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# Exploring societal and cultural influences on Taiwanese public relations

Ming-Yi Wu<sup>a,\*</sup>, Maureen Taylor<sup>a</sup>, Mong-Ju Chen<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*Department of Communication Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ 08901, USA*

<sup>b</sup>*Kelson Consulting & Developing Inc., Taipei, Taiwan*

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## Abstract

This paper offers a descriptive analysis of the development of public relations in Taiwan. Taiwan is one of Asia's economic success stories and the practice of public relations can be traced back to the early 1940s. In the last decade, the trend of democratization has been influencing the practice of public relations. This paper explores the societal and cultural context of Taiwanese public relations. Through the use of a survey instrument that measured the models of public relations and Hofstede's dimensions of culture, this paper reports data collected from public relations practitioners ( $n = 40$ ) about the actual values and practices that describe Taiwanese public relations. © 2001 Elsevier Science Inc. All rights reserved.

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## 1. Introduction

The trends of internationalization and globalization have played a significant role in shaping the field of public relations. In an attempt to better understand public relations theory and practice, scholars reflect on practices in many parts of the world. Asia has become one of the most fully explored regions of the world in public relations scholarship. There are now numerous articles and book chapters that explore and critique public relations practice in Asian countries including, China, Taiwan, India, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines and Thailand [1]. Many of these articles provide nation specific research. To extend the scope of this research, Sriramesh, Kim, and Takasaki conducted a meta-analysis

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\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1-732-932-1721.

E-mail address: MaureenT@scils.Rutgers.edu (M. Taylor).

to analyze public relations in Japan, South Korea, and India [2]. Taken as a body of knowledge, these studies show that public relations is developing according to the unique cultural and social conditions in each of these Asian nations.

This article contributes to existing research about public relations practices in Asian contexts. Its purpose is to build on Huang's research which explicated a Taiwanese perspective of public relations [3]. Huang traced the Confucian and cultural assumptions of personal influence and *gao guanxi* that underlie personal relationships in Taiwan public relations. Extending Huang's work, this article provides a quantitative and descriptive analysis for practitioners and researchers about public relations development in Taiwan. This paper begins with a discussion of the societal factors that influence public relations in Taiwan and provides the context in which public relations functions in Taiwan. The second section of the article offers a quantitative assessment of actual public relations practices in Taiwan. To understand the relationship between Taiwanese culture and public relations practices, the final section of the paper will analyze the cultural values that affect Taiwanese public relations practitioners. Research questions guiding this study include:

RQ1 What are the societal factors that affect public relations practice in Taiwan?

RQ2 Which models of public relations are practiced in Taiwan?

RQ3 What cultural values influence Taiwanese public relations practitioners?

## **2. Societal factors influencing public relations in Taiwan**

In the IABC Excellence study, Grunig proposed a power-control model of public relations based upon organizational behavior theories [4]. Organizations are viewed as organic structures that are located in their environments. Therefore, environmental factors will affect organizational processes as well as the public relations practices of an organization. For example, societal culture will affect organizational culture, and organizational culture will determine strategic choices of specific public relations models. Culbertson and Chen have also argued that "a nations' political system and culture do shape its practice of public relations. Related factors include social stratification, the nature of personal relationships, media credibility, economic development, stage of nation building, emphasis on personal loyalty and harmony, and presence or absence of elites created in part by colonial rulers" [5].

The first research question guiding this study (RQ1) inquires about the societal factors that affect public relations practice in Taiwan.

### *2.1. The geo-political context*

It is Taiwan's geographic and geo-political situation that greatly influences its place—for better and for worse—in world affairs. Taiwan is an island, small in size and since it is located in the midpoint of the Pacific Coast Islands, it is heavily involved in international trade.

Taiwan lies off the eastern coast of Asia and its most Western neighbor is the People's Republic of China. China continues to influence Taiwan's position in world events. General Chiang Kai-Shek established Taiwan in 1949. He led the nationalists out of China as Mao

Tse-Tung fostered the communist revolution. Initially, the world supported General Chiang Kai-Shek and the island was considered the real China. It enjoyed a seat in the United Nations and the world patiently waited for the communist revolution to end and the nationalists to prevail. In 1971 Taiwan lost its position as the official representative of China in the United Nations. Today, the Chinese government on the mainland goes to great lengths to persuade the world that Taiwan is a “renegade province” that must be returned to Chinese sovereignty. On an almost yearly basis, China threatens to take the tiny island by force. Nations such as the United States, members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the European Union have pledged to protect the democratic island as long as Taiwan does not outwardly declare its independence from China.

In the early years, when threats from Mainland China were very real, the Taiwanese government imposed martial law. Martial law was abolished in 1987, and Taiwan has made improvements in democratization. A variety of elections are held in Taiwan with the first presidential election held in 1996. In addition to the presidential election, a number of regional elections, such as city mayoral elections, county and city councilor elections, and township magistrate elections, are held regularly. Taiwan has established a multiparty political system. The three main political parties are the Kuomintang (KMT), the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), and the New Party. All of these political parties actively participate in the elections [6].

