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## Cheng Li-Wun's Polarizing Trip: The Kuomintang Leadership's April Delegation Visit to China

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On March 30, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP, 中国共产党) publicly announced that it had [extended an invitation](#) to Cheng Li-wun (鄭麗文), the chairperson of Taiwan's opposition Kuomintang Party (KMT, 國民黨), to lead a KMT delegation visit to the "mainland" (大陆) [i.e., the territory of the People's Republic of China (PRC)]. The move had been widely rumored in Taiwan since Cheng's [election as KMT party chair](#) in a party primary held in October 2025—following which Cheng quickly distinguished herself as an outspoken and controversial figure, in terms of both opposition to the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民主進步黨) administration of Taiwan President Lai Ching-te (賴清德), and her [advocacy for friendlier ties with the PRC](#). The same day, the KMT chair's office [announced acceptance of the invitation](#)—employing language that, in some aspects, closely echoed CCP narrative language about Taiwan. [1]

The KMT central party office followed up with announced plans for a ["2026 Peace Trip" \(2026 和平之旅\)](#), to "proceed on the basis of goodwill, upright concepts, and peace" (本著善意、正念、和平出發). The trip would be led by Chairperson Cheng, accompanied by a large delegation of 14 total persons: including key members of the KMT such as Vice Chair and Secretary-General Lee Chien-lung (李乾龍), Vice Chair Chang Jung-kung (張榮恭), Vice Chair Hsiao Hsu-tsen (蕭旭岑), and Central Council Presidium Chairman Su Chi (蘇起). [Su Chi was the former Minister of the Mainland Affairs Council from 1999-2000, who coined the term ["1992 Consensus" \(九二共識\)](#).] [2]

Cheng Li-wun and the rest of the KMT delegation conducted their trip from April 7-12, with meetings and site visits in Shanghai, Nanjing, and Beijing—to include

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meetings with senior CCP officials including CCP Taiwan Affairs Office Director Song Tao (宋涛) and CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping (习近平). The trip has proven to be highly controversial in Taiwan, and even within Cheng's own Kuomintang Party—revealing cleavages between “deep blue” KMT members favoring closer ties with Beijing, and more moderate members uneasy with the KMT leadership's open cultivation of the PRC's Communist rulers. The trip also highlighted Beijing's approach to dealing with Taiwan: organized on a party-to-party as opposed to a state-to-state basis, the trip further illustrated the CCP's refusal to deal with Taiwan's allegedly “separatist” DPP-led presidential administration, while seeking to cultivate contacts with the KMT opposition party.



*Image: KMT Chair Cheng Li-wun (center, holding flowers) is greeted by government officials upon arrival in Shanghai. Song Tao (far right), director of the CCP Taiwan Affairs Office, was among the delegation greeting Cheng upon her arrival (April 8, 2026). (Image source: [CCTV](#))*

### **The Itinerary of the KMT Delegation Trip**

The “2026 Peace Trip” by the KMT delegation to China ran from April 7 to April 12, 2026. The itinerary is shown in the next page.

A few stops during the trip were particularly noteworthy for their political significance. On April 8, the delegation visited the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum in Nanjing to pay tribute to Sun Yat-sen (Sun Zhongshan, 孫中山), the founding father of the Republic of China and a [foundational figure in the history of the KMT](#). Such visits are customary for KMT leaders traveling to China: for example, former President [Ma Ying-jeou \(馬英九\) paid respects at Sun's mausoleum](#) during a [spring 2023 trip to China](#). However, Cheng distinguished herself from her predecessors through provocative remarks delivered after the ceremony. In her speech, Cheng [repeatedly referenced Japan](#), tracing the origins of current cross-strait divisions to the First Sino-Japanese War; and portraying Japan as both a colonial ruler of Taiwan, and a participant in imperialism and aggres-

sion during the Second World War. This framing aligns with [Beijing's recent rhetorical posture](#), which emphasizes Japan's alleged role in interfering in cross-strait affairs and stoking regional tensions.



*Image: The visiting KMT delegation paying respects at a memorial to KMT founder Sun Chung-shan (Sun Yat-sen) at the Bi Yun Temple (碧雲寺) in the western suburbs of Beijing (Apr. 11, 2026). (Image source: [KMT Official Website](#))*

On April 10, Cheng was granted an audience with CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping at Beijing's Great Hall of the People (人民大會堂). Xi Jinping was accompanied by [four senior figures](#) from the Chinese Communist Party: Wang Huning (王沪宁), chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC, 中国人民政治协商会议); Cai Qi, director of the CCP General Office (蔡奇); Song Tao, director of the Taiwan Affairs Office; and Zheng Shanjie (郑栅洁), chairman of the National Development and Reform Commission (中华人民共和国国家发展和改革委员会). The CPPCC serves as the PRC's top advisory body and plays a key role in [advancing ideological outreach](#) through united front work (統一戰線工作), with Wang Huning holding the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC, 中共中央政治局常务委员会)'s [united front policy portfolio](#). Cai Qi and Song Tao likewise hold influential positions within the party-state apparatus: both Wang and Cai are [members of the PBSC](#)—the CCP's highest decision-making body—ranking fourth and fifth, respectively, while Song [oversees Taiwan policy](#) through the CCP Taiwan Affairs Office.

Another highlight of the trip was a series of visits focused on technology and artificial intelligence. Reflecting [Beijing's broader effort](#) to present itself as a global technology powerhouse, the itinerary included site visits to major companies and research institutions. On April 8, the delegation [toured the headquarters of](#)

*The 6-day itinerary of the KMT delegation trip to China.*

Date	City	Significant Trips and Meetings on the Schedule
April 7	<a href="#">Shanghai</a> , Nanjing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delegation met by <a href="#">Song Tao, director of the CCP Taiwan Affairs Office, at the airport</a></li> </ul>
April 8	Nanjing, Shanghai	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Visit to Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum</a></li> <li><a href="#">Visit with Xin Changxing (信长星), the Party Secretary of Jiangsu Province</a></li> <li><a href="#">Visit to Meituan (美团)</a></li> <li>Visit with <a href="#">Chen Jining (陈吉宁), Party Secretary of Shanghai</a></li> <li><a href="#">Night cruise with Song Tao on the Huangpu River</a></li> </ul>
April 9	Shanghai	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Visit to Yangshan Port in Shanghai</a></li> <li>Meeting with Taiwanese businesspeople in China</li> </ul>
April 10	Beijing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting with CCP General Secretary <a href="#">Xi Jinping</a> at the Great Hall of the People</li> <li>Press conference with journalists</li> <li>Visit to Tsinghua University High School</li> </ul>
April 11	Beijing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Visit to Zhongguancun Exhibition Center (中關村科技園區)</li> <li><a href="#">Meeting with Yin Li (尹力), CCP Party Secretary of Beijing</a></li> <li>Visit to the <a href="#">Beijing Palace Museum</a></li> </ul>
April 12	Beijing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Visit to Xiaomi (小米) car factory</a></li> <li>Taiwan Affairs Office <a href="#">releases</a> 10 policy measures</li> </ul>

[Meituan](#), a top on-demand delivery company in China, where they experienced food delivery service conducted by AI-powered drones. This was followed by visits to [AI laboratories in Tsinghua University High School on April 10](#), [Zhongguancun Exhibition Center on April 11](#), and [Xiaomi car factories on April 12](#). According to Cheng, some of these visits—particularly those to Tsinghua University High School and Zhongguancun—[were made at her request](#), as she indicated that Taiwan should learn from China’s experience in adopting technological innovation and general artificial intelligence to overcome the “middle-income trap.” Cheng’s language [echoes a common narrative](#) promoted by Chinese state media regarding Chinese economic and technological advancement.

***Cheng Li-wun’s Narrative Messaging During the Trip***

While in Beijing, Cheng framed cross-Strait relations in stark terms, stating that “[the KMT is] [seeking an institutional solution to prevent war](#).” This language points towards the idea of a structured framework governing relations between Beijing and Taipei through party-to-party contacts. In addition, Cheng characterized cross-Strait relations as a “[choice between peace and war](#).” While Cheng didn’t talk about defense issues directly, this framing could be seen as indirectly commenting on the Taiwanese government’s [recent push to increase defense spending](#)—which Beijing has portrayed as contributing to heightened tensions.

