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外媒台灣報導的幕後合作：

新聞協作者與外籍記者的協作實踐

Beyond the Bylines: Collaboration Between

News Collaborators (Fixers) and Foreign Journalists in

Reporting on Taiwan

羅敬文

Jing-wen Lo

指導教授：劉好迪博士
Advisor: Adrian Rauchfleisch, Ph.D.

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Studying journalism means you're often telling other people's stories and rarely get the chance to write about yourself. Your opinions? Yes. Your analysis? Certainly. But your feelings? Not really. So I figured this might be the only opportunity. But first, I want to thank everyone who helped me along the way.

To my advisor, thank you for giving me the freedom to spend five months on exchange in Germany without making any progress on my thesis, and for always patiently answering my questions, even when they were a little last minute.

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To myself, thank you for saying yes to the opportunities. If it weren't for a news internship I took in 2020, back when I was still a foreign languages major, I wouldn't have been able to apply to this master's program in journalism. And if I hadn't responded to a foreign journalist's post looking for a fixer, or as I prefer to say a news collaborator, I wouldn't be writing this thesis today. Every path has led somewhere, and there truly isn't a road taken in vain.

And that is enough sentiment for now. I have always been the listener in the friend group, and putting my own emotions into words has never been my strong suit. But I listen, I remember, and when it comes to journalistic work, I turn other people's stories into words. Maybe that is an occupational hazard, or maybe it is just who I am. Either way, I am ready to call myself a journalist.

摘要

　　近年來外國媒體對台灣的關注日益增加，外媒記者經常與一群幕後的「新聞協作者」合作報導。本論文探討台灣新聞協作者在外媒報導製作過程中的角色，特別聚焦於他們對報導內容的影響力、專業身份與工作條件。透過與台灣新聞協作者與外籍記者的深度訪談，本研究運用守門理論分析協作者如何參與報導流程與新聞敘事的形成。

　　研究結果指出，新聞協作者的影響力涵蓋多個層面，從蒐集資訊、設定主題到與記者協商編輯方向，特別是在台灣常被置於地緣政治框架下的背景中更為顯著。同時，協作者在新聞專業與助理工作之間的模糊位置，使他們多半缺乏專業認可與報導署名制度。本研究也指出，與過去著重於衝突區域的研究不同，台灣呈現出一種獨特的「敘事敏感」新聞環境。

　　本論文將新聞協作者的觀點置於分析核心，補足過往研究中對此角色的忽視，進一步豐富對跨國新聞製作過程的理解，並凸顯這些常被忽略的幕後勞動。

關鍵詞：新聞協作者、外媒、國際新聞、外媒記者、守門理論

Abstract

As international media attention on Taiwan grows, the role of local news collaborators, often referred to as fixers, has become increasingly critical yet remains underexamined. This thesis explores how Taiwanese news collaborators contribute to the production of foreign media reporting on Taiwan, with a focus on their editorial influence, professional identity, and working conditions. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with Taiwanese news collaborators and foreign journalists, the study applies gatekeeping theory and the concept of liminal labor to analyze the ways collaborators shape reporting processes and narratives. The findings show that news collaborators exert influence at multiple levels, from sourcing and framing to negotiating editorial expectations, particularly in a context where Taiwan is frequently portrayed through a geopolitical lens. At the same time, collaborators navigate an ambiguous professional status that is positioned between journalism and support work, often without formal recognition or consistent credit. This study also argues that Taiwan represents a distinct "representationally sensitive" fixer environment, which differs from the conflict zones emphasized in prior research. By foregrounding the perspectives of collaborators themselves, the thesis contributes to a more nuanced understanding of transnational news production and highlights the invisible labor that occurs beyond the bylines.

Keywords: fixer, foreign journalist, foreign correspondent, foreign media, Taiwan, gatekeeping theory

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Research motivation

In early 2020, as diplomatic tensions between China and the United States escalated, 17 foreign journalists were expelled from China, primarily due to their work permits being revoked or not renewed (Reuters, 2020). Consequently, some journalists who were originally based in China relocated to Taiwan (Lu & Hetherington, 2022). According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the most recent data from April 2024 shows that a total of 176 correspondents from 86 media outlets across 22 countries were based in Taiwan. This is more than double the 81 correspondents recorded in 2016 and reflects a trend of gradual increase (Yu, 2023). On the other hand, foreign media that usually do not have correspondents in Taiwan also send journalists to cover special events, also referred to as visiting journalists or parachute journalists. For instance, during Taiwan's 2024 presidential election, which garnered significant international media attention, over 430 foreign media reporters from more than 30 countries came to cover the event. Among them, about 130 were correspondents and more than 300 were visiting journalists (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of China [Taiwan], 2024). Regardless of whether they are newly arrived correspondents or visiting journalists, they might lack local contacts or Chinese language skills, thus requiring assistance from locally based media workers called "fixers" in Taiwan.
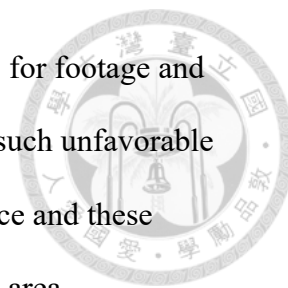
The term *fixer* still lacks a universally accepted Chinese translation. Some practitioners in Taiwan refer to themselves as guides (嚮導), news assistants (新聞助理), or local producers (在地製作人). Their work includes collecting information before interviews, finding interviewees, planning interview itineraries, accompanying interviews, and

translating. This study will refer to "fixers" as "news collaborators" to highlight their role in collaboration with foreign journalists. However, the names of local news collaborators rarely appear in the byline of news stories and may not be mentioned in the acknowledgments to contributors at the end, making them the invisible workers behind foreign media reports on Taiwan.

I had the opportunity to work with a foreign correspondent during the 2024 election period, participating in discussions about story topics prior to interviews, finding interviewees, organizing interview itineraries, and providing interpretation during interviews. I collaborated with a correspondent from a German-language media outlet based in Taiwan on two stories. The first, produced a few months before the election, featured Kinmen residents and focused on their daily lives, family histories, and identities. The second, completed just days before the election, shifted away from candidates and party campaigns, instead highlighting people of different ages, occupations, and regions, exploring the issues they cared about most and how these influenced their voting decisions. I agreed not to be credited for the first story, as I only participated in the preparation and did not travel to Kinmen with the journalist; for the second story, I was credited as *Mitarbeiter* (colleague/staff member) at the end of the article and received payment I was satisfied with. This experience offered me a first-hand glimpse into the collaboration process between foreign journalists and local news collaborators.

After the election, a group of stringers and local journalists issued a statement pointing out that they were not respected during the collaboration with foreign media and called for better treatment of news collaborators (Simorre, 2024). A freelance journalist also published an analysis on *Foreign Policy*, highlighting that Taiwanese news collaborators not only face a lack of respect and recognition but also encounter foreign media's biased

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views of Taiwan and foreign journalists' demands for sensational scenes for footage and narratives for stories (Wei, 2024). While I personally did not encounter such unfavorable experiences in my collaboration, the contrast between my own experience and these accounts inspired my interest in further investigating this underexplored area.

1.2 Background and context

1.2.1 Recent trends in foreign correspondence in Taiwan

Over the past decade, foreign media attention on Taiwan has increased significantly. For example, in 2015, an estimated 157 *BBC News* articles mentioned Taiwan, compared to 522 in 2024, as shown in Figure 1. To analyze how Taiwan has been represented in *BBC News* over time, I used the Google Custom Search API to retrieve English-language articles containing the keyword "Taiwan" from 2015 to 2024, restricted to the BBC News website (www.bbc.com/news). To identify key themes, article titles and snippets were extracted, preprocessed (e.g., lowercasing and removal of common stopwords such as "said," "republic," "island," and year-specific terms), and the five most frequent keywords per year were identified based on word frequency counts.

The keywords reflect the evolving thematic focus of BBC coverage on Taiwan over the years. In 2015, coverage centered around the natural disaster "typhoon." A modest peak occurred in 2016 due to the presidential election, although it received less extensive coverage compared to that of 2024. From 2017 to 2019, the volume of reporting remained relatively steady. In 2020, attention shifted slightly toward public health, with keywords such as "coronavirus" and "Covid" appearing frequently, often highlighting Taiwan's effective response to the pandemic (Hale, 2022). A significant turning point came in 2022, when then-U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan and China responded with

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military drills (Tan & Molloy, 2022); keywords like "Pelosi" and "military" became especially prominent. Since then, as Chinese military activities around Taiwan have grown more frequent (Guinto, 2023), "military" has consistently remained among the top keywords. In 2024, the focus returned to politics, with the presidential election emerging as the dominant theme, accompanied by a significant increase in the number of articles mentioning Taiwan.
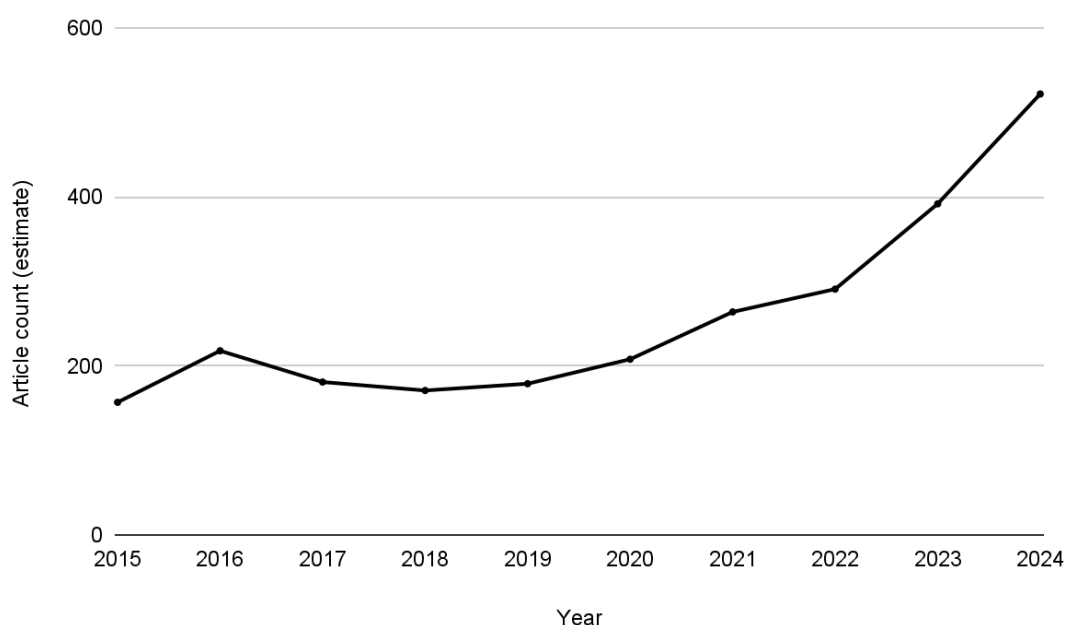
Figure 1

Annual Mentions of "Taiwan" in BBC News Coverage (2015–2024)

Note. Data compiled using Google Custom Search API.

The rise in international media coverage reflects Taiwan's increasing entanglement in regional and global geopolitical narratives. As tension between China and the U.S. intensifies, Taiwan has become an indispensable part in discussions around regional security and supply chains (Li, 2023). This shifting international attention has contributed to the growing presence of foreign journalists in Taiwan.

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1.2.2 Changing geopolitical and media landscape in the region

In March 2020, China expelled reporters from *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post*, and either stopped issuing press credentials or required foreign journalists to undergo time-consuming visa renewal processes (Tracy, Wong, & Jakes, 2020). The 19 expelled journalists represented about half of the reporting corps from these three outlets stationed in China (DeButts & Pan, 2024). One of the foreign journalists interviewed for this study noted that it was also difficult for freelance journalists, those not employed by any media outlet, to obtain a visa, which led them to relocate to Taiwan (personal communication, May 6, 2025). The tensions between Beijing and Washington extend beyond news organizations, encompassing a wide range of economic and geopolitical issues in which Taiwan is often deeply involved.

