

1998

Taiwanese newspaper use of government press releases before and after martial law

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.wnzu-5aps>
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TAIWANESE NEWSPAPER USE OF GOVERNMENT PRESS RELEASES
BEFORE AND AFTER MARTIAL LAW

A Thesis

Presented To

The Faculty of the School of
Journalism and Mass Communications
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science

by

Chia-Chi Shen

December 1998

UMI Number: 1392837

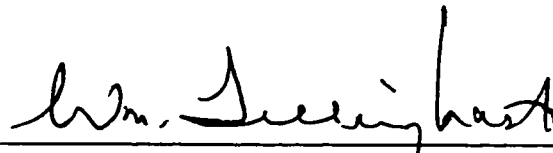
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ABSTRACT

TAIWANESE NEWSPAPER USE OF GOVERNMENT PRESS RELEASES BEFORE AND AFTER MARTIAL LAW

by Chia-Chi Shen

This thesis examines the use of government press releases by three newspapers before and after martial law in Taiwan. The three newspapers are the Central Daily News, the United Daily News, and the Independent Evening News respectively, and the observed press releases were issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Content Analysis is applied in this thesis to guide a quantitative study. The main focus is whether there are any differences in coverage and the degree of rewriting between the two time periods, which will exemplify the democratic progress made in Taiwan.

Findings indicate that Taiwan government did make a large step towards democracy after martial law. When martial law was enforced, there were many restrictions on news reporting. Also, the government put a very low priority in communicating with the public; hence, there were only a handful of press releases disseminated. However, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued more press releases after the dismissal of martial law and the three newspapers were freer to choose stories to cover. This thesis presents clear evidence of the efforts of the Taiwan government towards democracy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to offer my sincere thanks to several people who contributed to this thesis. Professor Bill Tillinghast, my primary advisor, had provided valuable advice and support to make this thesis possible. I would also like to thank Dr. William Briggs and Dr. Wen-shu Lee for their brilliant comments. I would like to thank all of them for giving me clear directions and insightful suggestions. Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family for believing in me.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The press release is probably one of the most important and ubiquitous public relations tools. It is deemed as a useful tool by public relations practitioners wherever public relations is functioned, such as profit and nonprofit organizations, education, entertainment, and government. Reams of news and features stories, bulletins, editorials, announcements, . . .etc. have been distributed; at the same time, the newsman's desk has been piled up with more and more such materials that are sent from public relations agencies and offices. It has become an essential job for newsmen to use and interpret the press releases.

Many studies have been conducted to measure newspaper use of press releases. The results vary widely. The wide variation in estimates and measurements may largely depend upon how the study was conducted and also depend upon what type of content was studied in which media.

However, the relationship between sources and reporters is delicate. Gandy (1982) noted that the concern for credibility, and unpaid publicity are the primary considerations leading to the observed preference that the public relations practitioners prefer to use news channels for the delivery of what he called "subsidized information"

(p.62), which is "an attempt to produce influence over the actions of others by controlling their access to and use of information relevant to those action" (p.61). The process of information subsidy is symbiotic (Miller, 1978; Walters & Walters, 1992). The sources deliver to reporters the raw material of their reliable, usable information, which is given in a way that requires the reporters less effort to convey. As Sigal (1973) explained, the reporter cannot satisfy his/her paper's day-to-day basis and numerous demands for news all by his/her own legwork. Therefore, s/he turns to official channels to provide him/her with newsworthy material day after day. Sandman, Rubin, and Sachman (1983) also put it bluntly: "Public-relations professionals report the routine stories for the media, and help them report the important ones. Few journalists relish their dependence on PR, but nearly all agree that there is simply no other way to get their business done on time" (p.383).

The politics-reporter relationship has attracted more debate than any other source (Gilbert, 1975). In a democratic system, there is always a need for government to communicate with the public. Traditional politicians viewed the mass media as the "vehicles for communication," which simply deliver news verbatim or convey what they wanted the public to know in the way they preferred. But as Davis (1991) contended:

Early U.S. political leaders envisioned a press that would play a significant role in the functioning of American democracy. Certainly their vision has become a reality—but in ways that the nation's founders probably did not anticipate. In areas that include government performance evaluation, elections, the formulation of public opinion, and policy-making, the press is a major player—not simply a vehicle for communication, but a force which to greater or lesser extent influences the democratic process (p.289).

Morgan (1986) also pointed out that "what marks the twentieth century in American politics is the professionalization of public and press relations skills and the rapid growth in the number of such professionals employed by governments at all levels and in every area of activity" (p. 19). The variation in newspaper use of press releases may also suggest that the mass media, at least the press, no longer purely served as the vehicle of communication but as what the traditional politicians thought they should be.

This is how the process works in the United States. Is it unique to mass media in the United States, or could it also be applied to other democracies?

In Taiwan, after 1987 when martial law was formally ended, substantial democratic development took place, which culminated in the first presidential election by voters (general public or citizens) on March 23, 1996. When martial law was enforced, the Taiwan government had imposed severe restrictions on news reporting. They were lifted in 1988

(Shih, 1989). More and more newspapers and news magazines were published to affirm the view that people deserve a broad knowledge fundamental to their society. Reporters no longer regard themselves as simply news transmitters. They take more responsibility to broaden the public's view, to serve as the people's voice on public issues, and to criticize government policy on the people's behalf. They are more aware of the "gatekeeping" function in their working position. The mass media seem to play a more important part in materializing democracy in Taiwan than they used to.

In the literature review section, three aspects are presented. First, a comprehensive review of previous studies done in the United States will be covered. The nature of press releases, and the various results are included in this part. The second part is an in-depth discussion about the relationship between the press and sources. Assertions held by scholars are addressed in this segment. An overview regarding government public relations practiced in Taiwan is the topic in the third section. However, there are only a handful of books or academic articles concerning government public relations in Chinese. The premier book in this field was written by Chan Lee in 1992. Part of his book regarding government public relations in Taiwan is based on interviews with authorized personnel and data collected from each department.

Purpose of Study

Taiwan's government has made a lot of effort to facilitate democracy. The effort can be seen in the elimination of restriction on news reporting and the removal of martial law. Meanwhile, the government also puts emphasis on government public relations. Each governmental department has its own public relations specialists and designated staff to communicate with the press (Lee, 1992). Therefore, it was significant to examine how the newspapers treat political press releases in Taiwan, especially by comparing the treatment before and after martial law.

Since the government gives increasingly higher priority to communicate with the public after the removal of martial law, does it issue more press releases than it issued before martial law? Do the percentage of press releases printed and the degree to which they are rewritten differ before and after martial law? Examining and comparing the results makes it possible to determine with more confidence the progress of press freedom in Taiwan.

CHARTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Nature of Press Releases

Wilcox, Ault, and Agee (1995) defined a press release, or news release, as "a simple document whose purpose is the dissemination of information in ready-to-publish form" (p. 562). Walters, Walters, and Starr (1994) viewed press releases as propoganda, which offer one-sided information, from the point of view of the organization on whose behalf the press releases were written.

Though the perception of press releases varies, the main purpose of the press release is to gain publicity (Walters et al., 1994). Its importance is supported by many public relations practitioners (Baxter, 1981; Morton, 1996).

Morton (1986) classified the press release into seven types (p.23-24):

1. Institutional. This type included all releases that relate to the entire institution as well as those about specific parts of the institution. It included reports of activities, services, and accomplishments of such units.
2. Coming events. This type included all articles that announce and/or promote events sponsored by the institution. These articles were all written and

- released before the event.
3. Past events. This type included all articles summarizing or based upon past events. They covered the same type of activities as coming events but were released after the event.
 4. Consumer information. This type included all articles that provided information to aid consumers. Much of this information told consumers how to do something.
 5. Timely topics. This type included all articles dealing with topics in the news.
 6. Features. This type included all articles about people associated with the institution of interest to and, therefore, released to newspapers besides the person's hometown newspaper.
 7. Research stories. This type included all articles that summarize or are based upon research projects conducted at the institution or by the institution's personnel.

The Newspaper Coverage of Press Releases

Several studies have been conducted to measure newspaper use of press releases. Sigal (1973) noted that press releases contribute to 17.5% of the news covered in the New York Times and Washington Post. Aronoff (1976) concluded that nearly 50% of local news items appearing in the Austin

American Statesman originated from public relations. In an effort to examine the coverage of press releases issued by the California Supreme Court, Hale (1978) found that the newspapers published 63% of the court releases. Honaker (1978) noted that city and managing editors surveyed from across the country used less than 5% of the news releases they received. A poll taken by the National Newspaper Association showed that newspapers do rely on press releases to get news leads or to further an interesting news story (Editor & Publisher, 1979). Martin and Singletary (1981) noted that the press releases of a state agency generated 10.9% of the newspaper articles, and 20% of the used releases were printed verbatim. In Kopenhaver's study (1985), it was found that 49% of editors surveyed used between 1-10% of press releases they received. The hometown releases were highly accepted by hometown newspaper (32%) in Morton and Warren's study (1992b). Minnis and Pratt (1995) noted that *Grosse Pointe News* (MI.) covered 34% of press releases received for publication.

The variable results are explained in two spheres: (a) the content of the press releases, and (b) newspaper characteristics.

Content of the Press Releases

News elements. Both gatekeepers and public relations practitioners define "newsworthiness" with news elements.

Therefore, the presence of news elements in press releases will be a crucial factor in determining the acceptance or rejection of the press releases. These elements are:

1. Proximity. According to the National Newspaper Association survey, the editors surveyed generally agreed that the materials from federal agencies tend to be better prepared than those of state, county or municipal units. But the releases issued by the latter offices generated higher coverage, because they provided a greater local or regional interest (Editor & Publisher, 1979).

Honaker (1981) contended that, if a press release does not have direct and quick recognition on localization, it won't be used. This point of view is supported by many studies (e.g., Aronoff, 1976; Editor & Publisher, 1979; Baxter, 1981; Martin & Singletary, 1981; Morton, 1993; Cantelmo, 1994; and Minnis & Pratt, 1995).

However, Martin (1988) noted that proximity doesn't assure the publication of press releases.

The conflicting result is because it contains two separate components: geographic distance and localization. The former means the distance between the source of the news story and the newspaper where the publication decision is made, and the latter is

the presence of a local angle to the story
(Morton & Warren, 1992c).

Morton and Warren (1992c) furthered classified past research on proximity into three categories (p.1023): (a) that which used it to mean both geographic distance and localization, (b) that which used it to mean geographic distance, and (c) that which used it to mean localization.

(1) Aronoff (1976) used proximity to mean both geographic distance and localization and found it to be the most important variable correlated to acceptance or rejection.

(2) In some research, geographic distance by itself is not a good predictor of publication (Luttberg, 1983; and Martin, 1988).

(3) Some studies tested how localization affected the acceptance of press releases. Honaker (1981) noted that lacking localization reduced the possibility of being used. Abbott and Brassfield (1989) also found it to be "the single most important factor for both television and newspapers in accepting or rejecting a news releases" (p.854).

In a test of the role of localization and distance in public relations press releases, Morton

and Warren (1992c) found that "the positive relationship between proximity and publication is actually a result of localization" (p.1027).

2. Impact. Abbott and Brassfield (1989) found that impact and timeliness are two important reasons for using or rejecting a press release. Morton and Warren (1992a) pointed out that impact is a substantial element in predicting use. The findings of Morton (1993) and Morton and Ramsey (1994) also supported this point of view.
3. Reader service. Morton and Warren (1992a) found that this element was present in 39.8% of the releases covered in newspapers. Thus, they suggested it to be a new news element.
4. Others. Timeliness, conflict, oddity, magnitude, known principals (well-known people) and prominence are commonly accepted news elements (Morton & Warren, 1992a; Morton, 1993). But some of them are not easy for public relations practitioners to utilize (Morton 1993). For example, a public relations practitioner will not want any mention of conflict in a press release, even if conflict is occurring. Few organizational activities involve magnitude or known principals.

Morton and Warren (1992a) noted that the day-to-day nature of press releases militates against magnitude. It is also not easy for practitioners in small and medium-sized organizations to tie their company to people in the public eye to fit the known principal. Oddity is sometimes available, but sometimes it is just difficult to find.

Type of press release. Publication decisions differ according to the type of release.

1. Consumer information. Morton (1986) found that this type of press release generated the highest coverage rate among seven types she categorized.
2. Coming events, timely topics, and research. These three types of press releases were preferred types, too (Morton, 1986). However, Minnis and Pratt (1995) said that coming events were the most commonly used release among seven types of releases by a weekly newspaper.
3. Others. The value of three types of press release--past events, features, and institutional--is questioned by Morton (1986), because of their infrequent coverage. They contributed 4%, 3%, and less than 1% of the coverage, respectively.

Morton (1986) concluded that consumer information, coming events, timely topics, and

research articles provide information that affects and relates to the day-to-day lives of readers directly. They contain a very important news element, reader service. Therefore, they are more likely to be published. However, past events, features, and institutional articles are less affected by the public. So they get less chance of being published.

Tailored press release. Abbott and Brassfield (1989) noted that editors are more likely to publish tailored press releases.

Along with photographs. Morton and Warren (1992b) found that press releases with photographs did not assure the coverage. But, when a photograph was available and the release was used, the photograph was also used.