Cheng further emphasized that the “[the Taiwan Strait](#)

won't be a focal point of potential conflict anymore, and won't be a chessboard of external interference.” With such statements, Cheng both aligned with Beijing's framing of cross-Strait issues as an internal issue, and obliquely referenced the [“abandoned chess piece” narrative](#) about US-Taiwan relations that is a staple of CCP propaganda. Cheng further invoked CCP talking points in a [speech in Shanghai](#) where she blamed Japan and the West as negative influences on cross-Strait peace. (It has long been a [CCP talking point](#) to look to Japanese aggression as one of the [central causes of China's “Century of Humiliation.”](#)) In addition, Cheng [has cast her own identity as Chinese](#), connecting to [Chinese messaging](#) that both sides of the Taiwan Strait are Chinese. These themes closely mirror CCP messaging—particularly in their emphasis on sovereignty issues, historical grievances, and framing Taiwan as a Chinese internal matter. [3]

Cheng's comments are also significant in the context of Taiwan's ongoing [debate over a proposed supplemental defense budget](#). With the framing of her visit to China as offering “institutional solutions,” presented in the context of a “peace versus war” dichotomy, Cheng appears to raise the question as to whether increased defense spending is needed at all. This feeds into domestic political controversies in Taiwan, where the supplemental defense budget has become a proxy debate for cross-Strait strategy, identity politics, and public trust in the different political parties.

### ***The PRC State Media Commentary Seeks to Leverage Cheng's Visit***

As would be expected for any such high-profile event, PRC state-controlled media has sought to leverage the trip to reassert the [CCP's narratives regarding Taiwan and “reunification” with the island](#). (Such was also the case with similar CCP-hosted trips to China undertaken by Ma Ying-jeou in [2023](#) and [2024](#).) Two themes invoked repeatedly in PRC media—as in a [speech presented by Xi at the April 10 meeting](#)—were the need to “uphold the 92 Consensus” (坚持“九二共识”) and “oppose Taiwan separatism” (反对“台独”). These are [themes that Cheng Li-wun herself has stressed](#) in public commentary in early 2026, marking a striking alignment between KMT and CCP messaging.

The CCP has also attempted to leverage Cheng's trip to reassert longstanding united front policies advocating for [closer economic ties between Taiwan and the PRC](#), as a preparatory step towards ultimate unification. On April 12, just as the KMT delegation trip concluded, the CCP Taiwan Affairs Office announced [“10 Political Mea-](#)

[sures for Advancing Cross-Strait Exchange and Cooperation” \(十项促进两岸交流合作的政策措施\)](#). These measures are as follows:

1. “Explore mechanisms for normalizing communication mechanisms between the CCP and KMT” (探索建立国共两党常态化沟通机制) “on the basis of upholding the ‘92 Consensus’, opposing ‘Taiwan independence’ [and] adhering to the concept of ‘both sides of the Strait are one family.’”
2. “Establish KMT-CCP Bidirectional Youth Exchange Mechanism Platforms” (建立国共两党青年双向交流机制化平台). [4]
3. “In areas of coastal Fujian where conditions allow, promote water, electricity, and gas connections with Kinmen and Matsu” (推动福建沿海地区在条件具备情况下同金门、马祖通水、通电、通气、通桥).
4. “Promote the comprehensive renewal of the normalization of cross-Strait passenger aviation direct flights” (推动全面恢复两岸空中客运直航正常化), with added direct flights between Taiwan and Urumqi, Xian, Harbin, Kunming, and Lanzhou; as well as shared use by Kinmen of the new airport at Xiamen.
5. “On the political foundation of upholding the ‘92 Consensus’ and opposing ‘Taiwan independence’, establish mechanisms for communication” (在坚持“九二共识”、反对“台独”政治基础上建立沟通机制), [and] “in accordance with inspection and quarantine standards, offer benefits to Taiwan farmers and fishermen in introducing their products into the mainland.”
6. “Improve cross-Strait fisheries access management” (完善涉台渔业准入管理), including access for Taiwan fishing boats in Chinese ports.
7. “Facilitate Taiwan food production enterprises registering in the mainland, and Taiwan food products entering the mainland [market]” (台湾食品生产企业在大陆注册和台湾食品输入大陆提供便利)
8. “Research how localities meeting requirements may establish small goods trading markets” (研究在有条件的地方新设对台小额商品交易市场), for Taiwan medium and small enterprises to open up access to mainland markets.
9. “Allow Taiwan television dramas, documentary films, cartoons, etc. – which follow correct guid-

ance, have healthy content, and are of superior quality – to be viewed on mainland satellite channels and internet” (允许引进导向正确、内容健康、制作精良的台湾电视剧、纪录片、动画片在大陆卫视频道和网络视听平台播出).

10. “Promote resumption of the experimental program for travel to Taiwan (the main island) for residents of Shanghai and Fujian provinces” (推动恢复上海市及福建省居民赴台 (本岛) 个人游试点).

Most of the listed 10 measures are not really new, and reflect longstanding CCP efforts to dangle vague promises of economic benefits (especially for fishermen and farmers) as an incentive for embracing cross-strait integration. Item #4 is interesting in terms of the proposed increased number of flights connecting Taiwan more directly with cities deep in the interior of the PRC. Arguably, the most interesting measure is item #9, pertaining to promised wider access to Taiwan entertainment products in the huge Chinese market. However, the stipulation that such media products must “follow correct guidance” and “have healthy content”—meaning that they must adhere to CCP censorship directives—would be a significant stumbling block.

### ***The Political Controversies within Taiwan over the KMT Delegation Trip***

The KMT delegation trip has been highly controversial within Taiwan itself, highlighting many of the differences that exist between Taiwan’s major political parties—and in some cases, even within those parties—over not only questions of cross-strait policy, but also of national identity.

The Democratic Progressive Party—which [controls Taiwan’s executive branch, but is in the minority in the legislature](#)—has been sharply critical of the delegation visit, criticizing the KMT leadership on alleged grounds of embracing CCP propaganda narratives, and promoting a “manufactured consensus” about Taiwan’s sovereignty status. [5] The government’s Mainland Affairs Council has also criticized the trip, with Minister Chiu Chui-cheng (邱垂正) [stating on April 10](#) that: “Chairman Cheng Li-wun’s ‘peace framework’ is really a ‘unification framework.’ The institutionalization of cross-strait peace is Beijing’s ‘One Country, Two Systems’ plan for Taiwan. For the Chinese Communist Party, only when Taiwan accepts ‘One Country, Two Systems’ and the Republic of China ceases to exist will it stop its military intimidation and make peace.”

### ***Internal Divisions within the KMT***

While criticism of the trip from government ministries

and the DPP would be expected, it is also striking how Cheng’s trip has exposed internal divisions within the KMT regarding the best path forward for cross-strait relations. Taipei Mayor Chiang Wan-an (蔣萬安), [who is running for reelection as the KMT candidate](#), distanced himself from Cheng’s proposal for an institutional framework by stating that “[Cheng is proposing her own opinion](#)” rather than expressing official policy. Chiang has also avoided adopting Cheng’s language on identity, stating instead that he is “[Taiwanese, a ROC national](#)”—which is more aligned with the KMT’s [post-democratization identity framing](#), which emphasizes the Republic of China while accommodating a Taiwanese identity.. At the same time, Chiang has [remained positive](#) on cross-strait communications: for example, during last year’s Taipei-Shanghai Twin City Forum (臺北-上海城市論壇), Chiang’s remarks [highlighted his preference](#) for engagement between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait.

