

# Misinformation about Taiwan from Japan: Narrative Analysis and the Formation of New Narratives

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## Abstract

How should we deal with the growing concern over misinformation and disinformation? This paper examines this issue using misinformation about Taiwan emanating from Japan. The article “90% of Taiwan’s Retired Executives Sell Information to China,” published by the Nihon Keizai Shimbun (Nikkei) on February 28, 2023, not only sparked debate in Japan, but also led to the Taiwanese government directly pointing out the inaccuracy of the content. In this report, we first conduct a fact-check of this information and analyze the high probability that it is misinformation. Next, we counter the misinformation through a detailed analysis of the persona of the target of the misinformation and the narrative that the misinformation conveys. This study points out that the disinformation could trigger anti-Taiwan sentiment based on the persona of a 50-year-old married man, a company employee in a managerial position, with a household income of 8.5 million yen, and a Nikkei Shimbun reader. We will formulate counter-narratives from the perspective of the economy, in which the persona has a high interest, and will also touch on points to be considered when diffusing the information. Finally, we conclude that even newspaper articles must be careful about accuracy, pointing out the limitations of this paper.

## Introduction

The Internet and social networking services have already become an integral part of our lives, but in recent years, disinformation and misinformation have become important issues.<sup>1</sup> “Misinformation” is defined as “the spread of unintentionally inaccurate information,”<sup>2</sup> while “disinformation” is defined as “information spread with the intent to deceive and cause serious harm.” Underlying this growing concern about disinformation and misinformation is the belief that in a democracy, free individual judgment should be ensured based on correct information, as well as a sense of crisis that the spread of disinformation or misinformation will erode the sound information infrastructure that supports this foundation.<sup>3</sup>

This sense of crisis is shared by the Japanese government and others. As an illustrative example, in July 2023 the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs journal *Diplomacy* published a special feature entitled “Prepare for the ‘Information Warfare Crisis’” that included 10 articles. Other private think tanks and platform operators are also working on countermeasures against disinformation, and the Japanese Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications is supporting these efforts.<sup>4</sup> Thus, awareness of the

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<sup>1</sup> In the Russian invasion of Ukraine that began in 2022, both Russia and Ukraine have been waging a war of recognition using disinformation. In addition, during the Taiwan presidential election held on January 13, 2024, it was widely reported that a large amount of disinformation was spread on the Internet through Chinese video sites attacking the candidate of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party and supporting the opposition party candidate.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Information Center, “Gizyoho he no taisyo: Gizyoho ga motarasu kadai to sono taio ni tsuite [Dealing with disinformation: Challenges posed by disinformation and how to respond to them]” (July 28, 2023).

([https://www.unic.or.jp/news\\_press/features\\_backgrounders/48456/](https://www.unic.or.jp/news_press/features_backgrounders/48456/) Accessed on Oct 21, 2023)

<sup>3</sup> Jessica Brandt, Maiko Ichihara, Nuurrianti Jalli, Puma Shen, and Aim Sinpeng, “Impact of disinformation on democracy in Asia,” Brookings Institution (December 2022).

(<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/impact-of-disinformation-on-democracy-in-asia/> Accessed on Sep 29, 2023)

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, “Gizyoho taisaku ni kansuru soumusyo torikumi ni tsuite [Efforts by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications to Combat Disinformation]” (May 25, 2023). ([https://www.soumu.go.jp/main\\_content/000882504.pdf](https://www.soumu.go.jp/main_content/000882504.pdf) Accessed on Feb 23, 2024)

problem of false information or misinformation is growing in both the public and the private sector.

In this paper we will focus on the spread of disinformation and misinformation about Taiwan using the Japanese language by actors in Japan. However, we go beyond merely investigating the authenticity of the information disseminated. We also discuss what narratives the disinformation or misinformation evokes in readers, why, and what counter-narratives are effective.<sup>5</sup>