These tensions escalated further in 2022 when, despite warnings from Chinese officials, then-U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan to meet with President Tsai Ing-wen. In response, China launched live-fire military drills encircling Taiwan. The visit became one of the most high-profile events in recent years covered by international media outlets, including *BBC*, *CNN*, *The New York Times*, *Financial Times*, and *The Washington Post* (Central News Agency, 2022).

The peak of international media coverage occurred during Taiwan's 2024 presidential election, evidenced not only by the large number of foreign journalists from various regions who came to report on the event but also by the increasingly diverse formats of coverage. In addition to traditional news articles and television broadcasts, reporting expanded to include feature stories (Davidson, 2024), live broadcasts, special programs (NHK WORLD-Japan, 2024), and podcasts (The Economist, 2024). While media attention has

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declined somewhat since the election, the sustained presence of a larger number of correspondents based in Taiwan continues to create more opportunities for foreign media to cover both political developments and local cultural stories (personal communication, May 16, 2025). These shifts reflect a changing geopolitical and media landscape in the region, with Taiwan occupying a more prominent position on the international news agenda.

1.3 Research purposes

The arrival of large numbers of foreign journalists in Taiwan during high-profile moments, such as the 2024 presidential elections, the 2022 visit of then-U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, or regional military exercises, according to a news collaborator I interviewed (personal communication, May 31, 2024), has repeatedly led to a spike in demand for news collaborators. In these periods, foreign journalists often operate under time constraints, with limited understanding of local norms, making the role of news collaborators critical to securing sources, interpreting context, and managing logistics.

While most existing studies on news collaborators focus on conflict or post-conflict zones, such as Iraq (Palmer & Fontan, 2007), or Afghanistan (Ashraf, 2021), where foreign media depend heavily on local collaborators to navigate dangerous terrain and political instability, Taiwan presents a different case. Although it is not in a state of war, international reporting here is often framed within, as observed by a news collaborator I interviewed (personal communication, June 12, 2024), a conflict-oriented lens, particularly around cross-strait relations. This creates a dynamic in which news collaborators must navigate not physical risk, but representational sensitivity, helping foreign journalists interpret nuanced political identities and avoid reductive or sensational narratives.

As the presence of foreign media in Taiwan continues to grow, understanding the role of

news collaborators is essential for examining how international news is actually made. This study aims to understand the collaboration and production process of foreign media reports on Taiwan with an emphasis on the perspective of Taiwanese news collaborators.

1.4 Positionality statement

In conducting this research, I aim to maintain reflexivity regarding my own positionality and how it may have shaped the research process and interpretation of findings. I acknowledge my standpoint as a former news collaborator. Having occupied this role myself, participated in gatherings with fellow collaborators and foreign journalists, and been a member of the group chat referenced in the study, I had access to field knowledge and informal networks that were valuable for recruitment and contextual understanding.

I recognize that my proximity to the topic may introduce certain biases, such as a tendency to foreground the significance of news collaborators or portray their contributions more favorably than an outsider might. To mitigate this, I intentionally avoided an autoethnographic approach and excluded my personal experiences and opinions from the analysis.

At the same time, I recognize that my social and linguistic background, being Taiwanese, with Mandarin as my first language and English as my second, may have influenced how I conducted interviews and interpreted participants' accounts. These aspects of my identity could have shaped how conversations unfolded and what kinds of insights were shared. While I remain aware of these potential effects, I also see them as part of the contextual grounding that allowed me to navigate the field and engage with participants more effectively.

Chapter 2 Literature review

2.1 Key roles in international reporting
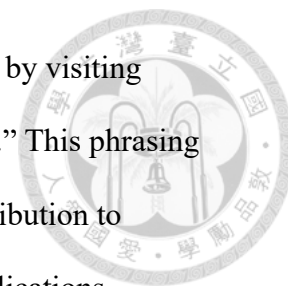
International news production is rarely a solo endeavor. Instead, it involves a network of actors whose roles differ based on nationality, affiliation, contractual status, and function in the reporting process. This section outlines the key professional categories involved in transnational journalism, including fixers (or news collaborators), foreign correspondents, visiting journalists, and freelance journalists.

2.1.1 Fixer/News collaborator

The term *fixer* literally means someone who fixes or solves problems. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, a fixer is "someone who is skilled at arranging for things to happen." In the international news industry, fixers, or *news collaborators* in this study, are local translators or guides hired by reporters for international reporting. This profession has existed for several centuries. For instance, during the history of the Chinese empire or when European colonizers entered the New World, individuals with language and social skills acted as *cultural mediators*, facilitating communication and exchange between people of different cultural backgrounds (Palmer, 2019). Today, news collaborators play a similar role in international news production. They are professionals with language, journalism, and cultural mediation skills who mediate between people, places, and political entities. Their tasks include translation, interviewing, arranging visits, background research, and assessing travel safety (Palmer & Fontan, 2007).

The term fixer still lacks a universally accepted Chinese translation, and is contested as a professional label. In 2016, The Martin Adler Prize, established by the Rory Peck Trust to

honor local contributing journalists, described the awardee as "regarded by visiting journalists as one of the region's most trusted and knowledgeable fixers." This phrasing was later revised to "a local freelancer who has made a significant contribution to newsgathering," reflecting growing awareness of the terminology's implications.

In this study, the term *news collaborator* is newly proposed to better capture the collaborative and multifaceted nature of the role. Unlike terms commonly used in previous studies such as *fixer*, *news assistant*, or *guide*, "news collaborator" avoids the negative or overly narrow connotations these labels often carry. The term "fixer" may suggest a short-term, outsourced support role lacking journalistic professionalism. "Assistant" can imply a subordinate position, while "guide" tends to reduce the role to logistical support alone. In contrast, news collaborator emphasizes a more equal relationship between local media workers and foreign journalists. It reflects the active and varied contributions these professionals can make throughout the reporting process.

2.1.2 Foreign correspondent

According to the United Nations (UN) *Convention on the International Right of Correction*, a *correspondent* is defined as "an individual employed by a media organization who is regularly engaged in collecting and reporting news material and who, when abroad, is identified as a correspondent by a valid passport or similar documentation" (Convention on the International Right of Correction, 435 U.N.T.S. 191). However, as economic pressures reshape the media landscape and technological advances make global communication more accessible and cost-effective, Hamilton and Jenner (2004) argue that "the traditional elite foreign correspondent is a yardstick that no longer measures well" (p.315). They propose a broader typology of foreign journalists that includes various roles:

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traditional correspondents working for national media and wire services, *parachute journalists* who are temporarily dispatched to cover breaking news in unfamiliar regions, and *foreign local correspondents*, who are local reporters working for foreign media outlets.

This study adopts *foreign journalists* as an umbrella term encompassing the diverse roles within foreign correspondence. It broadly refers to individuals who work for or contribute to foreign media. However, the term *foreign correspondents* is used in its traditional sense to specifically denote journalists of foreign nationalities who are employed by foreign media outlets and stationed in a region for an extended period. This distinguishes them from *parachute journalists* (also referred to as *visiting journalists*), who typically cover events on short-term assignments.

2.1.3 Visiting journalist

Visiting journalists, often referred to as *parachute journalists*, are dispatched to cover news stories far from their home base. However, the term *parachute* carries a negative connotation, evoking the image of a foreign journalist who "arrives by air, perhaps without much preparation or knowledge" (Grant, 2020) and "is extracted as soon as the story is over" (Fondren, 2019, p. 1). While parachute journalism is sometimes criticized for a lack of cultural, historical, and linguistic understanding, it also has certain advantages. First, deploying parachute journalists can be a more economical option for media outlets than maintaining a long-term foreign correspondent. Second, journalists sent for specific events may offer subject-matter expertise that surpasses that of correspondents. For instance, assigning an environmental reporter to cover a natural disaster (Fondren, 2019). For these reasons, this study uses the term *visiting journalists* instead.

2.1.5 Freelance journalist

Freelance journalists are not employed by a specific media outlet but are becoming an increasingly important part of international newsgathering, as news organizations have reduced the number of full-time journalists dedicated to foreign coverage due to budget cuts (Dorsey, 2016). Freelancers are not constrained by traditional newsroom structures, which brings both advantages and disadvantages to their work. Zhang and Jenkins (2021) found that freelance journalists involved in foreign newsgathering enjoy greater autonomy, often challenge Westernized framings, and tend to pursue human-interest stories, although they also face financial precarity.

Because precarity is a defining feature of freelance journalism, many freelancers take on a wide range of tasks beyond conventional reporting. This has contributed to the blurring of boundaries between freelance journalists and self-employed media workers. While the title "journalist" continues to carry social capital, many freelancers also engage in non-traditional storytelling and explore more creative formats (Josephi & O'Donnell, 2023). Hayes and Silke (2018) found that platforms like X (formerly Twitter) are not merely tools for work but integral to how freelancers structure their workflows. Developing a personal brand on social media enables journalists to act as news and opinion hubs, increasing their "market value" and promoting themselves more strategically (Brems et al., 2016).

These categories of media professionals: news collaborators, correspondents, visiting journalists, and freelancers, illustrate the complex division of labor and collaboration that underpin international reporting. Understanding their respective roles lays the groundwork for exploring the social dynamics that govern their relationships and collaboration, topics that are examined in the following section.

2.2 News collaborators and the gatekeeping of international reporting

Gatekeeping theory provides a foundational framework for understanding how news is selected, shaped, and transmitted through media systems. It addresses the question of why certain information is included in media content while other information is excluded. At its core, gatekeeping describes the process of filtering events into a manageable subset of media messages, shaping public perception and knowledge (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

The concept was first introduced by Kurt Lewin (1947), who used the metaphor of "gates" and "channels" to describe how information moves through a sequence of decision points, each influenced by facilitating or constraining forces. These forces can change polarity, becoming more or less favorable, as the item progresses through each gate (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Lewin's ideas were first applied to media by David Manning White (1950), who conducted a study of a newspaper wire editor, "Mr. Gates," and found that selection decisions were largely subjective and based on personal judgments about truth, interest, and available space (p. 15).

Subsequent research expanded gatekeeping beyond individual decision-making. Gieber (1956) argued that editorial choices were often constrained by structural and routine factors. Westley and MacLean (1957) proposed a systems model in which multiple actors, including media organizations and audiences, interact in the selection and transmission of messages. This model emphasized feedback loops and the organization as a central filtering mechanism.

Building on these developments, Shoemaker and Reese (1996) proposed a five-level model of gatekeeping: individual, routines, organizational, social institutional, and social system. Each level represents distinct influences on media content. At the *individual level*,

gatekeeping is shaped by personal attributes such as values, demographics, professional

roles, and cognitive shortcuts like heuristics. For instance, the representativeness and

availability heuristics influence how journalists categorize and prioritize stories under time

pressure (Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, pp. 57–58).

The *routine level* reflects standard journalistic practices, such as deadlines, beat

assignments, and story formats, that structure the production process and reduce variability

in decisions (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, pp. 76–79). Routines often align with assumptions

about audience preferences and technological constraints, creating norms that guide content

selection.

At the *organizational level*, factors such as newsroom hierarchy, ownership structure,

and editorial policy shape gatekeeping outcomes. Organizations exert influence through

managerial control, internal socialization, and established decision-making practices

(Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, pp. 109–115). Ownership, in particular, may impose constraints

tied to corporate goals or political interests.

The *social institutional level* includes external forces such as advertisers, public relations

professionals, governments, and advocacy groups that attempt to influence media agendas.

