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Democratic Progressive Party, Taiwan

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## China Influence Tracker (IV)

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*February 14th, 2025*

In collaboration with the [DPP China Affairs Department](#), the latest DPP U.S. Mission report provides key updates on the evolving cross-strait situation, focusing on four main topics: (1) China's maritime threat escalation, including undersea cable disruptions and flag-of-convenience fleet infiltration; (2) China's expanding influence and infiltration in Taiwan; (3) the CCP's new identity card policy and its parallels with Russia's "compatriots" strategy; and (4) the political tug-of-war over the resumption of cross-strait group tours. These developments illustrate the increasing complexity of U.S.-China-Taiwan relations and the CCP's persistent efforts to undermine Taiwan's democracy. Enclosed are the key developments to date:

### **China's Maritime Threat Escalates: From Undersea Cable Disruptions to Chinese Flag-of-Convenience Fleet Infiltration and Military Expansion**

■ **Timeline: Suspected Chinese Flag-of-Convenience Vessel Involvement in Undersea Cable Damage Near Yehliu since January 2025**

Since January 3, an undersea cable northeast of Yehliu, Taiwan, was suspected to have been damaged by the Cameroonian-flagged vessel "SHUNXIN39," which is believed to be a Chinese flag-of-convenience

vessel. The ship's abnormal navigation patterns raised concerns that China may be employing asymmetric tactics to threaten Taiwan's critical infrastructure. On January 6, Taiwan's Coast Guard Administration (CGA) referenced similar incidents in the Baltic Sea last year, noting that while the vessel's true intent remained unclear, the possibility of a Chinese gray-zone operation could not be ruled out.

Further investigation on January 7 revealed that while "SHUNXIN39" was registered under the Cameroonian flag, all crew members were Chinese nationals, and the shipowner was based in Hong Kong. This fueled suspicions of Chinese government involvement. Taiwan's government has handed the case over to the Keelung District Prosecutors' Office and sought assistance from South Korea, as the vessel was suspected to be heading toward Busan. However, South Korean authorities had not received any notification of its arrival, further increasing doubts about the vessel's movements.

Beijing denied any involvement, with shipowner Guo Wenjie dismissing the allegations on January 8, stating there was no evidence linking the ship to the incident. Meanwhile, China's Taiwan Affairs Office downplayed the event as a common maritime accident and accused Taiwan's government of deliberately fueling anti-China sentiment. In response, Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) refuted these claims, citing the repeated involvement of Chinese flag-of-convenience vessels in similar incidents internationally, including in the Baltic Sea, where Sweden and Estonia had launched investigations into Chinese vessel-related undersea cable damage.

On January 12, Taiwan's Maritime Port Bureau confirmed that "Shunxing39" had entered and exited Keelung Port multiple times between September and December 2024, using dual AIS (Automatic Identification System) transponders—one while in Taiwan's waters and another after exiting, further raising suspicions. However, Taiwan's Coast Guard had neither conducted an onboard inspection nor detained the ship at the time, failing to notify the National Security Council before allowing its departure. This raised significant domestic concerns. On January 14, Taiwan's Ministry of Digital Affairs (MODA) forwarded relevant evidence to the Keelung District Prosecutors' Office for further investigation, assessing whether the case posed a national security threat.

## ■ Chinese Coast Guard Vessels Intensify Harassment Near Kinmen

On January 9, Chinese Coast Guard vessels intruded twice into Kinmen's waters, prompting Taiwan's CGA to dispatch four patrol ships to repel them. This marked the first such incursion since the New Year, with changes in navigation timing suggesting an evolving strategy to test Taiwan's response capabilities. The CGA reaffirmed its commitment to firm law enforcement and the protection of Taiwan's sovereignty.

On January 10, in response to the escalating maritime threat, Taiwan's Premier Cho Jung-tai presided over a ceremony for the delivery and commissioning of new Coast Guard vessels, including the 600-ton "Suao" patrol vessel (蘇澳艦). He emphasized that Taiwan's domestic shipbuilding program ("National Shipbuilding for National Defense," 國艦國造) underscores its commitment to safeguarding democracy and freedom.

