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Use of Image Political Advertising in the  
Taiwanese Presidential Election of 2000**

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## **A Qualitative Case Exploration of the Use of Image Political Advertising in the Taiwanese Presidential Election of 2000**

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**ABSTRACT**      *By ‘image’ advertising we refer to television and press advertising that applies brand marketing techniques to political campaigns. Such advertising tends to contain appealing imagery and symbolism rather than factual, policy-based appeals. In the Taiwanese presidential election of 2000 the main opposition party, the Democratic Progressive Party, used image advertising on TV before their widely unexpected victory. This was a major departure for the DPP who until then were typically associated with poorly resourced, controversial but ineffective election advertising. This paper examines the Taiwanese political context and briefly reviews relevant research literature before discussing this particular case of political advertising. The paper adopts a mixed interpretive approach drawing on a quantitative analysis of poll data, a qualitative focus group and secondary sources to seek insights into the voter impact this image political advertisement may have had.*

**KEYWORDS:** Political Advertising, Political Marketing, Taiwan

### **The Emergence Of The Image Political Television Advertisement In Taiwan**

The Democratic Progressive Party’s presidential candidate Chen Shui-bian and his running mate Lu Xiu-lian secured a safe margin on the popular vote and declared victory late at night on March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2000. This victory not only marked the first ever non-Kuomintang (known as KMT, translating into Nationalist Party) president in the Republic of China’s history, which was found by Dr. Sun Yat-sen at 1911. It also ended the KMT’s 50 years of incumbency since the party first retreated to Taiwan from Mainland China after defeat by the Chinese Communists Party (The People’s Republic of China) in 1949. The outcome was stunning to the nation from all sides of the political spectrum. It was also received with astonishment internationally because Mr. Chen was not considered a sufficiently strong opponent to challenge the KMT party machine,

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even though he had performed relatively well in the prior Taipei City Mayor election. In the Presidential election Mr. Chen only obtained 39% of the popular vote, but he achieved victory because the KMT vote was split between the official candidate Dr. Lian, the former vice-president and prime minister, and Mr. Song, Dr. Lian's former political comrade who ran as an independent after losing the KMT primary.

Competitive elections were only available in Taiwan since the end of martial law in the mid 1980s. Election television advertising was not available until the late 1980s, but the importance of this medium for political parties has increased rapidly ever since. During the presidential campaign period from December 1999 until Election Day, all candidates used election television advertising as part of their campaign. The KMT spent the most in election television advertising in terms of production cost and air time but received very little critical acclaim for their advertising from the public or from marketing commentators. On the other hand, the DPP, who had limited resources and experience of such campaigns, utilized documentary footage and endorsements from both celebrities and ordinary citizens in their television 'spots'. The DPP campaign was widely regarded as a memorable image-focused one. According to the Democratic Progressive Party's official website ([www.dpp.org.tw](http://www.dpp.org.tw)), they created 23 advertisements for the campaign including 5 with Taiwanese dialect and one shorter version. From the researchers' perspective, only one included concrete political reform proposals.

The aim of this paper is to explore the roles and importance of the election television advertising spot in a non-western democratic country by focusing on one particularly powerful example of image election advertising in the Taiwanese Presidential election of 2000. The specific advertisement this study will look at is the DPP spot entitled '20<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the *Meilidao* (translated to Beautiful Island) Incident.' It is a unique political spot for Taiwanese politics because 1) it has no voice-over but only music, 2) it consists largely of old documentary and news footage, most of it filmed in black and white 3) it has no tangible political agenda or proposals. The ad itself was aiming at arousing emotional feelings, image building and attacking the KMT government through political symbolism, music and carefully edited and sequenced images.

The paper will first briefly review research into political advertising in western democratic countries, particularly focusing on image advertising. It will then describe the political climate and history in Taiwan, gradually introducing the history of the *Meilidao* Incident, before analysing the apparent effects of the spot using a combination of qualitative, quantitative and secondary sources.

## **The Research Literature on Western Political Marketing and Advertising**

There is extensive research literature on political communication, political marketing and political advertising. Among the many studies into Western, English-speaking countries are Maarek (1995), Jamieson (1996) and Kaid (1997) who studied political marketing in America while Kavanagh (1995), McNair (1999) and Lees-Marshment (2001) focused on the practice in Britain. Wring (2002) documented how the UK Labour Party's image was transformed (partly through advertising) since 1983.