### Articles to be Analyzed

This paper will focus on the article “Taiwan, the Unknown Face” in a series of special feature articles titled “Hakushin” published by the Nihon Keizai Shimbun (Nikkei Shimbun) on February 28, 2023.<sup>6</sup> The article is about the connection between Taiwan and China, focusing particularly on a Taiwanese military veteran leaking information to China. The article begins with a story about a man in his 50s who is said to be a former Taiwanese military official. After he retired from the military, he opened a restaurant in China in exchange for leaking military information to China through “the usual channels of military alumni,” but as the information he leaked ran out, he was harassed by the Chinese authorities and his restaurant was forced to close. But, he recalled, “I still love China. I have no grudge.” In addition, an alleged source said in an interview that about 90% of Taiwan’s military officers go to China after leaving the military and receive money in return for providing information about the military. The details will be discussed in the next section, but the interviewer also mentioned the recent news of information leaks concerning the Taiwanese military. The nature of the Taiwanese military is described as “a continuation of the old practice of having ‘Mainlanders’<sup>7</sup> with Chinese roots in senior positions.” The report also states that the military is strongly opposed to President Tsai Ing-wen’s

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<sup>5</sup> In this sense, it differs from the following article, which lays out the issues dealt with by this paper using plain language. Yoshiyuki Ogasawara, “Nikkei taiwan tokushu no nani ga mondai datta no ka: Genchi de hanpatu maneita houdou no otoshiana [Lessons from the ‘Nikkei’ Taiwan Debacle: A Call for Informed, Conscientious Reporting],” Yahoo News (May 18, 2023). (<https://www.nippon.com/ja/in-depth/d00904/> Accessed on Sep 29, 2023)

<sup>6</sup> “Taiwan: Shirare zaru sugao (Hakushin) [Taiwan, the Untold Face 1],” Nihon Keizai Shimbun, morning edition, p.2 (2023), p.2.

<sup>7</sup> In Taiwan, people who came to Taiwan from mainland China after the end of World War II. This is contrasted with people who have been residents of Taiwan since before the end of World War II.

hardline stance toward China, and that she has not been able to gain control of the Taiwanese military. Finally, the article touches on the issue between Japan and Taiwan over Diaoyutai (the Taiwanese name for the Senkaku Islands), introducing the motto “Diaoyutai is Taiwan’s territory,” and recalling the 2008 collision between a Japanese Coast Guard vessel and a Taiwanese fishing boat that sank in the Senkaku Islands. The then Taiwan Executive Yuan is quoted as saying that “We do not rule out an open war.” The article ends by raising the question of whether Taiwan’s military and Japan can really cooperate in territorial defense in an emergency with China.

The article caused quite a stir in Japan immediately after its publication, but what was remarkable was the speed of the Taiwanese side’s response. The next day, March 1, 2023, Feng Shih-kuan, the head of the National Military Retired Officials Guidance Committee, expressed his deep regret in front of the press, claiming that the story had no basis in fact.<sup>8</sup> On March 3, the representative of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in Japan, Hsieh Chang-ting, stated on [his Facebook page](#) that the representative office had visited the Nikkei and handed them a letter stating that the allegations had not been verified and were defamatory to the national military.<sup>9</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Presidential Office also [expressed their regret](#).<sup>10</sup> In response to the above, the Nikkei Shimbun published an article titled “Notice” in its morning edition on March 7, 2023, stating, “This is an introduction of the views and opinions

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<sup>8</sup> “Nissi no Taiwan houdou ga Taiwan de hamon [Japan’s coverage of Taiwan caused a stir in Taiwan],” The Taiwan Newspaper (March 9, 2023). (<https://taiwannews.jp/2023/03/%E6%97%A5%E7%B4%99%E3%81%AE%E5%8F%B0%E6%B9%BE%E5%A0%B1%E9%81%93%E3%81%8C%E5%8F%B0%E6%B9%BE%E3%81%A7%E6%B3%A2%E7%B4%8B/> Accessed on Dec 6, 2023)

Masanari Takahashi “‘Nikkei houdou’ de naibu wo kensei suru taiwan seijika no shitataka [Taiwanese Politicians’ Attitude of Checking the Inside with ‘Nikkei Reporting’],” Toyo Keizai Online (March 15, 2023). (<https://toyokeizai.net/articles/-/659405> Accessed on Nov 24, 2023)

<sup>9</sup> Posted by Chang-ting Hsieh on Facebook (March 3, 2023). (<https://www.facebook.com/frankcthsiehfans/posts/pfbid02e5PTHiyBB9PHqeVksQaUVtHaiiRsvJYTDEFZpypRyTF5nPrVFzKP6qGkwTkLv2ADl> Accessed on Nov 24, 2023)

