



VOLUME 25 • ISSUE 11 • JUNE 6, 2025

IN THIS ISSUE:

New Rules Advance Data-Based Governance System

By Arran Hope.....pp.2–6

Fracturing Transatlantic Convergence, One Capital at a Time

By Matthew Johnson.....pp.8–13

Taiwan's Lai Risks DPP Factional Infighting in Bid for Control

By Courtney Donovan Smith.....pp.14–19

Experts see Risk and Reward to Integrating AI in Nuclear Weapons

By Alex Lewis Richter.....pp.20–24

Hongmen Associations Have Links to United Front and Organized Crime

By Martin Purbrick.....pp.25–29

Beijing's Political Machine Makes Inroads in New York Politics

By Audrye Wong and Francis de Beixedon.....pp.30–35

New Rules Advance Data-Based Governance System

By Arran Hope



A building in Beijing that houses the National Data Administration. (Source: [Wikipedia](#))

Executive Summary:

- New regulations that seek to build an integrated national system for sharing government affairs data are intended to boost the Party's dual priorities of boosting innovation and safeguarding security.
- The regulations aim to resolve issues and inefficiencies caused by data silos and government organs refusing to share data with other organizations.
- They are the latest in a decade-long push to make data a core “factor of production”—something that accords with President Xi Jinping’s view that governance based on data is the dominant mode of governance in the new era.

In the analysis of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), history unfurls along a linear trajectory. Under the Party's steerage, the People's Republic of China (PRC) progresses through stages of development that are ever more advanced and bring ever more wealth and power to the nation. Modes of governance likewise have evolved over time. At first, "governance via experience" (经验治理) was the dominant mode for agricultural societies before they were supplanted by industrial societies, which instituted "governance via rules" (规则治理). Now, in Xi Jinping's new era, the Party operates a system of "governance via data" (数据治理).

This trajectory is laid out in a document published this week by the PRC Ministry of Justice that provides an exegesis of new rules intended to enhance the government's digital governance capabilities and improve the effectiveness of public services ([Ministry of Justice \[MOJ\]](#), June 4). The rules, titled "Regulations on Sharing Government Affairs Data" (政务数据共享条例), consist of 44 articles across eight chapters and will come into effect at the beginning of August ([State Council](#), June 3). According to the People's Daily, they aim to "promote the safe, orderly and efficient sharing and utilization of government data, enhance the government's digital governance capacity and the effectiveness of government services, and comprehensively build digital government" (推进政务数据安全有序高效共享利用, 提升政府数字化治理能力和政务服务效能, 全面建设数字政府) ([People's Daily](#), June 4). This will be achieved by establishing an "integrated national government affairs big data system" (全国一体化政务大数据体系) through the merging of existing data platforms, breaking down "data silos" (数据孤岛), and advancing the development of digital governance mechanisms ([Xinhua](#), June 4). Experimentation of this kind is already underway. Over the past year, 70 "demonstration scenarios" (示范场景) have been set up aimed at helping industrial development, social governance, and improving people's livelihoods ([Xinhua](#), June 4). As Director of the Data Resources Department at the National Data Administration Zhang Wang (张望) notes, these demonstrations have focused on areas such as transportation and logistics, satellite remote sensing, the low-altitude economy, meteorological services, and medical and health care—all areas the Party has emphasized for high-quality development ([Xinhua](#), June 4).

Regulations Signaled in Previous Directives

The regulations are the first dedicated to regulating and promoting data sharing in government affairs. The Party heralds their arrival as a "milestone event" (一里程碑事件) and a "requirement of the times for the new stage of digitization-driven Chinese-style modernization" (新阶段以数字化驱动中国式现代化的时代要求) ([MOJ](#), June 4). They build on—and supplement—years of extensive work by disparate parts of the government and Party bureaucracy that have sought to put data at the center of the PRC's governance model.

Several policy directives over the last few years have preceded the latest regulations. Most recently, an opinion (意见) released jointly in September by the general offices of both the CCP Central Committee and the State Council trailed the regulations. It said that by 2025 "the systems and rules for the development and utilization of public data resources will be initially established" (公共数据资源开发利用制度规则初步建立) and that "the role of public data resources will initially become apparent" (公共数据资源要素作用初步显现). The document also noted that "the government data catalogs shall be improved and uniformly managed" (完善政务数据目录, 实行统一管理) and that the system of policies concerning the open access of public data

would be improved by “defining the rights, responsibilities, and scope for open accessibility of public data” (明确公共数据开放的权责和范围) ([Lawinfo China](#), September 21, 2024).

More authoritative documents, such as the Third Plenum “Decision” (决定) published in July, also indicated that more regulatory clarity and support for data management was on the way. The document referenced “digital intelligence technology” (数智技术) for the first time, and stated that “the keywords of data, arithmetic, algorithms, and ‘new quality productive forces’ are interwoven to form a new picture of future digitization” (数据、算力、算法以及新质生产力等关键词交织成未来数字化发展的新画卷) ([Ministry of Justice](#), June 4). Similarly, the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021–2025) and 2035 Long-Range Goals called for a national integrated big data system that would make data more accessible to government and third parties ([Xinhua](#), March 13, 2021).

Going back even further, the Party’s Work Conference for Cybersecurity and Informatization in 2016—which marked the inauguration of the PRC’s “national big data strategy” (国家大数据战略)—called for “deep integration of information resources” (信息资源深度整合) and establishing a national information resource sharing system to improve the use of government data ([Xinhua](#), April 25, 2016). The following year marked the launch of a “Digital China Construction and Development” (数字中国建设发展) strategy that called for “data-driven socialist modernization” ([CAC](#), May 9, 2018; [Pacific Forum](#), February 2023). And in 2019, the Fourth Plenum “Decision” called for new systems to be developed for incorporating data into governance and macroeconomic management ([Xinhua](#), November 5, 2019).

The desire to build such a system stems from an assessment that puts data front and center in Party strategy. The Fourth Plenum “Decision” also listed data as a “factor of production” (生产要素), on par with traditional factors such as labor, capital, land, knowledge, and technology ([Xinhua](#), November 5, 2019). This elevation in importance has been consistent since Xi came to power in 2013. As he stated early in his tenure, “whoever controls big data technologies will control the resources and initiative for development” (谁掌握了大数据技术, 谁就掌握了发展的资源和主动权) ([CCP News Net](#), March 30, 2016). This view is echoed today by Zhang Wang who, in his appraisal of the new regulations, notes that government data is “an important basic strategic resource” (国家重要的基础性战略资源) ([Xinhua](#), June 4).

Regulations Seek to Fix Persistent Issues

The regulations seek in part to rectify problems that have arisen in the early years of the PRC’s national data strategy. One of the biggest issues has been the existence of data silos. As the Ministry of Justice notes, for a long time “the division of authority and responsibility in the vertical hierarchy, information barriers in horizontal departmentalization, and the heterogeneity of technical standards have seriously constrained the effectiveness of sharing government affairs data” (纵向层级制的权责分割、横向部门化的信息壁垒、技术标准的多重异构等问题, 严重制约了政务数据共享效能). It goes on to say that these contradictions are in fact “systemic problems” (制度问题) that “profoundly reflect an imbalance between the traditional mode of governance and the needs of governance in the digital era” (深刻反映了传统治理模式与数字时代治理需求之间的不平衡) ([Ministry of Justice](#), June 4).

Data silos that have persisted have led to inefficiencies. These include duplicative data collection by different departments and localities, an absence of standardized management of government data catalogs, and a mismatch between supply and demand for data. This in turn has meant that some data is incomplete, inaccurate, or obsolete, and therefore not useful. The penetration of the system is another issue. One report notes that grassroots-level governing organs have not been able to make full use of government data—something that the new regulations also seek to rectify ([Xinhua](#), June 4).

Innovation and Security in Focus

The regulations have a four-part design, according to the interpretation from the Ministry of Justice. These include a “chessboard” (一盘棋) layout, which refers to overall coordination of the system; a “one account” (一本账) approach, which refers to the management of data catalogs; a “one-stop” (一站式) service for data sharing and use; and an “integration” (一体化) of data-sharing platforms. This design is “a structural reform of the hierarchical governance paradigm, providing a rule of law solution to the problem of ‘being unwilling to share, not daring to share, and not being able to share’ government data” (对科层制治理范式的结构性改革, 为破解政务数据“不愿共享、不敢共享、不会共享”的问题提供了法治化解决方案) ([Ministry of Justice](#), June 4).

In more concrete terms, the regulations call for establishing a high-quality, nationally-integrated data catalog that covers all regions according to the principle of “compiling all data that should be compiled to the fullest extent possible” (按照应编尽编的原则). They provide detail on how government data should be recorded, how it should be standardized and formalized, and how it should be maintained and updated. Directions for submitting data for review and approval by the relevant organs before it is shared is also included, and on what timelines this should occur.

Underwriting all of the regulations’ stipulations are two considerations that are central preoccupations of the Party in the new era: stimulating innovation and safeguarding security. The purpose of centralizing and reducing inefficiencies is clear throughout. As the Ministry of Justice puts it, the regulations “give full play to the role of data as a basic resource and an engine of innovation” (发挥数据的基础资源作用和创新引擎作用) ([Ministry of Justice](#), June 4). This must not be done at the expense of security, however. In the very first article, the regulations cite the PRC’s Cybersecurity Law, Data Security Law, and Personal Information Protection Law, while reference to the “holistic national security concept” (总体国家安全观) appears in Article 4. The sixth chapter also focuses on “safeguarding measures” (保障措施).