While Chiang’s remarks can be seen as more cautious, Taichung Mayor Lu Shiow-yen (盧秀燕) is more assertive. Mayor Lu, a [likely contender to be the KMT’s presidential candidate for 2028](#), has been more explicit on defense preparedness, supporting a [significantly higher supplemental defense budget range](#) than the [KMT caucus in the legislature](#). [She also met with Cheng prior to her trip to China](#) to discuss the supplemental defense budget, suggesting some effort to achieve coordination on messaging. Lu’s willingness to back an increased supplemental defense spending highlights a more security-oriented faction within the KMT, showcasing the party’s internal divisions over how to balance engagement with deterrence regarding China.

### ***Conclusion***

The KMT delegation trip illustrates a number of important issues within both cross-strait relations and Taiwan’s domestic politics. The first of these is the continuing effort by the CCP to bypass official government channels in dealing with Taipei: shutting out ministries run by the “separatist” DPP, and preferring instead to deal on a party-to-party basis with the KMT—and furthermore, treating the KMT as if it were the sole and (semi) legitimate representative of the “Taiwan regional authorities.” It also demonstrates the eagerness of at least some in the more “deep blue” side of the KMT to take up the offer. Previous high-profile trips such as those taken by Ma Ying-jeou were clearly used to advocate for closer cross-strait ties, and for a sense of shared Chinese identity—but they were framed as private, not official, trips. By contrast, Cheng’s framing of the trip as building “institutional solutions” for cross-

Strait relations veers close to asserting a right for her faction of the KMT to negotiate on behalf of Taiwan.

Cheng and her advisors are also promoting positions that resonate poorly in Taiwan: the “92 Consensus” and “One Country, Two Systems” are both unpopular positions (see [here](#) and [here](#)), and [polling data](#) has consistently shown that Cheng’s avowed strong sense of Chinese identity is a minority position among her fellow citizens. This explains the apparent discomfort towards Cheng’s trip displayed by other, more moderate KMT political figures, and their efforts to distance themselves from it.

Based on the [March 2026 Foreign Affairs article](#) published under Cheng’s name, and her comments related to a [planned summer 2026 visit](#) to the United States, it appears that Cheng is attempting some version of what KMT interlocutors have called “using both legs to walk down the street” (用兩條腳走路)—that is, balancing relations between the PRC and the United States. However, the effort to curry favor in Beijing runs the dual risk of naively playing into CCP united front work, while alienating voters in Taiwan who are left cold by the Chinese identity messaging of the “deep blue” KMT. While Cheng’s trip was certainly successful in raising her own controversial profile, it remains doubtful whether any meaningful “institutional solutions” were actually created for the intractable disputes shaping cross-Strait relations.

**The main point:** KMT party chair Cheng Li-wun led a week-long delegation trip to the PRC in early April, visiting both economic and historical sites in China and holding meetings with senior CCP officials. While the messaging surrounding the “2026 Peace Trip” promoted the idea that it was building institutional solutions for cross-Strait disputes, the trip has been politically controversial in Taiwan, including within the KMT itself.

[1] The KMT central office statement indicated “Earnest hope that the two parties may make great efforts together to advance cross-Strait relations [and] peaceful development, promote cross-Strait exchanges and cooperation, consult on peace in the Taiwan Strait, [and] increase benefits for the people’s livelihood.”

(期望兩黨共同努力，推動兩岸關係和平發展，促進兩岸交流合作，為台海謀太平、為民生增福祉) In particular, the language about advancing “peaceful development” and “promoting cross-Strait exchanges and cooperation” hews very closely to CCP boilerplate propaganda messaging related to Taiwan. The similarity of such language raises questions regarding the process by which the statement was written.

[2] The full delegation consisted of the following persons: KMT Chairperson Cheng Li-wun; Vice Chairperson and Secretary-General Lee Kan-lung; Vice Chairperson Chang Jung-kung; Vice Chairperson Hsiao Hsu-tsen; National Policy Foundation Vice Chairman Lee Hung-yuan; Central Council Presidium Chairman Su Chi; Central Council Presidium Chairman Yuan Chien-sheng; Chairperson’s Special Advisor Lee Te-wei; Cultural Communication Committee Chairperson Yin Nai-ching; Mainland Affairs Department Director Chang Ya-ping; Youth Affairs Development Committee Chairperson Lien Sheng-wu; Spokesperson Chiang Yi-chen; International Affairs Department Director Tung Chia-yu; and Central Party Affairs Advisor Lei Hung-yi.

[3] It is worth noting that there is a notable shift in Cheng’s language when speaking to English language media: to the effect [that she is committed to deepening US-Taiwan relations](#) and is [supporting Taiwan’s national defense](#). In an interview with NBC, Cheng displayed a friendly attitude towards the United States by stating [“it’s very crucial and important for us to have solid US support for Taiwan.”](#) Cheng has also [indicated plans to visit the United States](#) in June 2026, suggesting an attempt to balance ties with Beijing and Washington.

[4] Note: The cultivation of “Taiwan youth” has been a longstanding and consistent theme of CCP united front work, intended to encourage young adults from Taiwan to study and work in the PRC. For examples of previous GTI analysis on this topic, see [here](#) and [here](#).

[5] DPP e-mail press release, “What the KMT Brought Home: Gift-Wrapped Extortion with a Political Price Tag” (April 16, 2026).

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## Taiwan Should Recalibrate Its Approach To Paraguay

By: Klaas Dykmann

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Should Paraguay switch diplomatic recognition from

the Republic of China (Taiwan) to the People's Republic of China (PRC), it would constitute a grave strategic setback for Taipei. Paraguay is the largest country out of Taiwan's remaining diplomatic partners, and a change in loyalties could catalyze a knock-on effect whereby other allies reconsider their ties. Besides the symbolic impact of such a move, Taiwan would lose a strategic partner in its international engagement in Latin America. Beyond [emphasizing shared values](#) and a recent democratic transition, Taiwan presently cooperates on a [variety of development projects](#) with Paraguay, [covering](#) the agricultural, medical, educational, and green technology sectors.

While these projects—as well as a recent opening to [certain meat imports](#) from Paraguay—signal strong relations, Taiwan may need to increase its ambitions in order to make the partnership more sustainable. In particular, Taiwan should open up its markets to Paraguayan agricultural products and raw materials, expand educational exchanges, and invest in digital infrastructure that leverages the South American country's cheap electricity.



*Image: Taiwan Foreign Minister Lin Chia-lung (left) meeting with Paraguayan Foreign Minister Rubén Ramírez (right) in Asunción, Paraguay (July 11, 2025). (Image source: [ROC Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#))*

### **Challenges For Taiwan In Paraguay**

Taipei's [overt support](#) for the dominant Colorado Party risks eroding Paraguayan public backing for the diplomatic partnership. The Colorado Party has [faced accusations](#) of corruption and favoritism towards elites already connected to the party. In addition, recurring Paraguayan debate on the so-called "[Taiwan cost](#)," addressing the estimated losses in potential Chinese investments and loans, continues to put the partnership at risk. Likewise, Taipei is confronted with a "[Paraguayan dilemma](#)" as groups within the Latin American coun-

try favoring recognition of the PRC create a persistent threat to the partnership. The opposition Liberal Party (PLRA), the left-wing *Frente Guasú* coalition, and powerful agricultural lobbies [have made the argument](#) that a switch to the PRC would unleash enormous export opportunities, foreign direct investment and loans—claims that are [somewhat overstated](#). According to a [2023 survey](#), 55 percent of Paraguayans favor switching recognition to Beijing, expecting economic benefits, while another question found that 58 percent still support relations with Taiwan. The primary driver for weaker support seems to be that the diplomatic relationship is perceived as symbolic, fragmented, elite-focused, [and not tangibly beneficial to the broader population](#).

### **Strategies for Taiwan to Raise Paraguayan Support for Diplomatic Ties**

In order to offset weakening Paraguayan support for the diplomatic relationship, the Taiwanese government should focus on three avenues: upgrading its meat exports and opening its markets to Paraguayan raw materials, enhancing educational exchanges, and investing in the Latin American country's digital infrastructure.

