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HOW CHINA'S GOVERNMENT IS ATTEMPTING TO CONTROL CHINESE MEDIA IN AMERICA

By *Mei Duzhe*

The U.S. Census 2000 data reveal dramatic growth over the past ten years in the Chinese American population. In these years the Chinese-American community has increased by 48 percent to over 2.4 million, making it the largest Asian ethnic group in the country.

Notably, surveys have found that of this Chinese-American population, as many as 82.9 percent speak the Chinese language at home, with 60.4 percent professing that their English skills are limited (www.asianmediaguide.com). As one might expect, these people's dependence on Chinese-language media is heavy. And to a significant degree it is these media, as made available in the United States, that determine the worldview of many Chinese-Americans living in the States. Depictions of the democratic process, the rule of law, human rights and other American concepts come to the Chinese-American filtered through Chinese-language media. The content and nature of Chinese-language media (hereafter "Chinese media") in America thus deserves greater scrutiny.

Before 1985, Chinese media operations in the United States came primarily from Taiwan and Hong Kong, with little influence from Communist Mainland China. This would

change in the mid 1980s, however, when waves of immigration from Mainland China changed the profile of the Chinese-American community. The influx of Mainland Chinese piqued concerns of state-run media operations back home, triggering what can now be described as aggressive media efforts in the United States by mainland operations. Indeed, the Mainland China government has made major inroads into the Chinese media market here over the past decade.

Four main tactics characterize the Chinese government's effort to influence Chinese media in America. First is the attempt to directly control newspapers, television stations, and radio stations through complete ownership or owning major shares. Second is the government's use of economic ties to influence independent media who have business relations with China. This leverage has had major effects on the contents of broadcasting and publishing, effectively remov-

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ing all material deemed “unfavorable” by the Chinese government. Third is the purchasing of broadcast time and advertising space (or more) from existing independent media. Closely related to this is the government’s providing free, ready-to-go programming and contents. Fourth is the deployment of government personnel to work in independent media, achieving influence from within their ranks.

These tactics have been applied with much effect to both national- and local-level Chinese media throughout the United States.

Influencing Chinese newspapers

The dominant Chinese media vehicle in America is the newspaper. Four major Chinese newspapers are found in the *U.S.-World Journal*, *Sing Tao Daily*, *Ming Pao Daily News* and *The China Press*. With an alleged total circulation of over 700,000, these publications are regarded as indicators of the market’s growth.

Of these four, three are either directly or indirectly controlled by the government of Mainland China, while the fourth (run out of Taiwan) has recently begun bowing to pressure from the Beijing government.

■ *The China Press*

Established in New York in January of 1990, *The China Press* is directly controlled by the Chinese government. The paper is characterized by its substantial and timely news reports from Mainland China. It represents the voice and views of China’s Communist government.

Its daily issue averages some forty pages in length, and is distributed in almost all major U.S. cities. The paper claims a total circulation of 120,000.

■ *Sing Tao Daily*

Sing Tao Newspaper Group (STNG) was established in Hong Kong in 1938. In the 1960s regional of-

fices were established in San Francisco, New York and Los Angeles to publish *Sing Tao Daily* in North America. In the late 1980s, STNG owner Sally Aw Sian met with financial crisis, and found a financial solution in the form of aid from the Chinese government. The past decade or so has seen the transformation of *Sing Tao Daily* into a procommunist newspaper. Sally Aw Sian has since become a member of China’s National Political Consultative Conference.

In January of 2001, the Global China Technology Group, a Hong Kong-based company chaired by Ho Tsu-Kwok, acquired the controlling shares of *Sing Tao*’s holdings. Ho Tsu-Kwok, it should be noted, has close ties with Beijing and is currently also a member of China’s National Political Consultative Conference. In May of 2001 Ho cooperated with China’s state-run Xinhua News Agency to establish an information service company known as Xinhua Online.