These two aspects likely will come together in the Party’s quest for ever greater oversight and control over commercial data. Just as the Cyberspace Administration of China has previously called for integrating e-commerce activity into government data-sharing and standardization systems, the new regulations “encourage and support the application of new technologies such as big data, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, blockchain and other new technologies in government data sharing” (国家鼓励和支持大数据、云计算、人工智能、区块链等新技术在政务数据共享中的应用) ([CAC](#), October 26, 2021; [State Council](#), June 3).

Conclusion

The “Regulations on Sharing Government Affairs Data” provide an insight into both the Party’s ambitions and its proximity to their achievement. They can be added to a growing portfolio of laws, regulations, and other measures that seek to shape and harness data as a “productive force”. At the same time, they suggest that the Party views the steps taken over the last decade to build a national, unified system for managing data as insufficient.

The Party has a good track record of policy experimentation and iteration, refining implementation to iron out problems at the early stages before arriving at more robust and sustainable solutions. As such, teething problems to date are not necessarily indicative of lack of success in future. [1] Should the Party succeed in implementing the roadmap laid out in this and other measures, however, they will have created a powerful tool for enhancing control, with troubling implications for private citizens and entities that live and operate in the PRC.

Arran Hope is the editor of China Brief.

Notes

[1] Samantha Hoffman, a senior fellow at The Jamestown Foundation, has previously made a similar point regarding the Party’s efforts to leverage the so-called “social credit” system during the COVID-19 pandemic. She described how any gaps that the COVID-19 crisis response revealed “could accelerate improvements and ultimately make the technology more effective” ([NED](#), April 2021).

Fracturing Transatlantic Convergence, One Capital at a Time

By Matthew Johnson



Cooperation partner, economic competitor, and systemic rival. PRC Premier Li Keqiang and European Council President Donald Tusk in Brussels, 2019 marking the final chapter of the EU's engagement-first posture. (Source: European Council)

Executive Summary:

- In the wake of U.S.–China trade talks in Geneva, Beijing launched a sequenced campaign across Europe—first signaling partnership, then reinforcing its trade credentials through multilateral forums, and finally engaging in targeted bilateral diplomacy. The aim was to present the People's Republic of China (PRC) as a stabilizing force while preempting coordinated action from the European Union (EU) by shaping national responses before regulatory momentum could build.
- This approach capitalizes on structural differences among European states to delay collective decisions. By engaging France, Germany, Poland, Denmark, and the Netherlands on their own terms, Beijing worked to fragment consensus, stall enforcement on trade and tech, and position itself as a pragmatic partner rather than a systemic challenger.
- Even as U.S.–EU coordination slowly advances, Beijing sees continued opportunity in Europe's internal divergence. As long as member states remain divided in their economic dependencies and policy instincts, the PRC will use bilateral engagement to paralyze EU deliberation and slow the convergence of transatlantic trade strategy.

Beijing is seeking to shape outcomes in Europe by avoiding direct confrontation with the European Union (EU) and instead driving wedges between member states through a calibrated campaign of bilateral diplomacy. Its latest push followed directly from the May 6–11 trade talks with the United States in Geneva ([MOFCOM](#), May 12). Rather than treating those negotiations as a discrete effort at de-escalation, the People's Republic of China (PRC) used them as a launch point for a broader strategy: loosen Europe's alignment with Washington and capitalize on emerging gaps through state-to-state engagement. A central objective was to prevent the spread of U.S.-style trade measures—especially subsidy scrutiny, market access restrictions, and enforcement actions targeting Chinese firms—by engaging European governments before regulatory momentum could take hold. [1] The rollout began with appeals to partnership, followed by selective multilateral outreach to bolster China's image as a stable economic actor, and culminated in a dense round of bilateral activity aimed at shaping national responses and slowing collective action.

The campaign began with messaging. In the run-up to Geneva, Party media struck a deliberately moderate tone, casting the PRC as a defender of global trade norms and describing Europe as a “highly complementary” (高度互补) and “closely intertwined” (紧密交融) economic partner—not a rival ([Economic Daily](#), May 2). This was followed by behind-the-scenes multilateral engagement: PRC officials met with Swiss and WTO counterparts and convened a working-level dialogue with EU financial regulators, all while steering clear of flashpoints like digital regulation and export controls. These moves were designed to signal openness, reinforce Beijing's rule-abiding posture, and preserve market access at a moment when the United States is pursuing more assertive trade measures and revisiting globalization's institutional foundations.

The final phase began as soon as the Geneva talks concluded. Over the following two weeks, Beijing launched a tightly choreographed series of bilateral engagements with European capitals—France, Germany, Poland, Denmark, and the Netherlands—tailored to exploit internal divergences and delay emerging regulatory actions. Beneath the appearance of constructive diplomacy was a clear pattern: blunt Brussels's momentum, fragment consensus, and recast China's relationship with Europe as a patchwork of pragmatic alignments rather than a bloc-to-bloc rivalry.

The PRC now faces a two-front struggle—one against Washington's escalating tech restrictions and another against Brussels's slow but accelerating pushback on trade, investment, and security. The core of Beijing's response is division and offset: isolate and pressure key EU member states where it still holds leverage, bypass EU institutions where consensus is forming, and dilute emerging trade restrictions through pragmatic, transactional diplomacy. With transatlantic alignment deepening—structurally if not always rhetorically—room for maneuver is narrowing. Yet as long as European states remain divided in their market entanglements and geopolitical outlooks, Beijing will continue to exploit those fractures—using bilateral diplomacy to stall EU deliberation and undercut the momentum of transatlantic coordination.

Preempting Transatlantic Alignment After Geneva

In the immediate aftermath of the talks, Beijing launched a tightly choreographed series of diplomatic engagements across Europe. These were intended to reinforce the PRC's dual-track strategy of pushing back against Washington's tech restrictions and trade penalties while securing Europe as a stabilizing export partner and high-tech collaborator.

Beijing's post-Geneva diplomacy was prefaced by a clear signal of strategic intent. On May 2, the *Economic Daily* (经济日报)—a Party-run outlet often used to preview internal economic priorities—published a lead editorial framing the PRC as a defender of the global trade order. The article declared that the PRC and European economies are “highly complementary” (高度互补) and called for deepening cooperation in the face of the United States ([Economic Daily](#), May 2). [2] Beneath the cooperative tone, the piece conveyed calibrated frustration, blaming the United States for destabilizing global trade and debt markets. This message amplified the line Beijing had laid down during Xi Jinping's state meeting with Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez in April, where Xi urged the PRC and Europe to “jointly maintain the trend of economic globalization” (共同维护经济全球化潮流) and resist “unilateral bullying” (抵制单边霸凌行径)—Beijing's standard euphemism for U.S. policy ([MFA](#), April 11).

The ground campaign opened on May 9 with a meeting between Vice Minister Li Chenggang (李成钢) and Swiss State Secretary Helene Budliger Artieda, focused on upgrading the China-Switzerland Free Trade Agreement. While the agreement itself was framed as a continuation of pragmatic cooperation, Switzerland was cast as a “first mover” in European trade relations with the PRC ([MOFCOM](#), May 13). No links were drawn to the concurrent tariff standoff with the United States, but the message was that economic ties with Europe could proceed on a separate, unpoliticized track. Two days later, on May 11—the same day PRC officials concluded the Geneva talks—vice premier He Lifeng (何立峰) met with WTO director-general Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala. He publicly reaffirmed Beijing's support for multilateralism, free trade, and the stabilization of global governance institutions, while briefing Okonjo-Iweala on the Geneva meeting's outcomes ([Xinhua](#), May 12). The meeting reinforced the narrative set forth in the May 2 *Economic Daily* editorial: the PRC, not the United States, is defending global trade norms; and Europe's interests align more naturally with PRC economic stability than with American politicization of trade.

The final engagement in this sequence brought the strategy to the regulatory level. At a May 13–14 China–EU Financial Working Group meeting in Brussels, discussions spanned financial technology, cross-border data flows, sustainable finance, and payment systems, with the PRC proposing a standing technical exchange mechanism ([PBOC](#), May 14). The talks showcased Beijing's aim to institutionalize ties with European regulators while avoiding politically sensitive headlines. That same week, the PRC's vice chair of the National Financial Regulatory Administration (NFRA), Xiao Yuanqi (肖远企), participated in a Basel Committee plenary in Stockholm, signaling Beijing's intent to remain embedded in global standard-setting bodies even as it faces pressure on trade and technology fronts ([NFRA](#), May 21). Taken together, the Brussels session and Basel participation demonstrated a clear pattern: the PRC is leaning into technocratic diplomacy to maintain long-term access to European markets and regulatory ecosystems, even as broader geopolitical tensions escalate. The post-Geneva campaign thus reinforced Beijing's deeper strategy of maintaining economic interdependence with Europe, delaying U.S.-led decoupling efforts, and presenting Beijing as the more stable and rule-bound global actor.

Bilateralism to Offset Brussels

Over May 15–19, Beijing executed a dense series of bilateral engagements with France, Germany, Poland, and Denmark, each calibrated to exploit internal differences within the EU and weaken Brussels' regulatory momentum. The centerpiece was the May 15 China–France High-Level Economic and Financial Dialogue,

where the two sides finalized agreements on poultry trade and breeding stock, reaffirmed support for multilateralism, and promoted greater openness to Chinese investment. While the material outcomes were modest, the political optics were carefully arranged. The PRC praised France as a “driver” (带动引领) of EU–PRC ties, implicitly positioning Paris as a counterweight to Brussels ([People’s Daily](#), May 19). This continues Beijing’s long-held goal of elevating France’s bilateral channel as a potential buffer against future EU-wide regulatory escalation, particularly in areas like data governance, green subsidies (e.g. the EU’s Net-Zero Industry Act), and market access (China Brief, [December 1, 2023](#), [May 4, 2024](#)).

