

Nov 04, 2016 by **Paul Rockower**

# **Radio Taiwan International: The Voice of Taiwan** <sup>[1]</sup>

In the realm of international broadcasting, Radio Taiwan International (RTI) serves as the “voice of Taiwan.” The station is an amalgamation of the “Voice of Free China” service that served as the Republic of China on Taiwan’s international broadcasting arm plus the Central Broadcasting System, which for years broadcast to mainland China. The Central Broadcasting System (CBS) was founded in Nanjing, China in 1928, and the original mission of the station was to broadcast government policy. During World War II, the station promoted Chinese national unity against the Japanese occupation of China. Later, with the defeat of the Kuomintang (KMT), the station followed the KMT government to Taiwan.

In the coming decades, the Voice of Free China conducted international broadcasting efforts, while the CBS outlet was used for propaganda and psychological warfare against mainland China. The CBS broadcasts encouraged Chinese pilots to defect with promises of freedom from Communist China as well as monetary rewards, in addition to aeronautical instructions of how to safely fly air force jets to Taiwan. One Chinese pilot who defected, Wu Rong-gen, did so not only for the rewards, but also for a chance to sing a duet with Taiwanese singer Teng Li-Chun, the famous “Little Teng” whose program had been broadcast to the mainland for many years.

In 1998, the stations were combined and reorganized with a new mission to project from a public diplomacy perspective. Today, the station broadcasts under the call sign “Radio Taiwan International.” RTI promotes and disseminates news and information about Taiwan and its cultural and political life in 13 languages, broadcast through short and medium wave radio signals and streamed online. According to RTI Chairperson Sunshine Kuang, each language service has its own unique characteristics and unique listenership. In its annual report, Chairperson Sunshine Kuang remarks on RTI’s mission:

“It is responsible for broadcasting news and features to China and the international community on behalf of the Republic of China on Taiwan. RTI is also tasked with giving the international community, including overseas Taiwanese and Chinese, a better understanding of Taiwan and its freedom, democracy, rule of law, human rights, and economic and cultural development.”<sup>i</sup>

In speaking with Chairperson Kuang, she further noted that RTI tries to highlight aspects of Taiwan’s “soft power” and provide a perspective on different sections of Taiwanese life, whether it in the political, economic or cultural sectors.<sup>ii</sup>

I also spoke with RTI’s Jonathan Seidman, who hosts the public diplomacy-focused program *Soft Power* on the RTI+ online program. He stated, “I think RTI’s function is very unique in that we are promoting information about all aspects of Taiwan to just about everywhere in the world. I find a lot of our listeners are people in more far-flung places like Indonesia, Pakistan,

India.” He further noted, “People who maybe do not have access to televisions or computers, and radio is sort-of their primary outlet to connect with the world. These people write back very interested in Taiwan. They want to hear more about the food, these cultural things that we talk about. I think we are achieving something very significant in that sense.”

Radio Taiwan International’s largest broadcast audience is found in its Mandarin service. This service targets both mainland China and the Chinese-speaking diaspora worldwide and offers them updated information on life in Taiwan. RTI broadcasts directly into mainland China, and the station sends technicians for periodic visits to make sure that the signal can be heard in China.<sup>iii</sup>

To expand its outreach, RTI has cooperative broadcasting agreements with over 40 broadcasting media outlets, including with the VOA, *Deutsche Welle* and *Radio France Internationale*. Meanwhile, since it began broadcasting online in 2001, RTI website has pages in 10 languages. Furthermore, RTI’s English service hosts RTI+, an online program that broadcasts an additional half hour of programming. As well, listeners can download podcasts in English and Japanese, with a Chinese podcast scheduled to soon be available. Listeners are also able to tune in via mobile phones and PDAs, and can also stay connected for news from Taiwan via the station’s e-newsletters. While Radio Taiwan International is barred from broadcasting domestically in Taiwan, Taiwanese listeners can hear the broadcasts online.

Radio Taiwan International connects through blogs of the various language website, including an award-winning Japanese blog. It also connects with its listeners through various listener clubs in Malaysia, Indonesia, Japan, Thailand, India, Bangladesh and Germany, and facilitates listener club meetings with visits from RTI personalities and staff.<sup>iv</sup>

RTI also plays a valuable role via its Thai, Vietnamese and Indonesian services for guest-workers residing in Taiwan in letting them connect with their families at home. RTI thus has become a source of news about Taiwan and information on the home countries for the numerous guest-workers from Southeast Asia living in Taiwan. Meanwhile, in a triangulated dialogue, family members in Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam can contact RTI and request songs or leave messages for their family members in Taiwan.<sup>v</sup> In addition, the station provides Mandarin language lesson programming to help guest workers learn the language and better assimilate. As previously mentioned, while RTI cannot broadcast directly, the Thai, Vietnamese and Indonesian services are relayed on Voice of Han, a public Taiwanese radio station that broadcasts the language services on their FM and AM stations. In addition, RTI hosts an annual family reunion gathering for migrant workers. For the family reunion, RTI brings over and hosts the family members of 8-12 migrant workers for a joyous special reunion for guest workers who often have not seen their family in many years.

Taiwan’s international broadcasting efforts through Radio Taiwan International represent a vital medium for Taiwan to communicate its culture and values to diverse audience through its multiple language services. RTI helps convey different aspects of life in Taiwan and broadens the perceptions of Taiwanese society through its multifaceted programming that helps raise the nation’s profile internationally. Through the RTI service, Taiwan can connect both regionally and globally and thus create a better understanding of the Taiwanese cultural and political landscape.

i. Sunshine Kuang, “RTI Will Strive for Excellence in the New Year,” Radio Taiwan International Annual Report 2009, p.7

- ii. Interview with Sunshine Kuang, Chairperson- Radio Taiwan International, August 5, 2010, Taipei, Taiwan
  - iii. Ibid
  - iv. Ibid
  - v. Interview with Carlson Huang, Radio Taiwan International, (August 5, 2010), Taipei, Taiwan
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