## ■ China Constructs Specialized Amphibious Landing Barges

A Naval News report on January 12 revealed that China is constructing at least five specialized landing barges at its Longxue Island shipyard in Guangzhou, potentially designed for amphibious assault operations. These vessels could allow armored vehicles to drive directly onto roads from the ship, significantly improving landing efficiency and surprise attack capabilities.

Longxue Island's Guangzhou Shipyard International has played a key role in China's naval expansion, previously constructing unconventional naval platforms, including unmanned surface vessels and a light aircraft carrier. This suggests that China is continuing to enhance its maritime force projection capabilities.

Additionally, the Council on Gestrategy, a UK-based think tank, pointed out that China is developing a dual-use civilian-military fleet, with merchant ships that can be rapidly converted for military use. Among these are roll-on/roll-off (RO/RO) ferries—vessels designed for transporting military vehicles—incorporating military specifications during construction. This strategy enables China to mobilize a large civilian fleet for military operations when needed, further escalating regional tensions and posing a growing threat to Taiwan's defense.

## ■ Chinese Fishing Boats Continue Gray-Zone Tactics Near Kinmen

Chinese fishing boats have frequently operated near Kinmen's waters, suggesting a coordinated gray-zone tactic. On the night of January 13, a Chinese fishing vessel was spotted operating off the coast of Kinmen's Lieyu (Little Kinmen) near Nanshantou. Taiwanese patrol boats intercepted and repelled the vessel, which then fled toward Zhangzhou.

On January 14, Taiwan's Coast Guard Administration announced plans to deploy additional inshore multi-functional patrol boats in key areas, including Wusha Point in Kinmen, in coordination with larger vessels to strengthen maritime interception and law enforcement efforts.

## ■ Taiwan-Matsu Undersea Cables Severed

On January 22, the Taiwan-Matsu No. 2 and No. 3 undersea cables were completely severed, causing widespread power outages in Nangan, Matsu, highlighting the vulnerability of Taiwan's critical infrastructure.

On January 23, the Lienchiang District Prosecutors' Office convened an emergency meeting with the Coast Guard, Maritime and Port Bureau, Matsu Port Authority, and Chunghwa Telecom to discuss intelligence-sharing mechanisms, real-time evidence collection, and protocols for detaining suspicious vessels and personnel.

That same day, the Coast Guard conducted its first onboard inspection of the Mongolian-flagged vessel "BAO SHUN," owned by a Hong Kong-registered company. The vessel had been loitering at low speeds near Taiwan's waters for two months and was classified as a "moderate threat." After evading the Coast Guard's pursuit on the 7th, the "BAO SHUN" only traveled a short distance northeast and continued to linger erratically near Taiwan's 12-nautical-mile territorial line until the 12th. Taiwan's expanded inspection efforts mark a significant step toward countering shadow fleet infiltration.

## ■ International Response and Taiwan's Reinforced Monitoring Efforts

On January 18, the U.S. State Department issued a statement expressing concern over the growing number of undersea cable damage reports

worldwide, particularly in Taiwan and the Baltic Sea. The U.S. emphasized the need for greater transparency in investigations and urged all parties to fully cooperate.

In response to the increasing presence of Chinese flag-of-convenience vessels, Taiwan has blacklisted 52 Chinese-linked vessels and, based on data from the Tokyo Memorandum of Understanding (Tokyo MOU), is prioritizing ships flagged under Cameroon, Tanzania, Mongolia, Togo, and Sierra Leone due to their history of maritime violations. Among them, 15 ships have been designated as threats, including one "high-risk" vessel, four "moderate-risk" vessels, and ten "low-risk" vessels.

### ■ **Surge in Chinese Flag-of-Convenience Vessels and Unusual Maritime Activity**

In early February, Chinese flag-of-convenience vessels continued their abnormal activities in Taiwan's surrounding waters, prompting intensified surveillance by Taiwan's Coast Guard:

- **February 4–5:** The Mongolian-flagged "BAO SHUN" displayed unusual navigation patterns near southern Pingtung.
- **February 7:** The Sierra Leone-flagged "Chengshun" had been loitering off Taiwan's western coast for over a month before turning off its AIS (Automatic Identification System) transponder.
- **February 6:** The Iranian-flagged "HAMOUNA" left Shanghai for Zhuhai but deviated close to Taiwan's territorial waters, possibly approaching undersea cables.
- **February 9:** The Chinese-flagged "TAI HANG 9" entered the Fangshan undersea cable zone but, despite being repelled, remained in restricted waters.