The tempo and tone shifted in Beijing’s May 19 calls with German and Polish foreign ministers, where diplomacy took on a more defensive and transactional character. In his call with German foreign minister Johann Wadephul, Foreign Minister Wang Yi (王毅) warned against “de-risking” (去风险) rhetoric and urged Berlin to help resolve the EU’s ongoing anti-subsidy probe into Chinese electric vehicles ([Xinhua](#), May 19). Notably, Wang invoked the Taiwan issue in highly direct terms, comparing it to Germany’s 1990 reunification and asserting that the PRC expects the same respect for its “core interests” (核心利益). With Poland—soon to hold the rotating EU presidency—Beijing appealed to Warsaw’s future institutional role, urging it to guide EU–PRC ties in a more “constructive” (建设性) direction ([Xinhua](#), May 19). Wang also reiterated Beijing’s line on Ukraine, framing the PRC as a neutral mediator while avoiding any criticism of Russia. Across both calls, no new offers were made, only appeals for influence and moderation from within the EU system.

Table 1: PRC Bilateral Engagements in Europe

	PRC rank as trade partner	Notable 2024 trade flows	Diplomatic value to the PRC
France	Top 5 EU partner	French exports to the PRC grew ~10% YoY, especially in aerospace, agri-food, and cosmetics	Agricultural leverage; France framed as EU bridge
Germany	Top trading partner	€5.7 bn (\$6.5 bn) German FDI in the PRC; €4.2 bn (\$4.8 bn) from auto sector; €80 bn (\$92 bn) trade surplus in the PRC’s favor	Industrial exposure; pressure point on EV probe and tech policy
Poland	Top 10 EU partner	Significant PRC–Poland freight rail links; moderate bilateral trade volumes	Rotating EU presidency in H2 2025; target for institutional influence
Denmark	Minor partner	Modest bilateral trade; green tech and Arctic access are core interests	Green tech cooperation; Greenland/Arctic sensitivity

(Source: Author research)

Denmark, by contrast, received a more measured message. During an in-person meeting with Danish Foreign Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen, the PRC emphasized green development and mutual investment, while expressing respect for Denmark's sensitivities over Greenland ([Xinhua](#), May 19). This differentiated approach illustrates a core aspect of Beijing's bilateral strategy: tailor messages to each country's leverage point, from institutional leadership (Poland) to trade policy (Germany) to sustainability diplomacy and sovereignty concerns (Denmark). Taken together, these engagements are aimed at marginalizing Brussels' position as the center of EU deliberation on the PRC. By leveraging state-to-state diplomacy, Beijing seeks to fragment consensus, stall regulatory action, and recast its relationship with Europe as a patchwork of flexible alignments.

This bilateral strategy also extends beyond the EU's institutional perimeter. On May 20, Beijing revived its long-standing commercial outreach to the United Kingdom through a meeting with the 48 Group Club, a business-friendly forum with historic ties to the PRC ([MOFCOM](#), May 20). The United Kingdom, no longer bound by EU policy coordination, offers Beijing a venue to test the limits of Western alignment—especially given London's deep security ties with Washington. PRC officials emphasized openness, denounced protectionism, and praised bilateral cooperation in trade and services. While largely symbolic, the engagement served a strategic purpose: to reframe the PRC as a pragmatic economic partner to individual Western economies, even as it clashes with Brussels on regulatory fronts.

Working Toward the Hague: PRC Courts the Netherlands Amid Regulatory Tensions

By late May, Beijing's bilateral charm offensive was tempered by rising frustration with the European Commission. The immediate trigger was Brussels's decision to sanction several PRC firms as "industrial enablers" of Russia's war effort—a move Beijing denounced as legally groundless and politically provocative ([European Council](#), May 20; [EUR-Lex](#), May 20). At a May 21 press conference, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning labeled the sanctions "unreasonable" (无理) and warned that the PRC would take "necessary measures" (必要措施) in response ([MFA](#), May 21). The same event also featured criticism of a new EU digital tariff targeting small-parcel e-commerce, framed as a discriminatory move against platforms like Shein and Temu. The subtext of these statements is Beijing's view of the EU's expanding regulatory actions as part of a broader response by developed economies to constrain the PRC's growth and restrict market access. In public messaging, Brussels was again being targeted as a co-participant in U.S.-led containment.

Even as rhetoric hardened toward Brussels, Beijing struck a markedly different tone with the Netherlands, whose "Big Five" firms ASML, ASM, NXP, Nexperia, and Besi sit at the center of global semiconductor supply chains. The PRC remains deeply dependent on Dutch lithography equipment, particularly from ASML. While the Netherlands has blocked exports of ASML's most advanced extreme ultraviolet (EUV) systems since 2019 under U.S. pressure, the more recent expansion of Dutch licensing controls to cover less advanced deep ultraviolet (DUV) tools and inspection equipment presents a direct threat to the PRC's manufacturing base ([Government of the Netherlands](#), January 15).

This technological dependence explains the highly disciplined tone of recent diplomatic engagements. A sequence of meetings in The Hague and Beijing from May 21–23 produced a carefully balanced diplomatic script. The PRC reiterated its openness to Dutch investment, affirmed support for multilateralism, and emphasized "non-discriminatory" (非歧视营商) business conditions ([MFA](#), May 22; [People's Daily](#), May 23).

On the sensitive issue of ASML and semiconductor export controls, both sides agreed to maintain dialogue “through existing channels” (通过现有渠道)—a coded acknowledgment of unresolved tensions. For the PRC, restoring access to ASML’s DUV tools is a strategic imperative; for the Netherlands, the challenge is to avoid a rupture with the PRC while sustaining its alignment with U.S. export control regimes.

This calibrated diplomacy underscores the selective nature of the PRC’s European engagement. While Brussels now faces sharper rhetorical pushback and retaliation threats, key EU member states are still being cultivated individually—especially those with leverage over chokepoint technologies or institutional-regulatory influence. Vice Premier Ding Xuexiang’s (丁薛祥) remarks during his May 23 meeting with Dutch officials captured the posture: the PRC welcomes Dutch investment and seeks “practical cooperation” (务实合作) but expects reciprocity and restraint on export controls ([People’s Daily](#), May 23). No breakthroughs were announced, but that was never the goal.

Germany’s Diminishing Room for Maneuver

The final and most symbolically weighty stop in the PRC’s May diplomatic circuit was Xi Jinping’s May 23 phone call with German chancellor Friedrich Merz. The exchange came at a time of deepening economic anxiety in Berlin. Germany’s 2025 growth forecast had been revised to zero amid a broader industrial slowdown and export uncertainty worsened by tariff pressures from both the United States and the PRC ([Deutsche Welle](#), April 24; [AP](#), April 24). For Xi, the call was less about resolving disputes than sustaining bilateral ballast. He emphasized political trust, stable cooperation, and renewed economic momentum, with a particular push for deeper alignment in AI, green development, and high-end manufacturing—areas where the PRC is now an assertive competitor ([Xinhua](#), May 23).

Despite the language of continuity, the structural imbalance between the PRC and Germany is becoming deeply embedded. In 2024 alone, German companies invested €5.7 billion (\$6.5 billion) in the PRC—€4.2 billion (\$4.8 billion) of it from the auto sector—making Germany by far the EU’s largest investor in the PRC market ([China-CEE Institute](#), May 25). By contrast, PRC investment in Germany remains smaller but increasingly strategic, with a growing share in renewables, research and development, and advanced production. The PRC has overtaken Germany in several key export sectors, including autos and industrial machinery, and now holds a trade surplus of roughly €80 billion (\$92 billion). This asymmetry leaves Berlin economically entangled but strategically exposed—dependent on a market where its competitive edge is eroding.

For Beijing, Germany remains a critical counterweight inside Europe. The PRC is increasingly able to dictate the terms of engagement as Germany becomes constrained by its own economic vulnerability. For Germany, the call therefore reinforced a narrow path of preserving a vital trade relationship without provoking Brussels or Washington. Merz affirmed the one-China policy and emphasized pragmatic engagement but made no new offers. The exchange underscored how the PRC now uses bilateral relations not only to sustain economic ties, but to deepen policy divergence within the EU on contested issues.

Conclusion

At the EU level, relations with the PRC are likely to harden. Current trends suggest more coordinated trade enforcement, stricter scrutiny of Chinese firms, and growing alignment with U.S. policy on technology and

investment controls. The EV probe and sanctions on Chinese entities signal that Brussels is no longer just watching Beijing, it is beginning to act—slowly, but with growing resolve. The PRC will continue to protest these moves as protectionist, but its influence over the EU's regulatory trajectory is weakening.

Bilateral ties, by contrast, will remain Beijing's primary tool. The PRC will keep cultivating countries with sectoral leverage or institutional roles to stall collective action. These engagements will stay pragmatic, transactional, and narrowly framed around market access, supply chains, and investment. As long as the EU's center of gravity remains cautious and slow-moving, the PRC will use bilateral diplomacy to shape outcomes in its favor, one capital at a time.

Dr. Matthew Johnson is a Senior Fellow at the Jamestown Foundation.

Notes

[1] The European Union has taken gradual but increasingly forceful steps to protect its economic and technological base from industrial overreach from the PRC. The launch of the €43 billion (\$49 billion) European Chips Act, the adoption of the Net-Zero Industry Act, and a series of reforms to EU state aid rules have signaled a new willingness to intervene in strategic sectors—especially semiconductors, electric vehicles (EVs), clean technology, and data (EUR-Lex, [September 13, 2023](#), [June 13, 2024](#)). While these measures rarely name the PRC directly, they are designed to insulate European industries from subsidized foreign competition and prevent long-term technological dependence. In parallel, the EU has begun deploying defensive trade instruments more aggressively: an anti-subsidy investigation into Chinese EVs launched in 2023 produced sweeping countervailing duties by late 2024, and the Commission is moving to expand outbound investment screening and supply chain resilience rules ([European Commission](#), January 14).