#### *Upgrading Agricultural Exports, Targeting Premium Markets*

To improve Taiwan's image, Taipei should facilitate greater imports from Paraguay. Strategic export expansion could extend to the sectors [of Paraguayan processed beef, sustainable wood, and biomass products](#). These products stand out because they combine Paraguay's comparative advantages with the potential to move beyond raw commodity exports into more value-added, job-creating, and diversified export sectors. Additional opportunities lie in medical and biotech exports via the [maquila regime](#) (through which foreign investors can circumvent certain tariffs), or joint ventures in organic agriculture (e.g. chia, sesame, sugar). Paraguay could boost its fresh and frozen beef exports to Taiwan through branding campaigns, as well as by emphasizing premium cuts for health-conscious consumers. Such a policy would appeal to the Paraguayan Industrial Union (UIP), which is already highly critical of China. The [UIP has advocated for elevating beef exports](#) by targeting premium markets such as the EU, Gulf states, and South Korea. In addition, Taiwan should accept Paraguayan products that are higher in the value chain. For example, instead of exporting raw soybeans, Paraguay could sell Taiwan higher value-added products such as oils, biodiesel, and plant-based proteins, raising income and generating skilled

local employment.

According to Robert Evans Ellis, Research Professor of Latin American studies at the United States Army War College, Paraguay's pro-trade orientation, low tariffs, low labor and electricity costs, and stable currency [render the country](#) an advantageous trade partner. Similarly, the country's central location and access to large neighboring markets through [Mercosur](#) (a South American trade bloc) create opportunities for Taiwan to employ Paraguay as a regional distributor of products from joint investments. As the [EU-Mercosur interim Trade Agreement](#) enters into force on May 1 2026, Taiwan could help Paraguay strengthen the compliance, traceability, and certification capacities needed to meet the EU's stringent sanitary and sustainability rules.

### *Talent Formation and Coalition Building*

Training engineers and technicians stands out as one of the most tangible ways Taiwan can contribute to Paraguay's economy. The benefits of such an action extend beyond Paraguayan political elites, and draw on programs that Taiwan is [already executing](#) in the country. In interviews this author conducted in Taipei, experts argued that a stronger "talent pipeline" connecting Taiwan and Paraguay—linking education, hands-on training, and real industry connections—would help more Paraguayans recognize the upsides of a close relationship with Taiwan. Expanding and internationalizing the [Taiwan-Paraguay Polytechnic University](#) (UPTP) could serve as a concrete step in that direction. The UPTP was established in 2018 to train high-skilled engineers and support Paraguay's long-term industrial development, but has so far only produced [218 graduates](#). An upscaled talent-focused policy would gradually shift the diplomatic relationship away from elite-focused engagement and towards measurable results for Paraguay's human capital: skilled graduates, professional networks, and practical projects to enhance local knowledge.

To enhance these policies, Taiwan can link training efforts to investment facilitation and a few targeted joint ventures, potentially co-sponsored by Japanese investors and the [European Union's Global Gateway framework](#) connected to the Mercosur bloc. Investment in talent and innovation promises not only to strengthen, diversify, and modernize the Paraguayan economy, but also its democratic system. This is important as diplomats in Asunción and Taipei are concerned about the fragility of Paraguay's democracy. Endemic corruption, institutional weaknesses, and persistent income in-

equality offer the PRC opportunities to exploit popular disenchantment with the elites.

### *Energy-Powered Digital Infrastructure*

[Paraguay's energy surplus](#) generated by the Itaipú Dam (a large hydroelectric power plant on the Paraná River bordering Brazil and Paraguay) provides new opportunities. The dam produces much more electricity than Paraguay needs. Yet, Paraguay is entitled to half of the output, and unused electricity is currently sold to Brazil. Through affordable energy, Paraguay could attract greater Taiwanese investment in energy-intensive industries. Data centers and cryptocurrency mining facilities [represent potentially lucrative projects](#) that could capitalize on the region's affordable energy production. From a domestic perspective, these types of projects also deliver visible benefits: AI services, digital government tools, cybersecurity systems, and IT infrastructure upgrades that improve productivity in government agencies and private firms. Given that Taiwan's foreign aid budget is limited in comparison to the PRC, its strategy must focus on targeted, high-visibility, and high-impact initiatives rather than large, expensive projects. Taiwan does not need to fund mega-projects to make a difference; one or two flagship pilots with local partners and built-in training can demonstrate results, create local skills, and create opportunities for scaling.

### *Challenges and Mitigation*

Even as Taiwan is encouraged to expand its relationship with Paraguay, there are limits to the degree of economic engagement that can bear fruit. Governance risks (especially corruption and clientelism) can undermine projects or generate local resistance, where new projects threaten established interests. External competition is also a factor. Competing diplomatic influence efforts, including by the PRC, may seek to [delegitimize cooperation](#) with Taiwan. Meanwhile, overly visible external branding with Japanese and European partners could create political sensitivities on two fronts. In Latin America, critics could cast a stronger European role as yet another version of [dependency or soft neocolonialism](#). Meanwhile, in Washington, greater European involvement might cause unease in a Trump Administration that has [revived the Monroe Doctrine and is wary of outside powers](#) gaining a larger foothold in the hemisphere.

Ultimately, the ideal strategy for Taiwan is to rebalance the relationship toward sustainable grassroots economic cooperation, while maintaining necessary elite-level channels. In practice, this means prioritiz-

ing initiatives that broaden domestic constituencies receiving support (such as by emphasizing education and training, public-facing digital infrastructure, and greater market access). This strategy will reduce the risk that Taiwan-Paraguay cooperation is perceived as elite-centric or purely symbolic. While this strategy would not eliminate the “Taiwan cost” debate in Paraguay—nor would it stop political elites from wielding the PRC as a bargaining chip—it could make the relationship harder to dismiss as symbolic.

**The main point:** In order to preserve the diplomatic partnership with Paraguay, Taiwan has conducted elite-focused engagement and messaging campaigns that highlight shared values. But this engagement has failed to secure sustainable grassroots support in Paraguay. Taiwan should recalibrate its approach by adopting a more visible economic engagement strategy that will appeal directly to working Paraguayans.

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## China Reinvigorates Its Taiwan Propaganda through Energy Narratives

By: Elizabeth Frost and Elena Yi-Ching Ho

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*Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not represent the official positions of the authors’ affiliations. The article does not draw on findings from ongoing joint research projects between the authors’ affiliations.*

China’s long-term objective of achieving “reunification” with Taiwan has been deeply embedded in its foreign policy and external propaganda strategy, and continues to evolve in response to changing global political landscapes. Turbulence in global energy markets triggered by the war in Iran has reinvigorated People’s Republic of China (PRC) propaganda campaigns concerning Taiwan’s energy security. Such narratives have emerged as an influential domain through which China attempts to advance its propaganda campaign and ad-

vance its reunification agenda.

Taiwan’s dependence on imported fuels for 97 percent of its energy needs is widely regarded as a major risk to its national security. The current global energy crisis, with oil and gas shipments through the Strait of Hormuz almost entirely frozen, has led to some voices within Taiwan warning of an energy shortage if gas stockpiles are used up. Taiwan’s [government downplayed this speculation](#), reassuring the public that liquefied natural gas (LNG) shipments have been [secured through April](#), with coal-fired generation a “last resort” [option](#) and state-owned energy companies [absorbing the majority of fuel price increases](#).

The PRC has capitalized on these energy security concerns as an opportunity to promote the benefits of “reunification.” Speaking on March 18, a spokesperson for the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council (TAO, 中共中央台湾工作办公室) said [China stood ready to provide Taiwan with reliable energy supplies](#) that would address Taiwan’s alleged shortages once peaceful “reunification” is achieved.

While the offer [made international headlines](#) and was branded by the Taiwanese government as a feature of the PRC’s [cognitive warfare](#), this “carrot-and-stick” approach that manipulates narratives and public opinion is nothing new.

In recent years, one of the ways the Chinese government has intensified its use of gray zone tactics to pressure Taiwan toward reunification is through cognitive warfare centered on energy security—aimed at influencing actors at both the governmental and grassroots levels. As energy security has become central to Taiwan’s national security debate, the carrot-and-stick approach has been deployed with increasing frequency.