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## **China's Expanding Influence and Infiltration in Taiwan**

### ■ **China's "Integration and Anti-Independence" Policy Push**

On January 12, 2025, China's state-run media outlet *China News Service* (CNS) published an article titled "Scholars' Outlook on Cross-Strait Relations in 2025: Firmly Promoting Integration and Opposing Independence." The article featured assessments from several Chinese

scholars specializing in Taiwan affairs, emphasizing Beijing's continued efforts to push for "integration" while "opposing Taiwan independence." It also outlined China's strategy of adopting a **"softer soft approach, harder hard approach (軟的更軟、硬的更硬)"** toward Taiwan.

Professor Lin Hong of Renmin University's School of International Relations stated that China would continue pursuing both economic integration with Taiwan and military pressure while actively opposing foreign intervention in the Taiwan Strait. Associate Professor Zhong Houtao from the same institution argued that Taiwan's political landscape under President Lai Ching-te had become a "one-man dominant" system, potentially affecting cross-strait stability. He also warned that if a Trump administration increased arms sales to Taiwan, it would embolden the DPP. Bao Chengke, Deputy Director of the Shanghai Institute for East Asian Studies, highlighted the upcoming 80th anniversary of Taiwan's "retrocession" as an opportunity for Beijing to reinforce historical narratives promoting cross-strait unity.

On January 13, the Fujian Provincial Government's annual work report emphasized measures to attract Taiwanese youth and first-time visitors (首來族) to the province, leveraging economic incentives to deepen cross-strait exchanges. Policies include facilitating education, healthcare, employment, housing, and social welfare services for Taiwanese residents in Fujian. The provincial government also announced plans to expand Taiwan student recruitment, streamline professional certification recognition, and encourage Taiwan's participation in local governance—all in line with China's broader effort to use Fujian as a model zone for cross-strait integration.

On January 15, the Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) of China's State Council held its first press conference of 2025, reviewing cross-strait relations in 2024 and outlining key priorities for the year ahead. The spokesperson reaffirmed Beijing's commitment to the "One China" principle and the 1992 Consensus, opposition to separatism and foreign interference, and promotion of cross-strait integration toward eventual unification. The TAO also stressed that future exchanges with Taiwanese political parties, groups, and representatives would be based on the "1992 Consensus" and aimed at **uniting the broader Taiwanese public to jointly contribute to the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation."** (團結廣大台灣民眾，共同致力於中華民族偉大復興). Furthermore, Beijing pledged to enhance trade

and economic policies for Taiwanese businesses, improve investment conditions, and implement measures under the “Fujian-Taiwan Integration and Development Model Zone” (福建兩岸融合發展示範區) to promote economic convergence.

## ■ Chinese Intelligence and Military Infiltration

### 1. Revealing the CCP Spy Network: The Fukang Alliance Party Case

In January 2025, Taiwan’s investigation authorities uncovered a major espionage case involving the pro-China “Fukang Alliance Party.” Its chairman, Chu Hung-yi, was accused of receiving Chinese funding to recruit retired military personnel, establish a covert paramilitary organization, and gather intelligence on Taiwan’s military installations and the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT). The Taichung District Prosecutor’s Office formally indicted him for violating the *National Security Act*.

Investigations revealed that since 2019, Chu had been in contact with China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) intelligence agencies and had received over NT\$2.67 million (approximately USD 81,000) through underground financial exchanges and WeChat transactions. He reportedly instructed his operatives to photograph and map strategic military sites such as the Alishan Radar Station and Hengchun Joint Training Base, later passing this information to China. Additionally, the party attempted to expand its political influence by covertly funding uninformed candidates in Taiwan’s legislative elections.