For example, Gandy's (1982) concept of the "information subsidy" describes how interest

groups offer ready-made content to increase the likelihood of media uptake (Shoemaker &

Vos, 2009, pp. 135–139).

Finally, the *social system level* considers macro-level influences such as national

ideology, political structures, and cultural norms. These systemic forces shape shared

assumptions about what constitutes legitimate news and who has the authority to produce it

(Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, pp. 155–159).

In sum, gatekeeping theory has evolved from a simple metaphor about individual

selection into a multidimensional model of media influence. It remains a valuable framework for analyzing both traditional and digital news production. This theoretical lens is particularly relevant for examining the roles of often-overlooked actors, such as news collaborators, who function as de facto gatekeepers in international reporting but remain marginalized in scholarly accounts.

Applying this framework to empirical studies of news collaborators reveals how their work intersects with gatekeeping at multiple levels. The first study examining the role of news collaborators was conducted by Palmer and Fontan (2007). It primarily explored how news collaborators carried out various tasks, such as interpretation, for visiting journalists during the 2003 Iraq War. The study found that, due to journalists' lack of local knowledge, the information in their collaborative reports was filtered through the news collaborators' translations or communications. As a result, the final reports were selectively shaped by the perspectives of news collaborators.

Building on past studies about the role of news collaborators, this present study also seeks to explore core tasks, routines, and competencies expected of news collaborators. This forms the basis for a broader discussion of how they work with foreign journalists and how responsibilities are divided, leading to the first research question (RQ1) of the study: *What role do Taiwanese news collaborators play in foreign reporting on Taiwan?*

News collaborators not only serve as interpreters and guides but also influence the angles, topics, and presentations of reports. Palmer (2016) studied the collaboration between Middle Eastern fixers and foreign media, pointing out that 21st-century conflict reporting included the perspectives of fixers. International reporting introduces audiences to distant and unfamiliar situations, and the selection of topics and viewpoints by news collaborators affects how these others are portrayed and how audiences understand and

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relate to them.

Arjomand (2018), using news collaborators in Turkey and Syria as examples, argued that to understand the production of international reporting, one must first explore the local media environment and socio-political context. The study found that news collaborators find it difficult to challenge the stereotypical narrative frameworks of foreign media about Turkey and Syria. They tend to avoid challenging the stereotypes of foreign media to meet client expectations and maintain their professional reputation. However, they still manage to incorporate local perspectives into the reporting process by selecting interviewees and providing contextual explanations based on their personal experience and understanding to foreign journalists.

Together, these studies demonstrate how news collaborators influence transnational reporting not only through logistical support or cultural translation but also through selective sourcing, and editorial negotiation, which are key dimensions of the gatekeeping process. While previous research suggests that dominant foreign media stereotypes are difficult to overcome, this study seeks to explore whether Taiwanese collaborators are able to shape editorial content by incorporating their perspectives.

2.3 Applying gatekeeping theory to news collaborators

To analyze the roles and editorial influence of news collaborators in international reporting, this study adopts the five-level gatekeeping model developed by Shoemaker and Reese (1996) and further elaborated by Shoemaker and Vos (2009). This model conceptualizes gatekeeping as a multi-layered process, shaped by individual, routine, organizational, institutional, and social system influences. Rather than seeing news collaborators merely as logistical assistants or interpreters, this framework allows for a

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more nuanced understanding of how they participate in the selection, filtering, and shaping of international news narratives.

At the *individual level*, the analysis explores how the news collaborators' own values, life experiences, cultural identities, and political orientations influence what information they choose to gather, prioritize, emphasize, or omit when collaborating with foreign journalists. news collaborators' subjectivities and sense of responsibility may shape which sources they deem credible or which issues they see as worthy of attention.

The *routine level* considers how news collaborators learn and internalize professional journalistic practices such as sourcing, verification, and narrative construction. In transnational reporting, fixers often navigate between different journalistic norms and editorial expectations, balancing local storytelling styles with foreign newsroom demands. This level also considers how news collaborators respond to structural time pressures, deadlines, and the expectations of newsworthiness.

At the *organizational level*, the framework addresses how news collaborators operate within or outside formal news production hierarchies. For instance, it examines their contractual relationships with media organizations, whether they are formally employed, freelance, or informally connected, and how this status affects their editorial agency, autonomy, and recognition within reporting teams.

The *institutional* level refers to broader forces outside individual news organizations that influence how stories are shaped. These include political systems, legal regulations, journalistic norms, and audience expectations that operate across the media industry. In the context of international reporting, institutional pressures may affect what topics are prioritized, how access is granted, or which narratives are seen as credible or publishable.

Finally, the *systemic level* considers broader ideological and geopolitical structures, such

as dominant Western news values, or narratives shaped by Taiwan-China relations, that influence which kinds of stories are told and how they are framed. News collaborators play a role in translating local realities into narratives that align with or challenge these global frameworks.

This study adopts gatekeeping theory as its analytical framework to address the second research question (RQ2): *How do news collaborators influence the narrative of foreign reporting on Taiwan?* It examines how collaborators influence international reporting not only through practical tasks but also through complex editorial negotiations that occur across multiple levels of power, culture, and professional structure. This framework guides the analysis of semi-structured interviews with both news collaborators and foreign journalists, enabling a multidimensional understanding of their collaborative roles within the transnational news production process.

2.4 Labor and identity politics in transnational news collaboration

The working conditions of news collaborators are shaped by intersecting forces of labor precarity and professional ambiguity. Often hired on a freelance or short-term basis, these media workers occupy a position that is both central to foreign reporting and yet frequently excluded from formal journalistic hierarchies. This section examines how professional status, contractual arrangements, and identity politics influence the recognition and treatment of news collaborators in transnational journalism.

Murrell (2010) studied the working conditions of BBC and CNN reporters with Iraqi news collaborators and found that those who signed long-term contracts with the BBC and CNN Baghdad offices were given a new job title as producers, enjoying job security and opportunities for promotion within the organization. In contrast, freelance news

collaborators had short-term, flexible roles and relied on word-of-mouth recommendations to obtain work opportunities.

Ashraf (2021) studied the working conditions of news collaborators in Afghanistan and Pakistan, finding that local journalists often face de-professionalization when working as news collaborators. However, the study also suggested that future research should not only focus on the exploitation or marginalization of local journalists but should critically analyze the reporting of wars and conflicts. This includes considering the social and contextual background of conflict zones to analyze the influence of news collaborators as professionals in the news production process.
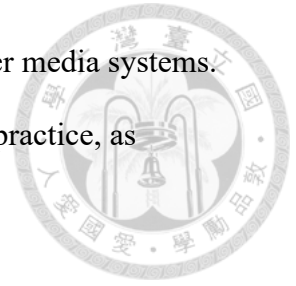
These studies highlight how the labor of news collaborators is shaped by structural precarity, inconsistent recognition, and blurred professional boundaries. While much of the existing research has focused on conflict zones or high-risk regions, this study examines how these dynamics unfold in the relatively stable and economically developed context of Taiwan, leading to the third research question (RQ3): *How do working relationships between news collaborators and foreign journalists typically function?* It explores whether similar patterns of invisibility and status ambiguity persist, or whether Taiwan's media environment enables different forms of negotiation and recognition for news collaborators working with foreign journalists.

The three research questions aim to build a fuller picture of how Taiwanese news collaborators operate within the production of foreign reporting. Gatekeeping theory offers a useful framework for examining their roles across different stages and levels of the reporting process, from sourcing and framing to navigating structural and organizational constraints. Rather than assuming a fixed role for news collaborators, this study uses the theory to explore where and how they might exert influence, and how their contributions

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interact with professional routines, institutional expectations, and broader media systems. This sets the stage for further analysis of how these dynamics unfold in practice, as developed in the following empirical chapters.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Research design

The aim of this study is to uncover the nuanced internal workings of collaborative international news production; the goal is not to measure, but to understand and explain. Qualitative research methodology collects data by going into the field to observe and engage with individuals whom the researcher seeks to understand. Its roots can be traced back to the University of Chicago tradition, which drew on journalistic practices to portray a representative picture of the groups being studied (Iorio, 2004). Qualitative interviewing, therefore, emphasizes the context and meaning of the information collected, recognizing interviewees as active meaning-makers rather than passive respondents (Brennen, 2021).

This study employs semi-structured interviews, interviewing 12 news collaborators with diverse backgrounds and experiences. Semi-structured interviews combine a certain degree of standardization in the interview questions with openness, allowing the conversation to flow naturally between the researcher and the interviewees. (Wengraf, 2001). This technique has been proven successful in previous research on freelance journalists (Marín-Sanchiz, Carvajal, & González-Esteban, 2023). Based on the interviewees' answers, it explores the details of their personal experiences and perspectives. Blacksin & Mitra (2024) noted that past studies on news collaborators were mostly descriptive or exploratory and lacked analysis of the diversity and complexity of individual identities and contexts. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were adopted to address these gaps in previous research.

3.2 Sampling strategies

Interviewees were selected using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling methods. Initial interviewees were identified through personal connections, a professional group chat, and publicly available online profiles. In some cases, participants also recommended others who met the inclusion criteria. Each interview lasted for approximately 45 minutes. Three were conducted in person, while the remaining took place online via Google Meet due to the interviewees being abroad or unable to attend in-person interviews during the study period.
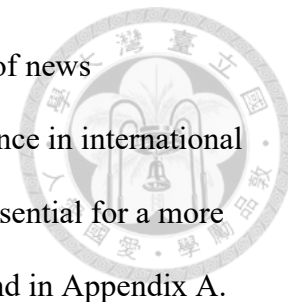
The interviewees include seasoned news collaborators with over ten years of experience, novice collaborators who are journalism students, and local freelance journalists. Almost all have worked with journalists across various forms of media, including print, television news, and documentaries.

All 12 news collaborators interviewed are Taiwanese, three are male, and nine are female. To protect their professional relationships, the interviewees' names and the media outlets they have collaborated with remain anonymous. Gender-neutral pronouns (they/them) will be used throughout when referring to specific responses. All participants agreed to the terms outlined in the consent form provided in Appendix B.

In addition, this study conducted semi-structured interviews with two foreign journalists, selected through purposive sampling, representing different types of media organizations, including a correspondent based in Taiwan and a freelance journalist. One is female and the other male. Although efforts were made to include a visiting journalist, it proved challenging to identify an available participant who met the study's selection criteria within the research timeline.

The number of interviews with foreign journalists is lower than that of news collaborators because the primary focus is on the latter's role and influence in international reporting. However, incorporating foreign journalists' perspectives is essential for a more comprehensive analysis. Lists of interviewees' backgrounds can be found in Appendix A.

3.3 Interview guide

Following the research design pyramid model outlined by Wengraf (2001, p. 63) for semi-structured interviews, one or two interview questions were developed for each research question. According to the model, interview questions are systematically derived from clearly defined research objectives but serve distinct purposes. Research questions guide the overall direction of the study and inform the development of interview questions; however, they are typically phrased in theoretical language and are not suitable for direct use in interviews. In contrast, semi-structured interview questions are written in conversational language, allowing flexibility for both the interviewer and interviewee to explore unanticipated topics or skip irrelevant ones.

