

# "The process of complete reunification of the motherland is unstoppable"

A summary of the CCP's White Paper on Taiwanese reunification and disinformation efforts against the island



# Executive summary

The CCP has released a new White Paper reinforcing its commitment to reunification with Taiwan, describing it as “unstoppable” and “an inevitable requirement for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” as well as assuring the defeat of “outside” and “separatist forces”.

Experts suggest the CCP and PLA are still hesitant on a full-scale invasion without a total guarantee of a swift victory. Therefore, it is highly likely that they will seek to ‘soften’ Taiwan with subthreshold operations including the repurposing of existing information, business, religious, cultural, and criminal links to destabilise the island. It is almost certain that disinformation will be the most constant and intensely used tool of any such campaign.

Historically, Taiwan has been the CCP's primary target for disinformation (some estimated they were targeted with 2,400 pieces of disinformation a day in 2020). Despite this, confidence in the Tsai administration on the island remains high, while support for reunification with the mainland China remains at a historic low. This is partly because Taiwan maintains one of the most effective counter disinformation structures in the international community.

This report aims to summarise and fact check the CCP's White Paper as well as its disinformation campaigns against Taiwan and the example Taipei provides for fighting disinformation.

# CCP White Paper on Taiwan - Aug 2022

## Summary

### 1. "Taiwan is an unquestionable and unchangeable part of China"

- To back up its current claims to Taiwan, the CCP paper pointed to historical Chinese presence on the island "going back to ancient times" as well as UN resolution 2758 (Oct 1971), which recognised the 'One China Principle' (recognising the PRC as the legitimate government of China), as well as 181 countries basing diplomatic relations on the principle.

### 2. "The Communist Party of China unswervingly promotes the complete reunification of the motherland"

- The paper insisted that the Communist Party of China "made great efforts to strive for Taiwan to get rid of colonial rule and return to the big family of the motherland and to achieve national liberation, including the Taiwan compatriots." Focusing on the role of Mao and Deng in seeking "peaceful resolutions".
- the paper also emphasised the role of Xi Jinping in "grasping the changing times of cross-strait relations, enriched and developed the national unification theory and policies and policies towards Taiwan, promoted the development of cross-strait relations in the right direction, and formed the Communist Party of China in the new era."
- The paper further reemphasised the CCP's repeated declarations to reunify with Taiwan in 1982, 2005 and 2015 - tying it to the international principles of "respect for sovereignty".

### 3. "The process of complete reunification of the motherland is unstoppable"

- The paper asserted that "realizing the complete reunification of the motherland is an inevitable requirement for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation".
- The paper further asserted that only with reunification can both sides expel the humiliation of colonial occupation of the past, avoid the risk of repeated occupation of Taiwan by colonial forces and "safeguard national sovereignty, security, and development interests". Equating Taiwanese independence to a rest to the colonial era.
- The paper further sought to legitimise the Party's legitimacy by tying current domestic policies of Xi Jinping as stepping stones to reunification: "national development and progress lead the development direction of cross-strait relations." Emphasising that the mainland's GDP is now "22.1 times that of Taiwan".

# CCP White Paper on Taiwan - Aug 2022

- The paper further sought to tarnish the "Taiwan independence separatist forces" as being tied to "external forces" and engage in deceiving the Taiwanese people, inciting hatred of the mainland, obstructing and sabotaging cross-strait exchanges, cooperation and integrated development, and stepping up "use of force to seek independence" and "reject reunification by force".
- The decision to place this after comparisons in "national development" is likely a purposeful attempt to infer externally backed independence forces are holding the island back.
- The paper went on to reemphasise its economic and military power; focusing on the persistent themes of past humiliation:

"More than 100 years ago, China was poor and weak, and Taiwan was occupied by foreign countries. More than 70 years ago, China defeated the invaders and recaptured Taiwan. Now China has become the second largest economy in the world, and its political, economic, cultural, technological, military and other strengths have been greatly enhanced, and it is even more impossible for Taiwan to separate from China [...] It is absolutely impossible to succeed."

#### **4. The White Paper further outlined a strategy for "promoting the reunification of the motherland in the new era and new journey":**

- a. "Adhere to the basic policy of 'peaceful reunification and one country, two systems'".
- b. "Efforts to promote the peaceful development and integrated development of cross-strait relations".
- c. "Resolutely smash "Taiwan independence" separatist and foreign interference attempts".
- d. "Unite Taiwan compatriots to seek national rejuvenation and national reunification."