<sup>10</sup> “Taiwan jiucheng tuixiu junguan hu zhang mai qingbao? Rimei: Jinwei shoufangzhe yijian [Ninety percent of Taiwan’s retired officers go to China to sell intelligence? Japanese media: only the opinion of the respondents],” *Radio Free Asia* (March 7, 2023). (<https://www.rfa.org/mandarin/yataibaodao/gangtai/hcm2-03072023075902.html> Accessed on Mar 7, 2023)

of the interviewee, and does not represent the views of Nikkei Inc. We regret any confusion this may have caused. We will strive to report the news in a fair and impartial manner.”<sup>11</sup> The issue was subsequently covered in a number of articles and garnered much attention.<sup>12</sup>

## Fact Check

This report conducted a fact-check of the information directly mentioned by Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defense and the Presidential Office that 90% of military veterans have gone to China to provide confidential military information. The fact-check determined that this information is “basis unknown.”<sup>13</sup>

The verification process is as follows. First, as to investigation of information leaks from Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defense to China, we found that information leaks themselves have occurred several times in the past. For example, in July 2021, it was found that the undersecretary of defense was under investigation for allegedly leaking information to Chinese spies.<sup>14</sup> Also, in January 2023, former Taiwanese officers and others were charged with leaking classified information to China, including military unit assignments.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> “Oshirase [Notification],” Nihon Keizai Shimbun (March 7, 2023).

<sup>12</sup> For example, “Taieki gunjin ra no kyuwari ga supai: Nikkei houdou ni taisuru Taiwan kaku homen no hanno to sonogo no ronso [90% of Veterans are Spies? Taiwan’s Reaction to the Nikkei Report and Subsequent Controversy],” TNL Media (March 17, 2023). (<https://japan.thenewslens.com/article/3512>);

Yenfu Liu “Nikkei no rensai ha naze Taiwan kara kougi to hihan wo uketa ka [Why Nikkei’s serialization drew protests and criticism from Taiwan],” Toyo Keizai Online (March 11, 2023). (<https://toyokeizai.net/articles/-/658676> Accessed on Nov 24, 2023)

<sup>13</sup> For criteria such as “Basis Unknown” and “Inaccurate,” the Japan Fact Check Center is used.

Japan Fact-Checking Center, “JFC Fact-check Guideline” (September 27, 2022). (<https://factcheckcenter.jp/n/ne2c802afa5e0?gs=a8936398e01b> Accessed on Aug 5, 2023)

<sup>14</sup> “Taiwan chugoku no supai meguri moto Kokubo jikan ra wo chosa [Taiwan Investigates Former Defense Undersecretary and Others Over Chinese Spying],” Reuters (July 28, 2021). (<https://jp.reuters.com/article/taiwan-military-china-idJPKBN2EY1G4> Accessed on Sep 29, 2023)

<sup>15</sup> Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defense, “The Ministry of National Defense issues a press release explaining ‘the media reported that retired Air Force Colonel Liu was involved in a situation in violation of the National Security Law,’” (January 4, 2023).

However, we were unable to confirm that “90%” of the veterans leaked information to China. In fact, Yoshiyuki Ogasawara (professor emeritus at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, researcher on Taiwanese politics), who wrote an article dealing with the same issue as this report, stated the following: “I visited Taiwan in April and exchanged opinions on this article with Taiwanese defense officials, intellectuals, and journalists. The number of spies had to be guessed at, but there was a common feeling that ‘there are some’. While ‘90%’ is out of the question, some felt that ‘10%’ might be close to the reality.”<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, we have not been able to confirm the veracity of the “90%” figure with clear evidence. The best result for verification would be “Basis Unknown” which means “no or insufficient evidence, and the facts cannot be verified.” However, considering the arguments presented by Ogasawara, it is not impossible to interpret “Inaccurate” as “incorrect or misleading,” which is defined as “partly correct but erroneous or lacking in important parts, or misleading.”

In addition, according to the definition of disinformation, it must be confirmed that the subject is intentionally misinforming the public. In this case, the possible entities are the Nikkei Shimbun, the reporter who wrote the article, the editorial staff, and the person who said the content in question in an interview, but we have not been able to clarify their true intentions at this time. The authors confirmed with a reporter that the Nikkei, like other newspapers, publishes articles only after thorough corroboration.<sup>17</sup> However, if we were to analyze the reason why the article was classed as “no evidence,” we could point out that the article in question was a series of feature articles. As a feature article, it is possible that the message was more important than the exact figures.