Writing skills. Studies have contradictory results on writing skills. Aronoff (1976) found that the quality of writing appeared not to be distinguished along with gatekeepers' decisions on news releases. On the contrary, Baxter (1981) found that the most common complaint in the "other" category of rejecting press releases was poor writing style. Public relations practitioners tend to use longer words and sentences, more complicated structure, and more passive voice. That could reduce the chance of publication (Morton, 1993).

The origin of press releases. Ryan and Owen (1976) found that 72% of social problem news is staff written and 54% of them originated within the city where the newspaper is published. This implied that press releases are seldom used by newspapers on social issues.

The National Newspaper Association poll showed that press releases sent from government appear to rate higher with more newspaper editors than do those distributed by corporate public relations departments (Editor & Publisher, 1979).

Among press releases sent from PR News Wire, Morton and Ramsey (1994) found that 93% of releases from business and industry were used by newspapers.

Newspaper characteristics

Size of circulation. Morton and Warren (1992b) and Morton and Ramsey (1994) noted that the circulation sizes of the newspaper affect publication decision.

However, Walters and Walters (1992) found that the size of newspaper does not restrict the need for news. Each type of newspaper may have been responding to a different imperative in publishing releases. The large newspapers have more space to fill, and the small ones have fewer people to fill it. Both may be looking to public information officers for help in filling the newsholes.

Frequency of publication. Morton (1986) suggested that releases are more likely to be published in weeklies and twice-weeklies than in dailies. And this is only one of the characteristics that influence publication decisions.

Nevertheless, Morton and Warren (1992b) found contradictory results. They found frequency of publication did not make a significant difference in whether newspapers used press releases.

Morton and Warren (1992b) suggested that the result might be because of the different characteristics between hometown releases and general press release. "Morton's study dealt with general releases rather than hometowners, and her study's newspaper population included twice-weeklies which used a greater percent of releases sent them than either weeklies or dailies" (p. 389). In their study, no twice-weekly newspaper was included.

The Relationship between the Press and the Source

The Press and the Source

Aronoff (1976) indicated public relations practitioners serve as "partners with the press in the dissemination of information" (p.43), and "serve as extensions of the newspaper's staff, playing a specific, functional, cooperative role in the information gathering network which ultimately places newspapers at doorsteps and in racks on the streets" (p.45).

Kaid (1976) and Hale (1978) provided evidence that press releases greatly influence the content of the news, although not all of the releases are published. The National Newspaper Association poll indicated that the press is not exactly enamored of press releases in general, but does find it worthwhile to check them out for news as written or for leads to staff-written stories (Editor & Publisher, 1979). Baxter (1981) noted that, if releases stopped coming, the press would miss a lot of stories. Petzet (1993) also addressed the importance of press releases for helping editors to follow events.

However, many complaints come from the press, such as out-of-date mailing lists, missing information, poor writing, lack of timeliness, too commercial, not localized enough, and many other grievances (Aronoff 1976; Honaker, 1981; Baxter, 1981; Kopenhaver, 1985; Morton, 1993; and Cantelmo, 1994).

Honaker (1981) pointed out that journalism students have been taught to hate press releases. Editors regarded practitioners "as obstructionists, keeping reporters from people they should be seeing" (Kopenhaver, 1985, p.40). They feel they have a much higher status than public relations practitioners. Also, Sigal (1973) pointed out that reporters usually express considerable doubts about the reliability of press releases, while continuing to rely on them in newsgathering process. Martin and Singletary (1981) found

that 50% of the press releases published were under AP or UPI logos. Walters and Walters (1992) also found that the coverage rate of press releases dropped largely when they were not picked up by a wire service. Moreover, compared to the high usage of press releases under AP and UPI logos, those releases sent from the PR News Wire generated only 17% utilization (Morton and Ramsey, 1994). It is obvious that the press releases could generate a relatively high rate of acceptance by the newspapers, if they are transmitted by the journalistic wire services, rather than a PR wire service or public relations offices.

However, Jeffers (1977) contended that the relationship between the newsman and the source is not adversarial as conventional journalism suggested. There is an ambivalent affection between the press and the source, especially in the relationship between the press and the politicians. Politicians rely heavily on the news media for information and communicating with each other, not only with the public, but also with the executive branch.

Cornwell (1970) contended that:

Obviously the press plays an absolutely crucial role in presidential politics. It is equally true, but perhaps less obvious, that presidential politics are of great importance to the press. Furthermore, this reciprocal relationship is by no means limited to the American political and journalistic scene. National executives everywhere are becoming more plebiscitary. Their ties with their

publics have become ever closer, and hence their dependence on the media ever greater (p.16).

Kaid (1976) found that 100% of a political candidate's campaign announcement releases, 67% of his/her personal information releases, and 56% of issue releases were carried by at least one newspaper. Moreover, 60% of the stories printed were verbatim from the candidate release or verbatim with a few omissions here and there, usually dropping of the last paragraphs. By sending out prepared releases, the candidate increased his/her coverage by 310%.

Miller (1978) pointed out that news reporters sometimes increased the significance of the issue and legitimized the issue. Miller found that the media had been involved to some extent in the preparation or presentation of approximately 15% of the hearings held by Congressional committees during the first six months of 1975. They also influenced committees to topics, affected the significance of those topics and cultivated coverage of hearings by other media.

Therefore, Miller (1978) contended that politicians and reporters are "sometimes inherently, unavoidably symbiotic" (p.3). Sigal (1973) referred to the symbiosis as information transfers, which is the passage of information from a single source through a single channel to a reporter.

The formal channel could be press releases and press conferences. Nimmo (1978) pointed out that information specialists "schedule daily and twice-daily briefings and press releases to meet reporters' daily rations of information. Reading press handouts is a routine procedure for routine stories" (p.198). The other way, an informal way, is one in which "information subsidy from the executive branch are delivered to the press in the forms of leaks, off-the-record interviews, or back-grounders, which provide reporters with enough information to construct a news story without identifying its source" (Gandy, 1982, p.74).

Many reporters preferred the informal channel rather than formal outlets, because they are not "controlled situations" (Steinberg, 1980, p.58). For the same reason, politicians prefer to use press releases to generate good publicity, since the releases are controlled by themselves (Hess, 1984; Yiannakis, 1982).

Hess (1984) said the interaction between the press and politician—"who is reacting to whom—that is, who is initiating or trying to manage the news—partly depends on supply and demand" (p.110), that is the newsworthiness of the news. Also, Steinberg (1980) indicated that many factors can affect the relationship between the federal publicist and the media. "Prime factors are the objectives and attitudes of the agency's management. A second consideration is the kind

of administration in Washington, an 'open' one or a closed door" (p.55).