#### **5. Lastly, the Paper outlined the "bright prospects for the peaceful reunification of the motherland"**

- a. "Taiwan will have a wider space for development".
- b. "The vital interests of Taiwan compatriots will be fully guaranteed".
- c. "Compatriots on both sides of the strait share the great glory of national rejuvenation".
- d. "Conducive to the peace and development of the Asia-Pacific region and the world".

# CCP White Paper on Taiwan - Aug 2022

## Factcheck

### 1. On China and Taiwan's historical connection

- The CCP has gone to great lengths to emphasise historical links between China and Taiwan, with the White Paper suggesting Chinese culture was present "in ancient times". However, this is a loose interpretation of historical facts:
  - Taiwan was not in fact subsumed under mainland administration until 1684, under the Qing dynasty, and only became a formal province in 1887 and continued to maintain local dialects of Hokkien and Hakka until Mandarin was imposed by Chang Kai Shek after 1949. In this way, Bill Hayton of Chatham House suggests Taiwan's history is similar to Ireland's.
  - Even in 1928, the CCP recognised the "Taiwanese" as a separate nationality as it sought to "build an anti-Japanese united front between the Chinese and the Korean, Taiwanese and other peoples", demonstrating a distinction between Taiwanese and Chinese.
- This is a common messaging tactic of the CCP: utilising history to support its international narratives, but also shore up its own legitimacy by making the Party appear to be a continuation of an "unbroken" Chinese civilisation.

### 2. On respect for international sovereignty

- The paper repeatedly calls for the international community (and especially the US) to adhere to the international principles of sovereignty regarding Taiwan.
- Despite this, the PRC remains is one of the few states not to condemn the Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine, which was unprovoked, a violation of international law, and based on a direct denial of Ukraine as a sovereign nation.

### 3. On CCP efforts at reunification

- The Paper keenly stresses the PRC's peaceful negotiations to reunify the mainland with the island. While these events did take place, the Paper willfully ignores the CCP's more aggressive attempts to coerce Taiwan into rejoining the mainland in 1954, 1958, 1995 as well as a long-standing espionage and destabilisation campaign.

# CCP White Paper on Taiwan - Aug 2022

- The paper also stresses the CCP's role in "[striving] for Taiwan to get rid of colonial rule" - referring to the Japanese invasion of China and earlier colonisation of Taiwan. However, the campaign to liberate Taiwan did not start until 1942 and was led by the Nationalist faction of Chang Kai-Shek; the CCP focused on the mainland and has been accused by Jung Chang and Jon Halliday (authors of 'Mao: The Unknown Story') of actively undermining the Nationalist's position against Japanese forces.

#### 4. On adhering to the basic policy of "peaceful reunification and one country, two systems".

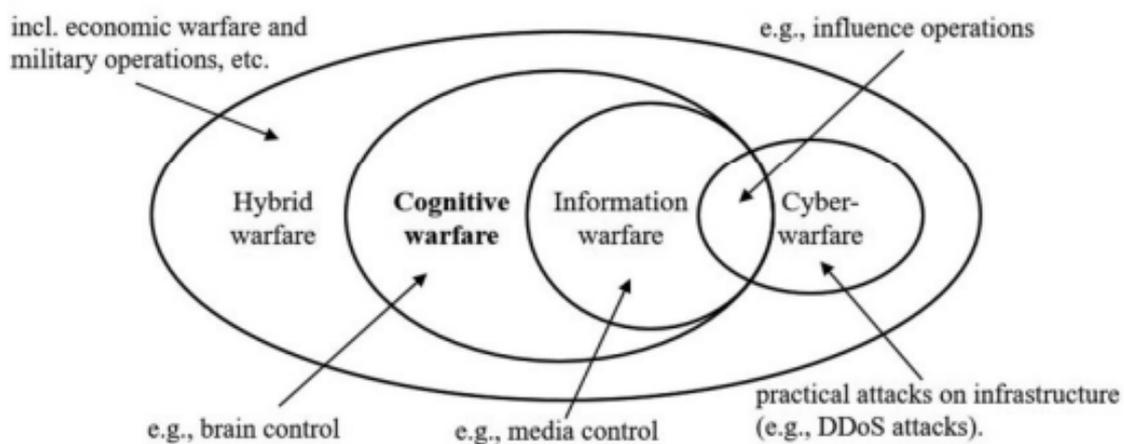
- This was the principle by which Hong Kong was returned to mainland control in 1997 and the potential model for Taiwanese and mainland reunification. However, the CCP's decision to disregard Hong Kong's autonomy with its 2018 National Security law, as well as violently suppress and discredit the protests that followed, have made any such use of the principle as a future framework impossible.