Larry Lee (Li Ge), the deputy chief editor at *Sing Tao*’s North America headquarters in San Francisco, is himself a former editor of China’s *People’s Daily*—the

mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party. Li is in charge of the newspaper’s editorial forum, *Sing Tao Square*. During the recent EP-3 incident, when two columnists published articles in *Sing Tao* asking China to release the American crew and return the U.S. airplane, they were singled out and attacked on *Sing Tao Square* for nearly a month. Similar situations have occurred following the publication of articles sympathetic to the Falun Gong spiritual practice.

Sing Tao Daily prints sixty-four pages in each issue and claims a circulation of 181,000.

■ *Ming Pao Daily News*

As preparation for Hong Kong’s return to China in 1997, the Chinese government made vigorous at-

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tempts in the early 1990s to purchase several major media agencies in Hong Kong. This was done through the use of third-party merchants who have close business ties with China.

In October of 1995 *Ming Pao Daily News* was bought by a wealthy Malaysian merchant in the timber industry, Datuk Tiong Hiew King. As people guessed, Datuk had close business ties with China. Like *Sing Tao*, *Ming Pao* has since been heavily influenced by the Chinese government. For example, there is an unwritten rule at both *Sing Tao* and *Ming Pao* that no exclusive reports on the Pro-Democracy Movement of China are to be published. In order to appear to be “neutral” and “independent,” they do however publish some related reports, but they are merely based on news releases from sources like the Hong Kong Information Center for Human Rights & Democratic Movement in China. Employees at *Ming Pao*’s New York office have told sources that their “true boss” is none other than the Chinese Consulate [in New York], and that they are obligated to do whatever the Consulate asks.

Ming Pao claims a circulation of 115,000 and is distributed mainly on the east coast of the United States.

■ *World Journal*

An independently run daily publication, *World Journal* is one of the six branch-newspapers of the *United Daily News* (UDN)—Taiwan’s most influential newspaper. *World Journal* is presently trying to develop business ties with Mainland China. The effects of this are already being felt, some persons report. For example, Chinese Consulates in both New York and San Francisco have pressured *World Journal*’s local offices to not publish ads related to Falun Gong. The New York office has already acquiesced in full, and the San Francisco office has in part; it still prints Falun Gong ads, but with them appearing on the paper’s least-viewed page 90 percent of the time.

World Journal is the most widely read Chinese-language newspaper in North America, and claims a circulation of 300,000 in the United States.

Influencing Chinese television

The Chinese government of Mainland China has managed to influence Chinese-language TV in the United States, primarily by means of its China Central Television International station, or CCTV-4. CCTV is China’s official state-run TV station.

Using digital compression technology, CCTV International offers Chinese programming twenty-four hours a day via satellite at no additional charge to viewers around the world, including those in the United States.

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CCTV-4 also rents broadcasting time from influential independent TV stations across the United States, such as SinoVision in New York, which reaches millions of households and tens of thousands of Chinese viewers daily with its several broadcasting channels. Furthermore, CCTV-4 also

provides free programming (especially news programs) to independent TV stations, ready for broadcast. Some of these stations also reach millions of households, such as Cable KPST 66 in San Francisco, which reaches 2.3 million households in the Bay area.

It is difficult to estimate the total number of viewers CCTV-4 has. First, its satellite broadcast signal is uncoded and can thus be received by any type of satellite dish; second, it runs on cable channels in most every U.S. city.

What this means is that CCTV-4 has effectively brought the Chinese Communist government’s slanted news, or propaganda, to the vast majority of ethnic Chinese living in the U.S. Much of CCTV-4’s broadcasting is identifiably anti-American even, and greatly at odds with reporting produced in the free world.

Concluding thoughts

The 2000 Census also revealed that 80 percent of all Chinese-Americans live in twelve major U.S. cities. As one might by now expect, all these cities are targeted by the Chinese government with misinformation and propaganda. Not only are the above said papers and broadcasting to be found, but also, in almost every case, there are smaller, local newspapers, television stations and radio stations that are controlled by the Chinese government.