Zheng (1995) included image advertising as one of the four categories of political advertising along with government propaganda, ideology promotion, and election advertising. Powell and Cowart (2003, p. 55) suggested that image advertising was typically categorised by scholars into a) leadership strength, b) judgement as a person and c) disposition toward voters. Image political advertising in this paper will be seen in more general terms as paid and non-personal political messages with an identifiable sponsor who had full control of the content that aimed at influencing audiences not through logical but emotional appeal (Olson, 1999). This definition is preferred because in the opinion of the authors the chosen advertisement does not easily fit into any of the above categories because of its inter-textual and symbolic nature. Inter-textual advertising draws on the viewer's knowledge of non-advertising genres and social practices (Cook, 2002, Hackley, 2005). In this case the spot used news and documentary footage of real events. In addition it was shot mostly in black and white and used a montage style of cinematography to merge together actual events which were historically distant and thematically diverse, techniques more familiar to film noir movie buffs than voters at election time. These techniques, familiar in brand advertising, symbolically connected events that were not historically contiguous. While the focus group discussion below will elaborate on the viewer interpretation of the spot, we believe that the *Meilidao* ad is designed to evince a very general positive emotional response, not unlike that of much brand advertising which seeks not to persuade but to seduce with music and imagery.

## **Research Literature on Taiwan's Political Environment and Political Advertising**

In the comparative study between nine countries done by Holtz-Bacha and Kaid (1995), they investigated and compared the infrastructure of each country's governmental, broadcast and media system in relation to each country's unique political advertising practices. Figure 1 was constructed by using the same criteria. The information in the chart was gathered from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Laws and Regulations Database of the Republic of China, and

Sponsorship of spots	Candidate, party, and affiliations
Electoral systems	Relative majority vote
Where spots are broadcast	Public and private
Method of political broadcast allocation	Public channel: assigned to qualified candidate Private channel: free purchase
Number and length of political broadcasts	Public channel: 30min or more Private channel: any length; mc* 30/60 sec
Restrictions on content of political broadcasts	Public channel: mostly used for debate, platform and manifesto only Private channel: none

\*Mc= most common

**Figure 1.** The political, broadcast and media structure of Taiwan

Zheng (1995). The purpose of the table is to outline the infrastructure of Taiwan’s system when compared to the systems in western democratic countries and demonstrate the research result can be easily applied elsewhere.

In Taiwan, studies on political communication (including political marketing and political advertising) increased rapidly since the end of martial law, reflecting the increased competitiveness in party politics and the rapid importation of political marketing techniques from abroad. The Americanisation of Taiwan’s political marketing is well-documented by Chang (2003) and Zheng (1995; 1998; 2004). Some of the studies were published in English language journals while most were published in Mandarin. The purpose of this section is to narrowly focus on the literatures that studied Taiwan’s political development, Taiwan’s political marketing development and the *Meilidao* (Beautiful Island) Incident.

*Taiwanese Political Culture Since 1949*

Tien (1996) suggested Taiwan’s political environment can be divided into three main periods since the KMT’s retreat to Taiwan. The first phase was 1959-1971 where only limited and local elections were allowed due to the chaos and conflicts after the defeat. The ten year gap from 1949’s retreat and 1959 is due to the heavy cross fire between the strait and the continuously fighting on nearby islands; therefore, democratic practices can not be carry out;

whereas the cross fire still continue after 1959 but the level of immediate threat reduced dramatically due to PRC's involvement in the Korean War and American's later involvement in Vietnam. The second phase was 1972-1985 where regional elections were conducted. This came during a change of political climate brought about partly by the fact that in the Republic of China Chiang Kai-shek released power to his son Chiang Ching-kuo and the death of Mao and some important party figures in People's Republic of China. At the same time America and other countries were establishing stronger links with PRC. Within this climate the KMT were pressured to be more democratic by promoting fair and competitive elections in order to win international support and sympathy. This was necessary to legitimise the KMT's governance of Taiwan. The third phase is the open and competitive political climate after 1986.

Chang (2003) studied the 1998 Taipei mayor election. Chen lost but was encouraged enough to run for president. In particular, Chang (2003) noted from this campaign that Western style political marketing and advertising techniques seemed to translate well into non-Western political scenes in spite of the considerable differences in culture and political history. Zheng (1995; 1998; 2004) perhaps had done the most extensive study on Taiwan's political advertising including development and characteristics. Zheng (1995) first examined Taiwan's political advertising practices in contrast with America's, then outlined common political advertising strategies in Taiwan (Zheng, 1998). Zheng (2004) recapped the 2000 presidential election with the specific focus on three contender's election television advertising (ETA). During the article, Zheng analysed the spots by its contents as well as resource allocation; hence, although it is short in details, but it gave a good overview on the election advertising strategies and analysis.