“Taiwan’s style of democratization is characterized as ‘election driven’ in the sense that the elections have engendered an impetus to widening political participation of the people and provided continuous incentive to building democratic institutions in Taiwan” [7]. In such a competitive election-driven political environment, candidates and political parties rely on public relations agencies to help them build positive images and conduct successful election campaigns. For example, more and more candidates hire professional political public relations agencies to design logos, posters, and direct mail efforts, as well as to manage media relations [8]. Thus, political public relations agencies play a crucial role in every election.

As the political system moves toward democratization; the Taiwanese people’s ideologies are also becoming more diverse. There have been many changes in the past decade. The Taiwanese government no longer regulates people’s free discussion of politics and social issues. Hundreds of demonstrations and petition activities have occurred since 1990 [9]. Sriramesh suggested that societal levels of tolerance for citizen activism are important for shaping public relations development [10]. One example of activism in Taiwan is the environmental movement. People in Kaohsiung County have organized to block the Chinese Oil Company’s entrance into the region because the company causes air pollution. To resolve such conflicts between community residents and corporations, many organizations have established public relations offices to communicate with the community members. The growing activism has become a driving force for Taiwanese corporations to devote resources to the public relations function. In the past decade, Taiwanese public relations has emerged as an important organizational unit during crisis management regarding consumers’ rights and environmental protection. However, today, public relations serves more than merely as a crisis management function; it also supports marketing efforts.

## *2.2. The economic and media context*

Taiwan reported one of the highest economic growth rates in the world during the past decade. The average Gross Domestic Product growth rate (GDP) for the past decade was about six percentage. The business environment is very competitive and companies have to establish good relationships with customers in order to compete. The industrial base of Taiwan's economy is also changing. Traditional labor-intensive industries have been replaced by technology-intensive industries including bio-tech, information technology and electronics. Therefore, these new industries will require public relations practitioners familiar with new technologies. Indeed, in the past few years, high-tech clients have accounted for 35% of the business at public relations agencies [11]. Thus, the free market economic system has provided public relations many opportunities to grow. Another related area of opportunity for public relations has been in the area of media development.

Growth in the media industry complements the development of Taiwanese public relations. Due to the advancement in modern technology and the liberalization of the media policies, the Taiwanese media market is thriving. The Cable Television Law was passed in August 1993. Since then, new cable television channels provide different types of programs to the Taiwanese people. In addition, the press market is also changing. There had been a 37-year press ban under martial law. However, "the end of the press ban in 1988 suddenly turned the market into a free-growing one. The total number of newspapers reached 279 by 1994. The sharp increase in the number of newspapers made the press market extremely competitive" [12]. The press boom is an opportunity for public relations because the new media companies need content and through these new channels, organizations can communicate important corporate information to publics.

Public segmentation is easier now that different channels have different target audiences and public relations practitioners can choose the most appropriate media channel to reach key audiences. Some government offices and large corporations also hold monthly press conferences to inform the public about their organization's actions. When crises do occur, corporations work with the media to clarify the issue and inform the public about how they have addressed the crisis. These examples all demonstrate that the media have become an important communication channel for Taiwanese public relations practitioners. The aforementioned societal factors—geopolitical, economic, and media contexts—have fostered Taiwanese public relations growth in recent years, and the next section will briefly review the history of Taiwanese public relations.

## **3. Taiwanese public relations practices**

James Grunig introduced four public relations models based on the historical development of the field [13]. These four models—press agency, public information, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical—represent public relations practitioners' goals and public relations activities. These four public relations models were based on an American organizational view of public relations practice. Two more models, derived from theses and dissertations at the University of Maryland, have been discussed qualitatively in the litera-

ture. Sriramesh's personal influence model [14] and Lyra's cultural interpreter model [15] are based on international research projects. Sriramesh has identified the personal influence model. This international model of public relations describes practitioners cultivating good relationships with external publics to restrict government regulation, secure government approval, and ensure positive press coverage. The job of the public relations practitioner is to perform "personal influence relations" [16]. In many nations in the developing world, organizations are not yet constrained by the attitudes and actions of mass publics. In these nations, practitioners tend to focus specifically on journalists and government officials as key publics [17]. Personal influence is not limited solely to Indian public relations but instead it may be a "pervasive public relations technique" in other cultures and nations [18]. Another international model, the cultural interpreter, was found in Greece [19]. The cultural interpreter model "seems to exist in organizations that do business in another country, where it needs someone who understands the language, culture, customs, and political system of the host country" [20]. These two new models reflect a more relationship-oriented approach to public relations.

The original four models plus these two international models help to explain the dynamic practice of public relations in many nations. However, more data must be collected to clarify and refine these models. To follow Huang [21], Lyra [22], and Kim and Hon's [23] examination of the models in international contexts, research question RQ2 inquired about the status of these six models in Taiwan.

