

# In Taiwan, a tycoon's influence

He uses media to help prod closer China ties

BY ANDREW HIGGINS  
IN TAIPEI, TAIWAN

Shortly before Taiwan's presidential election last weekend, Tsai Eng Meng, a local billionaire who spends most of his time in China, jumped in his Gulfstream 200 corporate jet and flew home to cast his vote.

More than 200,000 other Taiwanese businessmen based in China also rushed back, contributing to a comfortable victory by an incumbent president committed to rapprochement with China.

Tsai's role in prodding Taiwan closer to China, however, is far bigger than just his ballot. He not only has dozens of factories churning out rice crackers on the Chinese mainland but also controls a string of media properties in Taiwan that champion ever-closer ties between this boisterous island democracy and authoritarian but increasingly prosperous China.

"Whether you like it or not, unification is going to happen sooner or later," said Tsai, the chairman of Want Want Group, a sprawling conglomerate comprising a giant food business, media interests, hotels, hospitals and real estate.

While opinion polls show that only a tiny minority of people in Taiwan want a swift merger with China, Tsai says he can't wait: "I really hope that I can see that."

Many Taiwanese tycoons now look to China for most of their profits, and the island's wealthy cheered the election victory last Saturday of President Ma Ying-jeou against a rival who favors keeping Beijing at arm's length. "Praise the Lord for showing that he cares about Taiwan," Cher Wang, a devout Christian and multibillionaire businesswoman, told local media.

But only Tsai, Taiwan's third-richest person according to a Forbes magazine ranking, has poured so much money into trying

to shape opinion through media that, critics say, often echo the views of Beijing. He controls three Taiwan newspapers, a television station, various magazines and a cable network. A bid for a second, bigger cable operator is now under review by Taiwan's National Communications Commission.

When China Times, a leading Taiwan newspaper Tsai purchased in 2008, published an article that described China's top negotiator on Taiwan as "third rate," the editor was promptly fired. Want Daily, a tabloid Tsai launched in 2009, provides a daily digest of mostly upbeat stories about China and the benefits for Taiwan of closer cooperation.

Journalists, said the tycoon in an interview in a Taipei hotel that he also owns, are free to criticize but "need to think carefully before they write" and avoid "insults" that cause offense. The dismissed editor, he said, was a talented writer but "hurt me by offending people, not just mainlanders. On lots of things, people were offended."

Taiwan still has a vibrant press. The biggest-selling paper is Apple Daily, which is owned by Jimmy Lai, a Hong Kong-based Taiwan mogul and pro-democracy advocate who is detested by Beijing.

Freedom House, a U.S. group that monitors liberties around the world, said in a report last year that "Taiwan's media environment is one of the freest in Asia," while China's is "one of the world's most restrictive." But it also warned that growing commercial links across the Taiwan Strait, the narrow band of water between Taiwan and China, "raised concerns that media owners and some journalists were whitewashing news about China to protect their financial interests."

#### Economics first

Tsai denied currying favor with Chinese officials to advance his business and said he wants only to



PHOTOS BY ANDREW HIGGINS/THE WASHINGTON POST  
**A shrine honoring the late Chiang Kai-shek is an attraction for mainland Chinese and tourists but largely ignored by the Taiwanese.**

help Taiwan get over its wariness of the mainland. China "is very democratic in lots of places. Lots of things are not what people outside think," he said, adding that it is "constantly moving forward" while "Taiwan progresses very slowly."

Elections, he said, are fine, but economics should come first: "Most of us don't want to become some sort of chairman or president. . . . From the standpoint of ordinary people, the most important thing is to eat a little better, sleep a little better and be a little happier."

Tsai said he, too, used to fear China's ruling Communist Party and didn't want to risk doing business on the mainland, but that

changed after the 1989 military assault on student protesters in Tiananmen Square. While the crackdown outraged most in Taiwan, Tsai said he was struck by footage of a lone protester standing in front of a People's Liberation Army tank. The fact that the man wasn't killed, he said, showed that reports of a massacre were not true: "I realized that not that many people could really have died."

The party's own propaganda apparatus made the same argument at the time, citing the tank incident as evidence of the mili-



**"Whether you like it or not, unification is going to happen," said Tsai Eng Meng, ranked by Forbes as the third-wealthiest in Taiwan.**

tary "humanity." What happened to the unidentified man who faced down the tank is still not known. Hundreds of others were killed by the army elsewhere in Beijing on June 3-4, 1989.

Tsai has since moved most of Want Want's operations to China, where the company employs more than 50,000 people, compared with 6,000 in Taiwan. It has 331 sales offices in China. In Taiwan, it has two. His corporate jet is painted bright red. Focused on selling food, Want Want "needs mouths," Tsai said. "Taiwan has only 23 million people, but China has more than a billion. . . . The most important thing is that the mainland market is so big." It generates more than 90 percent of his profits.