On January 8, Taiwan’s Ministry of the Interior (MOI) announced plans to petition the Constitutional Court to dissolve the Fukang Alliance Party. However, concerns have been raised that opposition parties in the legislature may block the legal process, potentially impacting further action. Defense Minister Koo Li-hsiung condemned the involvement of retired military personnel in Chinese espionage operations and emphasized that even after retirement, military officers must uphold loyalty to the nation.

On January 12, Taiwan’s National Security Bureau (NSB) reported a significant increase in espionage cases, highlighting China’s infiltration efforts targeting both active-duty and retired military personnel. Beijing

has been leveraging five key channels—organized crime groups, underground financial networks, religious temples, civil organizations, and community associations—to expand its influence. The NSB warned that China is using financial incentives and debt coercion to develop internal sleeper cells and has even attempted to interfere in Taiwan’s electoral processes.

On January 23, retired Army Major General Kao An-kuo was accused of receiving funds from China to act as an internal facilitator for a potential Chinese invasion of Taiwan. His case closely resembles that of the Fukang Alliance Party espionage case, in which the party’s leader was charged with recruiting ex-military personnel to gather intelligence for China. Deputy Minister of the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) noted that over 85% of Taiwan’s national security cases involve retired military and police personnel, underscoring the severity of China’s infiltration efforts. He further urged Taiwan’s judicial system to treat national security cases with the highest level of scrutiny.

## **2. The PLA’s Infiltration of Taiwan’s Military**

On February 6, Taiwan’s MAC issued a briefing, warning that China would likely leverage the 80th anniversary of Taiwan’s “retrocession” as a platform to reinforce its “**Two Sides belong to One China (兩岸同屬一中)**” narrative. The MAC cautioned that China is using historical narratives as a tool for political manipulation to influence perceptions of cross-strait relations.

On February 7, Taiwan’s Supreme Prosecutors Office released alarming statistics, revealing a sharp increase in military personnel implicated in criminal cases. In 2023, 4,549 cases involving military personnel were investigated, compared to just 867 cases in 2014 – an increase of more than 5.2 times over the past decade. Notably, 46.7% of these cases involved violations of national security laws. The report also found that China’s infiltration efforts had shifted from targeting high-ranking officers to focusing on lower-ranking soldiers and even civilians, indicating a broader and more sophisticated intelligence operation.

To counteract these threats, Taiwan’s Coast Guard Administration (CGA) announced on February 9 that it had established a national security intelligence-sharing mechanism in collaboration with the NSB. The CGA

also introduced a whistleblower reward system, offering up to NT\$5 million (approximately USD 153,000) for information leading to the successful prosecution of espionage cases.

In a recent case, a Coast Guard officer voluntarily reported intelligence on an ongoing espionage operation, leading to the arrest of a Chinese agent. The officer was awarded a substantial reward by the NSB, underscoring the importance of internal vigilance in safeguarding Taiwan's national security.

## ■ Chinese United Front Efforts Targeting Local Governments, Political Parties, and Grassroots Organizations

### 1. China's Political Influence Through Local Taiwanese Governments

From January 4 to 9, 2025, Taitung County Magistrate (KMT) Yao Ching-ling led a delegation to the PRC and met with China's TAO Director Song Tao in Beijing on January 4. However, this meeting was not pre-approved by Taiwan's regulatory authorities, raising concerns over procedural violations. Yao claimed the visit was purely for agricultural trade promotion, specifically to boost exports of sugar apples to China. However, Taiwan's MAC Deputy Minister Liang Wen-chieh stated on January 9 that the meeting was pre-arranged and not properly disclosed, prompting an official investigation. Yao later responded that she was simply seeking trade benefits for farmers and acknowledged that she would accept any government-imposed penalties. The visit has fueled concerns that China is leveraging economic incentives to deepen political influence over Taiwanese local governments.

On January 24, the Taipei District Prosecutors Office dropped charges against 21 village representatives from Taipei's Wenshan District who had been accused of accepting an all-expenses-paid trip to Shanghai sponsored by the Shanghai Taiwan Affairs Office. While the case was dismissed due to insufficient evidence, it has reignited concerns that China is utilizing grassroots networks to exert influence over Taiwanese society.