[2] Two other recent China Brief pieces have focused on Beijing's strategic approach to Europe (China Brief, [February 28](#), [April 11](#)).

Taiwan's Lai Risks DPP Factional Infighting in Bid for Control

By Courtney Donovan Smith



President Lai Ching-te at his inauguration on May 20, 2024. (Source: [Wikipedia](#))

Executive Summary:

- Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te has jettisoned a Tsai Ing-wen era formula designed to keep peace between factions within the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and has actively advanced his own New Tide faction.
- Lai's more control-oriented approach has given the president increased leverage over the executive branch, the party's minority legislative caucus, and the DPP.
- Pushback from factions has already occurred and will likely increase as by-elections and primaries for next year's local elections start to take place through the rest of the year, while simultaneously providing opposition parties with ammunition to campaign on.
- It is too soon to determine if Lai's strategy of consolidating and streamlining of control and decision making will increase successful outcomes, or if he has sown the seeds of intensifying internal party division.

The inauguration on May 20, 2024 of President Lai Ching-te (賴清德) has heralded a return of public factional infighting within Taiwan's Democratic People's Party (DPP). Lai, who leads the New Tide faction (新潮流系統, usually abbreviated to 新系), has sought to overtly control internal factional politics. Upon election, he staffed the Executive Yuan with New Tide members and other allies, upsetting the careful balance that his predecessor Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) had maintained. This contributed to a groundswell of dissatisfaction among various internal party groups that played out in the weeks surrounding the party's National Congress in July last year.

Factional politics have remained central to political developments in 2025. In ongoing recall campaigns against district legislators from the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT)—a strategic move on a scale unprecedented in any democratic state—the process of nominating by-election candidates will involve fierce competition between rival factions. [1] Competition is also already underway ahead of the 2026 local elections, primaries for which could take place as early as this fall. A committee that includes key figures from various factions is currently determining the rules for selecting candidates ([RW News](#), May 26). [2]

Discussion of DPP factions has been largely absent from English-language reporting for more than a decade. As these latest developments show, however, factional dynamics are crucial to understanding Taiwan's politics today.

A Short History of DPP Factions: A Formal Ban Before Balance Under Tsai

In 1986, a group of pro-democracy and anti-martial law activists gathered in Taipei and declared the founding of the DPP. Martial law was still in force and new political parties were banned. To the surprise of many, then-President Chiang Ching-kuo (蔣經國) did not crack down. The following year, he lifted martial law on Taiwan proper, though authoritarian repression continued into the early 1990s.

The founders of the DPP were united in their opposition to the KMT's one-party state, but beyond that binding glue they were a disparate group with a range of ideological viewpoints and ambitions. Factions formed to maximize interest groups' impact on the party's agenda. Their fortunes varied: some ceased to exist, some were absorbed into other factions, and some reformed under new names. The sole exception was New Tide, the only original faction that remains intact today.

Throughout the 1990s, the factions increasingly focused their energies on promoting their influence and interests and building patronage within the party. This escalated following the democratic election of the DPP's Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) to the presidency as factions jostled for power within his administration. Intense factional infighting became the norm and soap opera-style intrigue at the top of government frequently played out in the press. This embarrassed the DPP and provided ammunition for opposition parties to portray them in a negative, chaotic light.

The DPP formally banned factions in 2006, but they did not disappear. Instead, they simply became more opaque. New Tide, the biggest and most organized of the factions, could no longer operate a headquarters openly and stopped issuing membership cards. Meetings began to be held more secretly, such that members in one area might not be aware of those in other areas who were also members. The ban had no

effect on limiting the factions' influence on politics, however. New Tide continued to expand, and was the most proactive in recruiting beyond political circles, actively moving into business and academia.

Following a landslide electoral defeat in 2008, the DPP was in disarray. The relatively unknown technocrat Tsai Ing-wen ran for party chair and won—the first for a woman in the DPP. She had no factional affiliations and had only officially been a party member for four years. A former academic, Tsai was tapped to serve as a trade negotiator for the KMT administration of Lee Tung-hui (李登輝) before serving in the Chen administration as head of the Mainland Affairs Council, where she oversaw relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC).

As party chair and especially as president, Tsai implemented a formula for appointing key party and government positions that reflected factional interests. Members of New Tide—the largest and most powerful faction—were appointed to 30–40 percent of positions. (Their business connections also assured them high representation in running SOEs.) The Taiwan Normal Country Promotion Association (TNCPA; 正常國家促進會, usually abbreviated to 正國會), another powerful faction, received 20 percent of positions, and other factions were apportioned roughly 10 percent each ([China Brief](#), March 3, 2023). This reduced incentives for factions to engage in public conflict, as drawing press attention would harm their position in negotiations with Tsai. While factional infighting did continue at the local level, it did little harm to the image of the party nationally. Tsai's formula allowed the DPP to present itself as more united and disciplined. The local Chinese-language press continued to write about factions, but the lack of high drama meant fewer big headlines. In English-language news coverage, factions all but disappeared.

Factional Infighting Returns Under Lai

President Lai prefers to be overtly in control of factional politics. This distinguishes him from Tsai, who positioned herself as the essential node in a more consensus-driven model of internal governance. In January 2023, Lai ran unopposed to become DPP party chair. The following April, the party nominated him as its presidential candidate. His ascendance broke old alliances; and factions split into two camps, a “trust in Lai” (信賴) coalition, comprising New Tide, TNCPA, and “Vital Spring of Democracy” in one camp, and another comprising everyone else. (For more on these and other factions, see below.) Upon his inauguration in February 2024, Lai had the executive branch firmly under control and a strong hold over the DPP's (minority) legislative caucus.

Lai's Executive Yuan cabinet and other top officials in the Office of the President are weighted heavily toward figures from his own New Tide faction and other close allies. The latter group consists of people he worked well with during his years as Tainan mayor and as head of the cabinet, and could be referred to as Lai's clique ([China Brief](#), March 3, 2023). Political opponents refer to them instead as Lai's “Tainan gang” (台南幫).

At the time of Lai's election, analysis by this author found that of 42 key positions, 11 were widely recognized publicly as New Tide figures, while a further 11 were of Lai's clique and may or may not be formal members of New Tide ([Taipei Times](#), June 22, 2024). Of the remaining 20, half were non-factional technocrats, and half affiliated with other DPP factions. New Tide figures also featured prominently on the list of leaders running state-owned enterprises (SOEs). It is not unusual for incoming leaders to appoint people they know they can

work with or those from their wing of the party, but the makeup of Lai's incoming administration provoked alarm both within the DPP and among the opposition Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) and Taiwan People's Party (TPP).

Within weeks, and in the run-up to the party's National Congress, DPP factional infighting on a scale not seen in well over a decade broke out. Lai's New Tide and allied factions were at loggerheads with non-allied factions and breakaway rebels. The opposition parties have long held strong suspicions about the power and influence of DPP factions, especially New Tide. President Lai's open promotion of New Tide members provided opportunities for these opponents to raise these concerns anew to their respective core support bases.

The next battle, which took place in July 2024 at the party's National Congress, was over control of the DPP's powerful 10-member Central Standing Committee (CSC), the 30-member Central Executive Committee (CEC), and the 11-member Central Supervision Committee. As part of the "trust in Lai" coalition, the TNCPA agreed to only run two candidates for the CSC, down from the three they held previously. They opted to pick their north and central Taiwan leaders to run, cutting out Tainan lawmaker Fifi Chen (陳亭妃), the top leader in the south. Chen had grievances against Lai from his time as Tainan mayor. (Lai allegedly had backed Huang Wei-che over her in the DPP primary for the 2018 mayoral race.) Overriding the factional agreement, Chen declared she would run for a CSC seat to ensure that the next Tainan mayoral primary would be fair. She was expelled from the TNCPA, along with some of her supporters, but went on to win the CSC seat with the highest vote count of any candidate. Although the "trust in Lai" coalition won six of the ten CSC seats, her election helped deny New Tide a majority. TNCPA now only have one CSC seat, and are only a mid-range faction among party representatives. Following the congress, Lai has instituted regular "lunchbox" (便當會) meetings with top factional leaders. These likely ensure Lai hears the concerns of various factions, which might help inform overall party strategy

Factions and Figures Today: Seven Groups and their Key Members

Today, many individuals are known to be members of a particular faction (sometimes this is publicly acknowledged, especially for the top leadership). Many others are widely assumed to be members of—or seen as "friendly" to—a specific faction. Others still have no known factional affiliations. Some publicly tout their lack of factional affiliations as a badge of neutrality. Assumptions about an individual's alignment are usually fairly accurate; however, this is not always the case. For example, Lai's successor as Tainan mayor, Huang Wei-che (黃偉哲), was publicly close to Lai and New Tide figures. To his frustration, he was regularly labelled as New Tide as a result. He eventually held a press conference to deny any factional membership.

New Tide remains the biggest, most powerful faction. Three main subfactions have formed around key figures. Lai's subfaction is currently dominant. Another has formed around former Kaohsiung mayor and current Control Yuan President Chen Chu (陳菊), though in her role at the Control Yuan she has formally stepped back from internal DPP politics. A third, smaller subfaction has formed around former Taoyuan Mayor Cheng Wen-tsan (鄭文燦), but his current incarceration on alleged corruption charges has thrown its future into question. Other key figures in New Tide include Secretary-General to the President Pan Meng-an (潘孟安) and former DPP legislative deputy speaker Tsai Chi-chang (蔡其昌).

The leader and top figure in the TNCPA is Minister of Foreign Affairs Lin Chia-lung (林佳龍). DPP Secretary-General Lin Yu-chang (林右昌) is also a key player.

