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THE TAIWAN ISSUE IN THE MASS MEDIA OF THE FUJIAN PROVINCE

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Abstract

The Chinese mass media differ from some countries in the global media development system. This is due to economic, cultural and socio-political factors. The Chinese mass media are currently experiencing major structural changes caused by new media trends. The emergence of new media has changed the news industry, primarily under the influence of external factors. The study of the socio-cultural dynamics of modern Chinese mass media is relevant and timely. The regional press in China, which includes the Taiwanese mass media, is of particular interest.

Keywords

China – Fujian province – Mass media – Taiwan

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Introduction

Taiwan, with a population of about 23 million people, has been governed and has existed independently of the mainland since 1949. The People's Republic of China (PRC) considers the island one of its provinces, while the inhabitants of this territory consider themselves an autonomous unit with their own democratically elected government. The leading political circles on both sides of the strait have different views on the status of the island and the specifics of bilateral relations. Despite this, in recent years, there has been a significant improvement in relations in the financial sector and yet political tensions continue to cloud relations between China and Taiwan.

The issue of China's reunification with Taiwan remains one of the most difficult issues in regional relations. The origin of this problem dates back to the last months of the Chinese Civil War in 1949.

Since then, each government — the new Beijing and the old Taipei — has claimed to be the only legitimate Chinese government¹. The Soviet Union recognized the PRC and the United States and its allies recognized the government of Chiang Kai-shek (Republic of China). The US and many other Western countries supported the position of the Republic of China and for a long time did not recognize the communist government of Beijing (PRC).

With the advent of President Nixon, the US administration changed its mind. The Republic of China lost its status as the Chinese representative to the United Nations in 1971.

In 1979, the US formalized official diplomatic relations with Beijing, reinforcing them with a joint communiqué telling that the US recognized the position of China. According to the communiqué, there was only one China and Taiwan was its component. During that period, US President Jimmy Carter terminated all relations with the Government of the Republic of China in Taiwan. However, soon the US Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act, confirming the importance of informal relations with the island.

Thus, the issue of Taiwan's affiliation is relevant and to a large extent affects the stability of the entire region.

Methods

- The sociological approach, clarifying the dependence of politics on society, the social conditionality of political phenomena, including the impact on the political system of economic relations, ideology and culture. This method is presented in the theory of interest groups by A. Bentley.

- The culturological approach, focused on identifying the dependence of political processes on political culture.

- The functional approach, studying the relationship between political phenomena and the level of economic development.

¹ Ch. Zhang, The history of relations between the two sides of the strait (Fujian People's Publishing House, 2014).

The novelty of the study lies in the fact that the Chinese press has a significant influence on society and the Taiwan issue has political significance and is constant in the coverage of the central and regional press of the PRC.

The practical significance of the study lies in the fact that the conclusions that we obtained as a result of our research can be applied in the activities of journalists and used to study international relations.

To analyze Taiwan issues in the regional media in Fujian, we selected three of the most popular and famous publications: Fuzhou Wanbao, Fujian Ribao and Strait News.

To analyze the coverage of Taiwan issues using the example of the regional media in Fujian, we collected materials from the news sources cited above for the period from October 11, 2018 to March 11, 2019. For clarity and generalization of statistical data, we conducted a study in several directions: plot of coverage, content analysis and anonymous survey.

We believe that these aspects are the most significant ones and fully contribute to the display of a real picture regarding this issue.

The coverage theme was divided into several subtopics: "Politics", "Economics", "Sports" and "Society".

The "Politics" subtopic includes the coverage of political processes in China and beyond, international activities, diplomatic visits and statements by senior administration of the PRC.

The "Economy" subtopic includes foreign economic activities, investment, finance, etc.

The "Sports" subtopic covers various sports events.

The "Society" subtopic displays social news related to people in general and Chinese citizens in particular.

Results

Due to its geographical location, the PRC province of Fujian has become the frontier of mainland China propaganda in Taiwan. Since 2010, Fujian and Taiwan's media contacts have become more frequent.

In September 1987, a reporter for Independent Evening News in Taiwan violated a ban from Taiwan authorities and interviewed people in the mainland. The mainland authorities quickly responded positively and welcomed the Taiwanese press on the mainland for an interview. For government officials, a special regulation was developed — "The Administrative Measures for the Interviews of Journalists from Taiwan on the Mainland". Since then, the Taiwan Affairs Administration of the PRC has made several changes to the rules for the Taiwanese journalists who wanted to take interviews on the mainland. In April 1993, the Taiwan Affairs Department of the State Council of the PRC amended the "Interview Regulations for Taiwanese Reporters on the Mainland", simplifying procedures for Taiwanese reporters coming to the mainland for interviews.