Beijing's Communist government has thus penetrated U.S. markets to no small extent, having effectively infiltrated all major U.S. cities home to Chinese-Americans. Perhaps what should concern us most, though, is the nature of reporting that results from this. In most cases journalistic standards are clearly far below those of their English-language counterparts, with half-truths and even gross misinformation sometimes being panned as "news." Analysis of the reporting that takes place in this arena is in great need of careful examination, but of course beyond the scope of this article.

But for many of the United States' 2.4 million Chinese-Americans, such reporting might be all that they read, hear or see. Few or, in some cases, no alternatives exist. The "outside world" and current events are filtered and presented through a limited number of media, the majority of which are influenced—or even run, as we have now seen—by Beijing's communist government.

While there has been no formal analysis of such reporting's impact on Chinese-American communities, its long-term negative effects can nonetheless be surmised if not caught in glimpses.

Startlingly apathetic responses to the September 11 tragedies are one recent indicator. Strong anti-American sentiments (especially notable among the Mainland Chinese communities in the United States) amidst the EP-3 affair and the Belgrade Embassy Bombing would be another. And fierce, even vio-

lent antagonism towards the Falun Gong on U.S. soil, would also seem telling.

And, surprisingly, this would appear just the beginning. This past week it was reported that AOL Time Warner had closed a major deal with the Beijing government that would bring CCTV programming to the United States on a much larger scale, via Time Warner's cable operations. The U.S. government, by comparison, continues to have broadcasting rights in China flatly denied, instead finding its Radio Free Asia and Voice of America radio networks constantly jammed. Similarly, all major U.S. newspapers are banned in China and their websites blocked.

Mei Duzhe is a PRC Chinese scientist now teaching at a leading Western university.

HU JINTAO:**THE BIRD THAT KEEPS ITS HEAD DOWN**

By Yao Jin

A Chinese saying best describes the risk of showing one's clear political or ideological leanings: "The bird that sticks its head out gets shot." Hu Jintao, the man who is widely expected to succeed Jiang Zemin as head of the Communist Party in 2002 and president of China in 2003, has been careful enough to act as "a bird that keeps its head down." In all his public remarks, Hu has cautiously toed the party line, and no outsiders know where he really stands on economic and political reform and many other critical issues that confront China today. His image as a political enigma reflects not only a cautious personality but also the pressures on him not to make mistakes and not to upstage Jiang.

Born in December 1942, Hu graduated from the hydroelectric engineering department at the prestigious Qinghua University in Beijing—China's MIT—in 1964. From 1965 to 1968, he worked as a

"The bird that sticks its head out gets shot."

political assistant of the university dealing with “political and ideological issues” among students. In 1968, during the Cultural Revolution, he was transferred to Gansu, an underdeveloped province in west China, to work as a junior hydroelectric engineer. In 1974, when Song Ping, a now retired party elder, was a provincial leader, Hu was Song’s secretary at the regional construction commission. Song once praised the young man as the “walking map of Gansu,” as Hu had visited different parts of the province over the years and knew the counties and their problems so well that he didn’t have to refer to his notes when asked to brief visiting senior officials from Beijing.

There are other stories about his photographic memory. But according to an insider, Hu works very hard to memorize the speeches he is going to deliver or the notes prepared for him before meeting with foreign visitors. Liberal intellectuals in Beijing deride him as “the best student at recitation.”

After the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, Song Ping, Hu’s mentor, was promoted to work at central departments in Beijing, and this helped Hu’s transfer to the nation’s capital. From 1982 to 1985, he was the secretary of the Communist Youth League, a position giving him the opportunity to develop extensive contacts with his colleagues that are now regarded as Hu supporters from the “Youth League faction.”