Furthermore, the symbiosis could be enhanced (Miller, 1978). First, reporters had to get their information from someone, and, for reporters in Washington, a likely choice was people in Congress. Because it not only has people with access to information about virtually every aspect of the federal government, but congresspersons also actively cultivate publicity. Second, the symbiosis extended to more than just the providing of information. Reporters were keenly conscious of the fact that political action on a topic which a reporter had originated could further that reporter's career. Politicians can hardly ignore it when reporters are demanding their response. Third, the symbiosis can also be enhanced by collaboration and exists quite apart from any conscious effort.

The symbiosis has strong power. Gieber and Johnson (1961) addressed that reporters' "functional relationships with the sources, particularly with the administrators, have led to cooperation and collaboration" (p.296). Miller (1978) also acknowledged that "each side had certain sources, skills, or assets that the other lacked" (p.11). Reporters and politicians together can come up with a more complete job than either could have gotten on their own.

Moreover, the source selection helps determine not only who will be heard, but also what will be heard (Walters & Walters, 1992). It can trigger interest in the rest of the nation's news media. The source not only gains the unparalleled promotional opportunity provided by access to the media agenda, but is also given the chance to define reality by changing the nature of information. Then, by providing information and legitimizing the issue, the press release from government influences the media agenda and the latter construction of reality (Miller, 1978; Minnis & Pratt, 1995). Leo (1996) argued that a lot of reporters rarely go beyond the releases to look at the reality. In such symbiosis, readers hardly know the reality and what is beyond the release.

Gilbert (1975) contended that:

Journalism in the United States today is undergoing more change—and is subject to more attack and criticism—than probably at any other time and place in history. Today, journalism is not so much discovering the role that a free press plays in a democracy as it is finding acceptance from two hundred million Americans who have been deluged with information concerning events than at any other period since the dawn of history (p.143).

Nevertheless, the symbiosis sometimes can increase the chances to get things right, like the case study described in

Miller's article (1978)—which helped the American prisoners in Mexican jails get better treatment.

Thus, the symbiosis exists, even though reporters complain about the press release.

The Ideological and Political System of the Press

Different ideological and political systems under which newspaper production takes place are also indicators of the nature of the product (Dunnett, 1988).

Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1973) pointed out that "to see the differences between press systems in full perspective, one must look at the social systems in which the press functions" (p. 2). They further identified four rationales for the mass media. The first two, authoritarian and Communist theories, are overlapping in some manner. The second two types are related, libertarian and social responsibility theories.

Authoritarian Theory

The chief purpose of the press in authoritarian society is to "support and advance the policies of the government in power; and to service the state" (Siebert et al., 1973, p. 7). Whoever owns a royal patent or similar permission has the right to use media. It is forbidden to criticize political machinery and officials in power (Siebert et al., 1973).

Dunnett (1988) noted that:

The press existed only under tolerance of the government. It therefore had an obligation to put forward the government's view and avoid undue criticism of the government, even though it operated as a private enterprise (p.18).

Communist Theory

In communistic society, the ownership of the press belongs to the public, at least the public's representative party (Siebert et al., 1973; Howkins, 1982).

However, Lendvai (1981) pointed out that instead of informing the public, the main function of the media in communist countries is to serve the ruling party. Howkins (1982) put it bluntly:

In China today, the main medium of communications is not the broadcasting or newspapers or the cinema, but the Chinese Communist Party. The main resources of communications are not wavelengths or printing presses but party members. . . The cadres' main tools are not TV programs but discussions (p. 5).

Libertarian Theory

Under this theory, anyone with economic means can own the media (Siebert et al., 1973). This viewpoint is based on the premise that individuals should be free to pursue their inherent natural rights without interference, especially interference from the government (Dunnett, 1988). Siebert et al. (1973) pointed out:

The important contributions of liberalism

in this area were the insistence on the importance of the individual, the reliance on his powers of reasoning, and the concept of natural rights, of which freedom of religion, speech, and press became a part (p. 44).

Merrill, Bryan, and Alisky (1970) contended that under this theory, "the press functions to uncover and present the truth, and it cannot so function if it is controlled by some authority outside itself" (p. 21).

Social Responsibility Theory

The essential feature of this theory is that it addresses the social responsibility of media. If the media do not assume their obligations, someone must see that they do (Siebert et al., 1973). Therefore, Dunnett (1988) noted that this theory acquiesces in government interference. Siebert et al. (1973) pointed out that "social responsibility theory holds that the government must not merely allow freedom; it must also actively promote it" (p. 95). It should look to three sources to improve press performance—to the press itself, to the public, and to the government. Therefore, under social responsibility theory, the media must recognize that they must perform a public service role and social and moral obligations to warrant their existence (Merrill et al., 1970; Dunnett, 1988).

Government Public Relations in Taiwan

Historical Respective

The Information Office, the forerunner of government public relations, was set up in 1946 during the autocratic rule of Ching Kai Shek. It was charged to disseminate governmental news (Lee, 1992).

In 1950, the Government Spokesperson Office was established and organized into three sections: Section 1—administering the publicity of foreign and domestic affairs; Section 2—governing the compilation, translation, gathering, and dissemination of information; Section 3—managing other general services (The organization of journalism in Republic of China, 1991).

The Government Spokesperson Office was reorganized into the Bureau of Information under the Executive Yuan in 1954 and took charge of publicity and public relations of the government (Lee, 1992). Since then, the Director of the Bureau of Information functions as the spokesperson of the Taiwan government.

In 1958, the Executive Yuan promulgated the *Promotion of public relations in government departments and government-owned enterprise organizations program*, and forced it to be put into effect. To establish public relations divisions became a common practice at that time (Table 1 shows public relations departments category). The Bureau of Information, the public relations bureau of government, was put into action comprehensively through approaches like "newspaper

contacting conference" and "public relations seminar" (Lee, 1992).

However, to cut down the number of offices, the government consolidated the Public Relation Division into the Secretary's office in 1978 (Lee, 1992).

But while realizing the importance of public relations in practicing democracy, in 1979, the Executive Yuan examined and approved the program called *Establishing the spokesperson system in departments of the Executive Yuan program*, drafted by the Bureau of the Information, and announced it was to be implemented in the same year (The Executive Yuan, 1979).

In 1982, to further facilitate government public relations, the Executive Yuan declared *Main points in enhancing the information dissemination and connection among departments of the Executive Yuan*. The current practice of the government public relations is based upon the two administrative decrees mentioned above (Lee, 1992).

