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Cartoon Wars
Imaginaries of enmity across the Taiwan Strait

HOW DO EDITORIAL CARTOONS IN CHINA'S GLOBAL TIMES AND TAIWAN'S TAIPEI TIMES FRAME THEIR POLITICAL ENEMIES?

Dataset: 620 editorial cartoons (July 2022–Feb 2024).
Focus: Visual enmity in China-Taiwan-US relations.
Method: Discursive analysis of political cartoons as narrative weapons

The research focuses on three dimensions:

- How both China and Taiwan engage in a **visual representation** of one another through artistic and satirical mediums, exploring distinctions and parallels.
- Through which mechanisms do cartoonists construct the identities of 'self/friends' and 'other/enemies'?
- Where and how is the US (United States) **portrayed** as an actor in the Taiwan Strait conflict?

Goal: Explore the "cartoon war" as a battleground of competing narratives across the Taiwan Strait.

THE MECHANISMS OF 'ENEMIZING'

- **Contrast and Contradiction** (focus on opposites and hypocrisies).
- **Exaggeration and Stereotyping** (visual and textual distortion that come to symbolize the enemy).
- **Binarism and Dehumanization** (polarizing and vilifying).
- **Ridicule, Analogy, and Metaphor** (symbolism and humor).

[See Caswell, Drawing swords; Conners, Hussein as enemy; Medhurst and DeSousa, Political cartoons as rhetorical form]

METHODS

Sample Size:

620 cartoons (from 1010 identified, July 2022–Feb 2024). **Global Times: 365 – Taipei Times: 255.**

Quantitative coding process: Categorizing a corpus of 620 selected cartoons into sub-themes and topics related to Sino-Taiwan-US relations.) ❖ 'International politics' (236 cartoons) ❖ 'Economy & technology' (154 cartoons) ❖ 'National politics' (112 cartoons) ❖ 'Military and defence' (94 cartoons) ❖ 'Health' (24 cartoons)

Qualitative analysis:

Discourse Theoretical Analysis (DTA): Looks at how editorial cartoons shape meaning using tools like binarism, metaphor & dehumanization. Focuses on how "Self" vs. "Other" is framed via chains of equivalence—unifying "Us" against a shared "enemy." Highlights visual persuasion's role in shaping sociopolitical imaginaries & explores how these cartoons fuel competing narratives in US-China-Taiwan relations.

References:
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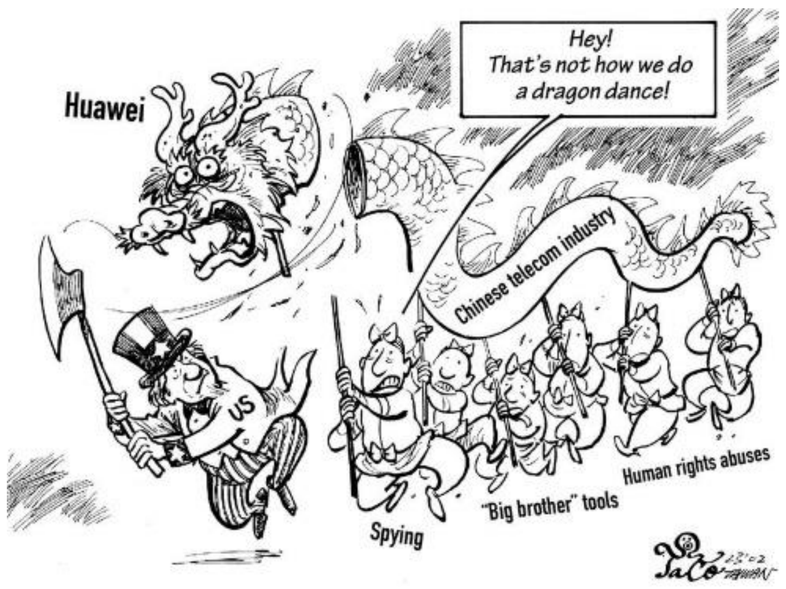

Taipei Times: 5 February 2023

Global Times: 6 April 2023

Taipei Times: 24 April 2023

Global Times: 3 January 2024

Taipei Times: 27 December 2022

FINDINGS

- GT & TT use editorial cartoons to construct external and internal enemies through visual metaphors, exaggerations, and dichotomous framing.
- Both outlets depict the external foe—primarily the United States for GT and China for TT—as sinister, deceitful, and threatening, often employing animalistic or grotesque caricatures to dehumanize the adversary.
- Internally, GT frames Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) as a puppet of the U.S., while TT portrays opposition parties like the Kuomintang (KMT) and Taiwan People's Party (TPP) as collaborators with Beijing.

CONCLUSIONS

- **Discursive Parallels and Divergences**: Both GT and TT use editorial cartoons to construct polarized identities of external and internal enemies through dehumanization, ridicule, and glorification of the in-group. TT employs more extreme enmity construction, legitimizing violence in ways absent from GT.
- **Contrasting Views of the US:** GT consistently portrays the US as a malevolent global force exploiting allies like Taiwan, while TT depicts the US as a heroic leader supporting Taiwan's defense against Chinese aggression.
- **Internal Enemy Narratives:** GT focuses on framing Taiwan as an internal issue caused by secessionist DPP politicians acting as US pawns, whereas TT targets internal opposition parties like KMT and TPP as traitorous collaborators with China, reinforcing a more antagonistic domestic discourse.
- **Broader Implications:** The cartoons reflect a developing "culture of enmity" in the Taiwan Strait, fostering polarization, hostility, and legitimization of containment or harm against adversaries, with potentially escalating implications for regional and global political dynamics.

Global Times: 18 January 2023