Naturally, the problem of the territorial affiliation of Taiwan attracts a lot of attention both in the regional and central mass media of mainland China. However, this topic and the features of its consecration in Fujian province have their unique features, which are caused by several factors.

The Fujian province is located on the coast of southeast China, 120 km from Taiwan. China and the island of Taiwan are separated by the Taiwan Strait.

Despite the political and ideological differences that today distinguish relations between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait, they are united by the common Chinese culture, ethnic unity and language.

In addition to cultural unity and a convenient geographical location, over the past decades, tendencies toward the integration of the inhabitants of the two shores of the Taiwan Strait in the economy have intensified².

At present, the processes of exchange and cooperation between the press groups of Taiwan and Fujian province are actively developing, softening rather complicated relations on both sides of the strait and presenting a model that cleverly avoiding intergovernmental disputes on sovereignty allows for constructive dialogue and exchange of experience. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that, due to differences in intergovernmental systems, people on both sides of the strait face some pressing problems³.

Thus, the problem of information exchange within the framework of press groups between Fujian and Taiwan is due to several reasons:

1. The interaction between them is often temporary and random.
2. The rules for performing various types of activity are not balanced, there are no restrictions on the work of the Taiwanese media on the mainland, while those restrictions exist for the representatives of the PRC on the island.
3. The Chinese government has unilaterally assisted reporters from Taiwan arriving in Fujian.

Some Chinese sources indicate that while the mainstream Chinese media focus on objectivity and comprehensive information when writing articles or reporting on Taiwan, the latter, in turn, emphasize hyperbolizing events in China, thereby selectively reinforcing ideological differences and encroaching on the objectivity of the subject in question. Active online media collaboration is also beneficial for integrating the media between Fujian and Taiwan. Today, when the audience needs to be diversified, traditional media, such as radio, television and newspapers, are inextricably linked to new media. For the driving force behind technology and raising capital, Internet broadcasting, Internet television, and digital newspapers are becoming a new area of cooperation. The media activities of Fujian and Taiwan are aimed at solving the problem of joint broadcasting in multimedia.

² H. H. Lin y X. X. Yun, Report on cooperation and development of the cultural industry across the Strait (Social science publishing house, 2012).

³ G. Wu y W. Guo, Cross-strait exchange and news exchange (Wuhan University Press, 2015).

The new media have become a new tool for news exchange in the media between Fujian and Taiwan. The audience of the new media mainly consists of young people. They can adapt to new realities. At the same time, young people are an object, at which the manipulative influence of the media is directed⁴.

However, there are still some problems with the network connection between Fujian and Taiwan. For instance, radio, cinema and the Fujian television group, as well as its subsidiary sites, such as the South-East TV channel, do not have traditional access to Taiwan and cannot provide information for Taiwan users. Topics directly or indirectly affecting Taiwan and the issue of its affiliation in the regional media of Fujian province have the frequency indicated in Table 1.

	Fuzhou Wanbao	Fujian Ribao	Strait News	Total
Politics	18 31.6%	28 40.6%	65 35.3%	111 35.8%
Economy	24 42.1%	24 34.8%	54 29.3%	102 35.4%
Sports	2 3.5%	5 7.2%	20 10.9%	27 7.2%
Society	13 22.8%	12 17.4%	45 24.5%	60 21.6%
Total	57 100%	69 100%	184 100%	310 100%

Table 1

The number and proportion of references to Taiwan in the regional press of Fujian

Based on the table, we can conclude that the largest number of mentions of Taiwan in the regional press of Fujian belongs to the “Politics” sub-topic (the average of the total number of references in the media equals 35.4%). Such news is often related to the desire of mainland China to reunite with its “younger brother” as soon as possible and harsh criticism of the countries that interfere in the internal state security issues of the PRC.

The second highest percentage belongs to “Economy”, with a 0.4% lower percentage of mention of Taiwan. Here the key role is played by Taiwan's desire to attract as much investment to the region as possible and to accelerate the peaceful reunification of China through economic integration across the bay.