The Research questions guiding the development of interview questions are as follows:

RQ1: *What role do Taiwanese news collaborators play in foreign reporting on Taiwan?*

RQ2: *How do news collaborators influence the narrative of foreign reporting on Taiwan?*

RQ3: *How do working relationships between news collaborators and foreign journalists typically function?*

The interview questions for news collaborators are as follows, with the related research question indicated in parentheses:

- How did you become a news collaborator? What are the common ways you find new freelance opportunities? (RQ1)

- What does a typical collaboration process between you and a journalist look like? (RQ1)

- What kinds of topics do you usually work on with journalists? (RQ2)

- Is there a particular experience working with foreign journalists that left a strong impression on you? Can you describe what happened? (RQ2)

- What are your thoughts on the job title "fixer"? What job titles do you prefer (in both English and Chinese)? (RQ3)

- Do you usually receive credit in news reports? (RQ3)

- What are your views on crediting news collaborators? (RQ3)

- *(If applicable)* If you have had negative experiences, what steps have you taken to improve collaboration and ensure better treatment? (RQ3)

Interview questions for journalists include:

- How long have you been based in Taiwan? How often do you work with fixers in Taiwan, and what types of stories do they usually help with? (RQ1)

- How did you first start working with fixers here? Was it through recommendations, professional networks, or out of necessity? (RQ3)

- What specific skills or qualities do you look for in a fixer? (e.g., translation, cultural mediation, logistics, editorial judgment) (RQ1)

- Have you ever found that a fixer influenced your perspective on a story? If so, how did that influence your reporting? (RQ2)

- *(If applicable)* Have fixers helped you access voices outside the mainstream narrative, such as underrepresented ethnic or social groups? (RQ2)

- Is there a particular experience working with a fixer that left a strong impression on you? Can you describe what happened? (RQ2)

- Do you credit fixers in your bylines or acknowledgments? Why or why not? (RQ3)

- Are there any formal guidelines or informal norms at your outlet regarding collaboration with fixers (e.g., contracts, fees, credits)? (RQ3)

Combining the results from semi-structured interviews with both news collaborators and foreign journalists, this methodological approach aims to, as Cottle (2003, p. 11) noted, "reveal the normally concealed internal workings of the 'black box' of news production and the routine professional practices."

Chapter 4 Findings and analysis

4.1 The roles of Taiwanese news collaborators

This section explores the first research question: What role do Taiwanese news collaborators play in foreign reporting on Taiwan? It examines how personal trajectories, professional routines, and organizational positioning shape collaborators' contributions to international news production. By analyzing their backgrounds, everyday practices, and perceived status within the media hierarchy, the section highlights how these individuals act as both facilitators and gatekeepers, influencing how Taiwan is portrayed to global audiences.

4.1.1 Professional background and personal motives
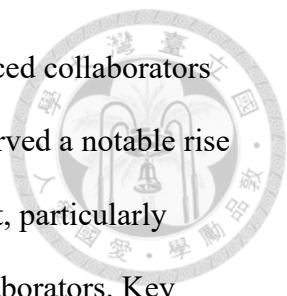
Most of the news collaborators interviewed in this study did not enter the field through formal job recruitment. Instead, their careers often began through opportunities that emerged from their expertise in specific topics and prior experience in reporting, whether in print or video. While many had worked in local news media or studied journalism, one collaborator (Interviewee G) began by launching a YouTube channel featuring street interviews on social issues, which eventually attracted the attention of foreign journalists. After collaborating on a project, journalists often recommend collaborators to their peers, and this referral system is how most collaborators secure new assignments. This reliance on informal networks aligns with Murrell's (2010) observation that freelance news collaborators often depend on word-of-mouth, with new clients typically referred by previous ones.

In addition to being recommended by former collaborators, many news collaborators use online platforms for personal branding and portfolio presentation. Some actively share

news and commentary about Taiwan on X (formerly Twitter), while others maintain personal websites or LinkedIn profiles to showcase their professional experience and past collaborations. Similar to freelance journalists who use social media to enhance their personal brand and increase their "market value" (Brems, Temmerman, Graham, & Broersma, 2016), news collaborators leverage these platforms to reach potential clients. Some collaborators also noted that their online presence helps establish credibility when contacting interviewees, making them appear more legitimate and less like unsolicited messages.

Although informal recruitment remains prevalent, job postings for news collaborators have evolved over time due to rising demand and a clearer understanding of the role's responsibilities. In earlier years, before Taiwan became a focal point for foreign media, the job was typically labeled "translator," despite involving similar tasks to those performed by today's news collaborators, such as translating, gathering information, and assisting with interviews. Today, the role is more commonly referred to as a "fixer," "news assistant," or "producer," and job postings may appear on foreign media recruitment pages, LinkedIn, or in group chats.

Most of the collaborators interviewed are freelancers, and news collaboration is just one aspect of their broader professional portfolio. Their income sources vary: some run their own businesses (Interviewee A), work as translators (Interviewee B), take on PR or commercial filming assignments (Interviewee G), or contribute to multiple media outlets as freelance journalists (Interviewees F, I, and J). According to the interviewees, the main motivation for continuing to accept news collaboration assignments is the comparatively high pay, especially relative to full-time salaries at local media outlets.

Experience levels also vary considerably. Some of the more experienced collaborators (Interviewee A and B) have been freelancing for over a decade and observed a notable rise in foreign media interest in Taiwan in recent years. This growing interest, particularly during high-profile moments, has led to increased demand for local collaborators. Key events mentioned include Taiwan's 2020 presidential election, COVID-19 pandemic response (2020–2021), the 2022 visit of the U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, ongoing Chinese military exercises, and the 2024 presidential election. By contrast, less experienced collaborators began freelancing during these major events. Some are still graduate students studying journalism or political science (Interviewees C, D, H, and L), and view the role as a stepping stone toward future opportunities and as a valuable entry point into foreign media circles.

These individual-level factors, such as career trajectories, motivations, and previous experiences, directly shape how news collaborators perform their work and make editorial decisions on the ground. From a gatekeeping theory perspective, the individual level accounts for how personal attributes, values, and cognitive orientations influence what information is collected, who gets interviewed, and which details are prioritized or omitted (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). For example, a collaborator with experience in investigative journalism may be more inclined to highlight grassroots perspectives, one with a commercial media background might anticipate what angles appeal to foreign editors. The diversity in collaborators' backgrounds thus contributes to variation in how stories are constructed, even before they reach the foreign journalist or editorial desk.

4.1.2 Everyday practices and journalistic routines
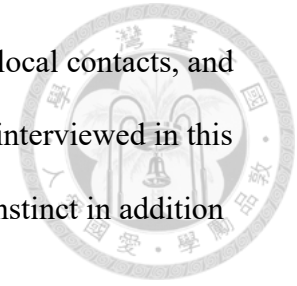
The collaboration between news collaborators and journalists typically unfolds in three stages: before, during, and after the interviews. Prior to the interviews, news collaborators and journalists discuss the story's topic and narrative direction, then compile a list of potential interviewees. These discussions often take place online and tend to be more time-sensitive when working with visiting journalists. Journalists usually arrive with a set of preferred interviewee profiles and, at times, specific public figures they wish to include. News collaborators search for individuals who meet these criteria and may also suggest additional candidates. One news collaborator noted that when assisting visiting journalists, whose time on the ground is limited, the interviewee list is often prioritized by importance: central figures are essential to the narrative, while others are considered supplementary voices that add nuance and depth.

Once the list is finalized, the news collaborator contacts the interviewees, schedules appointments, and, if the interviews take place outside of Taipei, arranges the travel itinerary. For television news or documentary teams, collaborators also discuss the visual elements the journalists aim to capture and help identify appropriate shooting locations. One news collaborator likened their role to that of a travel guide, handling a range of logistical tasks during the journalists' visits: from calling taxis and finding cafes to managing unexpected issues on the ground.

This division of labor and shared responsibility points to the professional competencies expected of news collaborators. Their role requires not only language skills and logistical coordination, but also the ability to understand editorial goals and anticipate what foreign journalists are looking for. As Kotišová and Deuze (2022) argue, the essential skills for

news collaborators include glocal perspectives, reliability, adaptability, local contacts, and an understanding of the international media market. The correspondent interviewed in this study echoed these expectations, emphasizing the value of journalistic instinct in addition to technical skills:

> The most important thing with the fixer is someone who really understands journalism and has a journalistic instinct. Because someone can be great at translating, great at logistics, really good at finding people, but all of that is sort of underpinned by knowing what in a situation, what a news story requires.
>
> (Interviewee N, May 16, 2025)

The freelance foreign journalist interviewed in this study had experience not only collaborating with local media professionals but also working as a news collaborator for visiting journalists from German media. Having occupied both roles, they similarly emphasized the value of glocal awareness:

> I think it's useful for the fixer to know the target audience a bit, and you can imagine what is being requested and where the piece or the reporting that you're doing is being broadcasted. When you know the country and the publication that the journalist is from, that actually makes it easier to understand why the journalist wants to focus on certain things. (Interviewee M, May 6, 2025)

During the interviews, news collaborators typically provide interpretation and facilitate communication between journalists and interviewees. In broadcast reporting, their duties may also include helping frame shots, assisting with filming, conducting street interviews, and coordinating with local photographers or video-journalists.

After the interviews, news collaborators are generally not involved in the editorial process. However, some journalists may follow up to seek feedback or confirm certain

details once the article is drafted. A small number of collaborators do contribute to writing or editing, but these instances usually involve long-term partnerships with correspondents and are supported by formal contracts, which will be discussed in the following section.

These recurring patterns reflect what gatekeeping theory describes as the routine level, the standardized professional practices and newsroom conventions that shape how news is produced (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). From preparing interviewee lists to scheduling and interpreting on-site, collaborators internalize and perform roles that align with the expectations of foreign media routines. These routines not only guide what kinds of information are gathered but also impose constraints such as limited time, predetermined formats, and narrative efficiency. In this way, collaborators help execute and sometimes adapt the procedural logic of foreign journalism within the local context, contributing to the gatekeeping process through adherence to and negotiation with established norms.

4.1.3 Organizational positioning and role recognition

Foreign journalists often approach news collaborators for background information or assistance in locating interviewees on specific topics. These initial consultations frequently lead to further collaborations. Among the twelve news collaborators interviewed in this study, only one had signed a retainer contract with a specific media outlet or journalist based in Taiwan, allowing for longer-term collaboration. Although they may still take on work from others, they are expected to prioritize the outlet or journalist with whom they are contracted.

A news collaborator working under a retainer contract performs many of the same tasks as freelance collaborators. However, the key difference lies in their deeper involvement in the editorial process. Because they work with a correspondent on a long-term basis, they

participate in regular discussions about both domestic and international news, and often share their observations about Taiwanese society. They may also pitch story ideas and, in some cases, contribute to writing the article, occasionally earning co-author credit. This arrangement shares some similarities with the BBC's contracted collaborators in Iraq observed by Murrell (2010), who were granted more opportunities within the organization and given the job title of "producer."

Regardless of whether they are freelancers or contracted collaborators, many news collaborators struggle to find a job title that accurately conveys their role. Some opt to use the term fixer on platforms like LinkedIn because it is widely recognized and easily understood. Others prefer alternative terms such as *(local/field) producer* or *freelance journalist* to better reflect their responsibilities and how they view the profession.

News collaborator B described their perspective on the term fixer:

> I wouldn't call myself a fixer. Now I refer to myself as a producer because what I do is really no different from the producers on their (foreign media) team. 'Fixer' sounds like a cheap part-timer who comes and goes at clients' disposal.
>
> (Interviewee B, May 31, 2024)
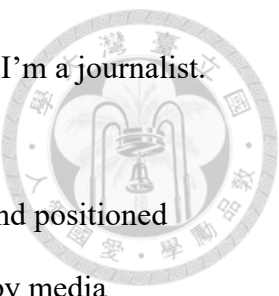
The news collaborator with retainer contract interviewed in this study said that their job title on the contract is "producer." However, they also noted that regardless of the job title, the relatively low visibility of this role still makes it difficult to describe their work to people unfamiliar with the international news industry, especially when they are introducing themselves to interviewees:

> The term fixer is kind of annoying because it's really hard to translate into Chinese. There's no existing Chinese word for this profession. It used to be really difficult to

explain to interviewees what I actually do, so now I just tell them I'm a journalist.