The government made a significant step in 1987 by eliminating martial law. Before the law, the government controlled everything, such as economics, politics, and of course, communication channels. Eliminating the law meant

Table 1

Taiwan's government public relations departments category

	Authorized Department	Authorized Section	Authorized Personnel
President Office	Assistant Secretary	Spokesperson Office	8
Executive Yuan	Secretary Division	Congressional Section	13
Bureau of Information	Bureau of Information	Domestic & Foreign Information Section	73
Ministry of Interior	Secretary Office	Public Relations Section; Spokesperson Office	14
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Secretary Office	Information & Culture Section; Congressional Section	16
Ministry of National Defense	Military Strategy Division	Military Spokesperson Office	18
Ministry of Education	Secretary Office	Senior Commissioner	4
Ministry of Economic Affairs	Secretary Office	Information Section; Congressional Section	17
Ministry of Communications	Secretary Office	Public Relations Commissioner	6
Ministry of Finance	Secretary Office	Information Section; Congressional Section	6
Ministry of Laws	Secretary Office	Section Chief & Secretary	2
Total			177

Sources from: Lee (1992, p.70)

that people regained their constitutional rights (Law, 1989). Moreover, the government eliminated the restrictions on newspapers—on registration, pages, and publication location—in 1988 (Tai, 1991). Since then, a communication

channel between the government and the public has been built (Shih, 1989).

Objective of Government Public Relations

Government public relations serves as the "communication bridge" between the government and the public. To keep this bridge firm, solid, and freely flowing is crucial to fulfill the spirit of democracy (Lee, 1992).

In recent years, the advancement of democracy, the prosperity of the economy, the pervasiveness of education, and diversity in society made the government realize the importance of communication between the government and the public. Therefore, the Executive Yuan promulgated the *Promotion public relations in government departments and government-owned enterprise organizations program*, *Establishing the spokesperson system in departments of the Executive Yuan program*, and *Main points in enhancing the information dissemination and connection among departments of the Executive Yuan* in 1958, 1979, and 1982, respectively (Lee, 1992).

In the foreword of *Main points in enhancing the information dissemination and connection among departments of the Executive Yuan*, it claimed that "for the sake of furthering the communication between the government and the public, and advancing the harmony and unity within the

country, the spokesperson in each department should improve the efficiency of news distribution and provide positive information to the press to make the public understand what the government has done for them" (1979, p. 1). The most important purpose is to clearly explain the new rules, facilities, and innovations, in order to gain support from the citizen, Legislative Yuan (the lawmaker body), and other social institutions.

Scope of Government Public Relations

The policy of democratic countries is based on the support and understanding of the citizen. In today's society, it can be achieved through the opinion leaders and the media. The mass media play an important role in communicating between the government and the public. Hence, good media relations are indispensable for government public relations.

The scope of government public relations in Taiwan can be divided into five categories (*Promotion public relations in government departments and government-owned enterprise organizations program*, 1958, p.1):

1. Enhance the working efficiency by improving the relationship among colleagues.
2. Promote the public's comprehension about the government's policy and set up credibility by expounding the policies, decisions and achievements.

3. Investigate the public's opinion of government policies, decisions, and achievements for reference.
4. Cultivate a harmonious relationship between the government and the media by disseminating true information and accepting criticism.
5. Enhance contact with the people's representative body and other organizations.

Public Relations in Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Public relations work is conducted by the Information & Culture Section and the Congressional Section (Lee, 1992, p.61):

Authorized Personnel

The Information & Culture Section is a formal categorized section divided into three groups which are in charge of international propaganda, news dissemination, and information gathering, respectively. There are 25 people in the section, but only 11 of them take care of public relations work.

The Congressional Section is not a formal categorized section. When issues occur, authorized personnel form a task team and are dismissed after the completion of their task. There are five personnel in this section.

Scope of Public Relations

The scope of public relations in the Ministry can be divided into five spheres (Lee, 1992, p.61):

1. International propaganda. Establish plans to complete information and cultural task assigned, and designate Ministry employees to gather and disseminate information.
2. Prepare press releases and photograph news pictures for domestic and foreign reporters.
3. Gather, analyze, and disseminate domestic and foreign information and news.
4. Publish internal brochures and manage ministry-owned books and periodicals.
5. Congressional Section takes charge in contacting Legislative Yuan, Control Yuan, and People' Representative Body.

Summary

The preceding section provided an overview of the press releases, the relationship between the press and the source, and the contemporary condition of government public relations in Taiwan. However, there was no concrete answer to the use of press releases and the relationship between the press and the source. For example, the publication decisions were subject to change according to the type of the press release. Also, the relationship between the press and the source depended on the philosophical environment in which the two counterparts operate.

This study focuses on the status in Taiwan—how newspapers use press releases before vs. after 1987. These two periods represented two ideological systems in which Taiwan's newspapers function. Before 1987, Taiwan was more like an authoritarian society. Since the elimination of martial law, Taiwan's press holds greater social responsibility than ever.

Hypotheses

All hypotheses are based upon two presumptions, the difference between the two time periods and the characteristics of three newspapers. First, in 1980, when martial law was enforced, there were more restrictions put on the three newspapers. On the other hand, such restrictions were eliminated in 1995, so the three newspapers had more freedom in making publishing decisions. Second, there are different inclinations toward issues regarding the government held by three newspapers. The *Central Daily News*, which is operated by the ruling party, is more positive about government issues; while the *Independent Evening News*, a privately-owned newspaper holds a negative point of view. In between these two newspapers, the *United Daily News*, another privately-owned newspaper, is more moderate. The rationale of choice will be explained in the following chapter.

H1a. In 1980, the *Central Daily News* will print more press releases than the *United Daily News*, which will print more press releases than the *Independent Evening News*.

H1b. In 1995, the *Central Daily News* will print more press releases than the *United Daily News*, which will print more press releases than the *Independent Evening News*.

Hypothesis 1 was based upon the characteristics of three newspapers. The *Central Daily News* is very supportive of the government; therefore, it is more likely to cover the government press releases. The *Independent Evening News* is the opposite.

H2a. The *Central Daily News* will print more proportionality in 1980 than in 1995.

H2b. The *United Daily News* will print more proportionality in 1980 than in 1995.

H2c. The *Independent Evening News* will print more proportionality in 1980 than in 1995.

Hypothesis 2 was based on the differences in the time periods. In 1980, there were more restrictions on newspapers, the newspapers were more likely to cover government press releases than they were in 1995. Therefore, the researcher suggested that the coverage rate of press releases in 1980 will be higher in all three newspapers.

H3. The difference of the coverage rates in 1980 and in 1995 of the *Central Daily News* will be smaller than the *United Daily News*, which will be smaller than the *Independent Evening News*.

Hypothesis 3 was based on the characteristics of three newspapers. Since the *Independent Evening News* is more likely to cover negative news toward the government, it is more likely to change largely between two periods compared with the other two. The *Central Daily News* is owned by Kuo Ming Tang, which is the ruling party in Taiwan; therefore, it seems to be less likely to change its inclination. The *United Daily News* will hold a more moderate view.