At the age of 43, he became one of the youngest rising stars when he was made party secretary of Guizhou, a poor southern province. In 1988, he was made party secretary of Tibet shortly after anti-Chinese rioting had broken out there. Hu proved his loyalty to the party by enforcing Beijing’s instructions to crackdown and to impose martial law in Lhasa.

With the blessing of Deng Xiaoping, China’s late paramount leader, who once referred to Hu as the

most promising leader of his generation, he has been on the powerful decisionmaking Standing Committee of the party’s Politburo since 1992. And he has been China’s vice president since 1998 and the first vice chairman of the Central Military Commission since 1999.

Liberal intellectuals in Beijing deride him as “the best student at recitation.”

Hu is also the president of the Central Party School, a party think tank and training center for rising cadres. This job has given him the opportunity of building contacts with his students, including relatively young colonels and generals in the military. No one in the military dares to report directly to Hu by overstepping Jiang Zemin, who is chairman of the Central

Military Commission, however, many officers who have been trained at the party school take pride in having established personal relationship with their president. Under Hu’s guidance, the school has been very active in exploring political and economic alternatives. Instructors and researchers there have been to Germany to establish contacts with leaders of its social democratic party, giving rise to speculations about Hu’s interest in reforming China’s Leninist party.

A “yes-man”?

Chinese liberal intellectuals have given a nickname to each of the seven members of the Standing Committee of the party’s Politburo. Hu is labeled “sunzi.” In Chinese, it literally means “grandson,” but it is also the synonym for “yes-man” in colloquialism. Jiang, nicknamed the “actor,” have assigned Hu to thankless jobs from time to time to test the loyalty of the “grandson.” After the NATO bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade in spring 1999, Hu was chosen to give an internal briefing to party and government workers. He openly said, “the hostile forces in the United States will never give up its attempt to subjugate China.” But in a television address to the nation, Hu left out his earlier remarks on the “hostile forces” while repeating China’s an-

ger over the bombing. And he urged the angry students and Beijing residents who were throwing rocks at the American Embassy to get back to their studies and jobs.

Later in 1999, a student of Beijing University wrote a letter to Jiang Zemin, accusing Liu Junning, a liberal researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, of advocating “bourgeois liberalism” in his lectures. Jiang again assigned Hu to handle the case. Hu quickly instructed party scholars to write articles to criticize “bourgeois liberalism,” however, he made it clear that only five such essays should be written and they should be published by one national newspaper only. Apparently, Hu didn’t want to repeat a nationwide campaign to attack “bourgeois liberalism” as was the case in the 1980s.

This year, shortly after Jiang declared on July 1 that the party would open to Chinese capitalists, remnant Maoists published articles in their journals, fiercely attacking Jiang by alleging that he had departed from the fundamental lines of Marxism-Leninism. Once again, Jiang passed on the thorny issue to Hu. Acting on Hu’s instructions, the Propaganda Department of the party suspended two leftist magazines for “rectification,” but it didn’t order to close them down for good, and the media nationwide was told not to publish any such articles in the future. In handling this case, Hu had tried to patch up the quarrel in a way acceptable to both the conservative and reformist wings of the party.

On October 27, Hu Jintao began his five-nation European tour. The extensive news coverage in Beijing showed his friendly meetings with heads of state, prime ministers and business tycoons in Russia, Britain, France, Germany and Spain, but it was intended, to a larger extent, to strengthen his credentials as a statesman and to portray him as the heir apparent for the home audience. Europeans tried hard to size up this closet man, but Hu remained a

political riddle to them. He frequently quoted President Jiang and China’s known policy on international and bilateral issues in his meetings with foreign leaders, as if he had nothing to say by himself.

This is because one of the most acute flaws of the Leninist party systems is that power is concentrated at the apex of the system without any existing means to assure a smooth political succession at that level.