(Interviewee K, May 8, 2025)

The variability and ambiguity in how news collaborators are labeled and positioned reflect the organizational and institutional levels of gatekeeping, shaped by media organization hierarchies, external norms, industry expectations, and broader media structures. Under external norms, the term fixer remains prevalent despite its lack of clarity or cultural equivalence in some contexts. Industry expectations often treat news collaborators as short-term outsourced support rather than as regular members of the journalistic team. Within broader media structures, their contributions tend to remain largely invisible, reinforcing their marginal status in the international news production process. Foreign media institutions establish not only editorial priorities but also professional hierarchies, terminology, and recognition frameworks. In this case, the prevalence of the term fixer, despite its contested meaning and low status, reveals how collaborators must navigate external norms and reputational considerations. The choice of job title is not merely semantic but deeply tied to how collaborators are perceived, legitimized, and positioned within the global reporting system.

Together, these individual, routine, organizational, and institutional dynamics illustrate how Taiwanese news collaborators navigate a hybrid professional space, blending journalistic knowledge, logistical expertise, and cultural translation. Their roles, though ambiguous and varied, are central to understanding how global journalism is produced on the ground.

4.2 Influencing the story

This section addresses the second research question and examines how Taiwanese news collaborators shape the sourcing, framing, and execution of foreign media stories about Taiwan. While collaborators may not hold editorial authority, they play a crucial role in shaping story angles, guiding journalists' understanding of the local context, and navigating practical constraints on the ground, ultimately shaping how Taiwan is represented to international audiences. This dynamic can be better understood through the lens of *framing theory*, which explores how the presentation of information influences how audiences interpret events.

Entman (1993) defines framing as the process of selecting certain aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a text, in order to "promote specific problem definitions, causal interpretations, moral evaluations, and treatment recommendations" (p. 52). Frames work by highlighting some elements while excluding others, shaping not only what audiences think about but how they understand and evaluate issues.

In subsequent developments, framing theory has identified several factors that influence how frames are constructed, including organizational routines, professional norms, and the interactions between journalists and sources. These processes, collectively referred to as frame building, shape the narratives that journalists ultimately produce (Scheufele, 1999). News collaborators contribute meaningfully to this process by providing local context, suggesting relevant angles, and facilitating access to people and places. In doing so, they influence the interpretive lens through which foreign journalists understand and report on Taiwan.
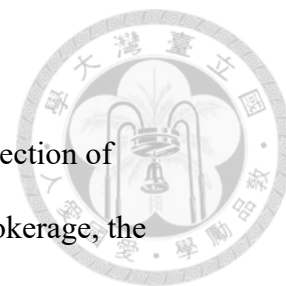
4.2.1 Gatekeeping through sourcing and selection

News collaborators' influence on a story is often reflected in their selection of interviewees. As Arjomand (2018) noted, news fixing is a process of brokerage, the mediation between disconnected parties. While foreign journalists may provide a list of desired profiles or interviewees, it is the news collaborators who use their local networks to identify and facilitate access to relevant sources, effectively shaping what information becomes available. Arjomand also suggested the importance of viewing news collaborators as moral agents who may hold personal biases or ambivalence, or have closer ties to certain individuals or groups. These factors can influence their decisions about whom to introduce to journalists, potentially affecting the story's direction.

From the perspective of gatekeeping theory, this process reflects both the *individual* and *routine* levels. At the individual level, news collaborators' personal values, political beliefs, and social identities play a role in shaping their sourcing decisions. Their perceptions of fairness, credibility, and representativeness influence not only who is considered a suitable source but also how local narratives are framed for international audiences. Meanwhile, at the routine level, collaborators' sourcing practices are shaped by the norms and expectations of journalistic work, such as the need for balance, quick turnaround times, or predictable formats. These practical constraints guide decisions about which sources are prioritized, which ones are excluded, and how information is structured in service of narrative clarity and efficiency.

These individual and routine-level influences can also be observed in the Taiwan context, where sourcing decisions are shaped by complex political and identity-related considerations. In the context of elections, a news collaborator's choice of interviewees

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may reflect political affiliations, national identity, and views on cross-strait relations. However, these perspectives are not easily categorized as simply pro-China or pro-Taiwan, as identities in Taiwan exist along a nuanced spectrum (Election Study Center, National Chengchi University, 2024). These subtleties are often difficult to fully convey in translation. For instance, the term "Chinese" may refer to either citizens of China (中國人) or people of Chinese descent (華人). When journalists ask questions like "Do you identify as Chinese?", the ambiguity leaves room for interpretation that cannot be captured by a simple yes or no. Similarly, distinctions between identifying with "Taiwan" versus the "Republic of China" are more nuanced than a binary opposition.

> One news collaborator reflected on how such nuances shape sourcing and potential bias:
>
>> A journalist once asked me how to interpret the word "Chinese," and I told them I can't speak for everyone living here. I said my take would be different from a fixer (news collaborator) who identifies with the Republic of China. We could each suggest different sources and perspectives. (Interviewee B, May 31, 2024)

However, suggestions from news collaborators are not always accepted. In many cases, especially when working under tight deadlines or when new to the industry, collaborators may simply follow the journalist's requests without much pushback. One news collaborator reflected on their very first assignment, a story about a group of women receiving civil defense training to prepare for war. At the time, the collaborator focused on fulfilling the journalist's requests and arranging interviews to ensure the collaboration went smoothly. It wasn't until the story was published that they realized it might leave audiences with the impression that war was imminent and that civil defense preparation was widespread across Taiwan. Now, with more experience and a better understanding of how Taiwan is portrayed

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in foreign media, the collaborator engages more actively in discussions and negotiations with journalists to shape the reporting more thoughtfully (Interviewee G, April 12, 2025).

These accounts suggest that news collaborators' influence is often shaped by a combination of accumulated experience, situational judgment, and the practical demands of the reporting process. While early-career collaborators may focus on fulfilling requests and avoiding disruption, those with more experience tend to engage more actively in shaping the selection of sources and negotiating the framing of stories. Their gatekeeping role does not always involve direct editorial control but is exercised through everyday decisions: suggesting or omitting interviewees, framing local contexts, and balancing competing narratives within the constraints of time, access, and journalist expectations. These forms of influence, grounded in both individual judgment and routine practice, play a subtle but significant role in determining how Taiwan is represented in international news coverage.

4.2.2 Shaping story angles and cultural context

Palmer and Fontan (2007) observed that foreign journalists often lack in-depth knowledge of local contexts, making it difficult for them to situate events within a broader socio-political framework. News collaborators interviewed in this study echoed similar concerns, consistently pointing out that foreign journalists, particularly visiting journalists, tend to frame Taiwan-related stories through a narrow focus on cross-strait tensions and the pervasive influence of "the China factor."

Palmer (2016) examined collaborations between visiting journalists and news collaborators in conflict reporting, noting that journalists often lack sufficient background knowledge and advocating for more ethical, culturally aware, and fixer-inclusive reporting practices. While Taiwan differs significantly from the war-torn contexts in Palmer's study,

most notably because it is not experiencing an active conflict, foreign media coverage of Taiwan is nonetheless often shaped by a conflict-oriented lens. News collaborators in this study identified three recurring themes that dominate foreign media reporting on Taiwan: war, identity, and semiconductors.

First is the theme of war. One news collaborator described their observations on how visiting journalists frame narratives and their response to this approach:

> They (visiting journalists) often come with a 'war is about to break out' lens, using this perspective to understand here (Taiwan). For them, it's a very exciting angle. ... I would tell them that this is actually very disrespectful to local journalists and to the people living here.   (Interviewee F, June 12, 2024)

One news collaborator also recalled an encounter with a visiting journalist unfamiliar with the situation in Taiwan prior to their trip:

> The (visiting) journalist asked me to double-check with the Ministry of Defense (MoD) whether a war might break out in the next few days, just so they could prepare for helmets and gear. I told them that was impossible, but they insisted I call the MoD just to be sure. So I hung up, waited about half an hour, then called the journalist back and said, "Yes, rest assured. No war." (Interviewee J, May 6, 2025)

This kind of framing reflects what scholars describe as *war journalism*, news reporting that centers on violence, threats, and binary narratives. It prioritizes immediacy and drama over context and nuance, framing stories as zero-sum contests between opposing sides while marginalizing diverse perspectives (Galtung, 2003). In the case of Taiwan, this approach reinforces the idea of looming conflict and treats the island primarily as a flashpoint within global power struggles.

The second repetitive theme is identity. Coincidentally, two news collaborators recalled that foreign journalists had asked them to find interviewees from three different generations, each representing a distinct political stance, to sit together at the same dining table and discuss identity and cross-strait relations. Both collaborators felt that the journalists were imposing overly specific and idealized criteria, effectively scripting a narrative before engaging with the actual social context (Interviewee A and B, May 31, 2024).

The third recurring theme is Taiwan's semiconductor industry. While this topic appears to be primarily economic, news collaborators noted that such stories often remain embedded within the aforementioned conflict-reporting framework, frequently emphasizing supply chain security, trade relations, and geopolitical tensions. The news collaborator working under a retainer contract said that "the China factor" is omnipresent in foreign media's coverage of Taiwan, whether the reporting is done by correspondents or visiting journalists, though the depth of observation and analysis may vary. The foreign correspondent interviewed in this study also expressed concern that it is nearly impossible to report on Taiwan without mentioning China, as this angle aligns with the priorities of foreign media and caters to international audiences' interest in global political dynamics (Interviewee N, May 16, 2025).

These recurring themes and narrative patterns reflect multiple layers of influence in the gatekeeping process. At the routine level, story angles such as conflict, identity division, and geopolitical risk have become familiar templates that guide how journalists structure their reporting on Taiwan. These frames are often used because they are seen as accessible to international audiences and fit within time-limited production cycles. For visiting
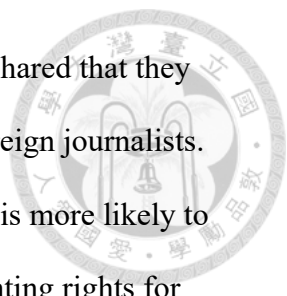
journalists in particular, the need to quickly convey "what matters" to a foreign readership often leads to simplified or pre-scripted narratives.

At the institutional level, these routines are shaped by the editorial expectations of foreign media outlets. News collaborators noted that references to China are often expected in any story about Taiwan, even when the primary topic is unrelated. This framing not only meets perceived audience interest but also aligns with the priorities of editors and the positioning of the media organization within broader geopolitical conversations.

At the systemic level, the persistence of conflict-oriented coverage reflects broader global discourses that position Taiwan within a strategic rivalry between China and the West. This framing is embedded in the structure of international news and often reinforces existing assumptions about global power dynamics. Even stories about semiconductors are frequently positioned within this framework, reflecting the deeper systemic logic of international news reporting.

While these influences are persistent, they are not absolute. Some news collaborators and foreign journalists have made efforts to occasionally move beyond the conflict-oriented lens and tell stories that focus on Taiwan in its own right. The correspondent interviewed in this study recalled reporting on local environmental issues, LGBTQ+ rights, and cultural practices such as Ghost Month. They believed that while these topics are not tied to geopolitical tensions, they can still engage foreign audiences and offer a more nuanced and multifaceted view of Taiwan:

> Like environmental stuff, human rights, like the fact that Taiwan is such a queer-friendly place, ... I just think our readers now have a general interest in Taiwan that goes beyond the China story. (Interviewee N, May 16, 2025)

Keeping foreign audiences' interests in mind, one news collaborator shared that they occasionally pitch story ideas related to trends or events in Taiwan to foreign journalists. When a story draws parallels with issues in the outlet's home country, it is more likely to be accepted. For example, discussions around name rectification and hunting rights for Taiwan's Indigenous peoples have been approved when framed alongside similar debates concerning Native American rights in the United States (Interviewee A, May 31, 2024). Although these stories are relatively rare and often framed as supplementary content rather than central to the international news agenda, they nonetheless provide occasional opportunities to present a broader portrayal of Taiwan.