### 2. A KMT-CCP Echo Chamber

On January 17, former Legislative Yuan Speaker Wang Jin-pyng (KMT)

delivered a speech at the Taiwan International Strategic Study Society addressing the "One China Principle." He argued that the **"One China" issue is a reality upheld by Beijing, acknowledged by Washington, and accepted by more than 95% of the global community.** He noted that Taiwanese politicians have generally adopted an evasive attitude toward this issue, but it is not something the island can truly avoid. Wang likened the "1992 Consensus" to a blanket that once concealed the sensitive nature of the "One China" issue but has now been uncovered and even discarded. He argued that the disappearance of this political framework does not mean the question of whether the two sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to "One China" has vanished. To address the current cross-strait stalemate, Wang proposed a new concept: **"separate jurisdictions with shared sovereignty (兩岸治權互不隸屬，主權同而不分),"** suggesting that this approach could serve as a potential breakthrough for the ongoing impasse.

From January 21 to 23, TAO Director Song Tao visited Taiwanese businesses in Shenzhen and Xiamen as part of China's Lunar New Year outreach campaign. During his visit, he echoed Chinese President Xi Jinping's New Year message, portraying it as a demonstration of China's "deep affection for Taiwanese people" while urging them to uphold the One China Principle and the 1992 Consensus, reject Taiwan independence, and oppose external interference. Notably, Legislator Chen Yu-chen (KMT) accompanied Song during a Lunar New Year event in Xiamen, triggering political backlash in Taiwan. DPP caucus whip criticized Chen, stating that "she slashed Taiwan's budget and then went to China to seek favors." Chen defended her participation, claiming that cross-strait exchanges help reduce hostilities and that Taiwan's outlying islands should enhance engagement with China to promote stability. However, this episode has raised suspicions that China is actively leveraging economic exchanges to cultivate ties with opposition figures, further advancing its "One Country, Two Systems" agenda.

### **3. Chinese Efforts to Influence Taiwanese Business Communities**

On January 2, 2025, the family of a 19-year-old Taiwanese citizen surnamed Huang from Changhua received an official notice from the Shanxi Provincial Public Security Bureau, informing them that Huang had been detained since March 2024 for alleged fraud. Strikingly, China failed to notify Taiwan's authorities under existing cross-strait

agreements. Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) Secretary-General Lo Wen-jia confirmed the case on January 10 and strongly criticized China's unilateral suspension of notification mechanisms since April 2024, calling it a violation of agreements and a threat to the safety of Taiwanese citizens.

On February 3, SEF hosted the 2025 Taiwanese Business Spring Festival Event, but China's local Taiwan Affairs Offices attempted to block Taiwanese businesspeople from attending. In response, MAC Minister Chiu Chui-cheng announced that if such interference persists, Taiwan will begin closely reviewing visa applications from PRC officials involved in obstructing cross-strait exchanges. Following this announcement, the MAC denied a Shanghai delegation's application to visit Taiwan for the Taipei Lantern Festival.

On February 4, Xiamen Taiwanese Business Association Vice Chairman Yeh Yung-sung stirred controversy when he openly shouted "Those who are in charge should not make waves" at the Taiwanese president during a Lunar New Year banquet hosted by SEF. The outburst raised suspicions of Chinese orchestration. According to past reports by Taiwan's Institute for National Defense and Security Research (INDSR), the Xiamen Taiwanese Business Association has a history of aligning with Beijing's United Front efforts. In 2019, the association organized a "Return Home to Vote" campaign, which encouraged Taiwanese businesspeople in China to participate in Taiwan's elections, illustrating how China leverages Taiwanese business networks to interfere in Taiwan's political processes.

## ■ Chinese Influence Operations in Youth Exchanges

From February 10 to 14, 2025, Hsiao Hsu-tsen, CEO of the Ma Ying-jeou Foundation, led a delegation of 40 students to Beijing to participate in the "Taiwan Youth Beijing Ice & Snow Festival", an event organized by Beijing municipal authorities. According to Chinese state media, over 400 Taiwanese students have participated in this program to date. Chinese media outlet China Review News praised such exchanges as a way for Taiwanese youth to "understand the real China," dispel misconceptions, and foster trust. However, critics argue that such initiatives are part of China's broader United Front efforts to influence Taiwan's younger generation.