Zheng's (2004) study did not consider the spot '20<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the *Meilidao* Incident' as one of the presidential election advertisements. This is understandable since it is more party focus than candidate focus, but the Democratic Progressive Party's website (Election Library) characterised it as part of the 2000 presidential election advertisement campaign. In addition, the spot was aired during the commonly agreed election campaign period; therefore, treating the spot as one of the ETAs in the campaign can easily be justified.

For this study then, we will look at the possible impact of *Tangwai*, *Meilidao* (Beautiful Island) and Kaohsiung Incident specifically since footages from this event was used during the '20<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the *Meilidao* Incident' election television advertisement for the DPP in 2000.



### ***Tangwai*, *Kaohsiung* and the *Meilidao* (Beautiful Island) Incident**

It is important to understand some of the events implicitly referred to in this advertisement in order to appreciate its rhetorical impact in the context of contemporary Taiwanese politics. *Tangwai* translates to “outside the party”. The expression was used by anti-KMT political factions to protest at the KMT’s dominance in politics from the 60s through out the 80s. Some of them supported Taiwan’s independence from mainland China while others support Taiwan’s self-determination within a continuing relationship with mainland China (Roy, 2003, p.158). Many of the *Tangwai* members later became important figures within the DPP.

*Meilidao* was a magazine published by the members of the *Tangwai* in 1979 and many of the articles were critical of the KMT government. The magazine soon became the second most popular magazine in Taiwan next to the TV guide (Roy, 2003, p.167).

*Kaohsiung* Incident was referring to the conflict between the rally crowd and the police at Kaohsiung, a major city in southern Taiwan. On December 10<sup>th</sup>, 1979, the members from *Meilidao* and *Tangwai* applied for permission to stage a public rally in recognition of the International Human Right Day. KMT officials turned down the application, but the rally was carried out regardless. The rally turned into riot and observers claimed about 100 policemen and civilians were injured while the KMT officials claim 182 policemen and one civilian were injured (Roy, 2003, p.168-169). Later the KMT government arrested eight leading members from the *Tangwai* and *Meilidao* staffs for trial and sentenced to them from twelve years to life time imprisonment. The DPP election advertisement we are studying spliced news footage from the arrests and subsequent release of these individuals with other images of Mr Chen (who was a defence lawyer of those imprisoned) thus implicitly associating Mr Chen with the resistance of those imprisoned and implicitly casting the KMT in the role of oppressor.

### *The DPP Spot*

The spot ‘20<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the *Meilidao* Incident’ was the second ETA shown on air by the DPP for this election. The election television advertising campaign started in early December 1999 while the party campaign machine started even earlier (Zheng, 2004). The polling day of the 2000 presidential election was March 18<sup>th</sup>. The Kaohsiung Incident happened 20 years before on December 10<sup>th</sup> 1979. A transcript of the spot can be found in appendix 1. Here, we will briefly outline the plot of this ETA. The first half of the spot shows a list of prisoners from the Kaohsiung Incident with their name and the length of their sentences. In the middle it shows the presidential candidate Chen Shui-bian who was the youngest defending

lawyer for the prisoners, and then more prisoners were shown. Toward the end of the spot, it turned to the Democratic Progressive Party's convention where the members from the party including Chen Shui-bian and many of the ex-prisoners were celebrating. Throughout the spot there is no voice-over, only music. The spot is filmed in black and white throughout until the very last part. We will develop a more detailed discussion of the spot content below. For the present our research method will be outlined.

## **Research Approach**

The first part of the analysis is on the macro-level with the opinion poll collections on the three presidential candidate contenders. We have obtained the collated data and will try to match up the poll results with the months of exposure for the spot. We recognise that there is a good degree of guesswork in this. The second part of the research was micro-oriented carried out through a focus group of Taiwanese nationals conducted in Taiwan. Focus groups, according to Malhotra and Birks (2003) can often result in unexpected and insightful results. In the present instance the aim of the research was exploratory so a small convenience sample was appropriate. There is no implication in the findings that the focus group opinions can be representative of the larger Taiwanese voter population. Rather, the group discussion is subject to an interpretive analysis reflecting the "culturally shared knowledge, beliefs, ideals and taken-for-granted assumptions" (Thompson et al (1994, p. 433, cited in Hackley, 2003, p. 12) of the group and the researcher (who is the same age and education level as the participants). In this way the nuance of participants' responses can be interpreted and understood within the wider cultural context. The aim is to seek a rich, fair and insightful interpretation of the data. To aid the integrity of the data analysis many direct quotes will be used to support the researcher interpretations. To assist in contextual interpretation the researcher reports the discussion reflexively by including subjective impressions and feelings in the account. This is consistent with traditions of reflexivity in qualitative, interpretive research (Easterby-Smith et al, 2002).