In third place is “Society” with an average value of 21.6%. In the framework of this subtopic, representatives of the regional press of Fujian province touch upon the issues of identity, cultural and linguistic unity of the two countries.

“Sports” is in the last place with a total number of references of 27 and 7.2% of the total. Although all three newspapers are regional, the Strait News is noticeably the leader in the total number of references to Taiwan, more than double that of Fuzhou Wanbao and Fujian Ribao. This is largely due to the orientation towards the people of Taiwan and the distribution of their products in this region.

⁴ S. Nikonov; T. Belenkova; S. Smetanina; I. Letunovski y L. Maryina, Political movement vector or real noopolitics. Information age num 3 Vol: 8 (2019). DOI: [https://doi.org/10.33941/age-info.com33\(8\)9](https://doi.org/10.33941/age-info.com33(8)9)

Fuzhou Wanbao has the smallest number of mentions of Taiwan since this newspaper is more urban and has the smallest circulation of all three.

It is also worth paying attention to the fact that the number of references in the subtopic “Economics” in the Fuzhou Wanbao and Fujian Ribao newspapers is the same and amounts to 24%, but in percentage terms, they vary significantly.

	Fuzhou Wanbao	Fujian Ribao	Strait News	Total
Politics	9 40.1%	13 59%	12 50%	34 49.7%
Economy	7 31.8%	6 27.4%	4 16.7%	17 25.3%
Sports	1 5.4%	0 0%	2 8.3%	3 4.6%
Society	5 22.7%	3 13.6%	6 25%	14 20.4%
Total	22 100%	22 100%	24 100%	68 100%

Table 2

The number and proportion of references to Taiwan issues or negative island coverage of the island's life in the regional press of Fujian Province

We identified the frequency of mentioning Taiwan issues or negatively portraying the island's life using the same set of topics (Table 2).

Based on the data of the table compiled by us, we can conclude that the largest number of references to the problems of Taiwan or the mention of the island in a negative way in the regional press of Fujian province belongs to the “Politics” subtopic. The average value from the total number of references equaled 49.7%, which is significantly higher compared to the previous table.

The “Economy” subtopic is in second place while and the third and fourth places were taken by “Society” and “Sports”, respectively.

In view of a certain policy towards Taiwan, in the local press of the PRC, as well as the central one, Taiwan is often covered one-sidedly and exclusively from the standpoint of united China, emphasizing many times both the position of China on Taiwan's affiliation with the PRC and the position of countries that do not recognize Taiwan as a separate state.

For example, the media emphasizes Panama's attitude to Taiwan as one of the regions of the PRC, and the fact that President Tsai Ing-wen is referred to not as the president of a separate sovereign state, but as the head of the region subject to mainland China.

Tsai Ing-wen has never been a “president”. We call her “the leader of the Taiwan region of the PRC. You should be aware of this”. The article in “Fenghuang News” was written in the same style: “The Foreign Ministry corrected the words of a journalist who called Tsai Inven ‘President’⁵.”

⁵ Finance.ifeng.com. Surging News, 2018. Available: <http://finance.ifeng.com/c/7IQ0EOzMBQW>

An interview with the Taiwanese actor Wang Yaocin was also massively covered by a mainland television channel, during which the actor aggressively reacted to the presenter calling him “half-Chinese”. His response, “Taiwan is also an integral part of the homeland”⁶, received huge publicity, including in the regional media in Fujian. This statement of the actor was covered from a positive point of view.

In the same vein of admiration, all such statements by the Taiwanese about supporting the position of united China are highlighted. For example, a Taiwanese scientist reporting a fine by Taiwan of \$50,000 for her report on Taiwan’s reunification with China provided good material to condemn Taiwan’s desire for independence in the regional media. The Fujian Wanbao newspaper interviewed Lin Yushi, who spoke about the unfair attitude of the Taiwanese authorities towards citizens advocating unity with the PRC and poor life on the island: “I do not trust the authorities of Taiwan, because now Tsai Ing-wen is trying to stop the people of Taiwan from coming to the mainland”.

There were also reports in the press about the incident, as a result of which, Taiwan refused to participate in the world mobile exhibition in Barcelona, as exhibition organizers refused to add Taiwan to the list of exhibitors under the name other than “Taiwan Province of China”. The request by the Taiwanese authorities for a presentation under the name “Taiwan” was rejected with a reference to the official name used by the UN. An article entitled “Taiwan Province of China” on the front page of the online version of the Strait News newspaper mocked Taiwan's stubbornness. The regional press did not ignore the updated statistics on the self-determination of the Taiwanese population.