Based on the above, we will proceed with our analysis, considering the article in question to be highly likely to be “misinformation,” rather than ruling it as “disinformation.” On the other hand, whether the article constitutes “disinformation” or “misinformation,” the significance of this report will not be lost. This is because misinformation, even if it was not

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(<https://www.mnd.gov.tw/English/Publish.aspx?title=News%20Channel&SelectStyle=Defense%20News%20&p=80926> Accessed on July 15, 2023)

<sup>16</sup> Yoshiyuki Ogasawara, “Nikkei taiwan tokusyu no nani ga mondai datta no ka [What was the problem with the Nikkei Taiwan feature?],” nippon.com (May 18, 2023).

<sup>17</sup> Interview conducted online on November 7, 2023 with a reporter from the Nikkei Shimbun.

intentionally disseminated, influences people's decision-making and behavior.<sup>18</sup> Also, disinformation or misinformation about Taiwan can be incorporated into [foreign strategies](#) and used by foreign countries.<sup>19</sup> Fortunately, there seems to be no instance of this misinformation being used by other countries. However, the importance of this article's analysis remains high, given that it is influential enough to be picked up by domestic and foreign media, including Taiwanese media.

### Persona analysis

An important part of correcting disinformation/misinformation and delivering correct information is to analyze what kind of people were targeted by the disinformation or what kind of people were exposed to the misinformation. This is because disseminating correct information to reach those affected is effective in protecting a sound information infrastructure. Since the subject of this analysis is likely to be misinformation, we would like to conduct as detailed a persona analysis as possible, considering the social status, thought patterns, emotions, and beliefs of the people exposed to the misinformation, in order to deliver to them an efficient and effective narrative that will help them recognize the correct information.

To this end, this paper will analyze the most common personas exposed to this misinformation. First, the overall characteristics of the [Nikkei's](#) main readership can be identified as being mostly in their 40s and 50s, about half of them being section managers or higher, and having an average annual income of about 9 million yen.<sup>20</sup> In addition, according to a

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<sup>18</sup> Sadiq Muhammed T and Saji K. Mathew, "The disaster of misinformation: a review of research in social media," *International Journal of Data Science and Analytics*, No.13, pp.271-285 (Feb 2022).

(<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8853081/#CR5> Accessed on Feb 13, 2024).

David M. J. Lazer and others, "The science of fake news," *Science*, Vol. 359, No. 6380 (2018). (<https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aao2998> Accessed on Feb 13, 2024)

<sup>19</sup> Scott W. Harold and others, "Chinese Disinformation Efforts on Social Media," RAND Corporation (2021).

([https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR4373z3.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR4373z3.html) Accessed on Feb 13, 2024)

<sup>20</sup> "Media de-ta, dokusya zokusei [Media Data and Readership Attributes]", Nikkei Marketing Portal.

(<https://marketing.nikkei.com/media/newspaper/mediadata/> Accessed on Feb 9, 2024)



survey by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, the proportion of married people in their 40s and 50s is equivalent to about 70% of the total.<sup>21</sup>

Based on the above evidence, this paper establishes a persona named “Masatoshi Yamada” with the following characteristics and assumes that this persona is the type of person most exposed to this misinformation. “Masatoshi Yamada” is assumed to be a 50-year-old married man, a company employee in a managerial position, with an annual household income of 8.5 million yen, and a reader of the Nikkei Shimbun.

From the approximately 3.5 million readers of the Nikkei Shimbun, we narrowed the search to approximately 200,000 people who would fit the persona of “Masatoshi Yamada” by being male, in their 40s or 50s, in a managerial position, and married.