### *Focus Group Selection*

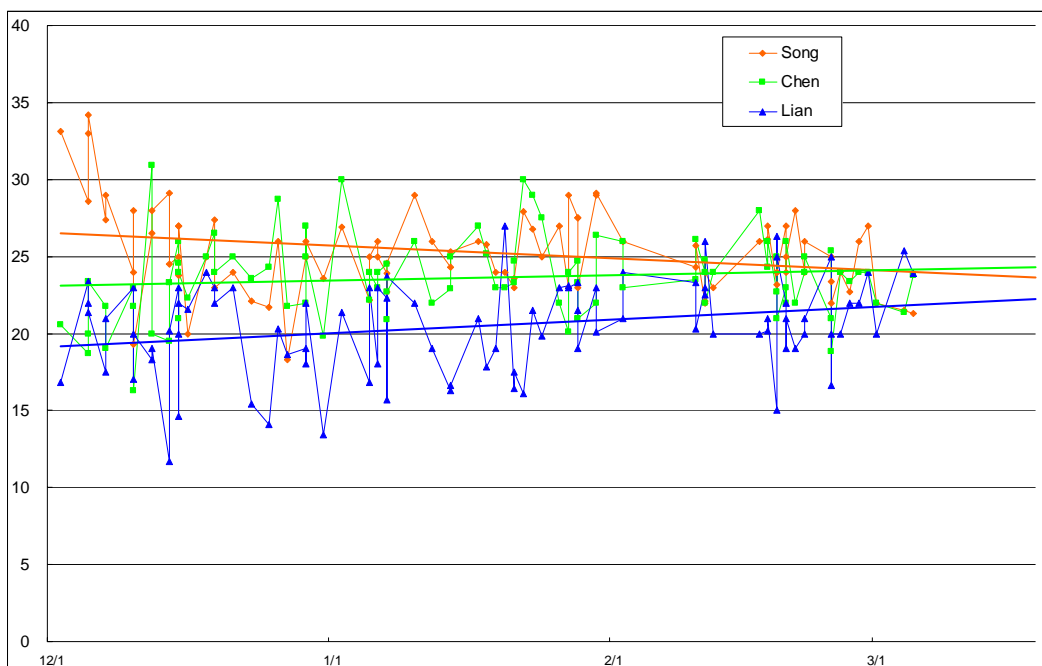
The group consisted of eight young, educated individuals from 24~28 years of age while Mandarin was used for the discussion. Two were female, six male. The group was selected because (before viewing the spot) four members declared themselves pro-DPP and four stated they were con-DPP. Neither the age nor the higher-than-average (post-graduate) education level of the participants was representative of the voter population. The group was selected in the hope

that they might enrich the discussion through a sophisticated appreciation of the persuasive techniques of advertising along with the heightened political consciousness of young, educated Taiwanese voters. The discussion was carried out in local coffee shop to create a friendly and open atmosphere. The researcher first outlined the purpose of the study and the relevant information before showing the spot. Following the spot was a leadoff question to start the discussion. The role of the researcher was to observe and make sure the discussion is balanced and friendly (political discussion being occasionally tense) and to ensure that each individual had a similar opportunity to express their opinion. The researcher acted as facilitator, giving gentle direction to the discussion while also allowing the talk to develop and flow naturally.

With the research method presented, the next section will be analysis and interpretation from the data and result collected from the field.

### *Secondary Data Analysis*

The graph below shows the shift in public opinion from December, 1999 until March, 2000. The law restricted the publication of opinion polls after March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2000, therefore it is the last entry on the graph. The data included all the published opinion polls and excluded those released by political parties. The dots on the graph indicate the percent of sampled individual's voting



**Figure 2.** Public opinion polls from December, 1999 until March 2000 (Chu, 2005)

intention on each candidate while the regression line is a prediction on the outcome of the election based the opinion poll. From the graph, it shows the individuals who intended to vote for DPP’s candidate Chen and KMT candidate Lian are each steadily increasing while the sampled individuals who intended to vote for independent candidate Song are declining.

The shift in public opinion may be the result of multiple factors and from the available data it is impossible to separately identify then measure the specific effects of the election television advertising. From the graph, it is only suggesting that perhaps Chen and Lian ran an overall better campaigns than Song, but it will be overstretching the interpretation of the data to suggest Chen and Lian both ran a better advertising campaign since the relevant literatures (Rigger, 2001; Roy, 2003; Zheng, 2004) suggested that Chen’s ETA was effective while Lian’s ETA was criticised as a failure.

Now the discussion will be narrowed in order to focus on the shifts in the three candidates’ support during the month of December since it was the time the Spot ‘20<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the *Meilidao* Incident’ was aired. The following is the shift in public opinion during the month of December, 1999.