Additionally, Ma Ying-jeou's office director, Wang Kuang-tzu, also accompanied the delegation, raising speculation that the visit may have involved preliminary discussions for a potential "Ma-Xi meeting" in 2025, marking the 10th anniversary of the first Ma-Xi meeting in Singapore in 2015. Such a move could further advance Beijing's outreach to the KMT and strengthen cross-strait political engagements.

## ■ China's Diplomatic Isolation Campaign Against Taiwan

### 1. Expanding Beijing's "One China" Narrative in International Diplomacy

In February 2025, China continued its global diplomatic offensive to reinforce the "One China" principle, securing statements from multiple nations endorsing its position on Taiwan:

- **February 5:** Kyrgyzstan's President Sadyr Japarov met with Chinese President Xi Jinping and reaffirmed Bishkek's commitment to the One China principle, recognizing Taiwan as a "part of China."
- **February 6:** Xi Jinping met with Thailand's Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin and Brunei's Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, with both leaders issuing statements repeating the claim that "Taiwan is an inseparable part of China."

Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) issued a strong rebuttal, denouncing these statements as "false narratives" and reaffirming that "The Republic of China (Taiwan) is a sovereign and independent country that has never been under the rule of the People's Republic of China." The ministry further condemned Beijing for manipulating international discourse in an attempt to marginalize Taiwan diplomatically.

### 2. China's Pressure Campaign Against Taiwan's Diplomatic Presence in South Africa

Meanwhile, China has intensified its efforts to pressure South Africa into downgrading Taiwan's diplomatic status. In late January, the South African government issued a directive ordering Taiwan's representative office to vacate its premises in Pretoria by the end of March and rebrand itself as a mere "Trade Office." The opposition Democratic Alliance (DA) strongly opposed the move, with DA Federal Chairperson Ivan Meyer

facing retaliatory sanctions from China, barring him and his family from entering China, Hong Kong, and Macau. MOFA reiterated that Taiwan would not accept unilateral attempts to downgrade its international status and pledged to explore countermeasures in response to China's mounting diplomatic pressure.

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### **China's Identity Card Policy: Russia's "Compatriots" Playbook?**

China's use of identity card policies to influence Taiwan has sparked growing concerns. Recently, Taiwanese YouTuber Pa Chiung (八炯) released a documentary exposing China's "united front" tactics, revealing that the Chinese government offers subsidies and loan opportunities to entice Taiwanese citizens into applying for Chinese identity cards. According to intermediaries featured in the documentary, tens of thousands of Taiwanese nationals have already obtained such documents. In response, Taiwan's Investigation Bureau announced on January 8 that it had identified individuals holding Chinese identity cards or household registration documents. The bureau reported these findings to the Ministry of the Interior and vowed to expand investigations, urging citizens to remain vigilant against China's infiltration efforts and to protect Taiwan's democratic freedoms.

On January 9, Minister of the Interior Liu Shih-fang confirmed that fewer than ten individuals were suspected of holding Chinese identity cards and were given ten days to explain their status. If confirmed, their Taiwanese household registration would be revoked. Additionally, the ministry discovered five borough chiefs in northern Taiwan with Chinese citizenship, including four who had served for over a year and one elected through a by-election. Should these individuals be found to have failed to renounce their Chinese citizenship, they would be removed from office.

On January 15, China's TAO held a press conference, during which spokesman Chen Binhua stated that the mainland welcomes Taiwanese citizens who see opportunities in China's development and wish to settle there. Chen dismissed Taipei's warnings as "cognitive warfare" and "green terror" orchestrated by the DPP. In response, Taiwan's MAC reiterated that the "single household registration system" has been a cornerstone of cross-strait exchanges for over 20 years. The council condemned China's efforts to disrupt this system through policies like

Fujian Province's lenient registration requirements, which allow Taiwanese citizens to obtain Chinese identity cards without surrendering their Taiwanese documentation. The MAC pledged to continue investigations and revoke the household registration of violators. National security officials warned that increased numbers of Taiwanese citizens holding Chinese identity cards could facilitate Beijing's extraterritorial jurisdiction and pose a direct threat to Taiwan's security.