#### A more pro-China line

When Tsai first bought China Times and an affiliated television station, rumors spread that he had received encouragement and even money from Beijing, which was wary of the media group falling into the hands of Lai, the owner of Apple Daily.

Lai was near to signing a deal but lost out at the last minute when Tsai offered more money.

Tsai denied getting any help from Beijing. "I've already got money," he said. "Why would I go and take their money?"

Since the takeover, the paper

has nonetheless veered sharply toward a more pro-China line, say journalists who have worked there and media analysts. The goal, according to Want Want's own company brochure, is to make China Times "the most influential Chinese-language daily" so as to "benefit the public" and "promote peace and harmony across the Strait." Flora Chang, a professor at National Taiwan University's Graduate Institute of Journalism, said Tsai's media "are very biased" in favor of positive news about China.

Wuerkaixi, a former Tiananmen Square student leader who now lives in exile in Taiwan, said he used to regularly get asked to write columns in China Times but not anymore.

When a provincial Communist Party boss traveled to Taiwan from China in 2010, he got an effusive greeting from Tsai on the front page: "On behalf of colleagues at Want Want, I welcome the Hubei Province (Party) Committee Secretary." The Chinese official, who visited CtiTV, a cable channel owned by Tsai, was invited to "give guidance."

Tsai said he was just being polite and denied being obsequious to boost his business in China. "I don't stroke the horse's bottom," he said, using a Chinese phrase for flattery.

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## Four Iraqi soldiers killed in Fallujah

### Gunmen assault checkpoint as wave of attacks continues

BY DAN MORSE

BAGHDAD — Gunmen armed with AK-47 assault rifles opened fire at an army checkpoint in the western Iraqi city of Fallujah on Saturday, killing four soldiers, according to a security official.

The attack in the center of the city followed an assault six days earlier in nearby Ramadi, where insurgents tried to blast their way into a police compound, setting off a deadly firefight with local authorities. After that clash, a police official warned that insurgents might soon target Fallujah.

On Saturday, about 7 p.m. local time, insurgents drove up to the Fallujah checkpoint in a four-wheel-drive vehicle, said Lt. Col. Najim al-Dulaimi, a spokesman for Anbar province's operations command.

Witnesses said the gunmen got out of the vehicle before opening fire. They shot two soldiers sitting in the back seat of a Humvee and two soldiers standing outside it, the witnesses said. Dulaimi confirmed that four soldiers were killed.

The attack Saturday followed a wave of bombings that occurred over the past month in the wake of the U.S. troop departure and amid a paralyzing political crisis. The major attacks began in Baghdad on Dec. 22 in various Shiite and Sunni neighborhoods and commercial areas. Then Shiite pilgrims were struck as they walked

to religious shrines south of Baghdad. Ramadi and Fallujah, the sites of the latest attacks, are in Sunni-dominated Anbar.

Officials in Iraq and Washington worry that insurgents are trying to provoke reactions from both Shiite and Sunni militias that could trigger bloody and disruptive sectarian battles across the country.

Also Saturday, an explosion occurred next to a military patrol just south of the city of Tikrit, injuring two soldiers, according to the al-Baghdadia TV channel's news Web site. Farther north, in Kirkuk, gunmen killed a civilian and wounded a police officer, al-Baghdadia reported.

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Special correspondents Uthman al-Mukhtar and Asaad Majeed contributed to this report.

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## Jesus Christ, Son Ahman

### Jesus Christ, Son Ahman

I, Your Lord Jesus Christ, Even Son Ahman, Speak to All Nations on Earth, My Own Revealing of My Soon Coming. Let All Hear My Will:

### Revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ Given to President Warren S. Jeffs

Palestine, Texas  
Tuesday, December 27, 2011

1. Let now all people on earth be told my holy will.
2. I, who am of the full Godhood power over world, even of my Father, Elohim, who is my Eternal Father, saith Jesus Christ, your Lord and Holy Savior, Son Ahman; who redeemed all mankind from the grave, to lift each up by my power over death unto life in the holy resurrection; I say to all nations --
3. Repent ye; now be of full humbling; all peoples shall be humbled in full way; as I send full judgments.
4. Now repent, so I may own and bless all who come unto me; even to be my people of Zion. Amen.

We, the undersigned, testify these are verily the word of God, Jesus Christ, of holy way of telling all of the people on earth of His soon coming; and to repent, and be prepared. Amen.

Vaughan E. Taylor  
Patriarch in the Fundamentalist  
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I, Vaughan E. Taylor, have been appointed to receive any inquiries.  
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