If Hu continues to play the role of the “grandson” by acting cautiously not to outshine Jiang, he will become China’s next leader after Jiang retires as head of the Communist Party and then as president in the next 18 months. At 59, Hu is young enough to rule China for ten to fifteen years. But for at least the first

five years of his rule from 2002 to 2007, he will have to look over his shoulders, as it is yet uncertain if Jiang will step down from his most important position as chairman of the Central Military Commission that controls the army. Even if Jiang resigns in full, he is likely to continue to rule “behind the curtains,” a Chinese imperial practice that gave the dowager empress much greater power than the young emperor. The best guess is that as a leader of a new generation, Hu will show himself as a force for faster political and economic changes in the second five years of his rule when Jiang and other party elders are too old to exert their influence, but no one is sure of that. China is a country of great uncertainties, and so is its next leader.

Yao Jin is the pen name of a Chinese writer.

ZENG QINGHONG: A POTENTIAL CHALLENGER TO CHINA’S HEIR APPARENT

By Wen Yu

Since the Chinese communists came to power in 1949, China has suffered gravely from succession politics. During the Maoist era that ended in 1976, convulsive political tensions and struggles sur-

Hu didn’t want to... attack “bourgeois liberalism.”

rounding the succession issue had greatly damaged the relationships among the ruling elite and brought untold suffering to millions of ordinary Chinese. In the late 1980s, China's then paramount leader Deng Xiaoping purged his own designated successors Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang one after another when they displeased him. In the subsequent political struggles to succeed Deng, ultimate decisions on succession were made in secret by a small group of party elders at Deng's home. China today, like its past, has not institutionalized succession. This is especially true regarding the position of the "core leader"—the top man at the center, whose effective leadership is critically important to maintaining stability in China. The uncertainty of smooth transfer of power has been highly damaging to the system in the past and has the potential to remain disruptive in the future.

It is widely believed that Hu Jintao, a member of the all-powerful Standing Committee of the communist party's Politburo and China's vice president, will succeed Jiang Zemin as party general secretary and president when Jiang starts to hand over power in fall 2002. But as Hu has to assure Jiang of his continuing fidelity, it is difficult for him to build up his own power base while Jiang is still around. Though it seems unlikely that Hu will be purged by Jiang before next fall, one can not rule out the possibility that Hu could be nudged aside by other contenders before he consolidates his position after the succession. In this scenario, Zeng Qinghong, now an alternate member of the Politburo, is the main potential challenger to Hu.

The "princeling"

In China, the offspring of veteran communist revolutionaries belong to the privileged class. They are labeled "princelings," or the "princes' party," though it is not an organized political group. Many of them, drawing on the influence of their parents, now hold important positions in the party, government and

military, or head lucrative trading companies. Zeng Qinghong is one of these princelings.

Zeng Shan, Zeng Qinghong's father, was a senior commander of the communist Third Field Army during China's civil war that ended in 1949 and a member of the party's Central Committee before Mao Zedong launched the Cultural Revolution in 1966. Zeng's mother Deng Liuqin, who is still alive, used to be the director of the Shanghai-based East China Kindergarten in the early 1950s, where the children of many senior officials were brought up. In a country like China where power resides in informal connections, the network of personal ties the Zeng family has cultivated over the decades has proven to be extremely useful.

Born in July 1939, Zeng Qinghong graduated from a Beijing technology college in 1963. His skill at political intrigue did not become evident until 1984 when he was made deputy director of the party's municipal organization department in Shanghai. When Jiang Zemin became Shanghai mayor in 1985, he immediately found in Zeng a man he could trust.

When the pro-democracy student movement of spring 1989 was gaining momentum nationwide, Jiang was Shanghai party secretary and Zeng was his deputy. Acting on Zeng's advice, Jiang closed the World Economic Herald, a liberal Shanghai-based weekly advocating bolder political and economic reform, in May 1989 and managed to keep the local student movement under control. Contrary to the bloody military crackdown in Beijing on June 4, 1989, Shanghai student demonstrations ended without bloodshed. Thus Jiang acquired merit in Deng's eyes and was made party general secretary in June 1989.