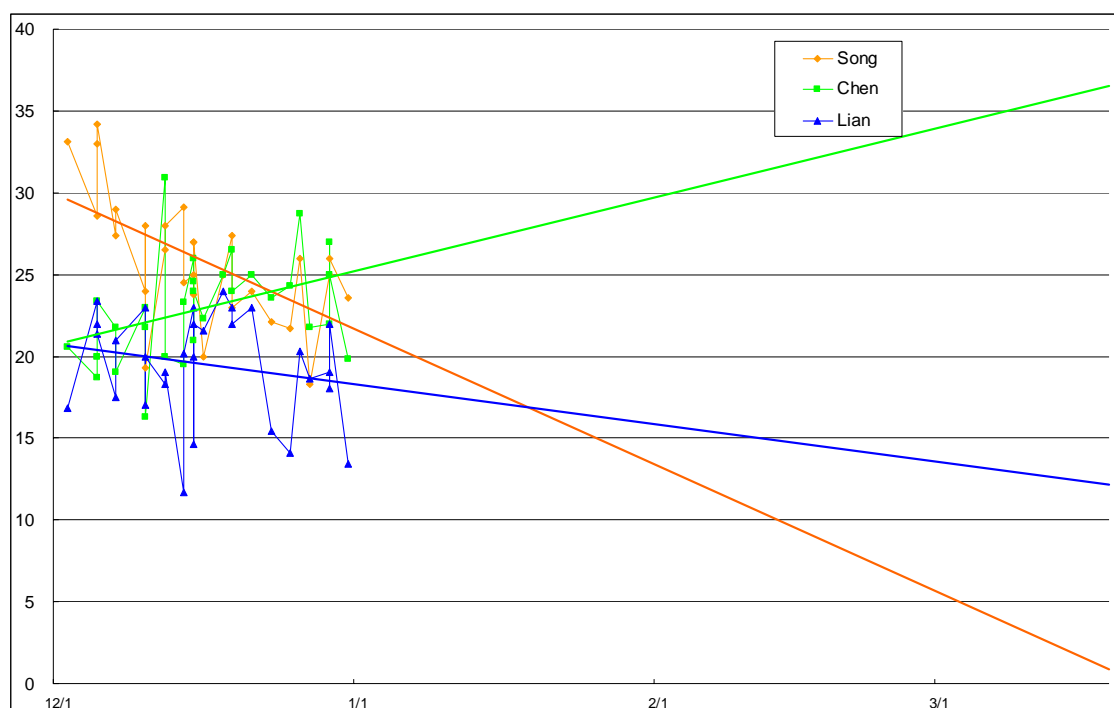


Figure 3. Public opinion polls during the December, 1999 (Chu, 2005)

From the trends shown above, it is more obvious that the DPP candidate Chen is out-performing his opponents by a large margin in the month of December, 1999, but the contribution from the advertising campaign and the spot '20<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the *Meilidao* Incident' is still unclear. While such tracking of polls is interesting it is far from conclusive since the causal factors influencing voter intention cannot be separated. The next section will discuss the focus group in our attempt to generate particularised qualitative insights into the emotive power of the spot.

## **FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION**

### *The Participants' General Impressions Upon Viewing the Spot*

The leadoff question raised by the researcher was 'what do you feel this spot is trying to present?' Respondent A commented that 'This spot is trying to raise sympathetic feelings by reminding viewers that they were oppressed by the authority.' Respondent E then said 'they want to make obvious their most important contribution which is... is...' Then respondent H interrupted by saying 'imprisonment?' in a cynical tone. From the tone, it is first suggesting that respondent E was trying to think of the contributions these people made but can not find the proper wording yet and second, respondent H felt that they had made little if any significant contribution, from her cynical tone. Respondent B then tried to disagree and F tried to assist E to finish his sentence while respondent E found the word he wanted to use and said 'their contribution to democracy'.

E continued to say 'because any political party must have areas where it is weak and where it is strong and they want to make obvious that they are strong in... in... They want to make it appeared to be their credit while hoping the public will forget about their weaknesses' Almost simultaneously respondent F added that 'at one hand they want to win sympathy and the other hand want to oppress the KMT government. Also they want to demonstrate how could the KMT government imprison these highly successful individual?' Then the discussion turn silent and members appeared to be in deep thoughts.