Through cognitive warfare, the PRC has repeatedly positioned itself as both the biggest threat to Taiwan’s energy security, and also Taiwan’s potential savior. Taiwan-focused energy propaganda illustrates how Chinese influence operations have constructed a multi-layered ecosystem of engaged actors. This includes Chinese state media, WeChat and Weibo bloggers, and Douyin (TikTok) influencers, as well as certain Taiwanese politicians, media outlets, and political commentators—all of whom can be utilized at short notice.

### **The Carrot: Taiwan’s Energy Savior**

Prior to the recent energy reunification offer, Xi Jin-

ping's [January 2019 speech](#) on the 40th anniversary of the "Issuance of the Message to Compatriots in Taiwan" (告台湾同胞书) called for advancing cross-strait "connectivity" through energy and resource development. Xi further suggested that such cooperation could begin with the provision of electricity and natural gas to Kinmen and Mazu from Fujian province.

In recent years, narratives emphasizing the [energy benefits of reunification](#) have been repeatedly circulated through Chinese state media, reinforcing the claim that the "motherland" can provide Taiwan with a more secure energy supply. These narratives are further amplified and elaborated within the Chinese social media ecosystem, where they provide discursive scaffolding that reinforces claims made in state media. These examples can be seen across WeChat, Baidu blogs, as well as Douyin (TikTok) videos, where reunification is framed as "[the golden key to solving Taiwan's energy dilemma](#)."

Generally, this content follows a similar argumentative pattern. First, it establishes that Taiwan is facing an "energy crisis" that is undermining industrial production and economic prosperity. In the past, Chinese blogs used blackouts, such as those in [2021 and 2022](#), as evidence of Taiwan's power supply crisis. More recently, following disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz, Chinese propaganda has described Taiwanese citizens as anxiously facing a "countdown crisis," with only seven or eight days of LNG reserves remaining. In reality, while the Taiwanese government currently only mandates an 11-day gas reserve, these stockpiles are [far from depletion](#); Taiwan has also already [secured](#) the majority of required gas shipments to reduce any risk of imminent energy shortage, and has additional emergency coal-fired generation capacity available as a backup if needed. Taiwanese experts say [price volatility](#), rather than supply sufficiency, is the primary concern.

Chinese narratives then attribute this energy crisis to energy policy mismanagement by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民主進步黨), the party which has governed Taiwan since 2016. Examples of these alleged "erroneous" energy policies include nuclear power plant decommissioning (which saw [Taiwan become nuclear free](#) in May 2025, although [plans to restart two plants](#) are currently being considered), a [lackluster roll-out of renewable energy](#), and continued over-reliance on energy imports. The DPP is characterized as being helpless in the face of the so-called energy crisis, with their actions leading to higher electricity prices for the Taiwanese public, and thereby jeopardizing Taiwan's energy security.

However, Taiwan's delayed renewable energy rollout has been driven by widespread [public opposition](#) to solar and wind projects, rather than failed policy implementation by the DPP. This opposition has been intensified by [mis- and dis-information circulated online](#), often by accounts associated with opposition parties. In November of 2025, opposition legislators even passed a series of amendments to tighten the Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA, 環境影響評估) for solar projects, which some industry insiders deemed the "[straw that broke the camel's back](#)" for the beleaguered sector.

Blog posts about Taiwan's "energy crisis" on Chinese sites often proceed to draw a comparison to China's energy policy, characterizing China as possessing abundant domestic energy resources and world-leading renewable and nuclear energy technologies, and perfectly positioned to assist Taiwan in solving its energy dilemma. Proposed solutions for Taiwan's energy crisis after "reunification" include integration with the Chinese grid via undersea interconnectors (presented as a much more economical choice than the proposed [Taiwan-Philippines undersea power cable](#)), alongside the deployment of Chinese nuclear, renewable, and grid technologies.

Within Taiwan, domestic pro-opposition and pro-China voices have echoed both the [scaremongering about a looming LNG shortage](#) in recent weeks, as well as longer-term criticisms of DPP energy policy. Legitimate concerns about electricity prices, the pace of the energy transition, and energy security, alongside questions over whether current energy policy can meet supply-and-demand needs, have been exploited by pro-China actors—suggesting a potential connected, broader influence campaign.

### ***The Stick: an Energy Blockade***

Another strand of China's energy-related cognitive warfare against Taiwan is far more overtly coercive. PRC navy and coast guard maritime drills in the Taiwan Strait over the past four years have simulated how China could blockade or even strike critical elements of Taiwan's energy infrastructure, including its three LNG import terminals. Chinese state media presents these drills as conclusively demonstrating Beijing's ability to [blockade Taiwan's imports](#), effectively [cutting off energy supply](#).

In reality, whether or not an energy quarantine or blockade in the Taiwan Strait would be effective is not so clear-cut. China Petroleum Corporation (CPC, 台灣中油), Taiwan's state-owned oil and gas supplier, has

already diversified its LNG and oil supply chain, and now sources from more than 10 countries. In March, Minister of Economic Affairs Kung Ming-hsin (龔明鑫) announced that imports of [American LNG are expected to increase to 25 percent by 2029](#). CPC has since signed a [long-term agreement with Cheniere](#) to purchase up to 1.2 million tons per year of LNG from 2026 to 2050. The [Taiwan Energy Security and Anti-Embargo Act of 2026](#), currently working its way through the US Congress, could further strengthen US-Taiwan collaboration on energy security—including the possibility that future LNG shipments, including from a proposed [Alaska LNG project](#), could be escorted by the US Navy.

### ***Energy-Related Cognitive Warfare is Not Just Taiwan's Problem***

Energy is fast emerging as a new frontier in China's cognitive warfare against Taiwan. Countering these efforts must become a regional priority. Energy security across the Indo-Pacific is being tested, as governments grapple to secure sufficient energy supplies, creating vulnerabilities China could exploit. Taiwan, on the frontlines of this pressure, is also at the cutting-edge of responses to cognitive warfare—including debunking initiatives led by both civil society and government—and its experiences offer valuable lessons for the wider region.

Critically, any disruption in the Taiwan Strait, one of the world's busiest shipping corridors, would send shockwaves through global trade, with consequences comparable to those resulting from instability in the Strait of Hormuz. China's threats to take any such action should be met with rapid and unequivocal international censure.

Understanding, exposing, and countering cognitive warfare narratives requires coordinated action between Taiwan and its partners. The priority of these efforts should be making the stark contradiction inherent in China's messaging visible to both domestic and Taiwanese audiences: China is positioning itself as the guarantor of Taiwan's energy stability, while simultaneously generating the very risks—the threat of a blockade or quarantine—that undermine it.

**The main point:** Energy is fast emerging as a new frontier in China's cognitive warfare against Taiwan. China has consistently employed a carrot-and-stick strategy: positioning itself as an energy "savior" while simultaneously threatening an energy blockade to pressure Taiwan into yielding to coercion. As such, not only should the Taiwanese government recognize the importance of countering this emerging trend, but re-

gional partners should also prioritize taking collective action to respond to energy-related coercion.

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## **The CCP's Shifting Narratives towards the 2-28 Incident: From Supporting Taiwanese Autonomy to Emphasizing Unification**

By: Baosheng Guo

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This year marks the 79<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the "2-28 Incident" (二二八事件), which began in Taiwan on February 28, 1947. According to [the inscription on the monument erected in 1995](#) at the 2-28 Peace Memorial Park in Taipei, the 2-28 Incident refers to the large-scale public protests and demonstrations against the Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨) government in late February 1947, as well as the subsequent suppression and massacre of the Taiwanese people—including the local elite—carried out by troops dispatched by the KMT government between March and May of that year. Both sides of the Taiwan Strait have held frequent ceremonies and conferences to commemorate the 2-28 Incident. Yet, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the present Taiwanese government maintain completely different narratives regarding the incident.