Next, based on several data sources, we explored the emotions of approximately 200,000 “Masatoshi Yamada” individuals. “Masatoshi Yamada” is a man in his 50s, about to retire, and is concerned about his life after retirement due to mortgage payments and pension issues.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, he is enthusiastic and serious about his managerial job, which is the source of his own salary, and makes efforts to collect information on economic trends directly related to the company’s performance and to facilitate internal operations. Such employees must communicate with both their subordinates and their superiors to support smooth organizational operations, which is a heavy burden for them.<sup>23</sup> This can easily lead to fatigue, anxiety, and frustration.<sup>24</sup> They are also more risk-averse, and in their consumption

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<sup>21</sup> The Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, “Koureika no nobi no donka to jinko gensho: Zu1-1-8 Nenrei kaikyū betsu mikonritsu [Slowing Growth of Aging Population and Declining Population: Figure 1-1-8 Unmarried Rates by Age Group],” Annual Health, Labor and Welfare Report, FY2020 (Sep 2020).

<sup>22</sup> Takashi Sako, “Kohukudo ha saikai 50-dai danseī wo osou [Happiness ranks lowest ”3 blues before retirement” strike men in their 50s],” Nikkei cross trend (Oct 7, 2021).

(<https://xtrend.nikkei.com/atcl/contents/18/00401/00018/> Accessed on Feb 9, 2024)

<sup>23</sup> “50-dai danseī no shiawase na hatarakikata ni kansuru ishikichosa [Attitude survey on happy working styles of men in their 50s]” AIR Lab. Journal (Aug 18, 2022). (<https://minnaair.com/blog/week2022-expo/#session2> Accessed on Feb 9, 2024)

<sup>24</sup> The Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, “Kounenki syozyo, syogai ni kansuru ishikichosa: Kekka [Results of Survey on Awareness of Menopausal Symptoms and Disorders]” (July 26, 2022).

activities, they try to buy brand-name products rather than unknown products.<sup>25</sup> They tend to place trust in the Nikkei brand, which is one of Japan's five major newspapers and is highly regarded for its economic commentary.<sup>26</sup>

How could this narrative affect these sentiments? First, trust in the Nikkei brand was the most important factor for this persona to read the article and trust its content.

Furthermore, his position as a manager, responsible for his staff, made him wary of information leaks. In particular, on February 27, 2023, the day before the article was published, it was reported that a compensation order of 13 million yen had been issued for the leakage of personal data of approximately 4,858 million people by a temporary employee of a Benesse Corporation affiliate, and it is considered that the timing was sensitive to acts by people inside the organization that were harmful to the organization.<sup>27</sup>

Another reason for the persona's interest in the article in question could be some antipathy toward China. According to a 2023 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center,<sup>28</sup> 87% of Japanese view China "unfavorably."<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, according to a survey on affinity with China conducted by the Cabinet Office's "Public Opinion Survey on Diplomacy," approximately 70% of men in their 40s and 50s answered "do not have an

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(<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/000969166.pdf> Accessed on Feb 9, 2024)

<sup>25</sup> Marie Takahashi, "50-dai no shohisya kara kangaeru tsuginaru shinia sizyo wo koryaku suru tameno pointo [Key Points for Capturing the Next Senior Market Based on the Consumption Attitudes of People in Their 50s]" *NRI Management Review*, Vol. 42 (2020).

([https://www.nri.com/jp/knowledge/publication/mcs/m\\_review/lst/2020/nmr42?year=2020](https://www.nri.com/jp/knowledge/publication/mcs/m_review/lst/2020/nmr42?year=2020) Accessed on Feb 9, 2024)

<sup>26</sup> Nikkei Marketing Portal, op. cit.

<sup>27</sup> "Benesse gawa ni 1300 manen baisyo meirei kojinhoho ryusyutu de Tokyo chisai [Benesse Ordered to Pay 13 Million Yen in Compensation by Tokyo District Court for Leakage of Personal Information]," Nikkei News (Feb 27, 2023). The same article was also published on page 46 of the morning edition on the same day as the article in question.

<sup>28</sup> Non-partisan, non-profit think tank organization based in Washington, D.C., USA. It conducts research in a wide range of fields, including information research on politics and policy.

<sup>29</sup> Pew Research Center, "Pew Research Center's Spring 2023 Global Attitudes Survey" (July 27, 2023).

(<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2023/07/27/views-of-china/> Accessed on Dec 6, 2023)

affinity somewhat” or “do not have an affinity.”<sup>30</sup> In particular, “Masatoshi Yamada” in his managerial position would have his antennae attuned to China, which has a large market, and on top of that, the fact that Japanese company employees were wrongfully detained under the National Security Law probably left a strong impression on him. These factors led “Masatoshi Yamada” to take a strong interest in the article.