These examples reflect some principles of peace journalism. Peace journalism advocates a more reflective and people-centered approach to reporting. Rather than focusing narrowly on violence or elite narratives, it seeks to explain the underlying causes of conflict, give voice to a wider range of actors, and explore possible solutions (Gouse, Valentin-Llopis, Perry, & Nyamwange, 2019). In the case of Taiwan, stories that highlight environmental activism or queer visibility do not dominate foreign media coverage, but when they are reported, they expand the narrative beyond confrontation and crisis.

4.2.3 Navigating external constraints
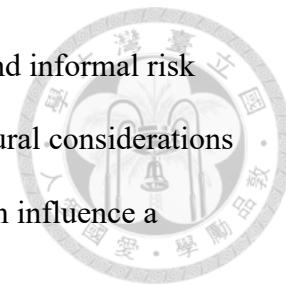
While Taiwanese news collaborators do not face the same life-threatening risks as those documented in studies of their counterparts in conflict zones (Murrell, 2010), they still contend with a range of external constraints that can complicate the reporting process. This is especially true in television journalism, where every second of airtime requires carefully planned visuals. Collaborators must plan appropriate locations in advance and anticipate what footage is needed for the story. They are often expected to be familiar with the local

landscape, including knowing exactly where to go to capture the most relevant or visually compelling scenes (Interviewee J, May 6, 2025).

Due to the time-sensitive and visually driven nature of television reporting, especially during election coverage when multiple campaigns may be unfolding simultaneously, planning often involves detailed discussions between journalists and news collaborators about which scenes should be captured. One collaborator described how, in preparation for filming, the journalist asked for their assessment, based on current polls and the collaborator's own observations of political trends, of which candidate was likely to win. This input helped shape the direction and focus of the shoot. After some discussion and reflection, the journalist finalized the reporting objectives and planned the footage accordingly. The collaborator recalled predicting a likely victory for the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) candidate, which may have influenced the allocation of airtime in the final report: approximately 60% was devoted to the DPP, 30% to the Kuomintang (KMT), and the remaining 10% to other parties (Interviewee I, May 4, 2025). This example reflects the dynamics discussed in earlier sections: news collaborators working on television reports can exert influence not only through their explanation of the local context but also through selection of what scenes to capture. At the same time, they must navigate external constraints and manage journalists' expectations in relation to what is practically achievable.
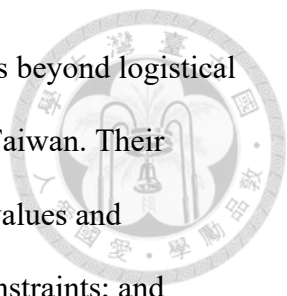
From a gatekeeping theory perspective, these practices illustrate the influence of both routine and institutional levels. The selection of locations, visuals, and airtime distribution reflects routine-level pressures associated with fast-paced television production, including tight deadlines, visual requirements, and narrative clarity. At the institutional level, collaborators' decisions are shaped by broader editorial goals and access limitations, such

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as media organization preferences, permissions for military coverage, and informal risk assessments related to safety, geography, or local contacts. These structural considerations often determine which stories can realistically be pursued and how much influence a collaborator can exercise in the final product.

Although reporting in Taiwan generally does not face restrictions on what can or cannot be covered, military-related topics tend to be more challenging. Since the potential war is a popular angle for foreign media, many journalists seek to cover military training or key defense sites, such as military camps or outlying islands near mainland China. For news collaborators, the main constraint lies in the geographic remoteness of these locations, which makes managing logistics significantly more difficult. One novice news collaborator mentioned that they typically receive assignments from a more experienced colleague when the latter is overwhelmed with multiple tasks. However, the senior collaborator chose not to delegate an assignment on Kinmen Island, expressing concern that the novice had limited local contacts and, as a woman, might face additional safety risks when accompanying a journalist in an unfamiliar and potentially unpredictable environment (Interviewee L, May 13, 2025).

This example illustrates how external constraints are particularly pronounced in the context of military reporting, where access is limited, logistics are challenging, and safety concerns shape how assignments are handled. While these decisions may not directly involve editorial judgment, they still influence which stories can be pursued and who is able to carry them out. Such limitations highlight that the gatekeeping process is not only shaped by editorial routines and institutional expectations but is also embedded in broader social, geographic, and logistical realities that determine the feasibility of reporting certain topics.

As this section has shown, the influence of news collaborators extends beyond logistical support to shaping the content and framing of international news about Taiwan. Their gatekeeping role operates at multiple levels: individually, through their values and experiences; routinely, through professional practices and production constraints; and institutionally, through the expectations and structures of foreign media organizations. At the systemic level, while collaborators often work within dominant global narratives, such as the conflict-centered framing of Taiwan, they also find opportunities to push back by suggesting alternative story angles and promoting more culturally grounded perspectives. These layers of influence underscore the crucial yet often underrecognized role that news collaborators play in shaping how Taiwan is represented to the world.

4.3 Forms of collaboration

This section explores the third research question, examining diverse forms of collaboration between news collaborators and foreign journalists, sometimes marked by one-off assignments and limited interaction, other times growing into more reciprocal and supportive partnerships. It examines how working conditions, motivations, and informal networks shape the nature of these collaborations. It also considers how professional credit is negotiated, reflecting both structural gaps in industry standards and the personal preferences of individual collaborators and journalists.

### 4.3.1 Working relationships from transactional to co-creative

The statement released by a group of news collaborators after the 2024 election highlighted several challenges they face when working with foreign journalists, including a lack of recognition and limited room to negotiate the often biased framing of Taiwan (Simorre, 2024; Wei, 2024). The issue of insufficient recognition and credit will be

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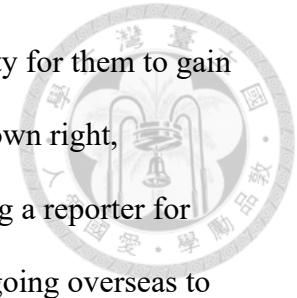
discussed in the following section. Regarding the inflexible and skewed framing, some collaborators in this study noted that such situations are more likely to occur during high-profile, time-sensitive events. Outside of these circumstances, there is usually more space for discussion, or collaborators may simply decline assignments if the reporting angle feels too disconnected from local realities.

Other negative experiences shared by the interviewees include delayed payments by foreign media, being asked to cover international wire transfer fees, and last-minute cancellations by foreign journalists who cited "more important events happening elsewhere in the world." After facing these issues repeatedly, some collaborators now emphasize the importance of clear communication in advance. They request partial payment before the assignment begins to protect their time and labor, and they advocate for explicitly defining job expectations and salary terms, ideally through a written contract. Despite these frustrations, most collaborators continue accepting new assignments. The primary motivation, as one interviewee put it bluntly, is financial: "It's all about the money (Interviewee J, May 6, 2025)."

In addition to financial incentives, some news collaborators view their work with foreign journalists as part of a mutualistic ecosystem. Novice collaborators, in particular, see these experiences as valuable opportunities to build their résumés and lay the groundwork for future careers in journalism, whether in local or international media (Interviewees C, D, E, H). The foreign correspondent interviewed in this study also emphasized the benefits of working with young local journalists or those aspiring to build a career in journalism:

> There are so many young Taiwanese journalists who have great instincts and great skills, but there's not a lot of opportunity to use that within Taiwan's media—to really, like, sink your teeth into a story and spend a lot of time on it. I kind of see

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people working as fixers with the foreign media as an opportunity for them to gain more experience and more skills, to become journalists in their own right, correspondents in their own right—whether that means becoming a reporter for Taiwanese media, reporting for foreign media from Taiwan, or going overseas to become correspondents themselves. (Interviewee N, May 16, 2025)

This mutualistic relationship between news collaborators and foreign journalists is not limited to those just beginning their careers in journalism. Some seasoned collaborators also view these partnerships as more than just a source of income. These relationships often transcend traditional media hierarchies; rather than following a strict dynamic of employer and employee, client and service provider, or—as seen in more extreme cases in conflict zones—exploiter and exploited (Ashraf, 2021), many collaborators simply describe foreign journalists as "friends." Discussions about story topics or the pitching of ideas are not always formalized or procedural. As one collaborator described it, "We were just chatting and came up with this idea" (Interviewee G, April 12, 2025).

While previous research has noted that news collaborators with contractual relationships enjoy better job security and promotion opportunities (Murrell, 2010), most collaborators in this study preferred the flexibility of freelance work. This absence of contractual constraint may contribute to the co-creative, informal, and relatively more equal relationships they develop with foreign journalists.

This co-creative and mutualistic network is also reflected in a group chat on the messaging app LINE called the "Taiwan Media Worker Alliance (TMWA)." With several interviewees from this study involved, the group was initially launched in 2022 as the "Taiwan Young Journalist Network" to share job opportunities. As of June 2025, it has 277 members, including foreign journalists, news collaborators, and other media professionals.
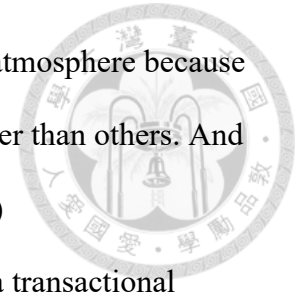
Many collaborators interviewed in this study noted that they are members of the group. In addition to sharing job postings and urgent assignments from foreign journalists, the group occasionally organizes "happy hour" gatherings and talks. It also serves as a platform for informal discussions, such as when Taiwan's Ministry of Defense issued a nationwide emergency alert for a "missile flyover" in January 2024 (Cave, 2024), or after the election, when collaborators exchanged their experiences and concerns regarding pay and working conditions.

TMWA was especially active during the election period, when many foreign journalists were arriving in Taiwan and urgently seeking local collaborators. Similar networks have emerged in other contexts in response to sudden surges in foreign media presence. For example, following the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan, many foreign journalists arrived with limited knowledge of the local context and struggled to access reliable information and navigate disaster zones. In response, local freelance journalists established networks such as the Japan Fixers and Journalists Network (JFJN) to support visiting reporters (Birmingham, n.d.).

Although TMWA is currently less active, novice news collaborators emphasized the group's value in helping them connect with other media professionals (Interviewee C and E). The members also intentionally kept the group informal and unregistered as a formal organization. Unlike formal organizations such as Taiwan's Foreign Correspondents' Club (TFCC), which requires membership, TMWA remains open to everyone. As one member explained:

> We did kind of think if we should formalize it more as an organization, because now we're not like a registered organization. And we only have activities on a spontaneous basis when somebody wants to do it. But I think it's also okay like that.

And if it's more informal, that also actually creates a more free atmosphere because there are no leaders and there are no people who have more power than others. And I kind of like this informal nature. (Interviewee M, May 6, 2025)

These examples show that while news collaboration often begins as a transactional relationship, it can evolve into a more reciprocal and co-creative dynamic shaped by shared interests, mutual respect, and informal networks. Although challenges such as unfair treatment and structural inequalities persist, many collaborators find value in the personal and professional connections they build with foreign journalists. Whether through one-on-one partnerships or broader networks like TMWA, these relationships contribute to a collaborative environment that supports not only the production of international news but also the development of local journalistic talent and cross-cultural understanding.

4.3.2 Attribution and professional credit

Insufficient recognition and credit was also a major issue highlighted in the statement released by news collaborators after the 2024 election (Simorre, 2024; Wei, 2024). However, the collaborators interviewed in this study, at various stages of their careers, expressed differing views on whether receiving credit is necessary or meaningful.