H4a. In 1980, the average amount of rewriting of the *Central Daily News* will be less than the *United Daily News*, which will be less than the *Independent Evening News*.

H4b. In 1995, the average amount of rewriting of the *Central Daily News* will be less than the *United Daily News*, which will be less than the *Independent Evening News*.

Hypothesis 4 was based upon the characteristics of three newspapers. The *Independent Evening News* would rewrite the most, because of its inclination to cover negative news about the government, while the preference of the *Central Daily News* is to support government policy.

H5a. The average amount of rewriting of the *Central Daily News* in 1980 will be less than in 1995.

H5b. The average amount of rewriting of the *United Daily News* in 1980 will be less than in 1995.

H5c. The average amount of rewriting of the *Independent Evening News* in 1980 will be less than in 1995.

Hypothesis 5 was based on the openness of the time period. The environment is more liberal in 1995. Therefore, the newspapers were freer to choose and cover news. Hence, the researcher suggests that the degree of rewriting in 1995 will be more than it was in 1980.

H6. The difference of the average amounts of rewriting in 1980 and in 1995 of the *Central Daily News* will be less than the *United Daily News*, which will be less than the *Independent Evening News*.

Hypothesis 6 was based upon the characteristics of the three newspapers. The *Independent Evening News* would rewrite the most, because of its inclination to cover negative news toward the government while the preference of the *Central Daily News* is to support government policy.

Statement of Questions

Q1. Has the relationship between the press and the source changed from 1980 to 1995?

Based on the findings, the researcher will include some qualitative assessments of the differences and similarities in the use of press releases by the three newspapers as well as for the environmental contexts of the two time periods. The relationship between the press and the source will also be discussed.

CHARTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study examined three Taiwanese newspapers' coverage of press releases issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1980 and 1995. The main focus was whether there was any difference in coverage and the degree of rewriting between the two years, which would exemplify the democratic progress made in Taiwan.

Study Design

Content analysis was applied in this study. Budd, Thorp, and Donohew (1967) described it as "a systematic technique for analyzing message content and message handling—it is a tool for observing and analyzing the overt communication behavior of selected communicators" (p.2). Babbie (1998) also said content analysis is a well-suited method for the study of recorded communications. Therefore, content analysis is an appropriate research method for this study.

Sampling

Newspapers

Three newspapers were selected. The *Central Daily News* is owned by Kuo Ming Tang, the ruling party in Taiwan. The

Independent Evening News and *United Daily News* are privately-owned newspapers.

Kuo (1984) pointed out that the *Central Daily News* covered very supportive news stories about the government's economic policy while the *Independent Evening News* held a negative attitude toward the policy and the *United Daily News* did not show any specific preference to be used. Hence, these three newspapers will also be suitable sample newspapers to observe their coverage of government press releases.

Time Periods

To make this study more meaningful, the press releases were examined not only by comparing the coverage of the number of press releases printed in three newspapers, but also by comparing the coverage of the number of press releases printed in two years, 1980 and 1995. Martial law and restrictions on newspapers were dismissed in 1987 and 1988, respectively. Therefore, two years were randomly selected from the years before and after the significant events with equidistance. The first period, 1980, was chosen to represent the newspaper coverage before martial law. The second year, 1995, was chosen to represent the coverage after martial law. The press releases issued during the two whole years were analyzed.

Measurement

Coverage

The unit of analysis to measure the coverage of the press releases was individual press releases. The results were gained from the number of the press releases used.

Degree of Rewriting

The unit of observation used in measuring the degree of rewriting was the number of sentences of the press releases. The degree was divided into five degrees: from verbatim, rewriting slightly, medium, mostly, to totally rewritten.

If the press release is printed 100% as the original copy, it is deemed as printed verbatim. If less than 33% of the press release printed has been altered or deleted, then the release is printed as slightly rewritten. If the original press release has been altered up to 34%-66%, then the release is deemed as medium rewritten. If more than 67% of the press release has been altered, it has been mostly rewriting. If the topic remains, but all of the sentences have been altered, then the press release has been totally rewritten.

Statistical Tests

Chi-square was applied to test all six hypotheses.

CHARTER 4

FINDINGS

In 1980, there were 76 press releases issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A total of 287 press releases were issued in 1995. All hypotheses but two were supported.

In this study, the performance of three newspapers during 1980 and 1995 were examined. The coverage and degree of rewriting of articles printed by the *Central Daily News*, the *United Daily News*, and the *Independent Evening News* were analyzed and compared between the two years and within each year.

Hypothesis 1a and 1b were supported (see table 2 and 3). The *Central Daily News* printed significantly more press releases than the *United Daily News*, which printed significantly more press releases than the *Independent Evening News* in both 1980 and 1995 ($p < .05$ and $p < .001$, respectively). In 1980, 68% of press releases issued were covered by the *Central Daily News*, while 58% and 45% of them were printed by the *United Daily News* and the *Independent Evening News*, respectively. In 1995, 20% of press releases issued were used by the *Central Daily News*, while 12% and 2% were printed by the *United Daily News* and the *Independent*

Table 2

Percentage of Government Press Releases Published in 1980 by the Central Daily News, the United Daily News and the Independent Evening News

	<i>Central Daily News</i> (n=76)	<i>United Daily News</i> (n=76)	<i>Independent Evening News</i> (n=76)
Printed	68%	58%	45%
Not Printed	32%	42%	55%

$X^2 (2, N=218)=8.72, p<.05$

Evening News, respectively. In both years, the political-point-of view held by newspapers influences the way they treat government press releases.

Hypothesis 2a, 2b and 2c were supported (see table 2 and 3). The *Central Daily News* printed more proportionality in 1980 than in 1995. The *United Daily News* printed more

Table 3

Percentage of Government Press Releases Published in 1995 by
the Central Daily News, the United Daily News, and the
Independent Evening News

	<i>Central Daily News (n=287)</i>	<i>United Daily News (n=287)</i>	<i>Independent Evening News (n=287)</i>
Printed	20%	12%	2%
Not Printed	80%	88%	98%

$X^2 (2, N=861)=44.19, p<.001$

proportionality in 1980 than in 1995. The *Independent Evening News* printed more proportionality in 1980 than in 1995. The coverage rate of the *Central Daily News* in 1980 was higher than it was in 1995. Sixty-eight percent of press releases was covered in 1980, while only 20% was covered in 1995. The *United Daily News* and the *Independent Evening News*

faced the same situation. There were 58% and 45% coverage rate in 1980 for each newspaper respectively, whereas there were only 12% and 2% of press releases was printed in 1995.