A popular Chinese saying goes, "when a man attains immortality, even his pets ascend to heaven." This is true of the Jiang-Zeng relationship. Shortly

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after Jiang's promotion to Beijing, Zeng was made deputy director of the party Center's General Office that handles administrative details of the bureaucracy. In 1993, he became the director. Taking advantage of his power at the General Office, Zeng functioned as Jiang's "chief housekeeper." When Jiang was appointed in winter 1989 to chair the Central Military Commission that controls the military, he had to remain on the periphery as he had no prior military experience. It was Zeng that helped Jiang cultivate and establish ties with the military brass by putting to use his family's extensive network of connections. Zeng's "housekeeping" also furthered Jiang's interest at the Central Discipline Inspection Commission (responsible for seeking out violation of party rules), the Central Commission for Political and Legal Affairs (in charge of the court and prosecuting systems and other repressive apparatus), Propaganda Department (overseeing the media, education and political studies), Organization Department (handling personnel appointments) and many other central party bodies. Zeng even extended his influence into foreign affairs. In the 1990s, when Jiang went abroad to visit foreign countries, Zeng, more often than not, was in the entourage.

Zeng the echo

Zeng rarely speaks out on China's major domestic and foreign policy issues except to echo Jiang's remarks. His role as Jiang's "chief housekeeper" is equivalent to that of a "chief eunuch" to the emperor in ancient China. Though the eunuch enjoyed unrestricted access to the emperor, he had nothing to claim in his own right and his role was often frowned upon by ministers in the court. To advance Zeng's own political career, Jiang maneuvered to make Zeng an alternate member of the politburo and a member of the party Central Committee's Secretariat at the 15th Party Congress in 1997.

In October 1998, Zeng made an effort to further consolidate Jiang's power. He submitted a proposal

to the Politburo in the name of the Secretariat to launch the "Three Stresses" (politics, studies, righteousness) campaign among party cadres at and above the county level. This was in name a rectification campaign to correct unhealthy tendencies. To a larger extent, however, it was an effort to strengthen Jiang's political control. After the Politburo had approved the proposal, Zeng instructed the Secretariat to list forty-five articles written by Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zeming as the required reading for the campaign. Fifteen of these were Jiang's speeches, thus putting him on a par with Mao and Deng.

That move
would have
prepared
the way for
Zeng's
elevation...

In March 1999, Zeng moved to head the powerful Organization Department, giving him more power to promote Jiang's and his own supporters.

Over the years, Zeng has successfully installed members of the "Shanghai Gang" (a term used to describe Jiang's proteges who had worked in Shanghai when Jiang was party secretary there) for leading positions at the central and regional levels.

At the party's 5th Plenum in fall 2000, it was widely expected that Zeng would be promoted to full membership in the Politburo to fill up a vacancy. That move would have prepared the way for Zeng's elevation to the Politburo's Standing Committee at the 16th Party Congress. But Zeng's promotion did not occur. At the 6th Plenum this past fall, Jiang again failed to install Zeng in the Politburo, as several members of the Standing Committee reportedly opposed Jiang's plan with success.

It seems unlikely that Zeng would rival Hu Jintao for the top spot at the 16th Party Congress scheduled for fall next year, however, Jiang has continued to portray Zeng as China's No. 2. This past September when Jiang was having a closed-door meeting with North Korea's dictator Kim Jong Il in Pyongyang, he reportedly referred to Hu and Zeng as China's "core leaders" of the next generation. In a meeting with Russian President Putin at the Shang-

hai APEC summit in October this year, Jiang made an effort to introduce Zeng to Putin and asked, “Do you know Qinghong? He is our director of the Organization Department and a member of the Secretariat.” By the standard practice in the party, Jiang, a senior, would refer to Zeng, a junior, as “Comrade Zeng Qinghong.” If the relationship is close, Zeng would be addressed as “Comrade Qinghong.” The reference to Zeng simply as “Qinghong” implies an extremely close relationship between the two.