What we know about Taiwanese public relations is most attributed to Huang [24]. Initially, Huang adopted Grunig's original four public relations models to measure Taiwanese public relations. Huang studied how an environmental-protection group's activist strategies affected the Taipower Company's (TPC) public relations practices. TPC attempted to build a fourth nuclear plant in Kung-Liao. Huang analyzed TPC's public relations activities in communicating with the antinuclear activist public. Huang used both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze TPC's public relations. She interviewed 21 respondents and administrated a quantitative questionnaire to 20 public relations practitioners in TPC. The results suggested that TPC practiced the two-way asymmetrical model most often, with the two-way symmetrical model the next popular choice. The press agency model followed these two models very closely. The public information model scored the lowest among the four public relations models. Given TPC's tenuous relationship with the activists, these findings suggest that TPC practiced the more professional models of public relations. In extending the 1990 work, Huang examined the cultural assumptions underlying personal relationships in Taiwanese culture [25]. Through a qualitative analysis, Huang explicated Confucianism and the cultural assumptions of personal influence and *goa guanxi*. Huang found that these cultural assumptions underlie personal relationships in Taiwanese public relations and will influence interpersonal and organizational relationships.

The data for Huang's thesis was collected over ten years ago. The personal influence and cultural interpreter models were not yet formulated and thus were not used to measure the public relations practices of TPC. Thus, to gain a baseline of current public relations practices in Taiwan, this study replicated Grunig's four original models. In addition, based on the qualitative assessments of Sriramesh [26] and Lyra [27], the researchers operationalized the two new international models. This study investigated how the six models are

enacted in Taiwan through a quantitative survey. While knowing which models are practiced is useful, culture is also a key variable that has significant influences on public relations practice in different societies. Sriramesh [28] and Vasquez and Taylor [29] have advocated for this type of research. Sriramesh and White proposed that “the cultural difference among societies must affect the way public relations is practiced by peoples of different societies” [30]. One explanatory way to examine the relationship between culture and public relations is through an application of the work by Geert Hofstede. RQ3 asked about the relationship between the models of public relations and Hofstede’s dimensions of culture [31].

### 3. Culture and public relations

Hofstede defined culture as “the collective mental programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another. . . Culture in this sense, includes systems of values; and values are among the building blocks of culture” [32]. Hofstede, a social psychologist from the Netherlands, studied a data set of over 116,000 surveys that reported on the work-related attitudes and values of international members of a multinational corporation. The surveys were collected in 1968 and 1972 and the respondents represented 40 countries. Hofstede’s study of the relationship of culture to work-related values is impressive and has informed research in sociology, social psychology, organizational communication, organizational behavior, and now, public relations.

Four dimensions of culture emerged from the Hofstede research: power distance (PDI), uncertainty avoidance (UA), masculinity-femininity (MAS), and individualism-collectivism (IND). Power distance studies the basic differences in equality/inequality across a culture [33]. Power distance affects the upward communication in an organization. In a high power distance culture, public relations technicians may be afraid of expressing their opinions to their managers. The second dimension, uncertainty avoidance, refers to people’s tolerance of ambiguity. Uncertainty avoidance measures the flexibility of people to cope with uncertainty. There tend to be more written rules, regulations, and stress in high uncertainty avoidance cultures. The third dimension, masculinity, defines achievement-related values. Masculinity-femininity examines the duality of the sexes in terms of work tasks and it is *not related* to the sex/gender of the worker [34]. Rather, it looks at the distribution of work tasks across a culture and identifies if these tasks are equally distributed to all people. For instance, a nation where both men and women are preschool teachers, secretaries, and nurses would be a highly feminine culture. A nation where women perform certain jobs and men do other tasks would be labeled as a masculine culture. The fourth dimension, individualism-collectivism, refers to how people orient themselves to their groups/organizations. Individualism-collectivism explores relationships between the individual and the group or collective [35]. People with high individualistic values tend to care about self-actualization and career progression in the organization, whereas people with collectivist values tend to value the benefits to the organization more than their own interests. These four variables are present in all cultures and the degree of their presence will influence the functioning of any organization.

For public relations, Hofstede’s variables affect the assumptions of interpersonal and organizational communication in a society. Hofstede did not apply his dimensions to public



relations; however, their applicability is clearly established through a variety of studies. The first group of public relations researchers who qualitatively explored Hofstede's dimensions of culture were from the University of Maryland. Ethnographic studies of Taiwan [36], India [37], Greece [38], and Slovenia [39] show the links between specific dimensions of culture and the practice of public relations.