#### 5. On Taiwan's "separatists".

- The White Paper states that the Taiwanese population being "deceived" by the Tsai administration, which heavily implies that the Taiwanese public support reunification, and that only the Tsai administration rejects it. However, polls conducted at the [Election Study Center at National Chengchi University](#) demonstrate that support for independence and rejection of reunification has been a long-term trend, spiking in the past few years in parallel to aggression from Beijing.
- The Paper also asserts that the Independence movement is backed by "external forces" (a euphemism for the US), who are regularly criticised for "interfering" in the PRC's affairs. But while the US has engaged in defence deals with Taiwan, it continues to avoid formal diplomatic recognition and has continually called for maintaining the "status quo". As the last point demonstrated, the upswell in support for independence in Taiwan has coincided with increased aggression from Beijing.

# CCP disinformation efforts against Taiwan

While the CCP has increased its kinetic pressure on Taiwan in the past few years, its "magic weapon" for softening Taiwan has been a "cognitive warfare" campaign designed to paralyse decision-making, manipulate political actions and exacerbate divisions (mainly carried out by PLA Base 311). According to a 2018 PLA White Paper, Information campaigns are at the forefront of this campaign and the White Paper on Taiwan contains many of its narratives.



**Figure 1.** The conceptual relationship among cognitive warfare and other types of warfare. Each type of warfare could contain the element of influence operations and impact on human cognition; however, only cognitive warfare is specifically dedicated to brain control by incorporating weaponized neurosciences into various practices.

TZU-CHIEH HUNG AND TZU-WEI HUNG, see Supplementary Reports.

# CCP disinformation efforts against Taiwan

## Messaging and Target Audiences

### 1. Assert the one China principle

- More often than not, this narrative focuses on manufacturing positive sentiments; blanketing the internet with blandly positive posts about reunification and the CCP.
- The aim is to create an appearance of a large-scale pro-reunification/pro-Beijing community on the island even as the actual community continues to shrink due to Beijing's aggression. In doing so it encourages "group-think" among the Taiwanese (though its effectiveness has clearly been limited).

### 2. Undermine the Tsai administration:

- President Tsai herself is a major target of this disinformation. One of the first claims was that her dissertation is a hoax (which has been debunked by the London School of Economics). In 2020, a petition appeared on the US government's website requesting an investigation into the matter and asserting a trampling on democracy, freedom, & the law in Taiwan due to the 2019 Anti-infiltration law. The petition gathered 1,296 citations in posts on public Facebook groups and pages (according to Graphika).
- Similar networks further asserted that Tsai's COVID-19 policies, among the most successful in the world, have been a failure.
- In April 2022, a fake memo from the Taipei Presidential Office claiming that Taiwan had agreed to receive the nuclear wastewater from Fukushima, Japan was circulated online.