The above part of the discussion took about four minutes. From the conversation, the researcher felt that members perhaps excluding H. From different sides of the political spectrum they agreed that DPP had made a difference in Taiwan's democratic processes in abstract sense, but they failed to provide concrete examples or details. From a political advertising point of view, this could be seen as a success because it enchanted DPP supporters to believe their party is

noble and encouraged them to question the legitimacy of KMT government. On the other hand, it made non-DPP supporters hard to counter argue because the footage was from historical documents and the imprisonment were historical events that cannot be denied, although it was carefully edited and had added montage effects. In commercial advertising, there are similar examples where the sponsor attacks its competitor through implied and subtle presentations like the ad Macintosh computer made at 1984. During the spot, Mac attacked its direct competitor IBM through various indirect cues such as prisons with bluish haze and the robotic actions among the workers within the prison (Messaris, 1997, p.164).

Furthermore, the participants including the pro-DPP members were aware of the lack of logical linkages between the imprisonments and the implied suggestion that the DPP would improve Taiwan's political condition if it wins the presidential election. The respondents also came to believe that voters with lower social status and education level will be more susceptible to this form of suggestion since they will not detect the lack of logical linkage.

The researcher questioned the validity of these responses because at least in the short-run, the literature on advertising effects indicated that higher educational level and professional trainings does not necessarily mean better ability to critically evaluate the spot. Noggle and Kaid, (2000, p. 922) studied the visual distortion and audience's reception based on visual literacy concluded the following: 'the level of visual literacy did not have any impact on voter's susceptibility.' Messaris (1997) offered the similar conclusion on commercial ads. On the other hand, individuals do learn to read and cope with persuasion attempts including political advertisements through experience and other social interactions (Johnson-Cartee and Copeland, 1991; Friestad and Wright, 1994; Messaris, 1997).

Besides, the focus group was conducted in a controlled environment and members were informed about the research objectivities whereas the general electorate might be distracted by other events happened around them simultaneously when the spot was played on TV.

#### *The Participants' View of the Presentation Style of the Spot*

The second part of the focus group was on the production style of the spot through the use of music, colour and cinematographic techniques. The following are some of the transcripts from the group members on the overall presentation style. Respondent E said 'It is a successful presentation because most voters already decided their voting intentions; therefore, this... [presentation style] is aiming at arousing undecided voters' emotional feelings.' Respondent C

agreed by saying ‘I agree: this spot will also encourage the [DPP/Chen] fundamentalists to actively persuade the undecided voters.’ Respondent F added: ‘pictures are often more powerful than words, this [presentation style] will work much better than telling viewers [what to act/what to think]; therefore, I think it is a successful presentation.’ Respondent B then suggest: ‘it [the lack of voice over] can be seen as a silent protest against the government.’

In terms of the use of colour and its meanings, the respondents also had some insightful comments. Respondents mentioned black and white image makes the footage appeared to be old, historical and poignant. The respondents also suggested the abrupt change from black and white to colour at the climax of the spot also carried multiple symbolic meanings referring to the radical transformation in Taiwan’s political development, the DPP gaining popular support, from sorrow to happiness, and DPP means colour and bright while KMT is black and white. Respondent C used an interesting comparison between the transformations in the spot with a popular commercial advertising slogan. The spot he mentioned was a medicine which claims the effect of protecting liver. The slogan after translation is ‘Life will be black and white if liver is unhealthy, but life will be colourful if the liver is healthy.’ Everyone smiled and agreed with this comparison.

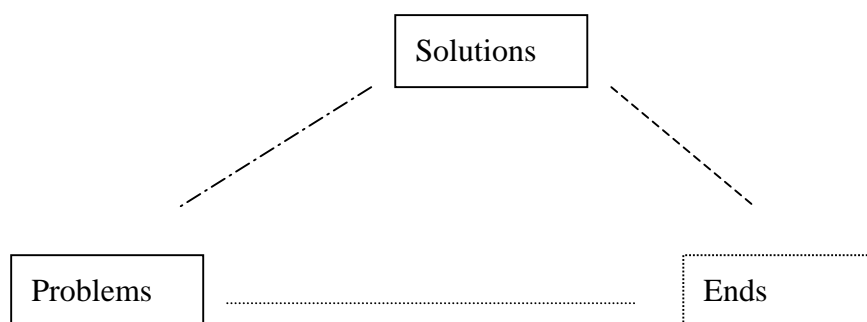
### *The Presentation of the Candidate Mr. Chen and the Symbolism of the Spot*

Another focus during the discussion on presentation style was the way Chen was presented during the spot. Chen was not imprisoned during the *Meilidao* Incident although he was imprisoned by the KMT later during his career. During the *Meilidao* Incident, Chen was the youngest lawyer among a team of defending lawyers. The respondents had agreement but also conflict during the discussion. One respondent said ‘since he [Chen] was the candidate; therefore, the spot must find a way to include him.’ Another respondent said ‘he [Chen] is the candidate; therefore, he is placed in the middle of the spot.’ Also respondent D suggested ‘it [the presentation style] is hoping to transfer the emotional feeling toward these wrongly accused individuals to the support of Chen.’ Respondent G and H then exchanged opinion on the issue: will the spot be more effective if Chen was shown as a victim like the rest of the individuals if he was also imprisoned during this incident? Respondent G thought it will while respondent H argued this is a better presentation because it made Chen ‘appear to be a figure of moral stature who graduated from the National Taiwan University [the best university in Taiwan] and had a bright future but instead decided to defend those who were accused by the authoritarian KMT government.’