*Image: Taiwan President Lai Ching-te laying a wreath in honor of victims at a memorial ceremony in Kaohsiung for the 2-28 Incident (Feb. 28, 2026). (Image source: [ROC Presidential Office](#))*

The CCP has long proven itself adept at weaponizing history to serve its political interests: one recent example took place when CCP Chairman Xi Jinping [brought up the United States' Pacific War with Japan](#) in a No-

vember 2025 call with President Donald Trump. In its propaganda regarding the 2-28 Incident, the CCP has constantly altered narrative themes in response to shifting political contexts. However, in stark contrast with its current policies, the CCP's earliest messaging regarding the incident advocated for Taiwan's autonomy, and even its independence. In the years since, the 2-28 Incident has served as a regular topic in the CCP's cognitive warfare strategy directed at Taiwan, and has impacted the KMT's own historical narratives.

### **Competing Cross-Strait Narratives Regarding the 2-28 Incident**

On the morning of February 28, 2026, Taiwan's [President Lai Ching-te attended](#) the nation's main memorial ceremony for the 2-28 Incident, held in Kaohsiung. In his [speech](#), Lai stated that “the 2-28 Incident was a tragic historical event where innocent people were persecuted by an alien regime; in itself, it was certainly not a democratic movement, nor was it related to colonial rule. However, the 2-28 Incident in combination with the White Terror of the martial law period did indeed drive the Taiwanese people's democratic will for self-determination.”

Meanwhile, this year's CCP-led memorial ceremony of the 2-28 Incident revolved around a contrasting narrative. One of the so-called “democratic parties” permitted to exist within China by the CCP, the Taiwan Democratic Self-Government League (TDSL, [台灣民主自治同盟](#)), [held a symposium in Beijing](#) to commemorate the 79<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the event. The TDSL operates within the CCP's [united front political warfare system](#) and contributes to the CCP's effort to portray the People's Republic of China (PRC) as the legitimate ruler over Taiwan. During the 2-28 Incident symposium in Beijing, representatives from the TDSL stated:

The 2-28 Uprising was a patriotic democratic movement of the Taiwanese people against the authoritarian rule of the Kuomintang authorities. It echoed the “anti-hunger, anti-civil war, and anti-persecution” movements being carried out on the mainland at the time, converging into a massive torrent of patriotic democratic movements among compatriots nationwide [...] TDSL has resolutely opposed “Taiwan independence” and the “Taiwan separatist movement,” and has carried forward the glorious tradition of patriotism and love for their homeland among Taiwanese compatriots.

While the current Taiwan government emphasizes democratic self-determination in its 2-28 Incident

messaging, the CCP underscores the event's connections to the “patriotic” and “democratic” movement in mainland China, and the party's unification and anti-independence stances.



*Image: A forum on the 2-28 Incident organized by the Taimeng (台盟), a CCP-controlled front organization (Feb. 28, 2026). The CCP seeks to leverage narratives surrounding 2-28 to promote its own program of unification with Taiwan. (Image Source: [Taimeng](#))*

### **The CCP's Early Interpretation of the 2-28 Incident**

The CCP's initial messaging regarding the 2-28 Incident was entirely different from the narratives it presents today. Surprisingly, when the 2-28 Incident occurred in 1947, the CCP defined it as an autonomy movement and encouraged Taiwan to break away from KMT rule and become autonomous or independent.

On March 4, 1947, while the anti-government uprising was unfolding in Taiwan, the CCP's [People's Daily](#) wrote that “the people of Taipei rose to fight. Chiang Kai-shek's police shot citizens, and the public became angrier.” On March 8, 1947, the Central Committee of the CCP (中國共產黨中央委員會) issued a significant statement defining the nature of the 2-28 Incident, titled “Taiwan Autonomy Movement.” [The statement](#) outlines that “The peaceful autonomy movement of the Taiwanese people was forced to defend itself... The autonomy movement of Taiwan compatriots will surely win, and will win soon. The CCP warmly praise the heroic struggle of Taiwan compatriots and wish them a glorious victory.” Indeed, the statement uses the word “autonomy” (自治) 33 times. This combined messaging indicates that, at the time of the event, the CCP defined the 2-28 incident as a Taiwanese autonomy and self-determination movement, and it openly supported Taiwanese self-determination, even independence.

After the CCP established the People's Republic of China in 1949, it directed the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to take over Taiwan. The CCP thus modified its narratives regarding the 2-28 Incident to complement this mission. In its post-1949 messaging the word "autonomy" was no longer used, and the incident was depicted simply as an armed uprising under the CCP's leadership against the bloody rule of Chiang Kai-shek's KMT and the imperialist United States. In February 1950, on the third anniversary of the 2-28 incident, [the CCP held grand memorial meetings in Beijing](#). The Red Army's Commander-in-Chief, Zhu De (朱德), participated in the meeting and issued a call to the Chinese people and government to liberate Taiwan. During the memorial, other CCP leaders [expressed their firm determination to liberate Taiwan](#). In February 1973, during the Cultural Revolution (文化大革命), [the CCP held a symposium to commemorate the 26<sup>th</sup> anniversary](#) of the 2-28 Incident. The CCP continuously defined the 2-28 Incident as an uprising and argued that that Taiwan must be liberated.

### ***The CCP's Post-Cold War Interpretations of the 2-28 Incident***

After the Cultural Revolution and the death of Mao Zedong, the CCP initiated its [reform and opening-up](#) policy. To attract investment from Taiwanese businessmen and improve cross-strait relations, the PRC began to emphasize a peaceful narrative for unification with Taiwan, and downplayed its commemoration of the 2-28 Incident. On February 27, 1987, China organized a meeting in Beijing to [commemorate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary](#) of the 2-28 Incident, defining that it was a patriotic movement. On the 49<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the historical event in 1996, the TDSL and other CCP united front groups [held a commemorative rally](#) that in one breath opposed "acts of national separatism," and in another called for the "the expansion of cross-strait people-to-people exchanges."

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, during the periods that Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) presidents have governed Taiwan, the CCP has emphasized that it would resort to force, if necessary, to achieve unification. Its messaging regarding the 2-28 Incident followed suit. On February 19, 2004, during the 57<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 2-28 Incident, the CCP made the specific claim that no one shouted a slogan of "Taiwan independence" in the 2-28 Incident. In 2017, during the incident's [70<sup>th</sup> anniversary](#), the PRC's Taiwan Affairs Office (台灣事務辦公室) spokesperson An Fengshan (安峰山) pointed out that the 2-28 Incident was "an integral part of the

Chinese people's liberation struggle," and castigated "'Taiwanese independence' separatist forces" for "exploiting" the event.

This new narrative under Chairman Xi Jinping's administration attracted the attention of Western media. Reuters [reported that](#) "China on Wednesday described landmark Taiwan protests against Nationalist troops in 1947 as part of China's liberation struggle that Taiwan independence forces were trying to hijack, ahead of commemorations next week for the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary."

In the Xi Jinping era, the CCP no longer employs the rhetoric of "uprising" or "autonomy" in reference to the 2-28 Incident. Instead, it employs an interpretation of the historical event that underscores Chinese patriotism in Taiwan and the island's sustained connection with mainland China. Meanwhile, the rhetoric regarding the 2-28 Incident under Xi is firm in its opposition to Taiwan independence.



*Image: The woodcut image "The Horrifying Inspection" by artist Huang Rong-can, depicting the violence of the 2-28 crackdown (circa 1947). (Image source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))*

### ***The Usefulness of the 2-28 Incident to CCP Propaganda and Cognitive Warfare***

The CCP has employed narratives regarding Taiwan's history in its cognitive warfare operations aimed at influencing political decision-making on the island. Its operations have indeed affected some Taiwanese. For instance, on November 8, 2025, the new KMT Chair Cheng Li-wun (鄭麗文) [attended a memorial](#) in Taipei honoring victims of the White Terror era. Among those memorialized in the event was the highest-ranking communist spy in the 1950s KMT government, Wu Shi (吳石). Wu Shi, a high-ranking KMT military offi-

cial-turned-spy for the CCP, has been [hailed as a martyr](#) by the CCP and was depicted in a 2025 Chinese television drama named *Silent Glory* (沈默的榮耀). The TDSL, the CCP-sanctioned united front political party in the PRC, also delivered a tribute at the event. Cheng Li-wun's participation, whether [intentional or unintentional](#), caters to the CCP's narrative that its spies killed in Taiwan are victims and martyrs.