Hypothesis 3 was not supported. The difference of the coverage rates in 1980 and in 1995 of the *Central Daily News* was not smaller than the *United Daily News*, which was not smaller than the *Independent Evening News*. On the contrary, the findings showed the opposite results. The difference of the coverage rates in 1980 and in 1995 of the *Central Daily News* (48%) was larger than the *United Daily News* (46%), which was larger than the *Independent Evening News* (43%). This reverse result will be discussed in the following section.

Hypothesis 4a and 4b were supported (see table 4 and 5). The degree of rewriting of the *Central Daily News* was significantly less than the *United Daily News*, which was significantly less than the *Independent Evening News* both in 1980 and 1995 ($p < .001$ and $p < .01$, respectively). The 1980 coverage of the *Central Daily News* showed that 85% of press releases were printed in slightly changed version or verbatim and the average of rewriting was 14%, while the *United Daily News* coverage showed that 68% of all releases were printed in slightly changed version or verbatim and the average of rewriting was 27%. Meanwhile, the coverage of the *Independent Evening News* showed that only 53% of press

Table 4

Degree of Rewriting in 1980 of the Central Daily News, the
United Daily News, and the Independent Evening News

	<i>Central Daily News (n=52)</i>	<i>United Daily News (n=44)</i>	<i>Independent Evening News (n=34)</i>
Used Verbatim	31%	18%	41%
Slightly Rewritten	54%	50%	12%
Medium, Mostly and Totally Rewritten	15%	33%	48%

$X^2 (4, N=130)=20.65, p<.001$

releases were printed in slightly changed version or verbatim and the average of rewriting was 37%. Compared with the great usage of printing press releases verbatim in 1980, the

Table 5

Degree of Rewriting in 1995 of the Central Daily News, the
United Daily News, and the Independent Evening News

	<i>Central Daily News (n=56)</i>	<i>United Daily News (n=34)</i>	<i>Independent Evening News (n=6)</i>
Slightly and Medium Rewritten	73%	45%	33%
Mostly and Totally Rewritten	27%	56%	66%

$X^2 (2, N=96)=9.44, p<.01$

result of 1995 showed a contradictory outcome. No press releases were printed verbatim in 1995. Seventy-three percent of the press releases were printed in slightly and medium changed copies in the *Central Daily News* and the average of rewriting was 42%. In the *United Daily News*, 45% of the press releases were printed in slightly and medium

rewritten copies and the average amount of rewriting was 62%. In the *Independent Evening News*, 33% of the press releases were printed in slightly and medium changed copy and the average of rewriting was 81%.

Hypothesis 5a, 5b and 5c were supported (see table 4 and 5). The degree of rewriting of the *Central Daily News* in 1980 was less than in 1995 (14% vs. 42%). The degree of rewriting of the *United Daily News* in 1980 was less than in 1995 (27% vs. 62%). The degree of rewriting of the *Independent Evening News* in 1980 was less than in 1995 (37% vs. 81%).

Hypothesis 6 was not supported. The difference of the average amounts of rewriting in 1980 and in 1995 of the *Central Daily News* (28%) was not significantly less than the *United Daily News* (35%), which was not significantly less than the *Independent Evening News* (44%). Although all three newspapers increased their average amounts of rewriting, the differences were not significant enough to support this hypothesis.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine whether the overall treatment of government press releases during 1980 and 1995 differed in Taiwan due to the elimination of martial law and dismissing of the restrictions on news reporting in 1987 and 1988.

The results of this study showed significant differences. One obvious change was the number of press releases issued in two years. The number of press releases issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1995 (287 pieces) was three and half times greater than in 1980 (76 pieces), which implied that as the Taiwan government became more democratic, more emphasis was put on communication with the public.

The government was more inclined to be authoritarian in 1980 and the society was conservative in nature at that time. The press did not serve as the channel for the public's right to know; in contrast, the press was a mouthpiece of the government. Consequently, the aim of issuing press releases was to disseminate information which the government wanted the public to know.

However, there was a dramatic change after the end of martial law. While the public and the media were more aware

of their right to know, the Taiwan government had to move from an authoritarian government to a more liberal one. The government realized that it had to work with the press to expedite its policies more effectively. Hence, the government established the spokesperson system and made efforts to execute government public relations. Disseminating more press releases after martial law was a major task to ensure a better "communication bridge" between it and the public. The aim of issuing government press releases shifted from telling the facts that the government wanted the public to know to making the public understand what the government had done for the public's good.

The use of press releases by newspapers, nonetheless, told a different story. As more press freedom was given to the press, the more selective the media were in choosing which stories to be printed and the government had less control.

In 1980, more than half of the press releases issued by the Ministry were used by the three newspapers, and even in the less supportive press, the *Independent Evening News*, used 45% of the government's press releases. More importantly was that many of them were printed in only slightly rewritten form in all three newspapers and only a handful of them were changed very much. In the *Central Daily News*, the total number of printed press releases in verbatim and slightly

changed version was up to 85% and in the *Independent Evening News*, the total came up with 53%. Although different political stances were taken by the three newspapers, it was not the first concern when making publishing decisions at that time.

The government was more aware of the importance of communicating with the public in 1995 and published more press releases; nevertheless, the use of those press releases declined significantly. There was no press releases printed verbatim in the three newspapers and each of the printed press releases were rewritten in different levels from slightly to totally. Twenty percent of the press releases were printed by the *Central Daily News* and, compared with the 1980 coverage, its usage rate dropped to 48%. Though there was still 43% of the printed releases in slightly rewriting version, which far outdistanced the *United daily News* (21%) and the *Independent Evening News* (0%), it was still only half of its 1980 performance. At the same time, the *Independent Evening News* overall coverage was down to 2%, which is far below any research that had been studied in the United States, and all of them had been rewritten in different degrees. This implied that the government press releases were rarely found in this newspaper.

Comparing the performance of the three newspapers in the two years, meaningful results were obtained. The decline of coverage of the *Central Daily News*, the *United Daily News*, and the *Independent Evening News* between 1980 and 1995 were 48%, 46%, and 43%, respectively. There was almost 50% decline in all three newspapers. *The Central Daily News* had the most dramatic decline, which did not support the researcher's hypothesis. This might take place because of the extreme high usage of press releases the *Central Daily News* had in 1980. It might also be because the expectation the public held toward a more *neutral report by the media*. Therefore, the *Central Daily News* had to make a larger step to be liberal. But since the differences among the three newspapers were not very significant, it was obvious that the expectation held by the public affected all newspapers after martial law.

The difference of the degree of rewriting among the three newspapers provided further evidence. Though the *Central Daily News* average declined the most among the three, it had the least change in rewriting (28%). In 1980, the *Central Daily News* had only 14% of press releases rewritten, but in 1995, rewriting increased to 42%. But such difference was beaten by the *United Daily News* and the *Independent Evening News*, whose changes were 35% and 44%, respectively.