To better understand the link between public relations and culture, Vasquez and Taylor [40] explored the quantitative relationship of Hofstede's dimensions of culture to the four models of public relations. In a pilot test of American public relations practitioners, Vasquez and Taylor modified Hofstede's dimensions to gain greater insight into actual public relations. Hofstede argued that the dimensions of culture are not mutually exclusive and in many societies, people will exhibit both ends of a dimension. Thus, both the masculinity-femininity and the individualism-collectivism dimensions were reformulated from two continuums to create a total of four separate dimensions. The newly created dimensions of masculinity and femininity were not intended to further stereotype the practice of public relations as women's work. Rather, the reformulated dimensions show the sex role distribution that is communicated to social members through the media, family, and peers. Hofstede found that "MAS [masculinity index] is significantly correlated with the percentage of women in professional and technical jobs" [41]. Vasquez and Taylor argued that "given the makeup of the field of public relations and the gender distribution of tasks, we posited that separate dimensions would result in greater insight and examination of the models" [42]. In an attempt to tap into the dynamics of the relationship between the public relations practitioner and the organization, Vasquez and Taylor reformulated a collectivist dimension to include questions that provide insight into the tensions between the goals of the individual and the goals of the organization. Although Vasquez and Taylor's pilot study showed that the models of public relations could be correlated with Hofstede's dimensions of culture, the generalizeability of the study was limited by a homogenous sample of American practitioners. This current study applied the instrument to measure Taiwanese public relations practitioners' work-related values.

#### 4. Method

Surveys were distributed during November and December of 1999. Recognizing that surveys in Asia often suffer from a low response rate, the researchers followed Kim and Hon's suggestion that key informants should personally manage survey distribution and collection [43]. In Taiwan, questionnaire distribution and data collection was performed by two Taiwanese public relations practitioners "because of the typically low response rate of mail surveys" [44]. The questionnaires were faxed to each respondent's office. To increase response rate, two research workers made follow-up phone calls to respondents. Fifty questionnaires were distributed. The total number of questionnaires collected was 41 (82% response rate). Surveys were checked for completion and all but one were deemed valid responses ( $n = 40$ ).

The snowball sample was obtained from four types of organizations. First, 23 respondents represented seven different Taiwanese-owned public relations agencies. Second, three re-

spondents worked for two different international public relations agencies. Third, 13 respondents were from six different for-profit organizations. Finally, one participant was from the public relations department of a private university. The goal of this diversified sample is to understand how several different types of organizations in Taiwan practice public relations.

Translation is one of the most important factors in international research. A self-administrated English questionnaire, based on Grunig's four models of public relations and Hofstede's cultural variables, was translated into Chinese. To insure accuracy, the Chinese questionnaire was back-translated into English by a Taiwanese graduate student not involved in the study. Following Brislin's rules for back-translation, the researchers compared the two questionnaires [45]. After minor adjustments, the meanings of the two questionnaires matched and met Brislin's standard for back-translation.

The questionnaire had three parts, including (1) close-ended quantitative questions, (2) open-ended qualitative questions, and (3) demographic information. There were 48 questions in the quantitative part. The first 16 questions represented Grunig's four public relations models and were adopted from Huang's thesis [46]. Second, the researchers operationalized eight questions that represented the personal influence model and the cultural interpreter model. Finally, 24 questions, which measured the practitioners' cultural values, were adopted from Hofstede [47] and Vasquez and Taylor [48]. These questions measured six sets of cultural values, including power distance, uncertainty avoidance, femininity, masculinity, individualism, and collectivism. Seven-point Likert-type scales measured all of the 48 items. SPSS for windows was used for the statistical analysis and a significance level of 0.05 was set.

## **5. Results**

The data for this study are based on 40 respondents at four different types of organizations. Twenty-nine respondents were female and 11 were male. Over 72% of the respondents had completed a bachelor's degree while 20% had completed a master's degree. Eighty-five percentage of the respondents had majored in communication at some point in their higher education. Some respondents had previous careers in journalism, marketing, and advertising before gaining positions in public relations. The length of time spent practicing public relations ranged from one to 10 years. Organizational titles of respondents included account executive, manager, general manager, and project manager.

Data examined the existence of Grunig's four models of public relations. Cronbach's alphas were also calculated to establish the reliability of the models in this international setting. Table 1 shows the mean scores on the four models of public relations from this sample. In this study, the press agency model ( $M = 5.23$ ) is the most favored. The reliability score for the press agency index was 0.8258. The public information model ( $M = 4.29$ ) scored very low and its reliability score was 0.5719. The two-way asymmetrical model ( $M = 4.82$ ) is used moderately and the reliability score for this model was 0.5295. Finally, the two-way symmetrical model ( $M = 5.09$ ) is often used and the reliability score for this model was 0.6810. Both of the two-way models appear accepted as useful. Although some of the