One news collaborator believed that being asked whether they would like their name included in a report is "the most basic form of respect" (Interviewee F, June 12, 2024). Whether in the byline or the acknowledgments section at the end of an article, they argue that names should be included based on the level of contribution and involvement. Having worked as a news researcher under a signed contract at a foreign media company's Taiwan office, where responsibilities included information collection, translation, writing reports, and pitching stories, this collaborator's name was always credited in the byline or

acknowledgments. Therefore, they suggest that foreign media should adopt this practice for all news collaborators.

One news collaborator with retainer contract said that they are always credited, and often mentioned in the bylines. This is done from the very beginning of their collaboration with a correspondent and initially brought up by the journalist. This practice made them feel like "we are equal co-workers" (Interviewee K, May 8, 2025).

In contrast, other collaborators expressed indifference toward being credited. One experienced collaborator agreed that credit should be based on the degree of involvement, but added that, having worked as a journalist before and not needing to build a portfolio, they were fine with not being credited. Another seasoned collaborator noted the responsibility that comes with being named. If their name appears on a report, they must be prepared to stand by its content. For this reason, they sometimes ask journalists not to include their name (Interviewee B, May 31, 2024).

Two novice collaborators also said they did not mind the lack of credit, believing that "not receiving credit is the norm" and something they have come to accept. Murrell (2010) pointed out that being credited can become *objectified cultural capital* for freelance news collaborators, as credited reports can be included in their portfolios, aiding in future job searches. This is, however, contrary to the responses of news collaborators in this study. Novice news collaborators noted that even if they are not credited in the report, they can still include it in their personal portfolios. When applying for news collaborator positions with foreign media, they only need to explain their experience to clients without requiring formally credited work.

From the journalists' perspective, both interviewees stated that crediting collaborators is ultimately up to individual discretion. The freelance journalist from Germany mentioned

that the *Pressekodex*, Germany's official journalistic code of ethics, does not contain specific guidance on working with news collaborators. Similarly, the correspondent employed by a foreign outlet noted that no formal organizational policy exists regarding collaboration or attribution. Nevertheless, both journalists said they credit collaborators. The correspondent explained their approach: if a collaborator did not participate in the editorial process, they are acknowledged at the end of the article with phrases like "additional support by" or "additional research by." If the collaborator conducted interviews independently or contributed to writing, they are credited in the byline.

These varying perspectives reflect how recognition remains a context-dependent issue shaped not only by structural gaps but also by individual-level factors. According to the *hierarchy-of-influences* model (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014), media production is shaped by multiple levels, including the *individual level*, which emphasizes the role of personal backgrounds, motivations, and values. In the absence of standardized industry practices, attribution often depends on the discretion of individual journalists and the priorities of collaborators, some of whom value credit as a form of professional respect, while others prioritize autonomy, responsibility, or strategic career goals. These micro-level influences explain why similar working arrangements result in inconsistent experiences for collaborators.
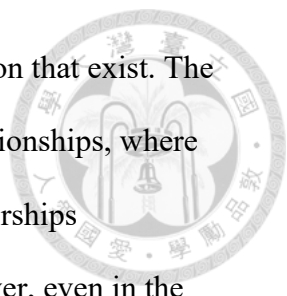
Chapter 5 Conclusion

5.1 Discussion

As Taiwan gains attention in international reporting, this study set out to examine how Taiwanese news collaborators contribute to the production of foreign media coverage. In addressing the first research question, what roles these collaborators play, it is clear that their involvement extends far beyond logistical support. Collaborators are not only responsible for organizing itineraries and facilitating interviews, but also play a key role in filtering and interpreting local situation for foreign journalists. News collaborators described making decisions about whom to introduce, which stories to prioritize, and how to explain culturally or politically sensitive topics, especially when dealing with issues such as Taiwanese identity and cross-strait relations. Their role as cultural interpreters is both practical and editorial.

The second research question explores how collaborators influence the narrative direction of foreign reporting. The findings showed that this influence is often exercised indirectly, through subtle acts of sourcing, framing, or in the case of video journalism, scene planning. For instance, one collaborator explained that when a foreign journalist insisted on juxtaposing polarized views on identity during the 2024 election, they instead introduced a more diverse range of perspectives to reflect the complexity of the political atmosphere. Others described pushing back against framing angles that portrayed Taiwan mainly as a geopolitical flashpoint. While collaborators rarely have the final say in storylines, their selective mediation of sources and contextual framing significantly shapes the narratives that are ultimately produced.

Finally, the third research question addresses the forms of collaboration that exist. The analysis revealed a spectrum ranging from short-term, transactional relationships, where collaborators typically had minimal editorial input, to longer-term partnerships characterized by trust, shared authorship, and informal influence. However, even in the latter cases, issues of professional recognition and role ambiguity persisted. Some collaborators are credited as producers, while others remain unacknowledged, although a few do not view attribution as necessary. These blurred boundaries reflect the in-between position that collaborators occupy: not quite insiders, yet essential to how international reporting on Taiwan is made possible. The following three sections further explore these dynamics: first, by analyzing how collaborators function as multi-level gatekeepers in shaping story narratives; second, by examining the ambiguity of their professional identity and the implications of freelance, informal labor; and third, by situating Taiwan as a distinct fixer environment shaped not by physical conflict, but by representational complexity.

5.1.1 News collaborators as gatekeepers in reporting on Taiwan

The findings of this study reveal that Taiwanese news collaborators serve not merely as logistical aides, but as active participants in the editorial process of international reporting. Drawing on the gatekeeping theory, their influence can be understood as operating across multiple levels: individual, routine, institutional, and systemic (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Each level reflects a different dimension of how decisions are made, what stories are pursued, and how narratives about Taiwan are ultimately constructed for international audiences.

At the individual level, collaborators' backgrounds, professional experiences, and political sensitivities shape the choices they make, from whom to contact to how certain topics are framed. For instance, a collaborator with prior experience in investigative journalism may prioritize grassroots perspectives, while others with commercial media backgrounds may anticipate angles more likely to satisfy foreign editors' expectations. In the context of Taiwan's complex identity politics, these individual choices become especially consequential. During election coverage, collaborators navigated not only political divisions but also the subtle spectrum of Taiwanese national identity, selecting sources in ways that reflected their sense of balance, fairness, or political sensitivity.

At the routine level, news collaborators work within the production rhythms of foreign media organizations, internalizing expectations such as fast turnaround times, balance, and narrative clarity. They curate interviewee lists, select locations, and propose visual sequences that conform to expected formats. In video production, this also includes planning scenes and determining airtime distribution. While these practices may appear technical, they influence how stories are shaped from the very beginning. Collaborators often adapt these routines to local realities, for example, by selectively introducing interviewees whose perspectives offer nuance or resist overly simplistic narratives. In doing so, they shape the direction and narrative of a story before any formal editorial process begins. This illustrates that collaborators are not passive implementers of foreign media logic, but active early-stage actors in the editorial process.
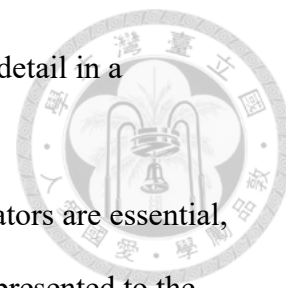
The institutional level further constraints what can be said and how. Media organizations often impose unwritten expectations, for example, that any story about Taiwan must mention China, even when the topic is unrelated. These editorial norms are reinforced by the position of the media outlet within larger geopolitical discourses. Collaborators are

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acutely aware of these constraints and often tailor their work accordingly, sometimes

feeling pressured to produce content that foregrounds conflict, tension, or risk. Yet some

also attempt to push against this logic by pitching alternative story angles, such as features

on everyday life, local culture, or social movements, portraying Taiwan in a more

autonomous light.

At the systemic level, Taiwan is frequently positioned within a global narrative of

strategic rivalry, especially between China and the United States. This framing not only

dominates foreign news agendas but also shapes what is considered newsworthy or

relevant. Even stories about semiconductors or local elections are often absorbed into the

larger security discourse. Within this environment, news collaborators often work to both

accommodate and gently resist such framing. While the "China factor" is difficult to avoid,

often expected by editors and understood by collaborators as a necessary reference, some

collaborators make efforts to discuss local realities with foreign journalists, emphasizing

that Taiwan's internal dynamics cannot be fully captured through the lens of cross-strait

tensions alone. These conversations help deepen the reporting by drawing attention to what

local people actually think and experience, thus broadening the narrative beyond

geopolitical simplifications.

What makes the Taiwanese case distinctive is that the gatekeeping role of collaborators

is not shaped by physical danger, as in war reporting, nor is it purely logistical, as in routine

international features. Instead, Taiwan represents a "representationally sensitive"

environment, where the risks collaborators must manage are symbolic and political. They

navigate contested identities, polarized discourses, and editorial expectations that often

flatten local complexity. Their editorial influence is therefore situated at the intersection of

geopolitical storytelling and cultural interpretation, requiring acute awareness of both

audience expectations and local nuance. This will be examined in more detail in a subsequent section.

In sum, these layers of influence show that Taiwanese news collaborators are essential, though sometimes underrecognized, actors in shaping how Taiwan is represented to the world. Their gatekeeping operates quietly, through sourcing, framing, and negotiation, but it is indispensable to the structure and tone of international reporting. Recognizing their role reframes news collaborators not just as a support figure, but as a co-producer of reporting on Taiwan.

5.1.2 News collaborators and the ambiguity of professional identity

The professional identity of Taiwanese news collaborators is characterized by liminality, neither fully inside nor fully outside the formal boundaries of journalism. Originally a concept in anthropology, the term *liminal* refers to transitional or threshold spaces, where individuals occupy ambiguous positions between two established roles or categories (Turner, 1967). Applied to media labor, *liminal labor* describes workers who are structurally necessary but not institutionally recognized, those who perform essential functions without fitting completely into established occupational frameworks (Sengul-Jones, 2018). In the context of international reporting on Taiwan, collaborators occupy an in-between position, neither fully journalists nor entirely outside the profession. They are essential to international news production but lack the protections, status, and clarity afforded to formally employed media workers.

This ambiguity is especially evident in how collaborators describe and negotiate their roles. Many are freelancers who balance news collaboration with other forms of income, such as translation, commercial media, or PR work. Some identify as fixers for

recognizability, while others prefer terms like producer or journalist to better reflect their contributions. The term fixer itself is contested, viewed by some as reductive and hard to translate, and by others as a default label in the absence of institutional alternatives.
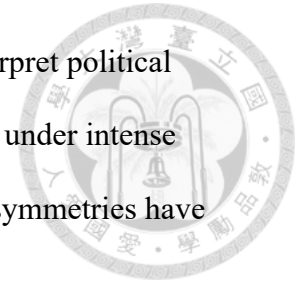
Although their work often begins as transactional, many collaborators go on to build collegial, co-creative relationships with journalists, especially those involved in longer-term projects or retainer arrangements. These roles can include pitching story ideas, contributing to writing, or providing ongoing editorial input. Still, such involvement does not always lead to formal recognition and rarely results in stable employment. Credit practices vary widely and are left to individual discretion. While some collaborators view byline inclusion as a basic form of respect, others prioritize autonomy or prefer not to be credited, seeing it as a potential burden of responsibility.

Despite these challenges, many collaborators find value in the flexibility and informal nature of their work. Networks like the Taiwan Media Worker Alliance (TMWA) without formal leadership or institutional structure offer peer support, job sharing, and collective reflection. These communities reflect the broader liminality of the role: simultaneously precarious and empowering, unrecognized yet influential. The result is a form of media labor that is both structurally marginalized and increasingly central to the production of international news in Taiwan.