### Narrative Analysis

What kind of narrative, then, did this misinformation deliver to “Masatoshi Yamada”? The article in question evokes the narrative of “Taiwan’s military is corrupt” or “Taiwan’s military is being bought by China” in the persona.<sup>31</sup>

As pointed out in the previous section, about 70% of the men in their 40s and 50s who correspond to the persona indicated that they “do not have an affinity somewhat” or “do not have an affinity” toward China. Therefore, this narrative, which evokes Taiwan’s proximity to China, risks triggering negative public sentiment toward Taiwan among the Japanese, which in turn could lead to a deterioration of Japan-Taiwan relations. If the article’s statement that the military is corrupt leads to the discourse that this indicates a lack of control by the presidential administration, the credibility of the Taiwanese government itself is threatened.<sup>32</sup>

Next, we will analyze the structure and characteristics of this narrative. First, it is important to note that this misinformation is combined with facts. As mentioned earlier, corruption and information leaks in the Taiwanese military were actual events. It is also generally known that people distinguished as so-called “outsiders” have traditionally occupied the core

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<sup>30</sup> “Reiwa 3 nendo gaiko ni kansuru yoron chosa: Zu 7 chugoku ni taisuru shinkinkan [2021 Public Opinion Survey on Diplomacy (Figure 7: Sense of familiarity with China)],” Cabinet Office (Jan 21, 2022). (<https://survey.gov-online.go.jp/index-all.html#fy2021> Accessed on Aug 22, 2023)

<sup>31</sup> What narratives readers draw from this article is highly subjective. However, this narrative is extracted from the fact that the article clearly states that 90% of veterans have leaked information to China, and the Taiwanese Presidential Office and Ministry of Defense are directly mentioned in the article.

<sup>32</sup> According to a report published by the RAND Institute, China is attempting to undermine confidence in the Taiwanese government and cause social divisions by spreading the narrative that the Taiwanese government and military are weak and corrupt. Harold and others, Chinese (2021).

of the Ministry of National Defense. Of course, there is no cause-and-effect relationship that says that people leak information to China because they are “mainlanders” but the combination of facts with misinformation can give the impression that this is true. In addition, it can lead to a loss of clarity in fact-checking, which in turn reinforces a resistance to new narratives to correct misperceptions.

In addition, the sources of the interviews (names, etc.) are not detailed except for the first one interviewed, making them ambiguous, but this form of interviewing makes the statements presented more realistic to the reader. Although it is not unusual for interviews to be anonymous to protect privacy, this makes it difficult to investigate whether the article is credible or not.

Also, the article emphasizes the closeness between the Chinese and Taiwanese militaries. In particular, the headline “I Still Like China,” coupled with the mention of veterans leaking information to China as well as invoking the Senkaku Islands issue, can be seen as a deliberate assertion of the closeness between Taiwan and China. The expression “threatened by China,” which also occurs in the article, could give a bad impression of Taiwan-China relations; but the expression, which appears to be a statement by a Taiwan veteran who says that he “still” likes China, makes Taiwan’s favorable feelings toward China even more impressive. In other words, there is a danger of triggering anti-Taiwan sentiment in a persona that does not feel any affinity for China.

### New Narrative Formation

Based on the above analysis, we formulate a new narrative to improve the impression of “Masatoshi Yamada” toward Taiwan, which was worsened by the article in question. In this paper, we formulate a new narrative that aims to foster our persona’s pro-Taiwan sentiment by stating that Taiwan and Japan have a deep economic relationship and that this good relationship has a positive impact on both sides.

The narrative of “mutual love” is valid for the following reasons. The “Norm of Reciprocity” suggests that when a person receives a favor or benefit from another person, he or she is inclined to reciprocate.<sup>33</sup> In particular, the tendency to return a favor to someone who shows the same

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<sup>33</sup> Alvin W. Gouldner, “The Norm of Reciprocity: A Preliminary Statement,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Apr 1960), pp. 161-178. (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2092623> Accessed on Mar 5, 2024)

favor to you is known as “Return of Favor” and is utilized in business and other fields. Appealing to “Masatoshi Yamada” that many Taiwanese people have a favorable impression of Japan may improve their feelings toward Taiwan.<sup>34</sup> It is also known as the bandwagon effect in behavioral psychology: people tend to have favorable impressions of things that the people around them have favorable impressions of. By informing the persona that many Japanese men of the same age as him have a favorable impression of Taiwan, we can anticipate the fostering of pro-Taiwan sentiment through the bandwagon effect.<sup>35</sup>