Table 1  
Means for Grunig's public relations models in Taiwan

Items	M
Press agency model	
1. The main purpose of my organization/agency's public relations is to get publicity about my organization/client.	5.95
2. In public relations we mostly attempt to get favorable publicity into the media and to keep unfavorable publicity out.	5.50
3. We determine how successful a program is from the number of people who attend an event or use our products and services.	4.63
4. In my organization/agency, public relations and publicity mean essentially the same thing.	4.83
Total	5.23
Public information model	
1. In public relations, nearly everyone is so busy writing news stories or producing publications that there is no time to do research.	4.40
2. In public relations, we disseminate accurate information but do not volunteer unfavorable information.	5.68
3. Keeping a clipping file is about the only way we have to determine the success of a program.	3.28
4. In my organization/agency, public relations is more of a neutral disseminator of information than an advocate for the organization or mediator between management and publics.	3.80
Total	4.29
Two-way asymmetrical model	
1. After completing a public relations program, we do research to determine how effective the program has been in changing people's attitudes.	5.18
2. In public relations, our broad goal is to persuade publics to behave as the organization wants them to behave.	5.05
3. Before starting a public relations program, we look at attitude surveys to make sure we describe the organization in ways our publics would be most likely to accept.	4.27
4. Before beginning a program, we do research to determine public attitudes toward the organization and how they might change.	4.78
Total	4.82
Two-way symmetrical model	
1. The purpose of public relations is to develop mutual understanding between the management of the organization and publics the organization affects.	5.30
2. Before starting a program, we do surveys or informal research to find out how much management and our publics understand each other.	4.90
3. The purpose of public relations is to change the attitudes and behavior of management as much as it is to change the attitudes and behavior of publics.	4.73
4. Our organization/agency believes public relations should provide mediation for the organization, to help management and publics negotiate conflicts.	5.43
Total	5.09

N = 40, Scale = 1–7

Table 2

Means for personal influence and cultural interpreter models in Taiwan

Items	M
Personal influence model	
1. Having good interpersonal relationships with other employees in my organization is very important for PR practitioners.	6.05
2. Having good interpersonal relationships with people outside my organization is very important for PR practitioners.	6.17
3. Socializing is one of the most important activities for a PR practitioner.	3.85
4. The best way to being successful at PR is to provide benefits (dinner, gifts) to gain influence with personal contacts.	3.23
Total	4.83
Cultural interpreter model	
1. Understanding a second language is important for a PR practitioner.	6.00
2. Providing services to international clients is an important part of my job.	3.85
3. Helping my international clients understand the Taiwanese business environment is important.	4.97
4. Introducing my international clients to important people in Taiwan is important.	4.40
Total	4.81

N = 40, Scale = 1–7

reliability scores may appear low, Kim and Hon noted that in their study of Korean practitioners, several of the models also showed lower reliability than desired [49].

Table 2 provides the operationalizations that were created to explore the two newest models of public relations. The reliability score for the personal influence model was 0.6649 and the respondents reported a mean of 4.83. The cultural interpreter model showed a reliability score of 0.7836 and the respondents reported a mean of 4.81.

The final quantitative assessment examined the work-related cultural dimensions experienced by public relations practitioners in their organizations. Table 3 reports the data on the Hofstede measures. All dimensions of culture appear to be reliable with the exception of the uncertainty avoidance scale. Reliability scores (Cronbach's alpha) were as follows: Power distance 0.58, Uncertainty Avoidance 0.39, Femininity 0.92, Masculinity 0.82, Individualism 0.75 and Collectivism 0.84. According to Fernandez, Carlson, Stepina, and Nicholson, Hofstede's original measurement of uncertainty avoidance had validity problems because items in this dimension measured three different constructs [50].

The practitioners in this study appear to be exactly on the middle of the power distance index ( $M = 4.05$ ), a little higher than average on uncertainty avoidance ( $M = 4.58$ ), very high on femininity ( $M = 6.08$ ) and masculinity ( $M = 6.02$ ), and moderately high on individualism ( $M = 5.70$ ) and collectivism ( $M = 5.42$ ).

To explore the relationship between the six models of public relations and the dimensions of culture, a correlation analysis was conducted. The data in Table 4 show the Pearson's correlations between the six models of public relations and Hofstede's dimensions of culture. The correlations between culture and public relations models are provided below.