Fuzhou Ribao in its article updated statistics for 2018, according to which, the proportion of the Taiwanese population, recognizing itself as part of China, had grown significantly over the past few years. The statistics are presented as expected:

“Given the development of the mainland, taking into account the interests of Taiwan and the peaceful development of the two sides of the strait, the Chinese identity of the Taiwanese people should have increased”, — concludes the author at the end of the article⁷.

The scandal during the Golden Horse Award Ceremony in Taiwan was widely covered in the Fujian media.

The Taiwanese director Fu Wei, who won the Best Director nomination, delivered a speech from the stage in support of the acceptance of Taiwan as an independent state by the world community. The Fuzhou Wanbao publication article sharply criticized the director’s speech and the support of her speech by users of the Taiwanese Internet: “The network users expressed support because they had been brainwashed from an early age. For them, China has always been an image of backwardness and poverty, which they have often been told about since childhood, so they left the country”⁸.

⁶ Taihainet.com, 2019. Available:

<http://www.taihainet.com/news/twnews/bilateral/2019-03-18/2245490.html>

⁷ News.sina.com, 2018. Available: <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/gat/2018-11-17/doc-ihnyuqhh6188686.shtml>

⁸ News.sina.com, 2018. Available: <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/gat/2018-11-17/doc-ihnyuqhh6188686.shtml>

The topic of “wrong” propaganda to set the young generation against mainland China is reflected in some articles on Taiwan's education system. Strait News highlighted the reform of the history curriculum in schools with an article entitled “Taiwan Incorporated ‘History of China’ into ‘History of East Asia’. What are the intentions of brainwashing students?”. In addition to analyzing the reform itself, the article focuses on criticism of the reform by Taiwanese teachers themselves. Any political error or unfavorable forecast for the future development of Taiwan is analyzed by the regional media with particular attention. Let us mention several articles from Fuzhou Ribao as an example: “What future does Tsai Ing-wen promise to Taiwan?” — an article which describes the hopeless development of the country while maintaining the policy of estrangement from the PRC: “To protect personal power and be prepared to undermine the peaceful situation in the Taiwan Strait, she does not hesitate to provoke a war and harm the life and property of the people. Is this the peace that Tsai Ing-wen wants to bring to the people of Taiwan?”⁹.

The article “What proposal of Tsai Ing-wen has Japan directly rejected?” published in the Strait News, ridiculed Taiwan's proposal to engage in a security dialogue with Japan. “Relevant officials from the Japanese Foreign Ministry also confirmed that Japan's main stance on Taiwan was to comply with the Sino-Japanese joint statement signed in 1972 and that the country invariably maintained a ‘nongovernmental’ practical relationship with Taiwan. This has not changed”. “If Tsai Ing-wen made an erroneous judgment, I did not expect Japan to openly reject it. This shows that her security team is in big trouble. An optimistic analysis of relations between Taiwan and Japan is so ridiculous and completely unrealistic”.

The leader of Taiwan receives an extremely negative assessment if we look at articles in the Fujian media for March 2019.

A popular topic for mainland regional media is the special attention and analysis of policy blunders of Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen and her government.

Regional media have noted the presence in the market of high-quality products made in Taiwan. The culture of modern Taiwan is perceived by regional journalists as a unique fusion of ancient Chinese and Japanese traditions.

The regional media, in contrast to the central ones, pay much more attention to such vital topics as crime, sports and Taiwan's ecology. The regional media are increasingly interested in such a winning topic for publications as Taiwan's rich culture.

When evaluating events related to the Republic of China, regional journalists take an involved position, describing the facts and indicating their position on the events. The arguments of the authors of publications on political and economic issues are biased in a particular way and most often do not suggest the reader to guess what the real message of the article is (Figure 1).