The Taiwan Forward faction (湧言會) is widely known as the “Ocean Faction” (海派). [3] Some members are frequently cited in international press. These include, on defense and regional security issues, Lawmaker Alex Wang Ting-yu (王定宇), who has contributed to this publication ([China Brief](#), February 16, 2024). Another is Lawmaker Huang Jie (黃捷), who was selected for the TIME100 Next 2024 List due to her status as the youngest Taiwanese legislator and her advocacy for underrepresented groups and human rights ([Time Magazine](#), October 2, 2024).

The Su Faction (蘇系) is named for Su Tseng-chang (蘇貞昌), a former premier in both the Chen and Tsai administrations. Former foreign minister and current Secretary-General of the National Security Council Jaushieh Joseph Wu (吳釗燮) is a prominent member. He is well-known internationally and is another former contributor to this publication ([China Brief](#), November 24, 2008). Domestically, Su’s daughter and current lawmaker Su Chiao-hui (蘇巧慧) is considered a possible DPP candidate for mayor of Taiwan’s largest city, New Taipei.

The Ing Faction (英系) is named after Tsai Ing-wen, though she has publicly distanced herself from it. Vice President Hsiao Bi-khim (蕭美琴), Minister of the Ocean Affairs Council Kuan Bi-ling (管碧玲), and Minister of Health and Welfare Chiu Tai-yuan (邱泰源) are widely associated with this Faction, while former premier and Vice President Chen Chien-jen (陳建仁) is widely speculated to be in or close to the faction.

The Green Fellowship Association (綠色友誼連線, sometimes written as 綠色友誼系統) is often referred to as the Sunny Bank Gang (陽信幫). It is one of the older factions in the party and is increasingly active at the local level.

The newest faction lacks an official English name, but may be rendered as “Vital Spring of Democracy” (民主活水連線). This group is pro-Lai but is significantly less established than New Tide. Its top figure is Cho Jung-tai (卓榮泰), the current premier.

Conclusion

President Lai has actively advanced people in his powerful New Tide faction within the DPP and people associated with him. This follows roughly 15 years of relative factional peace under a balanced power-sharing formula introduced by former party chair and president Tsai Ing-wen. Factional infighting made a significant impact on the DPP’s internal party congress in July 2024. If current recall campaigns against legislators prove successful, it likely will feature in the selection of by-election candidates too. Factions are already in fierce competition in some areas of Taiwan ahead of next year’s local elections, notably in the cities of Tainan, New Taipei, and Kaohsiung. These rivalries will likely intensify ahead of party primaries, which may be held this fall.

Courtney Donovan Smith is a Taichung, Taiwan-based staff columnist at Taipei Times, providing in-depth analysis on Taiwan's politics and geopolitics. Donovan is also the central Taiwan correspondent at ICRT FM100 Radio News, co-publisher of Compass Magazine, co-founder Taiwan Report (report.tw) and former chair of the Taichung American Chamber of Commerce. Follow him on X: @donovan_smith.

Notes

[1] Civil society groups launched recall campaigns against KMT district legislators starting in February. The deadlines for second-stage recall voter signups for the anti-KMT groups are currently coming due. Roughly 30 will proceed to the third stage, which is the public recall vote. The KMT and their supporters have responded by launching their own recalls against DPP lawmakers, though only 15 of their campaigns reached the second stage. Having started later, the results for the anti-DPP campaigns will not become clear until around mid-June. Currently, the DPP is united behind the recall efforts.

[2] Under the Republic of China (ROC) constitution, Taiwan is designated as a province. This elevates the 22 local heads of county and special municipality governments to a political role similar in stature to state or provincial governors in other countries. National-level factions have local chapters with their own histories, cultures, and makeup. These two levels converge in the selection of these local government heads, and local leaders often move on to national positions in the cabinet or the presidency.

[3] The “Ocean Faction” moniker comes from the third character in the name of Lin Kun-hai (林崑海). A former chair of pan-green news outlet SET TV, Lin more or less reconvened the former Frank Hsieh faction after the latter left the political scene. Lin has since passed away.

Experts see Risk and Reward to Integrating AI in Nuclear Weapons

By Alex Lewis Richter



A road-mobile ICBM, the DF-31, in the Military Museum of the Chinese People's Revolution, Beijing. (Source: [Wikipedia](#))

Executive Summary:

- Chinese experts see potential in the ability of cyberattacks enabled by artificial intelligence (AI) to disrupt nuclear infrastructure and increase the pressure to use nuclear weapons in a crisis.
- The development of early warning capabilities toward a launch-on-warning posture increases Beijing's impetus to integrate AI into data processing to inform decisions over nuclear use.
- There is significant ongoing debate on the threats AI-enabled conventional threats pose to the People's Liberation Army's nuclear forces, the effectiveness of remote-sensing in undersea warfare, and the vulnerabilities of using AI to process early warning data and generate options for decision-makers to respond to nuclear threats.

In April 2025, Zhang Gaosheng (张高胜), a researcher at the China Institute of International Studies, penned an article in *The Paper* pinpointing several mechanisms in which the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into nuclear command, control, and communications (NC3) systems will increase the risk of nuclear escalation ([The Paper](#), April 11, 2025). In particular, as AI technologies become increasingly embedded in critical nuclear infrastructure, the potential for miscalculation, system vulnerabilities, and unintended escalation grows more acute. It is, therefore, critical to understand how the PRC plans to integrate AI into its nuclear strategy.

Although Biden and Xi previously agreed on the need to maintain human control over the decision to use nuclear weapons, the decision to integrate AI into nuclear command, control, and communications NC3 is far more complex than the decision to maintain a human-in-the-loop ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), November 17, 2024). From processing early-warning data to autonomous targeting, there are numerous ways of integrating AI into NC3 while maintaining people within the decision-making process. As the performance of AI models rapidly improves, Chinese experts have identified opportunities to incorporate AI in NC3. They have also discussed the weaknesses of doing so and the risks AI may pose to the survivability of its nuclear forces.

AI-Enabled Cyber and Conventional Systems Threaten Nuclear Survivability

Chinese experts are broadly concerned about AI's threat to nuclear strategic stability. The ability of AI to detect targets, sort through data, and improve decision-making speed can enhance counterforce capabilities and provide offensive advantages that can threaten adversary retaliatory capabilities ([Center for International Security and Strategy](#), September 2, 2019). Chinese analysts have identified U.S. decisions to integrate AI into components of its NC3 system as threatening PRC second-strike capabilities. These decisions to enhance counterforce capabilities create arms race dynamics and drive up the requirements for a “strong strategic deterrent system” (强大战略威慑力量体系). This, in turn, will trigger Chinese countermeasures to upgrade the mobility and penetration capabilities of its nuclear forces ([Shanghai Institutes for International Studies](#), March 2025).

The Cyber-AI-Nuclear Nexus

PRC writings have emphasized emerging threats from AI-enhanced cyberattacks. As Xi Jinping declared while addressing the Central Leading Group for Cybersecurity and Informatization in 2014, “Without cybersecurity, there is no national security” (没有网络安全就没有国家安全) ([Xinhua](#), February 27, 2014).

The development of AI-enabled cyberattacks could significantly increase the vulnerability of PRC nuclear forces. AI-powered autonomous agents and advanced persistent threats (APT) can analyze vast amounts of data to systematically detect, analyze, and exploit weaknesses in target systems. AI-enabled malware can also automatically alter its code to evade detection and recognize where potential zero-day vulnerabilities may appear. Chinese analysts have observed that such developments in AI-enabled cyberattacks could more easily allow adversaries to find and exploit weaknesses in systems that could disrupt nuclear infrastructure. The proliferation of AI and cyber capabilities could enable third parties and terrorists to sow discord among nuclear-armed countries through “smart intrusions” (智能入侵).

The speed at which AI-enabled cyberattacks can “paralyze” (瘫痪) nuclear weapons systems could increase pressures to use nuclear weapons in a crisis, according to analysts from the National University of Defense

Technology. This is due to the difficulty of attributing responsibility, detection, and issuing warnings in a short time period—especially if the country maintains a launch-on-warning posture ([Information Security and Communications Privacy](#), October 11, 2021).

AI can also improve cyber defenses by autonomously conducting vulnerability analysis, searching for breaches, and identifying APTs. Some speculate that AI can intensify a measure-countermeasure race in which several actors repeatedly identify vulnerabilities in adversary nuclear weapons systems and take corresponding actions to rectify vulnerabilities in their own systems ([Center for Canadian Studies \[CCS\]](#), November 24, 2020; [Information Security and Communications Privacy](#), October 11, 2021).

Such vulnerabilities make the PRC's nuclear infrastructure a likely target in any crisis or wartime environment that involves cyber. Experts point to the Bush and Obama administrations' efforts to use cyberattacks to sabotage North Korea's nuclear weapons program as indicative of scenarios the PRC may face ([CCS](#), November 24, 2020). To address the threats posed by AI-enabled cyberwarfare, analysts writing in the *Journal of Intelligence* recommend increasing redundancies in information network systems, enhancing tailored defenses of infrastructure, and making the structure of critical infrastructure less predictable and harder to map ([Journal of Intelligence](#), 2021).

Blurring Conventional and Nuclear Threats

AI can also enhance conventional threats to nuclear forces. PRC experts have long feared that “non-nuclear strategic weapons” (非核战略武器) could threaten the country's nuclear forces. As a result of transformative technological advances in precision guidance and information networks after the Cold War, National Defense University scholar Zhang Yan (张岩) emphasizes that conventional weapons and long-range precision strike capabilities could be used to threaten an adversary's nuclear forces ([Military History](#), March 2018). Another analyst notes that the enhanced ability of the United States to detect, track, and attack missiles through precision-guidance threatens PRC nuclear capabilities and weakens mutual vulnerability ([Journal of International Security Studies](#), March 29, 2019).