On January 23, MAC announced that three individuals identified in Ba Jiong's video had been confirmed as Chinese identity card holders. As a result, their Taiwanese household registrations were revoked. MAC warned that individuals stripped of their Taiwanese identity would be treated as Chinese nationals when entering Taiwan and would lose access to national health insurance benefits. The Immigration Agency reported receiving 20 additional complaints regarding individuals allegedly holding Chinese identity cards, all of which were under investigation.

The documentary also revealed the potential role of Chinese state media. A clip featuring the Straits Herald's editor-in-chief mentioned Taiwanese influencer Zhong Ming-xuan, raising suspicions of collaboration with Chinese propaganda efforts. Zhong responded on January 29 by accusing Ba Jiong of malicious editing and questioning the motives behind the documentary. On January 30, Zhong's use of the phrase "reduce contradictions" was noted as a term commonly found in official Chinese Communist Party rhetoric—intensifying doubts about Zhong's potential links to Chinese influence efforts.

On February 5, MOI Minister Liu Shih-fang revealed that authorities had interrogated over 30 individuals and identified three to five public relations firms allegedly facilitating Chinese identity card applications. Investigators were examining whether these companies had violated the "*Act Governing Relations Between the People of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area*" (兩岸人民關係條例). Speaking at a Lunar New Year press event on February 6, Liu noted that some travel agencies lured Taiwanese tourists into applying for Chinese identity cards after organized tours ended. The ministry is cooperating with the MAC and national security agencies to determine whether these activities were purely commercial or part of a broader united front effort.

The issue also intersected with a political controversy in Nantou County.

Former county councilor Shih Shueh-yen was stripped of her position for failing to renounce her Chinese citizenship within the legally required one-year window after her election. Shih sought legal relief, claiming discrimination against mainland spouses. Minister Liu dismissed these claims on February 7, explaining that the law grants mainland spouses the right to participate in Taiwanese elections once they obtain an identity card but mandates the renunciation of foreign citizenship within a year of assuming office. Liu also emphasized that China's citizenship renunciation procedures are straightforward and that the law is essential for ensuring officials' allegiance to Taiwan.

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### **Cross-Strait Tourism: A Political Tug-of-War Over Group Tour Resumption**

On January 13, 2024, China's State Council announced its "Measures to Boost Cultural, Tourism Consumption", which included plans to optimize entry tourism policies. Just two days later, on January 15, the spokesperson for China's TAO, Chen Binhua, accused Taiwan's DPP government of "shelving" the first list of Chinese tour groups. Chen criticized Taiwan's continued enforcement of its "orange travel advisory" and "group tour ban", claiming these measures obstructed cross-strait tourism.

Taiwan swiftly responded. On January 16, MAC Deputy Minister Liang Wen-chieh clarified that no formal applications had been received. He emphasized that the resumption of Chinese tourism must follow the official mechanism (小兩會) of the Taiwan Strait Tourism Association (TSTA) and the Cross-Strait Tourism Exchange Association (CSTEA) to guarantee tourism safety and regulatory consistency. Deputy Minister Shen You-chung reiterated that Taiwan remained open to tourism exchanges, provided they adhered to principles of equality and mutual respect. He warned against political manipulation under the guise of tourism.

On January 17, China's Ministry of Culture and Tourism announced the upcoming resumption of group tours from Fujian and Shanghai. That same day, the local government in Pingtan (平潭), Fujian Province, unveiled a policy titled "Seven Measures to Promote Cross-Strait Group Travel". These measures include 120 RMB per person subsidy for

overnight stays, incentives for Taiwanese youth to join educational tours, and Permission for Taiwanese tour guides to work in Pingtan.

Chinese state media quickly amplified the narrative. On January 17, Xinhua News Agency reported that Taiwan's tourism industry was "suffering" and urged the DPP government to lift the group tour ban. The China News Service claimed that the "ball is now in the DPP's court," portraying Beijing as extending goodwill and Taiwan as the obstructing party.