# CCP disinformation efforts against Taiwan

## 3. Convince Taiwan's population that it cannot hope to stand against the PLA:

- In some cases, doctored images are circulated showing Chinese warplanes deep in Taiwanese airspace; inferring that the PLA would be able to strike Taiwan before its airforce were even able to get into the air. Or, as on August 8th 2022, outdated and altered images suggesting the PLA had fired rockets over the island.
  - There is often an attempt to compare and contrast the Taiwanese Armed Forces and the PLA, stressing the Taiwanese military's lack of a logistics core, insufficient training, and low morale versus videos of the PLA's "readiness".
  - There is also a real concern among the Taiwanese that the USA would not risk war with the PRC over Taiwan; the PRC seeks to exploit and inflame this.
  - The aim is to demoralise the Taiwanese into finding reunification, even if it leads to oppression, as more palatable than a devastating conflict they cannot win, thereby 'winning without fighting'.
  - On August 8th 2022, Maj. Gen. Chen Yu-lin, deputy director of the Political and War Bureau of Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense reported that "The CCP's military exercises began on Aug. 4, when the number of cognitive warfare-related posts targeting Taiwan skyrocketed to 73, peaking at 87 on Aug. 5" - most of the messages indicated that the PLA was going to invade, sparking panic.
- These campaigns have a variety of targets:
    - Youth audiences – both to spread message online and lure them away to China with promises of better economic situation.
    - Religious groups - The PRC aims to capture religious audiences to adopt its message of the PRC and Taiwan as "one people". It also allegedly utilises its financial contribution to Temples in order for respected religious scholars to assist in this.
    - Those who are highly partisan - Taiwan is know for robust and partisan political debate (there have been several brawls in its parliament), the PRC aims to deepen the divide.
    - "Opinion leaders" (celebs and online personalities), who can then effectively "launder" CCP disinformation and narratives:
      - Singer/actress Liu Le-Yan, who commented that the Taiwan Strait transit of the PLA Navy aircraft carrier Liaoning was unthreatening because it had "come to protect us,"
      - Master baker Wu Pao-Chun publicly described himself as "a Chinese person who supports the '1992 Consensus'".

# CCP disinformation efforts against Taiwan

## Methodology

### 1. Establish trusted profiles

- Sometimes this is done by offering online coupons or using profiles of attractive 20-25 year olds, though the more common tactic is to pose as trusted international outlets, such as France International, the National Endowment for Democracy or Radio Free Asia.
- Often articles are copied from these reputable sites and then the headlines and content altered before being circulated via content farms (see pt 2).
- Not all these profiles are necessarily Asian - foreign video bloggers, popular in Asia, have also been reported to have pushed pro-Beijing content, including regarding Taiwan.

2. Support main profiles and targeted rival messaging with sock-puppets and bots from “**content farms**” and co-opted local profiles to create the appearance of large-scale support for Beijing (a process known as 'astroturfing').

- In order for make sock puppet profiles (fake profiles designed to look like individuals but are manned as opposed to automated) appear more genuine, their profiles often engage in feel-good spam (like cat videos).
- These content farms can be both for hire outfits on Taiwan or on the mainland or state-operated (the most prominent examples are the '50 cent army' and 'Spamouflage Dragon').
- This reached its highest levels during the 2018 elections.
  - Irregularities were observed in online support for Han Kuo-yu, a KMT candidate deemed softer on PRC relations who was elected mayor of Kaohsiung City in the 2018 election and who would go on to become the party's candidate for president in the 2020 election. He gained more than three times the Facebook followers and likes between October 17 and November 14 compared to his opponent.
  - At the same time, After a typhoon closed Kansai International Airport in Japan, thousands of travellers were left stranded, including many Taiwanese. A story in China's Global Times claimed that the Chinese government was not only repatriating its own citizens, but also providing support to Taiwanese citizens. This story was then circulated on Taiwanese forums before being debunked by the Japanese government, but not before the director of Taiwan's representative office in Osaka, Su Chii-cherng committed suicide as a result of pressure from the scandal.

# CCP disinformation efforts against Taiwan

3. Expand Chinese media in the area through **infiltration** (funding and advertisement for local media, social media pages and online personalities in exchange for towing editorial line).

- In at least two cases, individuals with significant business interests in China have extensive influence over Taiwanese media:
  - The Want Want Group, a conglomerate owned by Tsai Eng-Ming, has received over \$495 million USD in Chinese subsidies since 2007 and obtained ownership of the China Times and CTiTV in 2008. In 2019, it was revealed that editorial managers at were taking instructions from the Chinese government's Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) on stories relating to cross-Strait relations.
  - Likewise, Cher Wang, the owner of TVBS, another popular TV channel on the island, also holds substantial business interests in mainland China.
- The CCP also covertly paid at least five different Taiwanese media groups to run specific articles, according to Reuters, including positive coverage of China-Taiwan entrepreneurial exchanges published in a leading Taiwan newspaper.