5.1.3 The distinct conditions of news collaboration in Taiwan

Much of the existing scholarship on news collaborators has focused on contexts marked by physical conflict, political instability, or logistical difficulty. In particular, studies by Palmer (2007, 2016), Murrell (2010), and Ashraf (2021) have examined the role of fixers in conflict and post-conflict zones such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria, where foreign

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journalists rely on local collaborators to navigate dangerous terrain, interpret political dynamics, and mitigate security risks. These collaborators often operate under intense pressure, with little recognition or protection, and the resulting power asymmetries have been a central concern in the literature.

A second, less theorized category includes more stable environments where collaborators primarily provide logistical and linguistic support, such as arranging transportation, securing access to interviewees, and providing interpretation. Although these roles are essential, they are often regarded as technical, with limited editorial influence. In such settings, news collaborators are typically framed as service providers rather than journalistic contributors, and their work receives little scholarly or public attention. One example comes from a former news collaborator interviewed in this study who is now a correspondent for a Taiwanese news agency based in Europe. When they first arrived in the host country with limited contacts and language skills, they also relied on a local collaborator to arrange interviews and assist with communication (Interviewee E, June 6, 2024).

Taiwan does not fit neatly into either of these categories. While it is not a conflict zone, it is frequently reported on through the lens of geopolitical tension, particularly in relation to China. News collaborators in Taiwan are not tasked with managing physical risk, but they regularly navigate symbolic and representational risks. Their responsibilities often involve helping foreign journalists interpret politically sensitive issues, such as national identity and cross-strait relations, in ways that avoid misrepresentation or oversimplification. These collaborators function not only as translators or logistical coordinators but also as informal editorial partners.

Unlike conflict zones, where the stakes are physical, or procedural environments, where the work is largely logistical, Taiwan presents a "representationally sensitive zone." Here, collaborators exert influence through framing, selection of interviewees, and contextual interpretation. As previous sections have shown, many collaborators engage in subtle negotiations over story angles and narratives, especially during high-profile events like elections or military exercises. They must constantly balance the expectations of international media, often shaped by systemic discourses about China, with the local nuances and complexities that do not fit easily into binary narratives.

This third category broadens the typology of fixer environments and encourages journalism studies to consider how symbolic, rather than physical, pressures can shape the conditions of news collaboration. In Taiwan, news collaborators navigate constraints that are less visible than those in conflict zones but still consequential, particularly in relation to how local issues are framed within global narratives.

An important reason behind the more balanced and co-creative relationship between collaborators and foreign journalists in Taiwan may be the growing number of correspondents now based in the country. As this presence increases, a more stable network of collaborators and foreign journalists has begun to form. Within this setting, both parties act as equal members of a mutually beneficial environment. This dynamic stands in contrast to the hierarchical or exploitative relationships described in previous studies conducted in conflict zones, where collaborators often had little editorial influence and few opportunities to negotiate narratives. While the physical danger and urgency of those environments partly explain such power asymmetries, another crucial factor is the short-term nature of journalistic assignments in those contexts. Most foreign reporters in conflict zones are

visiting journalists, whereas in Taiwan, many correspondents remain for extended periods and build ongoing working relationships with local collaborators.

Although Taiwan represents a unique case, it offers a useful comparison between short-term and long-term modes of foreign reporting. The evolving relationships in Taiwan suggest that the duration and continuity of collaboration can influence the degree of equality and co-creation in journalistic work. This more sustained engagement allows collaborators to move beyond logistical support and assume roles as cultural mediators and editorial partners, shaping not just access but also narrative framing. The Taiwanese case, therefore, expands the typology of fixer environments and points to the importance of structural and temporal conditions in shaping the dynamics of international reporting. It further suggests that mutualistic ecosystems are more likely to emerge where long-term collaboration is possible, allowing for deeper trust, local expertise, and shared editorial authority in the production of international news.

5.2 Implications

5.2.1 Academic contributions

This study aims to contribute to the growing body of research on news collaborators by introducing the Taiwan context, which differs from the conflict-driven settings commonly examined in previous research. It suggests a potential third typology of fixer environments, characterized by representational rather than physical risks, thereby expanding how such roles are conceptualized across different geopolitical conditions. By highlighting Taiwan as a site of symbolic negotiation in international reporting, the study contributes to a more differentiated understanding of the structural and editorial dynamics in which news collaborators operate.

The study also engages with gatekeeping theory to analyze the editorial influence of news collaborators, an area often overlooked in previous research, which tends to portray them as having little or no input in the production of content. By tracing the entire collaboration process, this research reveals that gatekeeping can occur during story selection and framing, and even before a journalist begins writing or filming. In this way, the study reframes collaborators not merely as logistical assistants but as early-stage editorial actors who help shape what becomes news.

By placing Taiwanese news collaborators at the center of analysis, as subjects rather than peripheral objects, this research also shifts the focus of international news production studies. Rather than portraying collaborators solely as passive or exploited actors within global media hierarchies, the study highlights the agency, negotiation, and informal influence they exercise, especially through gatekeeping and story framing. In doing so, it introduces the concept of liminal labor as a way to understand the blurred professional identities and status ambiguities collaborators navigate, while also showing that this liminality can be a source of flexibility, co-creation, and strategic positioning, not just disadvantage.

Future research may build on these concepts to explore other non-conflict regions where symbolic and representational risks dominate, or further investigate how gatekeeping unfolds across different stages of transnational news production in similarly freelance-based environments.

5.2.2 Practical contributions

Practically, this study underscores the essential yet often overlooked role that Taiwanese news collaborators play in shaping how Taiwan is represented in the international media. It

encourages foreign journalists, editors, and media organizations to recognize not only the logistical value of these collaborators but also their contextual knowledge and editorial contributions. In particular, it advocates for more ethical, transparent, and co-creative models of collaboration that involve clear communication, fair compensation, and, where appropriate, proper attribution.
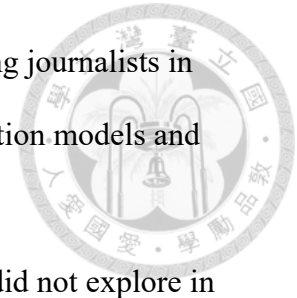
By offering a deeper understanding of how news collaborators work and what they navigate, this study aims to inform more reflective and responsible journalistic practices in Taiwan and similar settings. Ultimately, it calls for a view of news collaboration that looks *beyond the bylines* and takes into account the networks, negotiations, and invisible labor that make international reporting possible.

5.3 Limitations and future research suggestions

This study has several limitations that point to opportunities for future research. First, although efforts were made to incorporate a diverse range of sources in the literature review, much of the existing scholarship on news collaborators continues to center on conflict and post-conflict zones (Arjomand, 2018; Ashraf, 2021; Murrell, 2010; Palmer, 2007). While this study included examples from other regions, such as the fixer network formed in Japan following the 2011 disaster, the lack of fixer-focused research in non-conflict contexts remains a notable gap. Future studies could build on this work by further examining underexplored regions and developing comparative frameworks across different geopolitical settings.
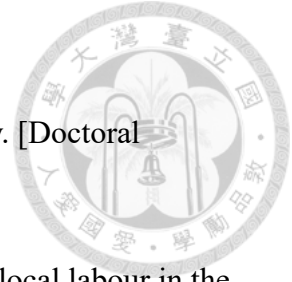
Second, this study attempted to include visiting foreign journalists in its interviews to provide a fuller picture of collaborative dynamics, particularly during high-profile events. However, due to time constraints and limited access, it was not possible to successfully

recruit such participants within the research timeframe. Including visiting journalists in future research would allow for deeper insight into short-term collaboration models and how editorial expectations are negotiated under deadline pressure.

Third, while this study focused on Taiwanese news collaborators, it did not explore in depth the experiences of foreign collaborators based in Taiwan. For instance, the freelance foreign journalist interviewed for this study had also occasionally served as a news collaborator for incoming media, highlighting a different category of collaborator whose positionality and professional identity may differ from that of local collaborators. Future research could investigate how foreign-based collaborators navigate their roles, and whether language, nationality, or perceived neutrality affect their access, recognition, or editorial influence.

By addressing these limitations, future studies can contribute to a more comprehensive and comparative understanding of news collaboration in diverse national and professional contexts.

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Generative AI Usage Statement

This thesis involved the use of the generative AI tool *ChatGPT* to assist with grammar correction and to enhance language clarity. All content was reviewed and revised by the author to ensure accuracy and academic integrity. No AI tools were used for data collection and analysis.

Appendix A: Interviewees Information

Table A1

Interviewee Background and Interview Details

	Background	Interview
A	Former journalist at local media. Freelance news collaborator with over 10 years of experience.	In-person; May 31, 2024
B	Worked in news translation and editing at a local media outlet, and as a translator for foreign media. Currently a producer (news collaborator) and translator.	In-person; May 31, 2024
C	Graduate student studying journalism. Started freelancing as a news collaborator in 2022.	Online; June 3, 2024
D	Graduate student studying journalism. Started freelancing as a news collaborator in 2023.	Online; June 6, 2024
E	Previously worked as a news collaborator; currently a foreign correspondent for Taiwanese media.	Online; June 6, 2024
F	Former news researcher for foreign media; currently a freelance journalist and news collaborator.	Online; June 12, 2024
G	Freelance video journalist and news collaborator.	Online; April 12, 2025
H	Graduate student studying journalism. Started freelancing as a news collaborator in 2024.	Online; April 27, 2025
I	Freelance journalist and news collaborator.	Online; May 4, 2025
J	Contract video journalist for a foreign news agency. Part-time producer (news collaborator).	In-person; May 7, 2025
K	Producer (news collaborator) with a retainer contract for a correspondent based in Taiwan.	Online; May 8, 2025
L	Graduate student studying political science. Started freelancing as a news collaborator in 2024.	Online; May 13, 2025
M	Freelance journalist from Germany, based in Taiwan from 2022 to 2024; contributor to German media.	Online; May 7, 2025
N	Correspondent for a British news outlet, based in Taiwan for the past four and a half years.	Online; May 16, 2025

Appendix B: Interviewee consent form

Beyond the Bylines: Collaboration Between News Collaborators (Fixers) and Foreign Journalists in Reporting on Taiwan

受訪同意書

Consent to take part in research

我了解，即使我現在同意參與研究，我仍可隨時退出或拒絕回答任何問題，且不需承擔任何不利後果。

I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without facing any consequences.

我了解，我可以在訪談結束後的任何時間撤回允許研究使用我的訪談資料，屆時相關資料將被刪除。

I understand that I can withdraw my permission to use data from my interview at any time after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

我已了解本研究的目的與性質，並已獲得機會向研究者提問，以確保充分理解研究內容。

I confirm that the purpose and nature of the study have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

我了解，參與本研究不會帶來任何直接的個人利益。

I understand that I will not receive any direct benefits from participating in this research.

我同意我的訪談內容被錄音。

I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.

我了解，我在本研究中提供的所有資訊都將被妥善保密。研究者將隱藏可能透露我或我提及之人物身分的細節，來確保匿名性。

I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially. This will be ensured by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview that could reveal my identity or the identities of people I mention.

我了解，研究論文可能會匿名引用我的訪談內容摘錄。

I understand that anonymized excerpts from my interview may be quoted in the thesis.

我了解，簽署的同意書與原始錄音檔將存放於研究者的電腦及硬碟中，直到論文口試委員會確認研究結果為止。

I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be stored on the researcher's computer and hard drive until the exam board confirms the results of the researcher's thesis.

我了解，不記名的訪談逐字稿將自論文口試委員會做出決議之日起保存兩年。

I understand that a transcript of my interview, with all identifying information removed, will be retained for two years from the date of the exam board's decision.

我了解，在研究資料存放期間，我有權隨時查閱我所提供的資訊。

I understand that I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage, as specified above.

我了解，我可以隨時聯繫研究者，以獲取進一步的說明與資訊。

I understand that I am free to contact the researcher involved in the study for further clarification or information.

Signature of research participant
受訪者簽章

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Signature of participant 受訪者簽章   Date 日期