⁹ Fznews.com, 2019. Available: <http://news.fznews.com.cn/taigangao/>

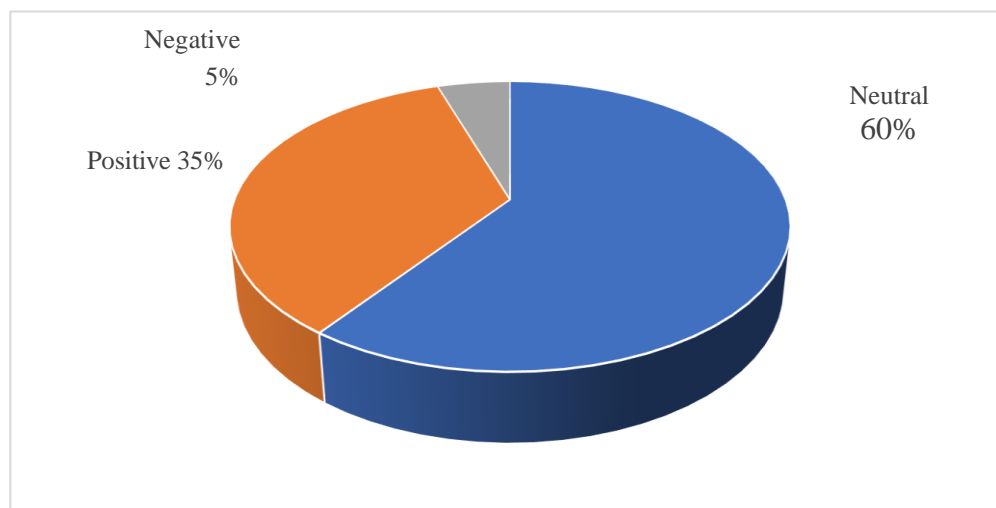


Figure 1
The emotional coloring of publications

Considering the whole process of confrontation between China and Taiwan in the same vein as the federal media, the regional press pays special attention to the mutual role. Taiwan is positioned as a state set up for peace negotiations and finding a solution in a civilized way and, at the same time, ready to defend its independence by military means (and having the corresponding potential). The direct and perhaps the main role in the confrontation is attributed by the Russian media to the US, which is arming Taiwan and exerting pressure on the world community to support Taiwan.

Taiwan's economic potential is rated extremely high in the Chinese media. The economic cooperation between Taiwan and China is actively developing despite complex political relations. We are talking about joint Sino-Taiwanese enterprises and the transfer of several industries to China by Taiwan.

By the powerful potential of Taiwan's economy and competitiveness in international markets, first of all, we understand the high-tech market, where Taiwanese products (computers, televisions, mobile phones, LCD and plasma monitors) are leading, and the interest in the Asian market, in general, coming from foreign global corporations.

Since 2016, when Tsai Ing-wen was elected President of Taiwan, the Chinese authorities have suspended official negotiations with Taipei. By organizing campaigns to isolate the Republic of China and carrying out naval maneuvers around the island over and over, they are thus trying to force Tsai Inwen to recognize the principle of "united China". Until China develops a roadmap for reunification with Taiwan, which will be recognized by the international community, the island's current status will remain unchanged. This was written by Mark Harrison, a senior teacher of Chinese at the University of Tasmania, in his article "Taiwan: no roadmap to unification", published in *The Strategist*, an Australian political publication. The author of the article believes that concerning Taiwan, Beijing is still forced to act within the framework of international law. Harrison notes that China needs the peaceful reunion with Taiwan to be supported by the international community, which, in turn, needs China to comply with international standards

and not turn the region into a hotbed of crisis¹⁰. The public diplomacy that Lai Lingzhi wrote about¹¹ is still functioning or the PRC is already implementing an information strategy that scientists call noopolitics¹².

Discussion

We conducted an online survey where we asked the participants to answer the following questions about Taiwan.

How many times have you been to Taiwan?

