevant and politicized issue that has become part of the PRC national identity - the Taiwan question.

To do so, this thesis will consider two media outlets: English-language state media *China Daily* and the Macau-published English-language *Macau Daily Times*. The *China Daily* is a Beijing-based (Mainland China) newsletter that is oriented toward foreign readership and its pieces favor the CCP's standpoint. The *Macau Daily Times* is a privately owned newsletter based in the special administrative region of the PRC - Macau. The newsletter is oriented toward foreign readership, however, its pieces tend to be more on the objective side compared to Mainland-based media. Macau was chosen because of its unique political status and similar demographic as in Mainland China - the majority of the population identifies itself as Han Chinese, the dominant national identity in the PRC (Leibold, 2010, p. 539). The two media outlets were also chosen because they provide official translations of their news in English. This, however, is a limitation that the thesis faces. Due to the existing language barrier, this thesis is unable to consider media outlets that publish only in Chinese and this limitation may influence the results of this study.

This thesis will be selecting three articles, one article per year, from the period of 2021-2023 - the time frame that was studied by Reporters Without Borders. The chosen time frame allows the thesis to explore articles from different years, thus avoiding the bias of studying news coverage from the same period, when for example, Chinese coverage on Taiwan was more positive compared to other times. What is more, the selected time frame is after the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, when the majority, if not all news coverage, was dedicated to the pandemic, its consequences, and suggestions to overcome it. Therefore, this thesis avoids studying news coverage from the year 2020 and will instead focus on the most recent time period of the past three years. The articles will be selected at random by going to the archive section of the media outlets, searching for Taiwan-related news, and looking for the most read (i.e., most relevant) articles.

Operationalization, Coding, and Coding Frame

For the sake of the qualitative research that follows, this thesis will operationalize national identity in media coverage by looking at rhetoric (usage of words, phrases, slogans), tone (overall mood and diction used), visuals (implicit, explicit visual messages), and opinions (present or absent).

This thesis will be conducting a single-N qualitative case study, with a deductive approach to coding. The analysis framework this thesis will be utilizing is structured coding

with predetermined codes, where the coded data will be assigned to categories and sub-categories. The above-mentioned overarching criteria will be broken into smaller pieces that will be coded individually with color and will later be systemized in the coding frame (**Table 1**).

Rhetoric is subdivided into Mainland nationalism (pro-China), anti-Mainland nationalism (con-China), Taiwanese nationalism (pro-Taiwan), anti-Taiwanese nationalism (con-Taiwan), con-foreign influence (con-foreign states), neutral (impartial). Tone is subdivided into neutral (impartial reporting), nationalistic (pro-Mainland nationalism; anti-Taiwan nationalism), and anti-nationalistic (anti-Mainland; pro-Taiwan nationalism). Visuals are subdivided into present: pro-Mainland (propaganda-like visuals), present: neutral (visualization of events), and absent. Opinions are subdivided into absent, present: neutral (voicing facts), present: pro-Mainland (con-Taiwan), and present: pro-Taiwan (con-Mainland).

Table1: Structure of coding-frame used to code the data

Category	Subcategory	<i>China Daily</i>	<i>Macau Daily Times</i>
Visuals	present: pro-Mainland (propaganda visuals)		
	present: neutral (visualization of event)		
	absent		
Rhetoric	Mainland nationalism (pro-China)		
	anti-Mainland nationalism (con-China)		
	Taiwanese nationalism (pro-Taiwan)		
	anti-Taiwanese nationalism (con-Taiwan)		
	con-foreign influence (con-foreign states)		
	neutral (impartial)		
Tone	neutral (impartial reporting)		
	nationalistic (pro-Mainland nationalism; anti-Taiwan nationalism)		
	anti-nationalistic (anti-Mainland; pro-Taiwan nationalism)		

Opinion	absent
	present: neutral (voicing facts)
	present: pro-Mainland (con-Taiwan)
	present: pro-Taiwan (con-Mainland)

Results

The articles from *China Daily* are reinforcing the CCP's Taiwan narrative, an expected result, considering that *China Daily* is a state-owned media. The articles were loaded with nationalistic sentiments, and rhetorics that glorified Mainland China, diminished the Taiwan independence movement, and opposed foreign opinions and influences in the Taiwan question. At times, anti-Mainland and pro-Taiwan rhetoric could be found in the articles, however, this rhetoric is later either 'disproved' and utilized to belittle the opponents of the one-China dream, or it is used to showcase the Chinese sympathy toward its Taiwanese "compatriots". The articles directly opposed the Taiwan independence movement, calling the activist behind it "selfish separatists", and critiqued the DPP for "threatening" the peace in the region. Two of the three articles utilize visuals, however, not in the expected way. This thesis was expecting to see visuals that subtly propagate Mainland sentiments, however, the visuals that are utilized in the articles showcase the participants in the event - as is the case with one of the articles - or, showcase the place where the event took place - as is the case with the second article. However, it is interesting to discuss the Leninist-type of propaganda slogans/watchwords that were observed in the articles. The articles made heavy use of watchwords with connotations that evoke nationalistic feelings like "motherland", "historic importance", "Chinese island", etc. Additionally, the articles heavily underline Beijing's capability of acting upon the Taiwan question and resolving it with force: "Beijing ...reunify Taiwan with the motherland by force", "playing with fire". This is a technique utilized by Leninist propaganda that evokes the nation's pride that its ruling elite is strong and capable of solving the problem: "Chinese leaders to resolve the Taiwan question". As mentioned, the news articles allow for anti-Mainland rhetoric, mainly in the form of foreign critiques, that the articles later disprove and use as a way to humiliate foreign opinion. For example, in one article, the author presents the opinion that China's economic "low growth rate" will not be enough to tempt Taiwan into reunifying with the Mainland. However, as the article progresses, the editor compares the expected US and Taiwanese economic growth and concludes that it is lesser than