On top of that, based on the analysis of the persona of “Masatoshi Yamada” so far, we believe that he is interested in the economy, and therefore, constructing a narrative from the economic aspect is a useful method for diffusion and penetration. In other words, by mentioning the prospects for economic development through deepened relations between Japan and Taiwan, we can deliver a “mutual love” narrative. In recent years, contacts between Japanese and Taiwanese companies, particularly in the semiconductor industry, have been expanding and deepening, and it is highly likely that “Masatoshi Yamada,” who checks the Nikkei Shimbun, has an interest in this area. For example, although there are various discussions

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<sup>34</sup> According to a Taiwanese public opinion survey in Japan by the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association, 77% of Taiwanese people feel close to Japan, and 60% of Taiwanese people listed Japan as their favorite country (excluding Taiwan).

Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association, “2021 nendo Tainichi yoron chosa [FY2021 Public Opinion Survey on Japan]” (Mar 18, 2022). ([https://www.koryu.or.jp/Portals/0/culture/%E4%B8%96%E8%AB%96/2021/2021\\_seron\\_shosai\\_JP2.pdf](https://www.koryu.or.jp/Portals/0/culture/%E4%B8%96%E8%AB%96/2021/2021_seron_shosai_JP2.pdf) Accessed on Mar 5, 2024)

<sup>35</sup> In a survey on Japanese sentiment toward Taiwan, about 80% of Japanese males in their 50s felt a sense of familiarity with Taiwan, citing “a sense of familiarity with the other’s national character,” “a high degree of cultural sharing with Japan,” and “geographic proximity to Japan” as reasons for this feeling.

The Sasagawa Peace Foundation, “Nihonjin no chugoku ni taisuru isikichosa no kekka ni tsuite [Results of the Survey on Japanese Attitudes Toward China,” The Sasakawa Japan-China Friendship Fund (Dec 12, 2022). (<https://www.spf.org/china/news/20221212.html> Accessed on Mar 12, 2024)

See also the following survey, which produced generally similar results. Central Research Services Inc, “Nihonjin no taiwan ni taisuru ishikichosa 2023 [Survey of Japanese Attitudes Toward Taiwan 2023]” (Dec 18, 2023). ([https://www.roc-taiwan.org/jp\\_ja/post/95005.html](https://www.roc-taiwan.org/jp_ja/post/95005.html) Accessed on Mar 12, 2024)

about the economic and political effects that the operation of the Kumamoto plant of the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC),<sup>36</sup> a Taiwanese company, will have on Japan and Taiwan, there are certain benefits for both sides. Emphasizing this mutual complementarity will improve the sentiments of “Masatoshi Yamada,” who is sensitive to the interests of his company, toward Taiwan.

The Nikkei, a newspaper that “Masatoshi Yamada” trusts and subscribes to, is an effective medium for spreading this narrative that emphasizes the positive relationship between Japan and Taiwan. It would also be important to have this narrative disseminated by organizations that work to build good relations between Japan and Taiwan, such as the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association, as a more general measure against disinformation and misinformation. If links to information and articles from these organizations could be posted in the Nikkei, it would be possible to spread this narrative through these media and foster a pro-Taiwan sentiment in “Masatoshi Yamada.”

On the other hand, as long as the error “90% of veterans are leaking information to China” is left unaddressed, the negative image of “Masatoshi Yamada” cannot be turned into a positive one, and more people may be directly exposed to the narrative. Therefore, we would like to correct the error by summarizing and publicizing the process of fact-checking and persona analysis as we have done in this paper in an easy-to-understand manner. Although it would be difficult to publish this information directly in the Nikkei, it would be possible for an organization that strives to build good Japan-Taiwan relations, such as the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association, to link the information to the Nikkei. In this case, the inclusion of a statement related to the importance of organizational control in the title of the link, would be in line with the interests of the managerial persona and would attract his attention.