Additionally, on February 27 this year, Cheng [attended a book launch event](#) for *Exiled 2-28* (流亡2-28) in Taichung. At the event, Cheng asserted that the 2-28 Incident was a democracy movement rather than a Taiwan independence movement. She further criticized the DPP for not learning from the 2-28 Incident, arguing that the historical event has become a “cheap” tool for political struggle. Given that it plays down connections between Taiwanese independence and the 2-28 Incident, Cheng's narrative is similar to that of the CCP.

Given that the CCP has adjusted its historical interpretations of the 2-28 Incident to complement its shifting political goals over time, the CCP's narrative regarding the incident at any given time cannot be taken at face value. When the 2-28 Incident was actually unfolding, the CCP had not yet taken power over mainland China, so it defined the 2-28 Incident as an autonomy movement and encouraged Taiwan to break free from KMT rule, or even pursue independence. After the CCP took power, its leaders sought to unify with Taiwan by force, so the party positioned the 2-28 Incident as an armed uprising under the leadership of the CCP, instead of emphasizing Taiwanese autonomy. When the CCP began its reform and opening-up policy, peaceful unification became the central theme of its Taiwan strategy, and the party downplayed the commemoration of the 2-28 Incident. Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, the CCP has focused on combating Taiwan independence forces and embraced the prospect of unification by force. The CCP thus labeled the 2-28 Incident as a patriotic and democratic movement, and removed the narrative of autonomy—while also denouncing the exploitation of the 2-28 Incident by so-called “independence forces” in Taiwan.

The CCP once advocated for Taiwan's autonomy. It now strongly opposes Taiwan's independence. The CCP's contradictory policy regarding autonomy is not unique to Taiwan. The CCP [once supported the independence of Xinjiang](#) in 1944. In fact, both the [Soviet Union](#) and Mao Zedong signaled initial support for the independence movement in Xinjiang. The CCP later opposed Xinjiang autonomy and [struck an agreement with the Soviet Union](#) to assimilate the region. Simi-

larly, the CCP's initial narrative regarding the autonomy movement during the 2-28 Incident stands in stark contradiction to Xi Jinping's present rhetoric of a “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” and Taiwan's “reunification with the motherland.”

In terms of interpreting historical events, the CCP is pragmatic, and is willing to adjust its rhetoric to serve its political objectives. Observers should recognize that the CCP's historical narratives are inherently contingent on the party's political interests, and should first seek to understand their origins before taking them at face value.

**The main point:** The CCP's narratives regarding the 2-28 Incident have been a feature of its cognitive warfare operations aimed at Taiwan. As the 2-28 Incident unfolded, the CCP initially published propaganda highlighting the “autonomy” of Taiwanese residents. Later propaganda has cast the 2-28 Incident as a movement led by the CCP, and a patriotic Chinese initiative coinciding with the founding of the PRC.

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## Fujian's Maritime Militia and Cross-Strait Signaling: Institutional Foundations and Governance Dynamics

By: Emerson Tsui

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Fujian is a critical launchpad for the People's Republic of China's (PRC) coercive unification operations aiming at Taiwan in both peacetime “gray zone” and contingency scenarios. In particular, Fujian's [maritime militia](#) has become an indispensable actor in the PRC's implementation of its unification objectives and cross-strait signaling, including lawfare, maritime operations, and military exercises, all supported by enhanced [maritime](#)

[domain awareness](#) (MDA) and [anti-access/area-denial \(A2/AD\)](#) capabilities. Through activities such as monitoring maritime targets, coordinated [swarming](#), and vessel [inspections](#), local militia units contribute to intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance ([ISR](#)) functions that support PLA operations while advancing sovereignty claims in low-kinetic forms.

### **Red Culture: Civil-Military Integration Heritage in Fujian**

Rather than being a recent *ad hoc* creation, Fujian's militia draws legitimacy and continuity from a long-standing civil-military governance tradition. Ingrained solidarity among the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the military, and the civil sector underpins Fujian's ongoing implementation of its militia initiatives.

After its founding in 1921, the CCP institutionalized its first series of "[revolutionary bases](#)" (or "red bases") (革命根据地) for capacity-building during its "[people's war](#)" (人民战争) insurgency, using them for guerrilla warfare and political mobilization. Locals were recruited and often assimilated into the CCP under political working groups, receiving training in literacy, ideology, and combat skills. Fujian Province served as both a regional foothold for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) during the Chinese Civil War, as well as its final battleground during the [Battle of Dongshan Island](#) (東山島戰役 / 东山岛保卫战) in 1950. As a result, Fujian's deeply rooted civil-military ties and "frontline supporting tradition" (支前传统) have a long legacy in terms of the province's militia development.

### **PAFMM: A Critical Facet of the People's Armed Force**

The People's Armed Force Maritime Militia ([PAFMM](#), 海上民兵) is often referred to as the "[third sea force](#)" ([中国海军的第三支力量](#)) and serves as a force multiplier for the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The force is distributed across 11 provinces nationwide, including the coastal provinces of Zhejiang, Hainan, and Fujian. The PAFMM includes civilians from various industries, while PLA veterans and professionals in maritime administration, commercial shipping, fishing, and emergency response constitute a significant portion of its membership. Such components and recruitment patterns also apply to the PAFMM in Fujian, which prioritizes candidates with military backgrounds and vessel maneuvering certifications (船只驾驶证) through targeted recruitment.

Referred to as the "[Helpers of the PLA](#)" (解放军的助手), the PAFMM enhances the PLA's skill sets and overall capacity for various types of missions. After com-

pleting basic military and maritime security training, including education in situational awareness and reporting functions, PAFMM civilians become auxiliaries within the PRC's broader maritime governance and signaling framework. As a result, the PAFMM actively engages in a range of tasks, from humanitarian support to enhancing maritime domain awareness, including patrolling, [search-and-rescue](#), and medical aid, while remaining relevant and ready for contingency operations. These include, but are not limited to, regular gray-zone activities (e.g., [ISR](#), [air and sea incursions](#)) and deliberate escalation from the gray zone. The scenarios of the latter usually span [vessel inspection](#), quarantine, and drills and exercises that could evolve into operations.

From the perspective of organizational structure, Fujian Provincial Military District ([福建省军区](#)) of the PLA, PRC government branches across all levels (Province-level; Prefecture-level; County-level; Township-level), the National Defense Mobilization Commission (国防动员委员会), and the [People's Armed Forces Department](#) (PAFD/人民武装部, also abbreviated as 人武部) are all institutional components of Fujian PAFMM's ecosystem from the military side, while local PAFDs serve as the primary actors in maintaining the militia's functionality and mobilization readiness. Specifically, local PAFDs, including county-level PAFDs, are responsible for the initial recruitment of local militia and for overseeing its organization, training, and potential mobilization. Such an institutional responsibility can be verified through the latest militia recruitment announcement on the [WeChat platform](#) from YouXi County's PAFD (尤溪县人武部). Meanwhile, militia members are required to respond to mobilization orders from any level.

### **The PAFMM in Operation**

Over the past decades, Fujian's militia has evolved from playing minor roles in coastal defense, anti-piracy, and civil war combat to those of a modern maritime force. Today, it serves as more than just a "helper of the PLA": It is a critical feature of the PLA's cross-Strait signaling strategy.

As a dual-use force, the PAFMM in Fujian has taken an active part in a range of tasks ([多样化任务](#)) since 2016, engaging in maritime surveying and navigational guidance, including participation in the Eastern Theater Command's island encirclement simulation ([合围台岛演习](#)) following former US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's 2022 visit to Taiwan. Since 2023, PAFMM units have facilitated [gray-zone tactics in lawfare](#), including

vessel inspections, sea mapping in contested areas, and close encounters with Taiwanese vessels and personnel. The PAFMM has played supporting roles in the recurring “[Joint-Sword Exercise Series](#)” (联合利剑系列演习) around Taiwan (see [here](#) and [here](#)). Local units have been immersed in training and simulations for seamless “operational conversion between peacetime and contingency” (平战转换)—while further supporting nearshore patrolling, maritime search and rescue (海上搜救), and emergency responses during extreme weather, such as tropical storms and typhoons.