the Chinese one. This again is an example of a Leninist type of propaganda, where foreigners and any opposition are humiliated through reporting data.

The *Macau Daily Times* reported its news in a much more neutral (impartial) tone than its Mainland counterpart. Mostly, the rhetoric in the articles carries a neutral connotation, which is typical for journalistic pieces. All three articles do utilize visuals as a way to showcase the participants in an event, or the place the event took place. Occasionally, the articles provide foreign, Taiwanese, and Chinese opinions, most of which are neutral (voicing facts), and at times anti-Mainland opinions and sentiments are presented. The articles do not provide opinions, rhetoric, and tone that supports the Mainland and its one-China dream on its own. However, wherever a heavy critique toward the reunification or the Mainland is expressed, the theme of the articles abruptly changes from neutral to pro-Mainland nationalism: “recognizes the “One China Principle”, “fundamental principles...implemented by the central government”, “countries...switch diplomatic relations to China”, etc. Additionally, the anti-Mainland critique is later “slammed” by the articles as critiques with subtle belittling aspects to them: “Taiwan...undermining Somali sovereignty...territorial integrity”, “Taiwan report on Macau is ‘baseless and biased’”. Anti-Taiwan rhetoric and a heavy nationalistic tone are also present, especially in articles that juxtapose foreign and Chinese opinions on the reunification question. Considering that the *Macau Daily Times* is a privately owned newspaper and that its freedom of speech is protected by law, this thesis was not expecting to discover hostile attitudes regarding the Taiwan question and foreign opinions. In such instances, *Macau's Daily Times* resembled the *China Daily*.

Analysis

After discussing the *Results* chapter of the thesis, one cannot help but wonder why there is such a similarity between Mainland-based state media and Macau-based private media in terms of coverage of the issue of the China-Taiwan relationship. Considering Macau’s autonomous political and economic system, the independent regional constitution, and being a hub for foreign investments in China, it would naturally follow that the *Macau Daily Times*’ coverage of the issue of Taiwan is different from the coverage in Mainland China. After all, Macau’s government does not claim Taiwan and has not made Taiwan a core aspect of its political agitations and agenda; however, whenever Taiwan opposes the Mainland, *Macau Daily* responds to the critiques by defending the Mainland’s ideology, yet in a more modest way than the Mainland media outlet. This thesis believes that the answer to this puzzle lies in the notion of the Chinese national identity.

Around 95% of Macau's population identifies as Han Chinese, which is the dominant national identity in Mainland China (Leibold, 2010, p. 539). One of the core aspects of the Chinese national identity is that Taiwan is a "sacred land" that belongs to Mainland China by right of existence (Simmons, 1973). This belief is built around the notion of respecting the land, the forefathers, and their dreams, so the notion that Taiwan is Chinese has been ignited by the Chinese forefathers to the point where the notion has become a core aspect of the Chinese national identity. National identities and their core values, shape how people perceive and interpret the world and this includes how nations interpret their history. Taiwan was originally named ROC and went by that name for a long time. This further intensified and still does, the Chinese mystification of the island of Taiwan. The Chinese national identity is proud of the fact that its forefathers took on a long and dangerous march from the Mainland to Taiwan, managed to reach the island and establish a functioning government on top of the previous Japanese colonial one. This further re-ignites the existing belief and historic accounts that Taiwan is Chinese. The fact that the island is trying to escape from the motherland could be perceived as a denial of history and treason to the forefathers and their dream of one-China. One of the articles from *Macau Daily Times* states that the autonomous region of Macau has not ceased prospering since its return to the Mainland; this is not a subtle propaganda watchword, but reflects the feelings of the masses - Macau is part of the motherland and it is prospering because it is working alongside the Mainland by upholding the one country two systems principle, which suggests that there could be prosperity only if the state is united and functions as one. In this sense, Macau and the Mainland have multiple common interests, however, what truly unifies them is the strong notion of the established Chinese national identity. It is no surprise that *Macau Daily* is rather laconic when it comes to commenting on the Taiwan independence movement. To the Han Chinese national identity, it may seem like a betrayal to the forefathers of the land who fought for the unification of the island with the Mainland, especially if the dominant national identity in Macau coincides with the one in Mainland China.