During this part of the discussion, the researcher sensed that the respondents had begun to be more open for exchanging ideas with each other: there was more eye contact and speaking with each other instead of looking at and speaking to the researcher. Furthermore, they also started to enjoy the process of decoding the spot. Their political enthusiasm combined with the controlled environment and allowed the members to evaluate the spot more critically and provide intelligent questions and responses.

From Zheng's (1998) perspective on political communication strategies, this spot mixed emotional as well as fear appeal. From this point of view, it can explain the transition from black and white into colour and the use of music instead of a narrator. The respondents' feedback certainly concurred with the coherence between the plot and the presentation style whether they realised it or not. Messaris' (1997) discussion on the use of visual metaphor and violation of reality can help to further the decoding of the spot. The transition from black and white to colour was interpreted by the audience as the metaphor for the transition from authoritarian to democracy, the oppressiveness of the KMT to the joyfulness of DPP and civilian's life under KMT and the possible brighter future with the DPP.

Respondents' chat on the presentation style of Chen was a very interesting one because they touched on one aspect of political rhetoric without knowing it. Smith and Johnston (1991) identified this type of positive rhetoric as epic whereas Lorenzo (1996) called it romantic, but the two are quite similar in some aspects. Smith and Johnston (1991, p.119) identified the characteristics of epic: "It lends dignity to the necessities of existence and 'advertising' courage and individual sacrifices... and it enables the humble man to share the worth of the hero by the process of 'identification'". Lorenzo (1996, p.9) set up a simple figure to explain the above processes within political spots (shown below).



**Figure 4.** The General Structure of Discourse (Lorenzo, 1996, p.9)



During the spot, it portrayed KMT as the problem that elites and public faced and also suggested that Chen was the justice figure who came and brought the cheerful celebration to those who were imprisoned and to the everyday citizens. The music and the transition of colour discussed earlier all added to the building of the plot.

Surprisingly, this part of the conversation is shorter than expected. Despite a line or two of heated comments, the respondents overall seemed to restrain themselves from offering opinions that misfit their social status; therefore, the expression of their true feelings perhaps were undermined by their social inhibitions. The intuition is that it is common for individuals to avoid religion, politics and ethnic topics during public discussion due to the sensitivity, but this research is to promote the discussion of such topic; therefore, it somehow violated the rules of human interaction and caused the respondents to be much more cautious. Then again, the avoidance of confrontation also provided another opportunity for observation because political discussions often occurred in public sphere.

### *Effectiveness of the Spot*

Despite the feeling generated by the spot and the strength and weakness in production and presentation style, one cannot forget that the ultimate purpose of election television advertising is to persuade the electorate to vote for or vote against (including not voting) one choice over another. Hence, the last part of the focus group was on the effect this spot might have on the electorate's voting intention.

In terms of this spot's effects on the group members, all of them recalled that they decided who to vote for when the campaign started and did not change and they suggested education level is one of the key influences. Respondents' comments on education and this spot's effect on voting intentions included the following: 'voters with higher education often decided earlier', 'high education voters often have strong pre-determined voting preferences based on partisanship and the candidate' and 'voters with higher education often are more objective.' Since the members' education level are all above undergraduate level and some in post-graduate studies; therefore, they were less cautious when criticising the less educated electorates.

In terms of effectiveness, participant D offered her opinion by the following: 'I don't think it is an effective ad to me or the general voters. In order to be effective, it needs some sort of follow-up campaigning activities.' Respondent E thought this spot will only polarise the

electorates and respondent F agreed with this opinion. Respondent G asked ‘isn’t this [polarising the electorates] the purpose of election advertising?’ Respondent F then replied ‘with this short time frame, it [the spot] can’t address any political agenda.’ Finally, respondent B concluded that ‘Democratic Progressive Party is good at manipulating electorates’ emotion through ideology and this spot’s sole purpose is to manipulate viewers’ emotion.’