Simultaneously, the TAO asserted that the core issue was not the lack of dialogue through the "TSTA-CSTEA" but rather "political interference" from the DPP. Beijing announced its decision to avoid official negotiations, instead delegating local governments like Pingtan to handle cross-strait tourism initiatives. This approach was seen as a strategic attempt to circumvent Taiwan's national-level authority.

On January 23, MAC Minister Chiu Chui-cheng reiterated that tourism exchanges must be handled through the "TSTA-CSTEA" framework, which formal agreements had established. He stressed that "cross-strait tourism involves public authority and cannot be managed by private or local entities".

On January 24, the TAO confirmed that applications from Fujian and Shanghai for tourism inspection visits had been submitted. Beijing blamed Taiwan for obstructing the process. In response, MAC reiterated that tourism operations had been suspended for years due to changing cross-strait dynamics and that safe, stable tourism could only resume through professional negotiations between the TSTA and CSTEA. Also, while Fujian and Shanghai had submitted applications for tourism inspection groups, China had yet to officially open Taiwan as a group tour destination.

**The 2025 Taipei Lantern Festival** became a microcosm of cross-strait tensions. On January 20, Shanghai applied to send delegations to participate in the event. However, the application was submitted only 20 days before the event, significantly later than standard procedures. As a result, MAC approved only one of the three proposed delegations.

Taipei Mayor Chiang Wan-an (KMT) expressed disappointment, saying

that "the road to cross-strait relations should grow wider, not narrower" and urging more dialogue. In contrast, Taipei City Councilor Chien Shu-pei (DPP) criticized Shanghai's tardiness as evidence of disinterest in the Lantern Festival and accused Mayor Chiang of failing to address China's political motives.

On February 4, at the Taipei International Book Exhibition, MAC Minister Chiu again urged Beijing to return to the "TSTA-CSTEA" framework to avoid unnecessary political tensions.

On February 7, MAC formally rejected the Shanghai Department of Culture and Tourism's application to attend the Taipei Lantern Festival, citing the late submission and the tourism inspection nature of the visit, which required prior discussion via the "TSTA-CSTEA" framework. Transportation Minister Chen Shih-kai expressed frustration, saying Taiwan had "consistently reached out for discussions, only to be left on read by Beijing." Tourism Administration noted a significant tourism imbalance: 2.77 million Taiwanese visited China in 2023, compared to only 437,000 Chinese visitors to Taiwan. He highlighted the severe tourism disparity and called on China to resume talks through official channels.

That same day, the TAO fired back, accusing Taiwan of "double standards" by referencing the 2023 reopening of tourism to Kinmen and Matsu without "TSTA-CSTEA" involvement. MAC responded, explaining that the Kinmen-Matsu agreement was an exception grounded in historical agreements unrelated to broader cross-strait tourism. MAC further condemned China for "weaponizing tourism to achieve political objectives" and "evading official dialogue in favor of media narratives and local-level engagements".

The KMT seized upon the controversy to criticize the DPP government's handling of cross-strait tourism. On February 6, Changhua County Magistrate Wang Hui-mei called for the government to "align with public and industry expectations" by facilitating tourism exchanges. Nantou County Magistrate Hsu Shu-hua accused the government of "technical obstruction", while Hualien County Magistrate Hsu Chen-wei suggested a more flexible, case-by-case review process. The KMT echoed these sentiments, presenting the tourism engagement as proof of the validity of the '1992 Consensus' and the necessity of sustained cross-strait

dialogue.

Scholars largely view China's tourism resumption policy as a politically motivated tactic rather than a genuine economic initiative. Professor Wang Hung-jen of National Cheng Kung University observed that China was "leveraging tourism to break the political deadlock" but remained unwilling to resume official dialogue to avoid legitimizing Taiwan's government. Wu Chi-sheng from the Asia-Pacific Elite Exchange Association noted the meticulous sequencing of China's strategy: first raising the issue during the Twin Cities Forum, then officially announcing the policy through the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and finally operationalizing it through Pingtan's tourism incentives. He described this as a "calculated effort to undermine Taiwan's central authority by empowering local actors and industry stakeholders."

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