National identities are largely shaped by the educational system and what is taught at schools. As discussed, Chinese religion has been transformed into a cult where the educational system is praised and respected by all. If the youth of a nation is taught to respect the educational system and take its teachings for the absolute truth, as in the case of China, then a sense of national identity is taught to the youth. As discussed above, it is the "small" repetitions of implicit messages that shape the national identity in a way that it becomes hard for the identity to be dismantled. The Basic Law of Macau allows the autonomous region to construct

the educational plan that schools follow, however, considering that the CCP has to approve the government representatives, it is fair to consider that the Macau educational system is mimicking in a way the Mainland one. In this case, the national identity that is taught in the Macau schools will resonate with the national identity that is taught in the Mainland schools. It is well-known that Mainland education on the Taiwan question is biased - it favors the narrative of the forefathers and the responsibility generations have to them and their efforts, therefore, it favors the narrative that Taiwan is a separatist island that defiles the legacy of the Chinese national heroes (Ohlendorf, 2014, p. 471). Through this logic of thinking, Taiwan is Chinese, it belongs to the Mainland, and the Chinese ruling elite has the responsibility to fulfill the dreams of the mythologized forefathers. In this sense, it does not matter that Macau is an autonomous region - the dominant national identity is concretely established and is fiercely protecting its core beliefs, knowledge, and morals. This would then explain why when the Chinese national identity is critiqued - be it by foreigners or by Taiwanese representatives - the *Macau Daily Times* defends the Chinese national identity.

Benson's (1999) argument of the "new" vs "old" national identity is as true and applicable in the Macau case as it is not. The argument has established that Macau is the "newer", less conventional version of the "older" and more traditional Chinese national identity. It implies that the "newer" national identity is more open to foreign identities, however, the argument crumbles when applied to the Taiwan case. *Macau Daily's* news is more objective and supportive of foreign opinions, however, it is not entirely open to opinions that go against the Mainland and its dream of one-China. In this case, the "newer" national identity is still closed off to foreign influence, especially opinions and ideas that go against the established beliefs of the nation. The established beliefs are not questioned and those beliefs hold the nation together. In this case, the Taiwan question has become an essential part of the Chinese national identity belief system - to the point where it borders with denial that Taiwan has the right to exist as an independent and sovereign state and that the main identity there is not Chinese but Taiwanese. Even if the national identity is exposed to other identities and is forced to interact with them for centuries, this does not imply that the core values and beliefs of the identity are washed away or that the local national identity adapts aspects of the foreign identity. In the case of Macau, the national identity may be more open and less conventional in terms of interactions that boost the economy of the region, however, the identity hardens, becoming more traditional when it feels threatened. In Macau, the Chinese national identity was tested for centuries by the Portuguese colonizers, however, the Chinese identity managed to prevail and keep itself whole. The national identity there is concretely established and may

only appear less conventional than the one on the Mainland, however, in reality, the Chinese national identity in Macau carries in itself the “old” values and principles. In this case, the *Macau Daily Times* may be more neutral in reporting on the Taiwan question, partly because the media is privately owned and not subjected to the CCP censoring machine, but also because it attempts to appeal to the foreign identities that invest in the region, therefore presenting the “newer” version of the Chinese national identity. In reality, however, the foundations of the national identity are strongly integrated into the masses, defending the Mainland and its agendas because the Macau national identity and the Mainland one coincide completely, creating a sense of reliability and commonality. By criticizing Mainland China and its reunification dream, the critique is not only pointed at the Chinese ruling elite, it is aimed at the Chinese national identity and the *Macau Daily Times* reflects on the dominant national identity by criticizing Taiwan, and supporting Mainland China, thus supporting the established national identity.

Conclusion and Discussion

This bachelor thesis attempted to answer the question *Why is there a similar narrative in state-owned media outlets in Mainland China and privately owned media outlets in the Macau autonomous region of the People’s Republic of China on news coverage concerning Taiwan independence?* by exploring two Chinese media outlets - Beijing-based state-owned *China Daily* and Macau-based privately owned *Macau Daily Times*. Through a single-N qualitative case study, the thesis discovered that there are striking similarities between the news articles from the two vastly different media outlets, something which was not expected. The thesis then managed to provide three possible explanations for the results: First, in the case of *China Daily*, the dominant national identity is politicized and used to propagate against Taiwan's independence, whereas, in the case of *Macau Daily Times*, the newsletter mirrors and reflects the dominant national identity and its core beliefs. Second, the educational system plays an important role in teaching national identity, so Mainland China and Macau are taught similar national knowledge on the importance of the Taiwan question. Finally, concretely established national identities cannot be undermined - they may appear to be less conventional, however, when challenged, national identities harden and defend themselves.

More study, however, is needed on Chinese media outlets, both in the Mainland and in Macau, to further strengthen the findings of this thesis. This thesis only managed to compare English-published media outlets as the language barrier was a limitation that this thesis could

not overcome. Further research is needed on Macau and Mainland Chinese media from media outlets that publish in Chinese and are aimed at the Chinese readership.

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