## 4. Cyber-Enabled Disinformation Operations (CEDOs)

- In recent cases disinformation has been enabled by cyberwarfare measures like hacks, either designed to prevent an official response, manipulate advertisements to broadcast pro-reunification messaging or add credence to disinformation by 'sandwiching' between legitimate documents that have been stolen during the hack. As of yet, Deepfakes have not been utilised.
- Even as the PRC reportedly ramped up its disinformation operations against Taiwan in response to US Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit in August 2022, Taiwan's Defence Ministry reported a wave of cyber attacks against infrastructure and government websites that hampered Taipei's ability to respond to fears inflamed by disinformation.
- Another target was National Taiwan University, which displayed the words "there is only one China in this world" on its website after being taken over by PRC actors.
- One of the most prominent groups linked to the PRC (according to Mihac Celik of Ragusa Strategic Communications) is 'Dragon Breach'.

# Taipei's Countermeasures

Although Taiwan has and continues to be one of the states most persistently targeted with disinformation, its resilience remains remarkably high even as it maintains high levels of media freedom (a direct contrast to the PRC model). This is largely due to Taipei's successful countermeasures; focusing on rapid response and both governmental and non-governmental nodal networks.

## Rapid Response

- Disinformation and misinformation thrive in vacuums; responding quickly, and preferably prior to its dissemination (pre-bunking), is critical to establishing a dominant narrative and checking its spread. Consequently, Taipei has facilitated structures (both government administered and non-governmental) to respond to disinformation and misinformation at pace; preventing short-term social instability.
  - The Political and War Bureau of Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense frequently briefs the press on ongoing "political warfare" operations.
  - The Taiwan Fact Checking Center, MyGoPen, is also credited as one of the most visited websites in Taiwan, and for providing vital clarity during the PRC's August 2022 disinformation campaign.
- The establishment of non-governmental institutions both conveys legitimacy to the messaging (it is not viewed as "establishment"), empowers its population to fight disinformation themselves and creates a nodal network that is harder to disable via cyber operations than a centralised, government controlled, network.



Logo of the Political warfare Bureau of Taiwan



# Taipei's Countermeasures

**While Taipei's countermeasures thus far have been impressive, bolstering resilience to cognitive warfare requires a whole of society approach. To do so requires focusing on improving societal structures along five main lines; as outlined in Hung and Hung's recent study of the PRC's cognitive warfare against Taiwan (see supplementary reports).**

## **Improving social structures**

1) Improve Transparency - Making visible the nature, level, and extent of China's influence on Taiwan to the public, especially media and information penetration, including China's financial support to, academia, companies, and temples.

2) Maintain fair competition of content providers - Reducing tech monopolies decreases the harm caused when they are exploited as China's attack channels and creates a more diverse information environment. For example, Australia's News Media Bargaining Code, for instance, prevents digital platforms such as Google and Facebook from diminishing the local production of particular kinds of news and journalism.

3) Raise barriers for attackers and local collaborators - Although the Anti-Infiltration Act prevents China from interfering with Taiwan's elections, political lobbying, and demonstrations, it cannot prevent attacks outside the campaign period or prevent Chinese exiled dissidents from being monitored and harassed or the hiring of networks to spread disinformation by local collaborators. This is not unique to Taiwan, multiple Western Intelligence agencies have remarked their states' interference laws are not fit for purpose.

4) Breach the Great Firewall and Encourage democratisation on the mainland - The CCP's control of media on the mainland imbues it with a confidence to engage in cognitive warfare with a sense of impunity. It is likely that working to get behind the Firewall and expose its public to facts the CCP hides from them will diminish this. Studies show that the PRC's cyberattacks on Taiwan were dramatically reduced during its Hong Kong crackdown in 2018, suggesting its capacity remains limited and it cannot afford to fight two cognitive wars at once. This will require credible messengers engaging in truthful narratives if it is to succeed.

- An added benefit to these structures is that they are hard to undo, even in the unlikely event of a democratic backslide in Taiwan.

**Taiwan is not the only state to be the target of disinformation, its example has shown that a strategy to counter cognitive warfare based on rapid response and whole of society structures is not just supplementary, but absolutely necessary.**

# Supplementary Reports

Graphika. 'Detecting Digital Fingerprints: Tracing Chinese Disinformation in Taiwan'

RAND. 'Chinese Disinformation Efforts on Social Media'

Reporters Without Borders (RSF). 'China's Pursuit of a New World Media Order'

Tzu-Chieh Hung and Tzu-Wei Hung. 'How China's Cognitive Warfare Works: A Frontline Perspective of Taiwan's Anti-Disinformation Wars'