Table 3  
Means for Hofstede's cultural dimensions

Items	M
<b>Power distance</b>	
1. In this organization, subordinates are afraid to express disagreement with their superior.	3.23
2. My supervisor usually makes decisions on his/her own and then expects the decisions to be carried out loyally and without raising difficulties	4.25
3. My supervisor usually makes decisions on his/her own but before going ahead explains the reasons for the decisions and answers any questions	4.13
4. I prefer to work for any type of supervisor expect for one who asks me for advice and then announces his/her decision and expects me to loyally implement the decision whether or not it was in accordance with the advice I gave.	4.57
Total	4.05
<b>Uncertainty avoidance</b>	
1. It is very important to follow organizational rules even if I think it is in the organization's best interests if I break the rules.	4.40
2. It is important for me to work in a well-designed job situation where the responsibilities and requirements are clear.	5.28
3. It is very important for me to have long term security of employment.	5.37
4. It is very important for me to have little tension and stress on the job.	3.27
Total	4.58
<b>Femininity</b>	
1. Having a good working relationship with my direct supervisor.	6.03
2. Working with people who cooperate well with one another is important.	6.07
3. Working in a friendly atmosphere is important.	6.15
4. Having good physical working conditions is important.	6.05
Total	6.08
<b>Masculinity</b>	
1. Having training opportunities to improve or learn new skills is important.	6.25
2. Working in a modern, up-to-date company is important.	6.00
3. Having an opportunity for high earning is important.	5.83
4. Having an opportunity for advancement to higher level jobs is important.	6.00
Total	6.02
<b>Individualism</b>	
1. Having sufficient time left for my personal or family is important.	5.75
2. Having challenging tasks to do, from which I can get a personal sense of accomplishment is important.	6.03
3. Fully use my skills and abilities on the job is important.	6.13
4. Working in a large and prestigious organization is important.	4.88
Total	5.70
<b>Collectivism</b>	
1. Making a real contribution to the success of my organization is important.	5.70
2. Serving my country is important.	5.05
3. Working in a smaller, but desirable organization is important.	5.32
4. Having an opportunity for helping other people is important.	5.60
Total	5.42

N = 40, Scale = 1–7

Table 4

Correlations between public relations models and cultural values

	Press Agentry	Public Information	Two-Way Asymmetrical	Two-Way Symmetrical	Personal Influence	Cultural Interpreter
Power	—	—	—	—	—	—
Distance						
Uncertainty	.418**	.459**	—	—	—	—
Avoidance						
Femininity	.397**	—	.484**	.484**	.313**	—
Masculinity	.555**	.345*	.434**	.463**	.406**	—
Individualism	.434**	—	—	.483**	.382*	—
Collectivism	—	—	—	.365*	—	.325**

\*  $p < .05$ ;\*\*  $p < .01$ ,  $n = 40$ .

### 5.1. Press agentry

The press agentry model describes public relations actions whereby the practitioner disseminates information but that information may not be truthful. Four of Hofstede's cultural dimensions correlated with the press agentry model of public relations: uncertainty avoidance, femininity, masculinity, and individualism. Uncertainty avoidance correlated with the press agentry model,  $r=0.418$ , ( $p < .001$ ). Taiwan, according to the Hofstede study, falls slightly higher than the mean on the uncertainty avoidance index (UA). In Hofstede's study, the mean of the 40 nations was 64, while Taiwan scored a mean of 69. Respondents for this survey instrument scored around the middle of the UA ( $M = 4.58$ ). Femininity,  $r=0.397$ , ( $p < .05$ ) and masculinity  $r=0.555$ , ( $p < .01$ ) also correlated with the press agentry model. Taiwan falls on the average to low end of the masculinity index with a national score of 45, while the overall mean for all nations was 51. Respondents for this survey scored on the high end of the masculinity index ( $M = 6.02$ ) as well as on the high end of femininity ( $M = 6.08$ ).

### 5.2. Public information

The public information model shows that practitioners rely on truthful one-way communication to inform publics about organizational positions. Two of Hofstede's cultural dimensions correlated significantly with the public information model of public relations: uncertainty avoidance and masculinity. The uncertainty avoidance correlation was,  $r=0.459$ , ( $p < .001$ ). Masculinity also correlated significantly with the public information model of public relations,  $r=0.345$ , ( $p < .05$ ).

### 5.3. Two-way asymmetrical

The two-way asymmetrical model of public relations describes organizational practices that encourage two-way communication with publics. However, these organizations employ

this communication to better tailor messages and the end result can be an imbalanced relationship between the organization and the public. Two dimensions of culture, femininity,  $r=0.484$ , ( $p < .01$ ) and masculinity,  $r=0.434$ , ( $p < .01$ ), correlated significantly with the two-way asymmetrical model of public relations.

#### 5.4. *Two-way symmetrical*

The two-way symmetrical model of public relations seeks mutual understanding between the organization and its publics. It is considered by J. Grunig to be the most ethical model because “excellent public relations can help the rest of the organization be excellent” [51]. Four cultural dimensions correlated with this particular model: collectivism ( $r=0.365$ ,  $p < .05$ ), individualism ( $r=0.483$ ,  $p < .01$ ), masculinity ( $r = .463$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and femininity ( $r=0.484$ ,  $p < .01$ ). It was expected that Taiwan would fall on the very low end of the individualism scale but respondents in this study scored toward the moderately high end of the index ( $M= 5.70$ ).

#### 5.5. *Personal influence and cultural interpreter*

Sriramesh has argued that a personal influence model of public relations exists in some nations where practitioners cultivate relationships with journalists and government officials to achieve organizational goals [52]. Three dimensions of culture correlated with cultural interpreter model: femininity ( $r = 0.313$ ,  $p < .05$ ), masculinity ( $r = 0.406$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and individualism ( $r= 0.382$ ,  $p<. 01$ ). Lyra argued that a cultural interpreter model of public relations exists where practitioners act as mediators between their own culture and their international clients [53]. Only the collectivism dimension ( $r = 0.325$ ,  $p < .05$ ) correlated with this new dimension. Taiwan has traditionally been considered a highly collectivist culture yet respondents in this study scored a mean of 5.42 on the collectivism dimension.