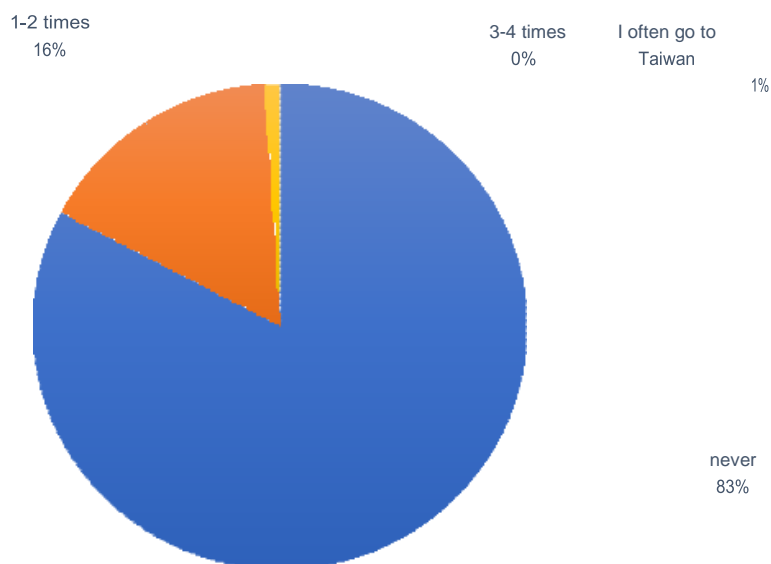


Figure 2
The results of the survey on visiting Taiwan

Five respondents (1%) answered that they had traveled to Taiwan regularly and the majority of the respondents (83%) had never been there (Figure 2).

For political reasons, the Taiwan government has not recognized the position of “united China” in recent years. Many media outlets report Taiwan's shortcomings, resulting in fewer and fewer tourists choosing to go to Taiwan, preferring South Korea and Japan for traveling and preferring mainland media to inform them about Taiwan tourism.

¹⁰ M. Harrison, Taiwan: no roadmap to unification (ASPI: The Strategist, 2018). Available: <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/taiwan-no-roadmap-to-unification/>

¹¹ L. Lai, Media tools and channels of public diplomacy in promoting China's “soft power”. Information age num 3 Vol: 2 (2019). DOI: [https://doi.org/10.33941/age-info.com32\(7\)030](https://doi.org/10.33941/age-info.com32(7)030)

¹² S. Nikonov, “Noopolitical Aspect of International Journalism Middle-East”. Journal of Scientific Research Vol: 17 num 1 (2013): 21-25 y I. Danilova; A. Puiy; S. Nikonov; R. Bekurov y A. Litvinenko, “Problems of Ethno-social Representation in Media: Review of Theoretical Approach in XX-XXI”. Century International Review of Management and Marketing Special Issue for "Media as the Tool: Management of Social Processes", num 5 (2015): 2146-4405.

Next, we divided the respondents by age group. Thus, most of the respondents were aged from 18 to 30 (36% and 43% respectively) (Figure 3).

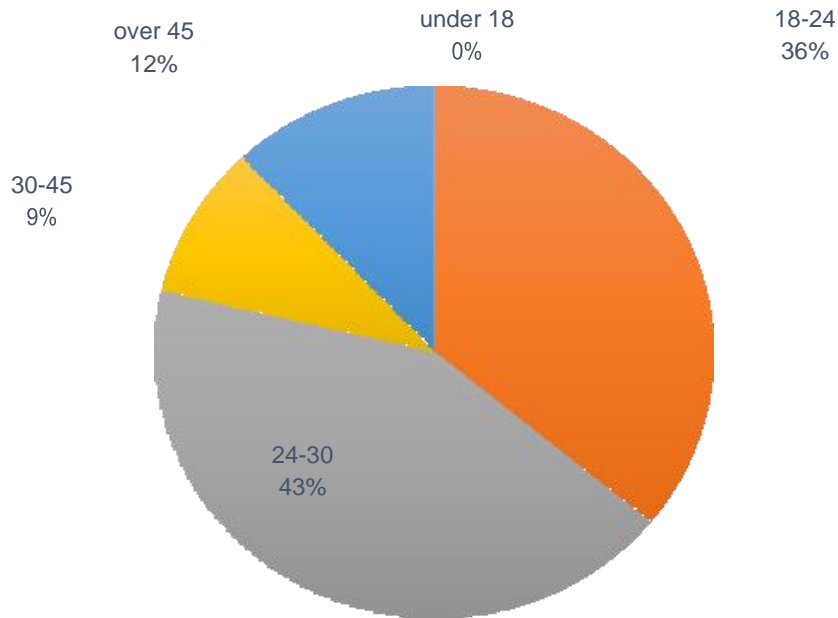


Figure 3
Age categories

In terms of gender, the analysis of the respondents showed a significant prevalence of the female gender (Figure 4).