The integration of AI with conventional weapons creates additional means of threatening PRC nuclear forces. As the United States and the PRC both attempt to integrate autonomy into drones to enhance conventional capabilities, experts have indicated that drone swarms can be used to threaten PRC nuclear facilities. As an op-ed in the *PLA Daily*, the official mouthpiece of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), highlights, drone swarms can be used to penetrate multi-layered air defenses and launch pre-emptive strikes that threaten the PRC's nuclear counterattack capabilities and allow adversaries to gain advantage via “unilaterally assured destruction” (单方面确保摧毁). These drone swarms can be used to target nuclear delivery vehicles, NC3 infrastructure, and early warning systems used to enable nuclear retaliation ([PLA Daily](#), July 20, 2021). [1]

Some experts posit that AI will not enhance the ability of conventional forces, especially drone swarms, to threaten an adversary's nuclear delivery systems. Drones carrying conventional payloads are not effective in destroying reinforced silos and are less ranged compared to traditional ballistic missiles. Geographic factors also limit the ability of drones and other autonomous vehicles to hunt ballistic missile transporter erector launchers or nuclear submarines (SSBNs) located in vast oceans, mountain caves, or other remote locations ([The Journal of International Studies](#), 2020).

AI Opportunities in Early Warning and Remote Sensing

Integrating AI in Early Warning and Data Processing

Since 1964, the PRC has maintained a no-first-use declaratory policy, committing to not be the first country to use nuclear weapons in any conflict under any circumstances ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), July 23, 2024). At the same time, however, the U.S. Department of Defense assesses that the PRC is building a diverse array of space and ground-based early warning sensors designed to detect nuclear launch and provide the PRC an option to maintain a launch-on-warning posture and rapidly retaliate before a nuclear weapon has been detonated ([Department of Defense](#), December 18, 2024).

Using early warning systems to inform decisions over nuclear use is data-intensive and labor-intensive. Chinese experts highlight that commanders and decision-makers may be overwhelmed by the large amount of information about adversary actions, preventing commanders from making quick and informed decisions. AI integration in nuclear early warning systems can quickly screen incoming data, improve the quality of data, and distinguish between false and real warnings to give decision-makers more time to respond. Outside of data processing, scholars foresee AI being used in a generative role to provide commanders with potential options to respond to nuclear and non-nuclear threats ([Journal of Intelligence](#), 2021).

Some experts nevertheless fear that AI models used for decision support in NC3 can be deceived, manipulated, or produce erroneous judgments in early warning systems. One Chinese observer asserts that a lack of high-quality training data could hinder the effectiveness of AI models, especially in the nuclear domain. With fewer relevant data points and limited access to data, AI models are likely to produce unreliable outputs that could lead to failures in sensitive nuclear weapons systems. More maliciously, actors can use AI to create deepfakes that simulate videos or audio of senior civilian and military leaders that are leaked to another country's intelligence collection and analysis organization. Experts point out that such deepfakes can contribute to creating crisis instability, misperception, and strategic misjudgment ([Information Security and Communications Privacy](#), October 11, 2021). AI models may also be susceptible to data poisoning by nefarious actors. This can be done when adversaries deliberately expose or hide information based on how an AI model weighs information to create analysis or predictions, causing the model to draw incorrect conclusions ([PLA Daily](#), July 20, 2021).

Stalking the Sea

The United States relies heavily on ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) as a key component of its nuclear triad to maintain its nuclear deterrence. It maintains 14 Ohio-class SSBNs—a larger fleet than the PRC's six operational Jin-class SSBNs, which it deploys for strategic deterrence missions. (The sea leg of the nuclear triad is one of the most survivable and critical components of the nuclear triad due to the difficulty of tracking SSBN in the deep sea.)

Chinese analysts indicate that AI technology and remote sensing can enable the deployment of autonomous underwater unmanned vehicles (UUVs) to detect, track, and attack SSBNs to reduce their survivability and limit their range. Their relatively cheap production could allow the PRC to deploy UUVs in large numbers to monitor choke points that SSBNs must pass through to reach or leave their patrol areas. Once the SSBN is

identified, AI and remote sensing technologies could enable UUVs to continuously track SSBNs and prevent them from entering specific areas. One Chinese expert from the University of International Relations in Beijing points out that researchers are investigating the effects AI could have on SSBN survivability, because the PRC maintains fewer SSBNs that all perform worse than those of other nuclear powers ([Theory and Practice of International Relations](#), December 17, 2024). Others, however, dismiss the effect AI has on undersea warfare, pointing to the limitations on the ability to deploy enough UUVs to cover a wide enough stretch of sea to track and destroy SSBNs ([The Journal of International Studies](#), 2020).

Conclusion

The question of integration of AI in its nuclear forces continues to provoke active and ongoing debate within the PRC. Experts perceive AI as both an enabler and a threat in the nuclear domain. While it can enhance early warning, data processing, and decision support, it also introduces new vulnerabilities to nuclear forces. Scholars are especially wary of AI-enabled cyber threats to nuclear infrastructure and the potential vulnerabilities of AI models to cyberattacks in NC3. Understanding how the PRC conceptualizes the integration of AI into its nuclear strategy is critical for contingency planning, crisis management, and assessing future risks to strategic stability, as it allows planners to anticipate how the PRC may respond to U.S. technological initiatives.

Across authoritative releases and white papers, the PRC for years has been emphatic about AI's potential in areas ranging from military systems to economic development. It has been opaque, however, on the nature of its nuclear build-up and operational concepts, let alone on specific plans for integrating AI within nuclear weapons systems. This means that any such analysis inherently has limited predictive power. Outlining a range of potential applications for AI in nuclear weapons as identified by Chinese experts nevertheless remains a valuable exercise—their views could inform future PRC policy and military development. Academic journals and PLA analyses likely will continue to publish on the topic, and are worth paying attention to as the debate develops in the years ahead.

Alex Lewis Richter is a student at UC Berkeley

Notes

[1] Zhang Huang and Du Yanyun. "The Trend of Militarizing Artificial Intelligence and its Impact on Security" (人工智能军事化发展态势及其安全影响). *Foreign Affairs Review* (外交学院学报), no. 3 (2022): 99-130. DOI: 10.13569/j.cnki.far.2022.03.099.

Hongmen Associations Have Links to United Front and Organized Crime

By Martin Purbrick



The World Hongmen History and Culture Association, East Africa Branch. (Source: [Douyin](#))

Executive Summary:

- Hongmen associations, with historical roots in Qing-era secret societies, have become entangled in Chinese Communist Party (CCP) united front efforts abroad, particularly through patriotic messaging promoting unification with Taiwan. Their mythologized origins and rituals make them nearly indistinguishable from criminal triad societies.
- Criminal actors like former 14K triad boss Wan Kuok-koi have co-opted the Hongmen brand to build business ventures in One Belt One Road countries, including security firms, liquor brands, and even cryptocurrency—all under the banner of patriotism and cultural heritage.
- The CCP has tolerated and even benefited from this arrangement, as triad-affiliated Hongmen groups serve its geopolitical goals. Events like the 2023 “Taiwan All Circles Conference to Promote Peaceful Reunification” show how Hongmen has become a platform for CCP-aligned messaging overseas.

Hongmen (洪門; “great gate” or “vast family”) associations are expanding their activities in multiple countries, with individuals and organizations who claim affiliation with Hongmen associations increasingly operating in One Belt One Road partner countries. Advertisements for businesses involving these associations include selling branded luxury watches, Maotai (茅台; aka Moutai) liquor, and “Hung Mun” beer—using the Hongmen name as a marketing tool.

These associations are deeply intertwined with Chinese Communist Party (CCP) united front activities. They promote the Party’s key messaging priorities such as patriotic rhetoric about national unification with Taiwan and traditional Chinese culture. They are also connected with criminal gangs. Hongmen have operated as Chinese community organizations overseas for over a century but the distinction between them and criminal triad societies, with which they share rituals and mythology, is blurred. This makes it difficult to tell legitimate cultural organizations from criminal networks, allowing some triads to operate under the Hongmen name for legitimacy.

Wan Kuok-koi (尹國駒), also known as “Broken Tooth Koi” (崩牙駒), is an alleged former leader of the Macau 14K triad who has used the Hongmen brand to front his businesses. He exemplifies a broader trend among Chinese criminals who, by publicly declaring loyalty to the People’s Republic of China (PRC) through Hongmen organizations, seek tacit acceptance for their overseas operations.

The Origins of Hongmen

Hongmen, or Hung Mun, traces its origins to sworn brotherhoods and mutual aid associations formed during the Qing Dynasty. According to one central legend, the organization was originally founded after 128 Shaolin monks helped Emperor Kangxi (康熙帝) repel an invasion. Refusing any reward, the monks returned to their monastery but were later accused of rebellion. The Emperor ordered the temple’s destruction, from which only five monks survived. The survivors devoted themselves to overthrowing the Qing and restoring the Ming, inspired after finding a stone tripod engraved with the words “Oppose the Qing, restore the Ming” (反清复明). They formed the *Tiandihui* (天地会; Heaven and Earth Society) as a secret revolutionary brotherhood and adopted the surname Hong (洪) after the regnal name of the Ming’s founder. They also used a triangular seal representing heaven, earth, and man, which later became the iconic symbol of “triad” societies in the West.

This creation myth is apocryphal but has endured in part because of its appeal to nationalism, which Sun Yat-sen (孫逸仙) and other revolutionaries utilized in the early twentieth century (Jiang Sun, [Secret Societies and the 1911 Revolution](#), 2017; [Wikisource/Plan for National Reconstruction](#), accessed May 30). Suppressed by colonial powers and outlawed by the CCP after 1949, Hongmen associations survived in Taiwan, where the Hong Men International Headquarters registered legally in 2004 ([Hung Mun Headquarters](#), accessed May 28).