## 6. Discussion

Hofstede’s research showed Taiwan to be a highly collectivist, medium high power distance and uncertainty avoidance, and medium low masculinity culture [54]. The data from Hofstede’s study are now over 25 years old and social contexts in Taiwan have changed. Fernandez, Carlson, Stepina, and Nicholson updated Hofstede’s dimensions of culture because significant changes in values occur as “external environmental factors shape a society” [55]. Although Taiwan was not one of the nine countries included in their updated research, the Fernandez et al. study proves that societal changes such as economic growth, education, and democracy may affect cultural dimensions. These current data show these Taiwanese practitioners to be moderately high on individualism and collectivism, in the middle of the power distance index, a little higher than average on uncertainty avoidance, and very high on femininity and masculinity. These findings, along with the scores on the six models of public relations, identify a cultural approach to public relations in Taiwan.

### *6.1. Emergent practices in Taiwan*

One goal of this study was to operationalize and measure the two newest models of public relations. The quantitative measures for the personal influence and cultural interpreter models show reliability and further research, both qualitative and quantitative, will no doubt lead to greater refinement of the operationalizations. Furthermore, results of this study show two important developments for international public relations practice and scholarship—there is a prevalence of the press agency model in conjunction with a recognition of the value of two-way communication.

Huang's 1990 data identified the press agency model as the third most favored model of public relations. In her data, the press agency model followed very closely to the two-way models in frequency. In this current study, press agency emerged as the most favored model. However, this level of preference is very small because the mean differences between the most favored—press agency—and the second and third most popular models is only 7.8%. These current data support Sriramesh, Kim, and Takasaki's meta-analysis that identified press agency as the most frequently practiced model in Asian countries [56]. In addition, the small mean differences among the top three models demonstrated that Taiwanese public relations practitioners use what Murphy identified as a "mixed motive" approach to communicate with their publics [57].

When reviewing practitioner responses to the two newer models of public relations—personal influence and cultural interpreter—we find that relationship-building is very important. Table 3 shows the high mean scores on the questions about personal relationships inside and outside of the organization. These data show that the Taiwanese practitioners in this study recognize that effective public relations is as much about interpersonal communication as it is about media relations. The emergent practices in Taiwan show that although gaining publicity for clients is very important to short-term goals, the practitioners also recognize that long-term relationships—both with colleagues and publics—is also an imperative.

A second emergent practice can be found in a closer look at the score on the public information model, especially the question about disseminating accurate information but not volunteering unfavorable information. This suggests that protecting the client is very important for these practitioners. The questions on Table 2 under the public information model support the popular Chinese adage, "tell other people the good news, don't tell them the bad news" in daily life. For the practitioners in this study, there may be an inherent tension between providing counsel for the organization that helps upper management to negotiate conflicts with publics with a desire to focus on the positive information about their clients. This situation is not unique to Taiwanese public relations. Kim and Hon reported a similar finding that Korean practitioners are reluctant to tell negative information about their clients [58]. Thus, these consistent findings may reflect the importance of saving-face and group membership that is an implicit and explicit value in Taiwanese, and other Asian cultures.

### *6.2. Group membership as the means to self-actualization*

Three parts of the data analysis provide insight into the importance of group membership as a means to self-actualization for these Taiwanese practitioners. First, the high correlation



of the masculinity dimension with five of the models of public relations points to a strong desire for personal, economic, and professional development. Chen and Culbertson reported that practitioners in China feel constrained by their roles in “guest relations” [59]. The data here suggest a major difference between mainland practitioners and those in Taiwan. The Taiwanese practitioners in this study fully expect to achieve many personal and professional goals through their careers in public relations. The mean score on the question about opportunities for training ( $M = 6.25$ ) is one of the highest in the study. While the respondents clearly want to achieve personal goals; they also want to have this achievement situated within a work climate that is supportive and rewarding. Thus, the high femininity dimension score taps into another key dimension of the work-related attitudes—relationships. Respondents in this study not only want to work in a place that can enhance their professional development but also want a workplace that offers a friendly and cooperative environment. There appears to be a blending of personal goals, personal relationships and organizational goals.

Second, the correlations between collectivism, the two-way symmetrical model, and the cultural interpreter model also offer insight into the work-related values of these public relations practitioners. Collectivism points to the belief that the needs of a group—whether an organization, community, or group of friends—is more valued than the needs of an individual. When the organization succeeds, then its members succeed. Taiwan is a highly collectivist society. Vasquez and Taylor posited that collectivism would be related to the two-way symmetrical model of public relations because the characteristics of collectivism include cooperation, helping others, and contributing to the success of the organization [60]. Successful organizations require that both individuals and organizational units contribute to organizational effectiveness and productivity. A closer look at the mean scores on the collectivism index, especially the question about helping others, shows that practitioners appear to embrace what Broom, Casey and Ritchey [61] and Ledingham and Bruning [62] have identified as a new trend in public relations—relationship management. Indeed, scholars interested in pursuing the relational approach to public relations may learn more about this area by looking at Taiwanese public relations.