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<sup>36</sup> Regarding TSMC’s overseas expansion, there are many discussions that emphasize the benefits enjoyed by Japan and Taiwan, such as the stabilization of the supply chain. On the other hand, while acknowledging certain benefits, the following books (among others) raise concerns about the impact on the East Asian economy and Taiwan’s security. Christopher Miller translated by Toshio Chiba, “Handoutai senso Sekai saijuuyo tekunorogi- wo meguru kokkakan no koubou [The Semiconductor Wars: The War Between Nations Over the World’s Most Important Technology]” (2023); Chris Miller, *Chip War: The Fight for the World’s Most Critical Technology* (New York: Scribner, 2022).

Also, including a general reminder about how to interact with information will serve as “information inoculations” to help people avoid being influenced by disinformation or misinformation, beyond addressing this case individually.<sup>37</sup> In receiving such reminders, people become more aware of their misperceptions of Taiwan, and it is hoped that this will help to dispel negative impressions.

## Conclusion

This paper is part of the results of joint research on “Countering Disinformation and Protecting Democracy,” an intensive seminar held by the Institute for Global Governance Research (GGR) at Hitotsubashi University in February and April 2023. Although not the author, Toma Suzuki (Master’s student, Nara Institute of Science and Technology) also participated in the discussions.

In this paper, we conducted fact-checking and narrative analysis of the article “90% of Taiwan’s Retired Executives are Selling Information to China” published by the Nikkei Shimbun on February 28, 2023, and examined effective narratives to correct misperceptions caused by incorrect information based on the results of persona analysis, and to repair the damage to Taiwan’s image caused by misperceptions. We have used this opportunity to investigate in greater depth how this misinformation affected citizens (and continues to affect them for about a year), making use of the findings from the intensive seminar “Countering Disinformation and Protect Democracy” organized by the GGR at Hitotsubashi University, as well as various previous studies.

On the other hand, we were unable to definitively determine whether the content of this article constituted “disinformation,” and thus we conducted research based on the assumption that it was “misinformation.” Although we were aware that there are many situations in which it is difficult to identify the source of “disinformation,” this report made us keenly aware of the difficulty of investigating from the outside what intentions were

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<sup>37</sup> Informational inoculations, such as (1) calling attention to inaccuracies in information and (2) explaining logical fallacies in the thought process, are effective against multiple types of conspiratorial beliefs. Cian O’ Mahony, Maryanne Brassil, Gillian Murphy, and Conor Linehan, “The Efficacy of Interventions in Reducing Belief in Conspiracy Theories: A Systematic Review,” *PLOS ONE* (Apr 2023). (<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0280902> Accessed on Sep 30, 2023)

behind the publication of a newspaper article that passed through the hands of multiple people, including the reporter and the editor-in-chief. We would also like to note here as a limitation of this report that we were not able to fully examine the specifics of the new narratives and the institutions that issued them. These challenges are a major lesson for the authors.

The information that people obtain in their daily lives forms the basis of democracy, as it shapes the free judgment of individuals. This paper has shown that it is important to be vigilant about the accuracy of information obtained not only from the Internet, but also from newspapers and other sources that are clear about the origin of the information they present.



## Author Profiles

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Misato Kuroki is a second-year student in the Master's program in Policy Studies, Graduate School of Social Sciences, Nanzan University. She graduated from the Department of International Relations, National Defense Academy. She studies international political economy and security studies with a focus on economic security. To broaden her knowledge of the influence that citizens have on international politics, she participated in the GGR Intensive Seminar held in the spring of 2023.

### So SAKAGUCHI

So Sakaguchi is a Master's student in the Department of Political Science, Graduate School of Political Science, Tokai University. He graduated from the Department of International Studies of the College of Liberal Arts at Tokai University. He studies international politics and diplomatic history, and is interested in nuclear policy, particularly in the United Kingdom. He participated in the GGR Intensive Seminar in the spring of 2023 to deepen his knowledge on the strategic use of disinformation by states.

### Masamune SATO

Masamune Sato is a senior student at Kobe University's Faculty of Ocean Science and Technology. He seeks to work on security issues as a bureaucrat in the future and has a broad interest in security in non-military fields. He participated in the GGR Intensive Seminar held in the spring of 2023 to learn about security in the information space and the effects of disinformation or misinformation in cognitive warfare.

### **【Translated by】**

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