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Chinese try 'Tokyo Rose' style propaganda attacks on Taiwan

PEKING (AP) — The lilting strains of sentimental Chinese music are followed by a soft, resonant female voice which coos: "Dear Taiwan compatriots, I just want to be your friend."

It is the melodious, beckoning "Voice of the Motherland" — 42-year-old Xu Man, and her program, "Friends on the Air," part of an intensified radio propaganda campaign directed at Taiwan.

Eight times a day, Xu's 15-minute program is beamed over 11 frequencies across the 100-mile Taiwan Straits. Neither strident nor dogmatic, she is the embodiment of peaceful reunification, the voice of maternal persuasion.

Her message is soft-sell, in contrast to the hostile, self-righteous propaganda of the Cultural Revolution era when announcers read People's Daily editorials and lectured the Taiwanese about the glories of communism. Absent are the threats to "liberate" Taiwan where many Chinese fled after the Communist takeover in 1949.

"We hear she is really big on Taiwan," one of her colleagues at Central Broadcasting boasts.

"We want to quietly dispel the Koumintang (Nationalist Chinese) rumors and set the record straight," Xu said in a

recent interview. Taiwanese "newspapers are still printing stories that we need a permit to leave our houses and each person has only one inch of cloth rationed each month."

One Taiwan listener wrote Xu to ask: "After the reunification of Taiwan with the mainland, would we also need cooking oil and cotton coupons to live on Taiwan?" Her answer: Of course not. Taiwan can maintain its present lifestyle.

Taiwan authorities continue to jam the mainland broadcasts, without complete success, and Xu's listeners run the risk of penalties that could be as severe as a prison term.

Xu, the mother of three, has short-cropped hair, deep dimples and a broad smile. She wears baggy, nondescript trousers and a gray jacket with a brightly colored shirt.

Every day she courts 18 million Chinese on Taiwan, appealing to the profit instincts of Taiwan businessmen and plucking at the heartstrings of those who long to see loved ones on the mainland.

Her refrain is China's nine-point plan for peaceful reunification, which claims Taiwan may retain capitalism, its armed forces, and its less-restricted way of life.

Politics is interwoven with Chinese fairy tales about the moon festival, advice on treating stomach cancer with herbal medicine, and interviews with former Nationalist Chinese officers who returned to the mainland.

Tourism is a major theme, artfully wrapped around nationalism.

Xu reminds her listeners that all Chinese should see the grandeur of the Motherland, weaving visions of standing at the Great Wall, climbing the misted Taishan mountain, floating down the gorges of the Yangtze River.

She answers letters from

listeners on the air. Her program has received about 400 letters since it began in January 1981, and she directs her listeners to write to a box number at any Chinese diplomatic post.

There are no direct mail links between Taiwan and China at this time. In answer to their letters she tells Taiwan businessmen they will receive special advantages and discreet treatment.

Xu also helps locate lost relatives and makes it possible for families to correspond by mail. Hundreds of thousands of Chinese were separated after the 1949 Communist victory. She once received a letter from Taiwan listing 30 lost relatives and dispatched two reporters to find them. They located 28 — two had died — and informed the Taiwan listener by mail.

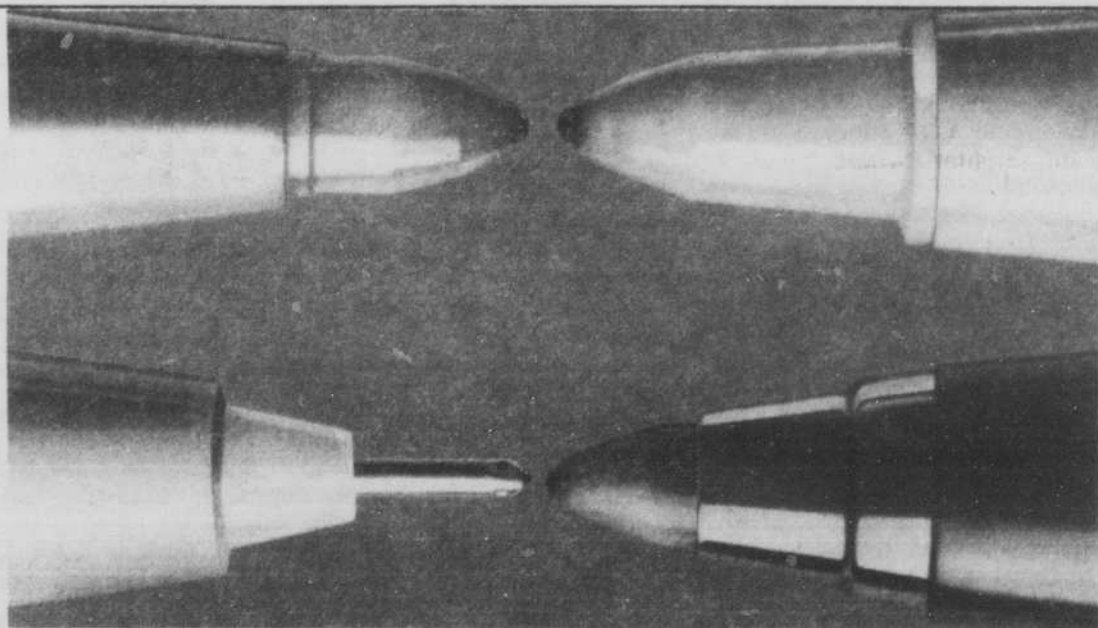
These services are a small chapter in the struggle between China and Taiwan for the hearts and minds of each other's citizens.

After a defecting Chinese air force pilot arrived in Taiwan on Oct. 31, Taiwan newspapers printed for the first time a picture of Xu's Taiwanese counterpart, known as "the rose," whose broadcasts are credited with persuading seven Chinese pilots to defect to Taiwan.

The pilot read a statement on the radio saying his decision to defect had been influenced by Radio Taiwan broadcasts.

China has in turn increased the resources committed to radio propaganda. The message: Life is good and getting better, please come home.

On Oct. 1 — National Day — China stepped up its daily Taiwan broadcast from 21 hours to nearly 38 hours over various frequencies, with 24 announcers proclaiming the good news about higher living standards on the mainland.



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