Thirdly, power distance does not seem to be an influential factor in the work relationships of these respondents. The practitioners in this study scored exactly on the mean ( $m = 4.05$ ) of the power distance index showing neither a high nor low level of power distance influence in their workplace. Moreover, this study found that none of the six models of public relations correlated with the power distance index. This low score and lack of correlation offers two important insights into the work experiences of these Taiwanese practitioners. First, over 57% of the practitioners in this study work in public relations agencies. Agency size in Taiwan, especially in the capital city of Taipei, varies. Most public relations professionals work as a team composed of two to three members. In this teamwork, every member should know how to collect information, pitch proposals to clients, generate creative ideas, conduct programs, and evaluate the results of the public relations activities. This cross tasking may account for the low power distance score as well as the absence of the power distance dimension from the correlations with Grunig’s models. In the United States, a low power distance nation, Vasquez and Taylor found that power distance correlated with the one-way models of public relations [63]. According to this 1999 data, Taiwanese public relations

practitioners are similarly not heavily influenced by power distance. Public relations is not limited or stifled by high power distance between public relations professionals and the managers that they serve. It appears that practitioners follow assumptions of the press agency model during certain times and that aspects of the two-way models are chosen during other times. The mixed motive approach employed by these practitioners shows that they make conscious decisions about which type of communication is needed to address different situations.

## **7. Conclusion**

In Taiwan, there appears to be a blending of relationship-oriented and organization-centered public relations models. As evidence of the relational approach to public relations, shown through personal influence and cultural interpreter models, Taiwanese practitioners seek good interpersonal relationships with people inside and outside of their organization. They recognize the importance of understanding a second language and helping clients to understand the Taiwanese business environment. As evidence of the traditional organization-centric models, respondents recognize the value of favorable publicity for their client organization, value accuracy in communication with publics, implement research to evaluate public relations effectiveness, and understand that public relations can mediate relationships between the organization and publics. Societal factors such as the geo-political situation, economic and media context, and the cultural dimensions make this unique blend of Taiwanese public relations values and practices possible.

The significance of this study is that it describes and measures a cultural approach to public relations development in Taiwan. It offers a snapshot of the public relations practices and values of a group of practitioners in Taiwan. This study of public relations development in Taiwan informs our understanding of international public relations and adds new insight into the impact of culture on practice. First, we know that the field of public relations in Taiwan is committed to serving its clients, and that it seeks to focus on positive information about the client. Second, public relations practitioners understand the value of two-way communication and select it as the second most favored model. Third, practitioners view public relations as a profession that supports their goal of success and personal achievement. Fourth, practitioners tie their personal success to the success of their client or organization. Finally, higher education, especially a communication-centered education, is valued as a background for the practice.

There are, of course, limitations to the generalizeability of these results and it has been the researchers' intention not to overly generalize the results of this study. While the total number of responses ( $n = 40$ ), gathered through a snowball sample, is double that of Huang's (1990) thesis, and this research studied four types of organizations rather than one organization, additional research is needed to fully articulate the Taiwanese practice of public relations. A larger, more random sample will no doubt build on this study and increase the reliability of these findings. The data collection focused on the Taipei region—the economic and political center of the island. Further studies should survey the regions in the middle and south of the island to better define broader Taiwanese public relations. In

addition, the reliability rating for the some of the models was lower than desired and the question about stressful working conditions was dropped from the uncertainty avoidance scale. Future replication of the survey should refine these questions. Finally, research by Bond and Hofstede has articulated a Confucian Dynamism dimension [64]. This cultural variable measures thrift, perseverance, and the desire for orderly relationships with others. Although not tested here, it may provide additional insight into the practice of public relations in Taiwan and further illuminate the personal influence and cultural interpreter models of public relations.

However, given these minor limitations, this study is useful to both practitioners and scholars alike. Practitioners and international organizations can better prepare for business in Taiwan. They can use the information about Taiwanese societal factors and culture to ensure effective and culturally sensitive communication efforts. Scholars can also gain insight from this study. The use of an instrument that simultaneously measures culture and the models of public relations offers insight into the cultural and societal dynamics that influence public relations communication. Public relations in Taiwan employs highly educated people who recognize the importance of communication with publics. The trends toward democratization and continued economic growth offer excellent opportunities for public relations to develop as a respected profession and key relationship-building function in Taiwan.

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**Ming-Yi Wu** is a doctoral candidate.

**Maureen Taylor** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication at Rutgers University.

**Mong-Ju Chen** is a public relations practitioner in Taiwan.

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