Given the possibility that Jiang will continue to exercise a great deal of political influence after his retirement, the most likely scenario is that China will be ruled by a “troika” consisting of Hu, Zeng and the new premier, with Jiang as the overlord behind the scenes. But should Hu show any sign of disobedience, he could be ousted before he has the time to build and consolidate his own base of supporters. If this happens, Zeng could emerge as the victor amidst the subsequent jockeying for power at the apex. But as most Chinese believe that the nation’s social and economic progress hinges on a strong and stable central leadership, the possible division at the top does not bode well for China in the years to come.

Wen Yu is the pen name for a former Chinese official.

TAIWAN’S UPCOMING ELECTIONS

By Willy Wo-Lap Lam

As with Taiwan elections for the past several years, President Jiang Zemin has set up a special task force of civilian and military aides to monitor developments in the run-up to the December 1 parliamentary polls on the island.

Jiang, who also heads the Chinese Communist Party’s Leading Group on Taiwan Affairs, has also

been demanding regular updates of the electoral campaign from officials such as the head of the Taiwan Affairs Office, Chen Yunlin. While the state media as well as semi-official websites have run a slew of news reports and comments on the forthcoming balloting, senior cadres have avoided giving their views in public. This reticence, however, hardly masks the fact that Beijing has adopted a multipronged strategy to ensure that it will derive maximum benefits from the first island-wide polls after the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) replaced the Kuomintang (KMT), or Nationalists, as Taiwan’s ruling party in March 2000.

Beijing’s best-case scenario is that the pro-independence DPP’s tenuous grip on the Legislative Yuan will slip further. The DPP holds only sixty-six out of 225 legislative seats, meaning that most of President Chen Shui-bian’s policies are routinely blocked. Chen has vowed to boost his party’s legislative positions to at least eighty-seven. And a Chen ally, former President Lee Teng-hui, has formed a Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) which, in Beijing’s view, is also gunning for covert independence. The

mainland leadership hopes to prevent the TSU from gaining enough seats so that it can join forces with DPP politicians, independents and “rebel” KMT lawmakers to control the legislature. At the same time, the Jiang administration has quietly thrown its support behind the two major opposition parties, the Kuomintang (KMT) and the People’s First Party (PCP), many of whose politicians have visited Beijing the past year. In closed-door meetings with KMT stalwarts, Beijing cadres have pledged to give them political and other kinds of support to ensure the DPP’s defeat at the polls.

The gameplan

Beijing’s Taiwan gameplan has been summed up by a Communist party Politburo member in a terse dictum: “Be as tough—or as conciliatory—as the situation requires.” For the past year, Beijing has

“Be as tough—or as conciliatory—as the situation requires.”

been ruthlessly wielding the “business card” against the DPP. The mainland leadership’s strategy is simple. First, roll out the red carpet to Taiwan companies, particularly hi-tech firms. As Taiwan’s economy becomes more reliant upon the mainland, not only businessmen but professionals and fresh college graduates see their future well-being in Shanghai, Xiamen or Dongguan, Guangdong Province. Second, establish the linkage between Taiwan’s economic woes and the sorry state of its relations with the mainland. Third, continue the policy of snubbing President Chen—and laying the blame for mainland-Taiwan tension squarely on Chen and his DPP colleagues.

So far, things seem to be going Beijing’s way. Unlike predecessor Lee, Chen has been unable to prevent the flow of capital—and talents—to coastal China. Latest statistics—the island’s GDP shrunk by 4 percent in the third quarter of the year and unemployment shot to 5.3 percent—have raised the specter of long-term hardship. While a major cause of the recession has been the downturn in the American and world economy, it is easy for anti-DPP forces to play up Chen’s failings. Since early this year, the KMT and PFP have trained their fire-power on Chen’s apparent failure to open a dialogue with Beijing—and presumably to get enough mainland business to resuscitate Taiwan.