### **Maritime Assets and Militia Training Infrastructure**

Fujian Province has long leveraged its coastal status and political-military heritage to develop its maritime militia. The province has pursued a maritime-centered development strategy [since the 1990s](#) to establish itself as a “[leading coastal province](#)” (海洋强省). Maritime assets, including deep-water ports and training bases in its critical coastal cities—[Xiamen](#) (厦门), [Quanzhou](#) (泉州), [Zhangzhou](#) (漳州), [Dongshan](#) (东山), and [Pingtan](#) (平潭)—have established robust logistical foundations for the PAFMM’s [coordination](#), training, and mobilization.

Militia training bases in Fujian are distributed across the province’s cities, from the municipal to the county level. The number of sites continues to [expand](#), including the ongoing [base construction project](#) in Minhou County (闽侯县). While the exact number and locations of all active militia training bases remain unverified, open-source intelligence has confirmed the locations of several PAFMM training bases in active use so far. These established bases are located in [Quanzhou City](#) (泉州海上民兵训练基地) in [Quanzhou Ocean Institute](#) (泉州海洋学院), [Zhangzhou City](#) (漳州南炮台训练基地), Dongshan Island (东山岛), [Ningde](#) (宁德陆军预备役海防团训练基地), as well as two bases in Xiamen City (厦门水警训练基地、[厦门海沧区民兵训练基地](#)). The militia training base in the [Haicang District of Xiamen](#) (厦门海沧区民兵训练基地), established in [July 2025](#), is the newest and one of the largest PAFMM training bases. Bases in Dongshan have trained both the [People’s Liberation Army Navy Marine Corps](#), and local militias each year in various combat subjects, particularly amphibious landing operations and [beach obstacle breaching](#) (滩头破障), as well as supporting roles. Meanwhile, the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has conducted annual amphibious assault training exercises on Dongshan Island since the mid-1990s, following the [Third Taiwan Strait Crisis](#).



*Image: Philippines Coast Guard personnel approach Chinese-flagged vessels near Whitsun Reef (AKA Julian Felipe Reef) in the Spratly Islands (April 13, 2021). The coordinated use of such vessels illustrates the increasing role of the Chinese Maritime Militia in pursuing Chinese state goals. (Image source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))*

### **Governance Structure and Command Hierarchy**

The National Defense Mobilization Commission of the Fujian Provincial Military District ([省军区国防动员委员会](#)) is the leading coordinating body responsible for [integrating military requirements with civilian resources](#) at the provincial level. Incorporated into PRC’s broader national defense mobilization system, the commission operates under a civil–military coordination framework ([军地联合](#)) to plan, organize, and oversee the mobilization of personnel, transportation assets, and logistics in both peacetime and contingency scenarios.

At lower administrative levels, corresponding branches of the National Defense Mobilization Commission at the prefectural and county levels execute and coordinate the inspection, registration, and the organization of civilian vessels and other maritime assets into militia units. In parallel, national defense transportation authorities ([国防交通主管机构](#)) at the provincial and municipal levels manage the requisitioning and operational mobilization of civilian vessels to ensure operational readiness of maritime assets.

At the grassroots level (基层), local People’s Armed Forces Departments (人民武装部) keep detailed registries regarding both personnel and vessels, drawing on open-source reporting and local policy documents that indicate systematic tracking mechanisms for mobilization readiness. Under the principle of “one vessel, one file; one individual, one record” ([一船一档，一人](#)

一册), each registered vessel is paired with a dedicated administrative file documenting ownership, capabilities, and mobilization status, while individual militia members are cataloged with personal, professional, and political information to facilitate rapid activation and assignment.

This multi-layered organizational structure—spanning military, administrative, and civilian institutions—may appear complex, but in practice it enhances responsiveness, and local adaptability. Rather than representing fragmentation, the system enables distributed coordination across jurisdictions while maintaining centralized strategic direction. As a result, Fujian’s maritime militia can mobilize quickly, operate flexibly in nearshore environments, and integrate civilian maritime resources into broader military and signaling activities with relatively low friction.

### **Recruitment and Personnel Composition**

The PAFMM’s recruitment in Fujian adheres to strict regulations, yet participation remains [fully voluntary](#). In practice, the recruitment and assimilation process often prioritizes CCP members, seasoned professionals in navigation and broader maritime affairs, and professionals holding the “Seafarer Identification Document of the People’s Republic of China,” ([中华人民共和国海员证](#)) issued by the Maritime Security Administration of the PRC ([中华人民共和国海事局](#)). Such an identification is commonly referred to as a “Seaman’s Book”. According to the “Regulations for the Crewmember of the People’s Republic of China” ([中华人民共和国船员条例](#)), this document is required for Chinese nationals serving as crew on internationally operating vessels or undertaking overseas maritime assignments. Such staffing prioritization also applies to veterans with combat experience. [Local recruitment notices](#) indicate a preference for personnel with maritime-related professional skills, including navigation and seafaring experience.

As a result, Fujian’s PAFMM [categorizes recruits](#) into “core militia” ([基于民兵](#)) and “regular militia” ([普通民兵](#)), under two separate organizational structures. The former—as the more skilled force—acts as the vanguard for “high-risk missions” ([高风险任务](#)). The political vetting of militias in critical positions is routine. Political vetting and allegiance investigations usually occur during the recruiting stage and the formation of the militia unit, and the promotion of individual militiamen to core positions ([骨干](#)).

### **Regulatory and Incentive Framework**

The PAFMM regulation and incentive framework is standardized, following provincial directives but locally implemented. In January 2025, the Fujian Provincial Government issued its “[Measures for Guaranteeing Militia Rights and Interests](#)” ([福建省民兵权益保障办法](#)), the latest provincial regulation concerning the incentives and benefits that are guaranteed for PAFMM personnel. The objective of the regulation was to enhance the Fujian PAFMM’s “sense of honor, sense of gain, and sense of responsibility” ([荣誉感、获得感和责任感](#)). The regulation has unified the incentive and reward system province-wide, encompassing compensation, labor protections, insurance, and certifications. The regulation specifically instructs banks and other financial service providers to consider innovative financial products that offer “[appropriate favors](#)” ([适度优惠倾斜](#)) for militia members.

Another prefecture-level regulation, the 2002 “Several Provisions on Militia Work in Urban Fuzhou” ([福州市城市民兵工作若干规定](#)), delegated financial administration of the militia to the city and district levels, including funds for training and equipment storage. In addition, the city of Fuzhou has been implementing the “Contemporary Regulations on Civilian Vessel Requisition and Crewmen Mobilization” ([福州市民用船舶和船员民兵动员征用暂行规定](#)) since 2005, which sets the standard for PAFMM members’ financial compensation. As the headquarters of both the Eastern Theater Command and the Fujian Military District, Fuzhou has been classed as one of the “Model Cities of Double Support” ([双拥模范城市](#)). “Double Support” ([双拥](#)) is a shorthand for “[localities support military members and their dependents, the military supports the government and loves the people](#)” ([地方拥军优属、军队拥政爱民](#)). Other “Double Support” coastal cities, including Xiamen and Zhangzhou, also serve as launchpads that underpin the Fujian PAFMM’s activities.

As a result of these regulations, militia personnel in Fujian now qualify for employment advantages, special benefits from state-owned banks, subsidized medical services, and are legally guaranteed compensation for training. In particular, these “[reward criteria](#)” ([奖励标准](#)) that are implemented at prefecture-level cities (e.g., [Putian/莆田](#)) aim to bolster local militiamen’s morale and [enthusiasm](#) for training participation.

**The main point:** The PAFMM in Fujian has developed into a dual-use actor that can both safeguard the province’s maritime security and also assist the PRC’s unification objectives toward Taiwan. It serves as a political signaling tool during peacetime gray-zone activities

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and as an indispensable auxiliary for the PLA Navy's potential operations in a Taiwan contingency. As a result, international stakeholders should closely monitor the development of PAFMM.

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