From the discussion, it is clear that these members thought education will make them more objective and the electorates with less education will be more easily manipulated. The research literature mentioned above suggested otherwise, but their belief is, perhaps, not completely without merit. Compared to general voters, studies did show higher educated voters behaved differently when exposed to different forms of political messages. Peng (1997) for example outlined several empirical studies that explored the relationship between high educated electorates and their use of mass media as the source of information for political affairs:

1. Electorates with higher social status or education are more active in terms of seeking political information and participating in political communication processes
2. Electorates with higher education relied heavily on mass media whereas the general electorates relied on personal contact or opinion leaders
3. The voters exposed more to mass media tend to decide their choice earlier than those less exposed to mass media.

From the above, the focus group members in fact are likely to be more informed by the mass media in political affairs. On the other hand, it is important to distinguish the level of information received through mass media and the ability to critically analyze the content, because mass media also have their point of view like any other information sources (Mosco, 1998). The interpretation here is the members are assuming the mass media are more creditable than other sources of information without questioning the mass media itself.

Three additional observations were made during the process. First, members noticed the effectiveness of the campaign cannot rely on the performance of individual spots. This is supported by Maarek (1995) who advocated for the importance of campaign coherence. Second, they realised the limitations of short spot in terms of making logical or rational appeals and it this is supported by researchers including Szybillo and Hartenbaum (1976) and Kaid (2000) who actively propose political advertising reforms. Perhaps these individual’s active participation in political affairs and seeking political information caused them to be more or less aware of the advantages and disadvantages that political marketing and advertising techniques can bring to democratic practices; although, further investigation will be needed to examine the hypothesis.

Finally, at least during public discussion the members were concerned about the use of emotion arousing spots as a form of political debate, even though (or perhaps because) it might be very effective. Scholars who study political advertising such as Johnson-Cartee and Copeland (1991), Zheng (2004), Franklin (2004) all reported that negative advertising, despite being criticized by public, often proved to be more effective. Although the spot under discussion is not a negative spot in nature, it certainly lacks the logical and rational appeal. Therefore, it can be argued that it is emotionally powerful and therefore manipulative, as one of the DPP supporters said during the discussion.

### **Concluding Comments**

This paper looked at the impact of political image advertising by focusing on the spot '20<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the *Meilidao*' made by the Democratic Progressive Party during the Taiwanese presidential election of 2000. Although the authors acknowledge the small and unrepresentative nature of the study, there are several insights emerging that may suggest implications for academic research and political marketing practice. The following comments are offered as tentative suggestions emerging from this exploratory study.

First of all, the single political advertising spot, like a single product advertisement, probably has limited effect regardless of its creativity or presentation styles. This seems self-evident, even though the Figure 2 above clearly shows that the DPP voter support increased significantly during the month of December 1999, the month in which the spot was aired. While this may be interesting circumstantial evidence of the impact of the spot it is far from conclusive. The focus group discussion weakened the suggestion that this spot had a radical effect since participants were divided on its meaning and impact. Clearly, the focus group discussion may not have captured the mood or receptivity of the general voter population to this spot.

Secondly, it seems that shorter political advertising spots facilitate image political advertising in which the lack of logical connection within the narrative (particularly evident in a montage of diverse news footage events) is difficult to detect. This creates a window for emotional appeals to be created as the careful editing and advanced cinematography create implied links between temporally and factually distinct events. This begs the question of whether political advertising spots should be produced and bought like commercial spots or regulated as a form of political speech. Of course, while some focus group participants were uneasy about the use of emotional advertising in political campaigns, since we cannot say with certainty that such advertising is

exceptionally persuasive to voters there is no compelling argument for such political ads to be forbidden or subjected to regulation.

Third, academics and political marketing professionals should further investigate the differences in meaning and characteristics between the emotional appeal of image ads and negative ads. The spot in question fell into both categories since its imagery carried an implied criticism of the KMT, but conventional systems of categorising advertising are unable to capture such polysemy or multiple meanings in advertising (Hackley, 2005). Fourth, the cause and effect relationships between education level and the ability to critically evaluate political messages should be clarified and further studied. Highly educated voters who gathered political information through mass media may find that this does not necessarily lead to better judgement when compared to voters who receive information through personal contacts or family and cultural background. Finally, utilising news and documentary footage can be an effective form of persuasion due to the realness of the images as well as the shared context that audiences might have, especially when the footage comes from well-known events. Moreover, for a party under a tight budget, it can be an economic way of using limited resources.

This paper has discussed the possible impact that one example of image political advertising had in the Taiwanese Presidential election of 2000. While our findings are speculative, they offer interesting insight into the changing political culture of Taiwan. What cannot be doubted is that there is still much to learn about the use of brand marketing and advertising techniques in the political context, both in the West and in the emerging democracies of South-East Asia.

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