The Jiang leadership’s business card has become more effective after both the mainland and Taiwan have entered the World Trade Organization. A number of Taiwan transportation firms, including four aviation companies, have already committed sizeable investments in the mainland in anticipation of direct air and shipping links. And Beijing doesn’t need to do much to persuade Taiwan businesses to put pressure on Chen to make concessions on the Cross-Strait front, such as recognizing the one China principle. A source close to Beijing’s Taiwan policy

establishment said that the Jiang administration had earmarked billions of yuan for investments in Taiwan should the three direct links be established.

As more Taiwan businessmen and workers become dependent on the mainland, Taipei’s economic sovereignty—and ability to determine its own destiny—may be dealt a body blow. “Since multiparty elections began in Taiwan in the mid-1980s, this is the first time that economics has become a dominant issue,” the source said. “Beijing is confident that the momentum is going its way because the mainland economy is thriving while that of Taiwan is deteriorating.”

Diplomatic analysts say that Beijing has encountered more difficulties in efforts to woo the Taiwan public through assuming an open and flexible posture on the reunification issue. In the run-up to Taiwan’s presidential elections in 1996 and 2000, Beijing hurt its own cause—and indirectly helped its foes, Lee and Chen—by issuing dire threats to the island’s electorate. Witness the war games off the Taiwan coast in 1996 and Premier Zhu Rongji’s tough message in March 2000 that a vote for the DPP was the moral equivalent of a ballot for war. This

Taipei’s economic sovereignty—and ability to determine its own destiny—may be dealt a body blow.

time around, Beijing has exercised relative restraint and focused on waging some form of smile diplomacy. For example, both Jiang and Vice Premier Qian Qichen have emphasized that as long as Taipei recognizes the one China principle, anything—including the title, flag and anthem of the new, reunited China—is negotiable. Officers of the People’s Liberation Army have also been told not to make provocative remarks about the “renegade province.” There was, however, a major mishap last month, when the hardline Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan, almost repeated the errors of 1996 and 2000. At the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in Shanghai, Tang caused widespread indignation in Taiwan by refusing to let

Taipei's representative, Economics Minister Lin Hsin-yi, reply to a reporter's question at a press conference.

The payoff question

Tang also alienated a good chunk of Taiwan's voters by delivering an ad hominem attack on Chen in his speech at the United Nations General Assembly earlier this month. "I despise Chen Shui-bian because all he says are lies," Tang said. Chinese sources in Beijing said Tang received an indirect reprimand from Qian for his impolite—and totally undiplomatic—treatment of Lin in Shanghai. At a high-level internal meeting to reassess APEC, Qian told Tang it was essential to follow the policy of being tough when toughness is required—and being conciliatory when the situation so demands. And the part of Tang's UN speech that savaged Chen was not reported in the official Chinese media. The big question: Will Beijing's elaborate strategies pay off on December 1?

Taiwan analysts say much depends on whether the DPP can hold on to the loyalty of the 30 percent or

so of the electorate that has always cast their ballots for pro-independence, native-Taiwanese candidates. Chen and his colleagues are facing a tough test because the majority of long-standing DPP supporters live in southern Taiwan, which is hardest hit by unemployment and other woes.

Chen's strategists, however, have claimed that economics will not triumph over politics—at least not in the case of proud native-Taiwanese residents who have over the decades valiantly battled alien powers ranging from the Japanese to the mainlanders. The chances of Chen and Lee retaining the backing of native-Taiwanese voters may rise if cadres such as Tang were to let their desire to gloat over the mainland's growing prowess get in the way of efforts to reassure Taiwan that it will not be swallowed up in the wake of the tricky business of reunification.

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Shui-bian because
all he says are lies.”

Willy Wo-Lap Lam, one of Asia's best known journalists and authors, is a senior China analyst at CNN's Asia-Pacific Office in Hong Kong.