Hongmen Links to the United Front System

Hongmen are involved in the PRC governance system via the China Zhi Gong Party (中国致公党; lit. “Public Interest Party of China”), one of eight nominally “democratic” political parties represented in the State Council. These parties are managed as part of the united front system ([United Front Work Department](#), June 21, 2005). In the early twentieth century, before becoming an official political party, it was a Hongmen organization that

supported Sun Yat-sen's efforts to revive China. According to the World Hongmen Management Center, eight out of ten overseas Chinese in the United States were members at that time. After the Chinese civil war, Hongmen that stayed in mainland China became the China Zhi Gong Party, which is now based at No. 55 Andingmenwai Street, Beijing—the same location as the Chinese Peasants and Workers Democratic Party (中国农工民主党), another of the PRC's eight officially sanctioned democratic parties ([World Hongmen Management Center](#), September 17, 2023; [Chinese Peasants and Workers Democratic Party](#), accessed May 28).

The World Hongmen Management Center actively promotes unification of the PRC and Taiwan. In November 2023, it hosted the “2023 Taiwan All Circles Conference to Promote Peaceful Reunification” (台湾各界促进和平统一大会). Attended by over 500 representatives from the CCP, government, military, religious groups, and major non-governmental organizations, the conference “unanimously condemned the ‘retrograde actions’ (一致声讨 ... “倒行逆施”) of Taiwan’s government, which it characterized as “a pawn of the United States” (美国棋子) ([World Hongmen Management Center](#), November 14, 2023). The role of the World Hongmen Management Centre seems to be influencing rather than directing, in the same manner as many united front activities. Hongmen within Taiwan also conduct united front work. The chairman of the Taiwan International Hongmen Chinese Association (国际洪门中华总会), Liu Peixun (刘沛勋), said at the conference that the Hongmen “is a hardcore force that is clear-cut in its stance of opposing independence and promoting reunification” (“反独促统”旗帜鲜明的铁杆部队) and has long been carrying out work to “resist Taiwan independence forces and promote cross-strait reunification” (对抗台独势力及促进两岸统一) ([World Hongmen Management Center](#), November 14, 2023).

The World Hongmen Organization (WHMO; 世界洪門組織), a separate group headquartered in Colorado, has helped internationalize Hongmen's ties to united front activities ([WHMO](#), accessed May 28). In its constitution, the first item it lists under the scope of its business is “hold various patriotic propaganda activities, introduce various dynamics and progress of the Hongmen cause around the world, and vigorously promote measures and policies for China’s peaceful unification” (举办各种爱国主义宣传活动, 介绍全球洪门事业发展的各种动态和进展, 大力推广宣传中国和平统一方针、政策) ([WHMO](#), accessed May 30). Part of this work is presumably carried out by one of its constituent organizations, the Propaganda Team for Promoting China’s Peaceful Reunification (促进中国和平统一宣讲团) ([WHMO](#), accessed May 30).

The organization's sprawling structure includes affiliated offices across the globe from Hong Kong and Nairobi to Toronto and Madrid. It oversees a Business Development Department (事业拓展部) that claims to be active in—among other things—the health industry, blockchain, industrial development, rural revitalization, and hospitality. A Brand Development Center (品牌发展中心) is responsible for Hongmen-branded products ([WHMO](#), accessed May 30). It even claims to be a United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)-registered NGO—though it does not appear in the United Nations's own directory—and presents itself as a global platform for communication, mutual aid, and development among Hongmen members ([WHMO](#), accessed May 28; [UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs](#), accessed May 28).

Hongmen Links to Criminals

The website of the World Hongmen Organization refers to Wan Kuok-koi as the president of the World Hongmen Historical and Cultural Association, although it does not explain the relationship between the two Hongmen organizations ([WHMO](#), September 26, 2022).

Starting in 1996, the Macau faction of the 14k led by Wan engaged in violent turf wars with rival triad groups over the control of casino VIP rooms and vice operations. That year, Macau recorded 21 murders, with a dozen more in the first five months of 1997 ([China Brief](#), February 25, 2022). Wan was arrested in May 1997, and in November 1999 was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment for charges including criminal association, loan sharking, and illegal gambling. He was released on December 1, 2012, after serving the majority of his sentence.

Shortly after Wan's release, on March 22, 2013, Wan became President of the World Hongmen History and Culture Association (世界洪門歷史文化協會) in Macau ([Imprensa Oficial of Macau](#), March 12, 2013). The association claims its mission is "to love the nation, organize cultural exchange activities in various places, and pass on the history and culture of the Xinhai Revolution" (熱愛國家民族，組織各地文化交流活動，卑能傳承辛亥革命歷史文化) ([South China Morning Post](#), October 6, 2021). (The Xinhai Revolution overthrew the Qing in 1911.)

In a speech delivered in February 2018, Wan announced a plan to establish a Hongmen Security Company to protect PRC merchants in the One Belt One Road countries. He emphasized that the association's motto is "loving and supporting the country" and pledged to do his utmost to "promote the national policy and assist in whatever way for peaceful and united cross-straits relations" ([Macau Business](#), February 23, 2018; [Asia Times](#), February 23, 2018). Although there is no public indication of the current state of the Hongmen Security Company, there has been a significant growth in the number of unregulated private security companies operating in Cambodia and Myanmar ([SCMP](#), June 24, 2021). Later in 2018, Wan announced that the World Hongmen History and Culture Association had established its headquarters in Cambodia, with plans to launch a cryptocurrency and open schools for overseas Chinese to learn about Chinese culture ([Macau Business](#), June 2, 2018). He has since continued to promote Hongmen-linked business ventures and publicly state his support for the unification of the PRC and Taiwan, as seen in the many references by Wan and associates.

Between 2021 and 2024, several Douyin posts highlighted the expanding international presence of the World Hongmen History and Culture Association. In October 2021, a user named Uncle Jiang (江大叔) shared a video of incense burning at an altar to mark the association's official entry into Cambodia ([Douyin](#), October 6, 2021). A year later, images surfaced of a branch in Uganda featuring armed local security guards posing with Hongmen symbols ([Douyin](#), September 30, 2022). In December 2023, a representative of the National Operation Center of Hongmen Liquor posted a photo of Wan Kuok-koi holding a can of Hung Mun beer, claiming it was produced in Cambodia under the association's authorization ([Douyin](#), December 14, 2023). Most recently, in April 2024, a user shared images of Wan with Hongmen insignia and documents, announcing that a branch in Hainan had been approved by the association's General Assembly and emphasizing Hongmen's mission to serve the country ([Douyin](#), April 13, 2024).

The U.S. government has sanctioned Wan and his Hongmen-related ventures for their criminal ties under the Global Magnitsky Act. These include the World Hongmen History and Culture Association, the Palau China

Hung-Mun Cultural Association, and the Dongmei Group. The latter is a key investor in the Saixigang Industrial Zone in Myanmar, a crime hub that uses trafficked labor and whose victims have been subject to torture and extortion ([U.S. Department of Treasury](#), December 9, 2020; [The New York Times](#), December 17, 2023; [Justice for Myanmar](#), August 29, 2024).

Conclusion

Hongmen have long been intertwined with overseas Chinese networks, including with criminal triad societies. For more than a century they also have been associated with patriotic causes, though since aligning with the CCP this has been reduced largely to advocating for unification with Taiwan. Hongmen's identity has continued to straddle the line between cultural organization and criminal enterprise, as their association with former Macau 14K triad boss Wan Kuok-koi shows. The CCP has turned a blind eye as Hongmen ventures have expanded across One Belt One Road countries, in part because these organizations serve the purposes of united front work. This implicit endorsement of criminal activities that pose a transnational risk could undermine trust in the PRC government along parts of the Belt and Road where Hongmen and related triads are active, especially as it touts its leadership credentials among developing countries.

Martin Purbrick is a writer, analyst, and consultant. He spent over 32 years in Asia working in the Royal Hong Kong Police serving in Special Branch and the Criminal Intelligence Bureau, followed by senior leadership roles managing financial crime risk with several major companies. Martin is an Honorary Fellow at the Keele Policing Academic Collaboration (KPAC) of the Keele University focused on public order and criminology in Asia.

Beijing's Political Machine Makes Inroads in New York Politics

By Audrye Wong and Francis de Beixedon



Lester Chang (right), who represents the 49th district of the New York State Assembly, is backed by organizations with links to the united front system. (Source: [Wikipedia](#))

Executive Summary:

- The united front operates abroad as a political machine, helping to get people elected by fielding candidates, mobilizing votes, and building power bases.
- Asian-Americans are growing in numbers yet remain key swing voters. Beijing's role in shaping the political leanings of this demographic could have an enduring impact on who the United States's leaders are.
- In New York City, individuals and networks connected to the Party's united front system have helped elect at least three local politicians in the last three years.
- John Chan, a power broker whose networks span U.S. and Chinese officials, supported a 2022 proposal that would have created New York City's first majority-Asian district, opposing established Asian-American community groups in the process. This likely would have given united front-linked groups a more dependable way to select and back elected representatives.

In April, the People's Republic of China's (PRC) newly-appointed Deputy Consul General in New York met with overseas Chinese community leaders from across the city ([World Journal](#), April 28). The meeting was hosted by BRACE (Asian-American Community Empowerment; 美国亚裔社团联合总会), a grassroots organization founded by John Chan, a prominent power broker with extensive connections to the PRC government ([Washington Post](#), September 3, 2024; [The New York Times \[NYT\]](#), December 9, 2024). The Deputy Consul General praised BRACE for providing community services and safeguarding the rights and interests of overseas Chinese, while Chan thanked the consulate for its continuing support.