The rewriting of the *Independent Evening News* in 1995 was up to 81% and both of its coverage and degree of rewriting were extremely low in 1995, which suggested that its negative inclination toward the government was more apparent after martial law. But the differences among three newspapers were not significant enough to draw a conclusion that the *Independent Evening News* had a more outstanding performance than the other two. The three newspapers were in an equal effort to meet the public's expectations.

Meanwhile, the decline in the use of government press releases also implied the change between the source (in this case, the government agency) and the reporters. During the era when martial law was enforced, there were many unreasonable restrictions on newspapers imposed by the government, from the number of pages to the stories they covered. The government press releases were the one and official source of formal issues. Meanwhile, many press releases issued by the Ministry were related to or took place in foreign countries, and there was less possibility that newspapers were able to afford to appoint special correspondents outside the country at that time. Therefore, reporters were used to printing those materials not only because they were handy but also because it was safe to cover those stories.

The trend has changed since the elimination of martial law, however. Newspapers have more pages and space to be filled (four times than before) and they are allowed to deliver a more liberal opinion in public. Therefore, the media practitioners are more aware of their "gatekeeping" role and feel an obligation to report divergent views about what is "going on" in government, rather than what the government was "telling" them. Under such consideration, reporters gradually perceived the government press releases as nothing more than propaganda. Therefore, many issues were printed as reporters' stories and not from official releases. Reporters also might deem the press releases as clues for them to develop other news stories or more in-depth news reports. Press releases still play an important part in newsgathering process, but are not viewed as important as they were before martial law.

Besides, Taiwan experienced large economic growth in the late '70s, and many mainstream newspapers had sufficient capital and, therefore, could afford to appoint correspondents to report the news happening in other countries. In many cases, because of the active role reporters possessed, the newspapers could cover stories more rapidly and more accurately than official sources did.

In addition to the reasons mentioned above, limited space was another factor. Although the pages and space had

been largely expanded after martial law was eliminated, events and issues also increased. The result was that more news stories had to share the space. Hence, many stories were deleted or rewritten.

Less usage of government press releases did not mean that the issues deserved less attention than it used to be. On the contrary, the foreign issue was as important as it was before martial law. The difference, however, was the treatment it received.

This study showed substantial evidence of the efforts of the Taiwan government to move from an authoritarian government to a liberal government. The results of this study showed not only that the government's enhanced emphasis on public relations, but also that the press were more aware of their role as gatekeepers. Accordingly, they chose to say "No!" to government press releases and seek news stories they thought to be newsworthy.

Directions for Future Research

This study focused on exploring whether government press releases receive different treatment during two different time periods and how large the differences were. But there was still something more that could be said. A qualitative analysis, or a combination of quantitative and qualitative research could reveal how those changes take place. More specifically, a study comparing the performance of the press

between the time period when martial law was just eliminated and a time period when martial law had been eliminated for more than 10 years would also be interesting.

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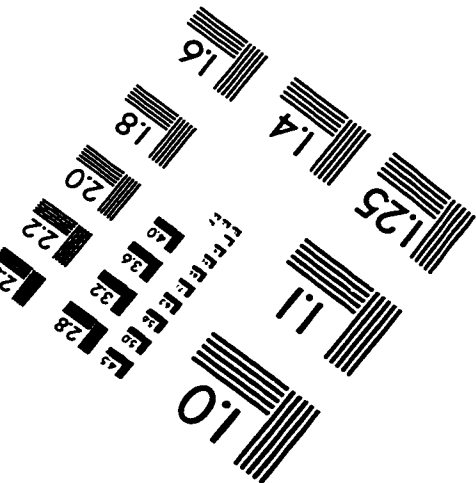
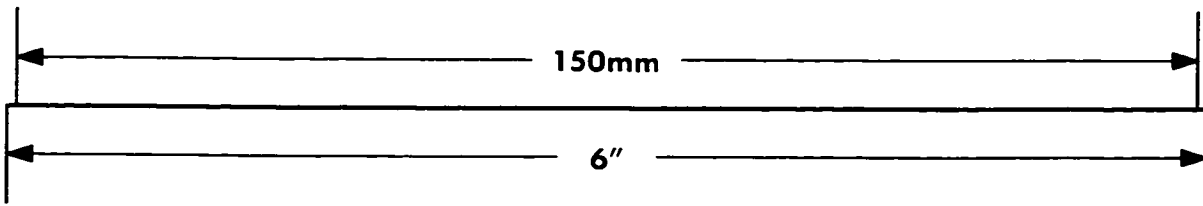
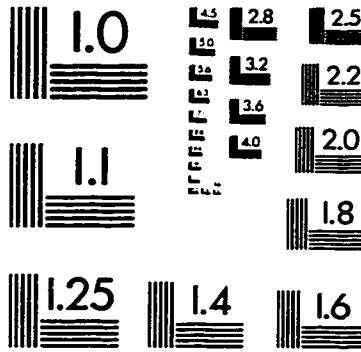
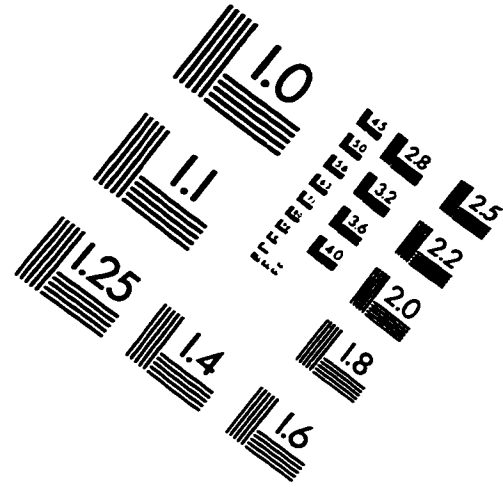
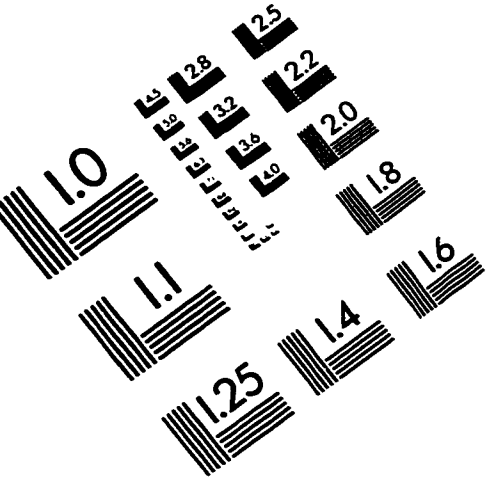
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