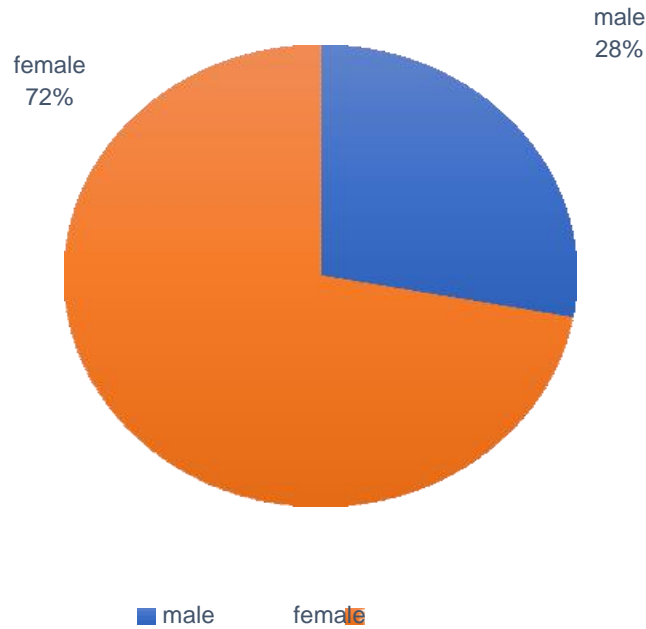


Figure 4
Gender division

What information would you most like to know about Taiwan?

other	19.20%
medicine	28.80%
science and technology	24%
education	42.30%
diplomacy	36.50%
culture and art	69.80%
economy	31.70%
politics	51.90%

The majority is interested in culture and art (69.8%), while somewhat fewer readers prefer politics (51.9%). Science and technology are of interest to a small number of people (24%) compared with Taiwanese education (42.3%).

We see more mainland residents, especially Fujian residents, interested in the art and culture of Taiwan because of its close cultural ties with Taiwan due to its special geographical location. Political issues are also troubling Fujian residents.

Without the cognitive needs of people on both sides of the strait, there will be no interaction and development between the two sides of the strait. For people on both sides of the strait, their needs are both informational and spiritual needs, they must understand the latest information from both sides and have a common cultural identity (Table 3).

As for the exchange of information and cooperation between the peoples of Fujian and Taiwan for the media of Fujian and Taiwan, people are most interested in cultural exchange and cooperation. People on both sides of the strait want to know more about each other's society. It is reported that Taiwanese people understand Fujian more intuitively and expect to be able to travel to Fujian to study, do business and work.

The most popular source of information is the website SINA.com.cn (80.8%) and among the print media — the newspaper Zhenmin Ribao (59.6%). The Sina social network has more than 500 million regular users and publishes millions of messages per day. The number of users is increasing by 20 million every month, according to company reports. Currently, the top 100 users have united more than 180 million unique subscribers. It is the largest Chinese-language mobile portal. It is managed by Sina Corporation, which was founded in 1998. The company was founded in Beijing and its global financial headquarters have been in Shanghai since October 1, 2001. Thus, we can conclude that 80.8% of users receive information about Taiwan via the Internet, however, since the network is an open platform, a lot of negative and inaccurate information comes from the network. Renmin Ribao readers accounted for 59.6% and Fujian Ribao readers accounted for only 9.6%, which suggests that more and more users prefer to use information from regional media than read the official ones. In principle, in the era of the development of a new visual culture in the media space, this, according to the Russian researcher Kudriashova, is natural¹³.

¹³ E. Kudriashova, "New visual culture in the media space". Information age...

More often, users and readers receive information through Internet resources (85.6%) and television (69.2%), since the Internet occupies a leading position not only in this country but also in the world. Almost in the last place was the position “books” (31.7%).

Half of the respondents answered that the problem is covered in mass media and most often it is politics (90.4%).

Conclusion

The content analysis of the text of publications has shown that the image of Taiwan is presented one-sidedly while the most important components of the image of the republic are ignored. Such topics as technological development, scientific discoveries, socio-economic, tourism, lifestyle and other winning topics for Taiwan are not presented widely and in a detailed way. The mainland Chinese media reports on Taiwan focus on objective and comprehensive information, while some media in Taiwan often report on the mainland in a way to selectively reinforce ideological differences and influence the objectivity of news reports.

Thus, we can conclude that the main topic for the regional press of China on the Taiwan problem is the censure of the current Taiwanese government’s desire to secede from China, ridicule of Taiwan’s attempts to position itself in the international arena as a separate state, which is emphasized in the press by the non-acceptance of Taiwan’s sovereignty by other foreign states and international organizations, the desire of the Taiwanese themselves to identify themselves as citizens of the PRC in both ethnic and political aspects.

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