Just one month earlier, Chan's close connections were on display once more—this time with New York politicians. Chan successfully persuaded two representatives to petition the U.S. Consulate in Guangzhou to revisit a previously rejected visa application, in order to facilitate a crucial medical procedure for a local resident he met through BRACE ([Huaren Toutiao](#), April 23). Chan's position as a power broker, with his close ties with U.S. and PRC officials, as well as to a network of local community organizations, is illustrative of a key strategy underpinning Beijing's influence efforts: cultivating individuals with links to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) at the core of ethnic Chinese communities with a view to building up a political influence machine over the long term.

United Front Builds Grassroots Machine

The Party's foreign influence activities can take many forms, from the harassment of dissidents to public protests against a Taiwanese president's visit. Many of these activities are managed under the umbrella of the "united front" (统一战线), an amorphous global network of official and grassroots organizations tasked with mobilizing friends, suppressing enemies, and promoting Beijing's interests. At the central level, united front work is the responsibility of the United Front Work Department, a Party organ.

The united front operates abroad as a political machine. Its work extends beyond pro-Beijing advocacy and rubbing shoulders with those in power. It is also about getting people elected, by fielding candidates, mobilizing votes, and building power bases. At a time when Asian-Americans are growing in numbers yet remain key swing voters, Beijing's role in shaping the political leanings of this demographic could have an enduring impact on who the United States's leaders are ([NYT](#), August 13, 2024). The machine operates through societal organizations (社团) such as community and grassroots associations. These play a key role as "channels" (渠道) to build links with broader ethnic Chinese communities while maintaining Party connections. [1] They wear dual hats, providing public goods that help ground their legitimacy while engaging in political mobilization on behalf of the Party ([China Brief](#), October 21, 2024). [2]

United front tactics can be hard to detect. In the United States, united front work is frequently carried out under the guise of America-centric community mobilization rather than overtly adopting a pro-Beijing banner. In 2009, the then-director of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office—which merged with the United Front Work Department in 2017—called for Chinese people to actively participate in local politics and make their voices heard, framing this participation as defending the interests of minority groups ([Overseas Chinese Affairs Office](#), 2009; [China Brief](#), October 7, 2024). The united front also mobilizes ethnic Chinese communities to engage in protests by tapping into explosive "wedge" issues, such as race and identity ([Foreign Policy](#), March 6). Issues such as anti-Asian hate, public safety, homeless shelters, bail reform, and standardized testing for high school admissions

have been framed as part of longstanding racial discrimination toward and political exclusion of Chinese-American and Asian-American communities. Crucially, such mobilization is further directed toward explicit political goals—getting Chinese-Americans to vote for endorsed and preferred candidates.

Candidates and Campaigns Across the Spectrum Have United Front Ties

In New York City, individuals and networks connected to the united front system have helped elect at least three local politicians in south Brooklyn in the last three years. They have also participated in the electoral redistricting process to ensure a mobilization advantage for their favored candidate, even though this put them in opposition to other established Asian-American civil society groups.

The united front political machine now dominates multiple layers of local politics in the Bensonhurst area in southern Brooklyn, a neighborhood with diverse immigrant communities that includes a large and growing number from the PRC mainland ([NYT](#), April 15, 2015). John Chan connects many of the individuals involved in local politics there. A 2024 article by Sing Tao, a PRC government-linked media outlet registered as a foreign agent in the United States since 2021, noted that John Chan had been involved in Brooklyn elections for the past 20 years and claimed that almost every politician who had risen to power has a close relationship with him ([Sing Tao](#), June 18, 2024). [3]

A state senator, two state representatives, and a city council member, whose districts overlap in Bensonhurst, have all frequently appeared with John Chan and his affiliates. Chan publicly endorsed Republican Steve Chan (no relation), who won a tight 2024 State Senate race against Taiwan-born Democrat incumbent Iwen Chu ([YouTube/eStarTV 第一直播](#), October 13, 2024). Steve Chan also participated in several united front-linked homeless shelter protests ([Fox News](#), March 19, 2024). Long-time state representative William Colton is a regular fixture at united front-linked events, and has sponsored multiple bills to make the PRC's National Day a New York state holiday ([The Diplomat](#), December 2, 2021). Staff of City Councilwoman Susan Zhuang, who is Colton's former chief of staff, allegedly used their work email accounts to solicit donations for BRACE, John Chan's community organization ([New York Daily News](#), March 13, 2024; [New York Post](#), July 28, 2024). (Zhuang has denied being a part of BRACE.)

Even unsuccessful candidates reveal the united front's reach and resources, indicating how intertwined these networks can be. Pro-CCP actors can field candidates simultaneously in Democrat and Republican primary races, in essence covering their bases and vastly increasing the likelihood of a united front-favored politician winning election. Lin Yu, who ran in the 49th State Assembly District Democratic Party primary in 2022, is one such candidate ([YouTube/Louis Zhao](#), February 7, 2022). In the late 1990s, when he was eight years, Lin immigrated to the United States from Fujian Province. On April 11, 2022, the youthful Chinese-American spoke to fellow immigrants from his hometown, Changle ([Sino-US Innovation Times](#), February 14, 2022). Lin—who Chan had also endorsed—promised to change the Democratic Party from within and speak out for the Chinese community. A bright blue poster hanging on the wall as he spoke read “Fuzhou Police Overseas Service Station” (福州警侨事务海外服务站) ([New York News Agency](#), April 11, 2022). Lin was hosted by the America Changle Association, whose offices the FBI raided in October 2022 for functioning as one of hundreds of Chinese overseas police stations ([NYT](#), April 17, 2023). Lu Jianshu, also known as Harry Lu, a former president of the organization who was arrested for assisting agents from the PRC's Ministry of Public Security, had attended Lin's event in 2022.

Lin dropped out of the primary when the seat's incumbent, Peter Abbate, challenged his candidacy in court. Abbate nevertheless subsequently lost his seat to a little-known Republican challenger, Lester Chang, who also has close links to Beijing and is supported by Chan ([US China Press](#), December 5, 2022; [Sohu](#), January 1, 2023). As an elected official, Chang has repeatedly met with representatives from a known united front organization, the China People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries—once in the PRC and twice in the United States ([US China Press](#), January 26, 2024; [World Journal](#), June 15, 2024; [China Brief](#), June 21, 2024). In June 2024, Chang welcomed a delegation from the Hainan Provincial People's Congress to New York ([The Voice of Chinese](#), June 30, 2024).

Chang's win, an upset for Abbate, was unexpected—in part because of the latter's warm relations with John Chan. From 2013 to 2022, Chan personally donated hundreds of dollars to Abbate's campaigns and invited him to appear at events organized by Chan's community groups, including BRACE's fifth anniversary celebration ([Toutiao](#), January 3, 2019). [3] Abbate also had a remarkably PRC-friendly policy orientation. He attended meetings with PRC officials (alongside Chan) and supported PRC-friendly legislation, telling the New York consul-general in 2019, "We are here, New York state, no matter what happens with our Washington, we are here to work with you" ([The Diplomat](#), December 4, 2021). In this case, the favor—or disfavor—of united front-linked organizations appears to have been a powerful factor in shaping electoral outcomes. Of more concern, even if Abbate had won, the united front system would still have had a sympathetic advocate elected to office.

Activities Expand to Other Districts and Electoral Reforms

Public statements by a close affiliate of John Chan, Ling Fei, point to motivations underlying united front activities. Ling, whose real name is Ni Xuhui, is State Senator Steve Chan's communications director. He spoke at a December 2024 fundraiser for Councilwoman Zhuang's re-election, where he presented his vision for further developing the political and civic prowess of New York's Chinese community ([YouTube/美国华讯](#), December 20, 2024; [World Journal](#), December 21, 2024). Noting that improved Chinese voter turnout has already caused New York's politicians to be more attentive to the needs of the Chinese community, Ling argued it would be critical to find and cultivate the right political candidates, especially those of ethnic Chinese descent, who can truly unify and empower the community. While this is a reasonable argument on its face, the potential domination of the process of identifying and grooming candidates by united front-linked organizations could mean effectively allowing the PRC government to have a say in U.S. elections.

In some cases, winning candidates backed by united front-linked organizations appear to have run very slim campaigns. Lester Chang claims to have spent just \$25,000 when he ran for office, attributing his victory instead to on-the-ground canvassing supported by teams of enthusiastic Chinese-American volunteers ([The Guardian](#), November 28, 2022). For context, Iwen Chu's 2024 campaign expenditure exceeded \$1 million, nearly double that of her opponent Steve Chan. Despite being a strong incumbent with the backing of deep-pocketed groups such as the New York State Democratic Party and local unions, she was unable to beat Chan, who also outperformed his party's previous candidate by over 10,000 votes. (Chu improved her vote total by about 5,000.) This suggests that part of the efficacy of the united front's political machine is its mobilizational capacity. United front-embedded political organizing networks can boost turnout, which is especially significant given the low levels of political participation in Asian-American communities.

This political machine has also attempted to shape election outcomes in Flushing, another New York neighborhood with a large ethnic Chinese population, although with less success. John Chan has said he finds the community organizations in Flushing to be “very complicated” ([Sing Tao Daily](#), June 18, 2024). At least two united front-linked candidates have challenged Democrat State Assemblyman Ron Kim in primary elections there. Kenneth Chiu, a close associate of John Chan with ties to several local Democratic politicians, lost narrowly to Kim in 2022 ([The Diplomat](#), December 2, 2021). In 2024, United front actors threw their weight behind Yi Andy Chen, a young contender who immigrated from Fujian Province to Queens when he was 13. Chen’s campaign website described him as an executive director of two Chan-affiliated community organizations ([Yi Andy Chen for New York State Assembly](#), accessed June 25, 2024). He secured endorsements from the American Chinese Chamber of Commerce, led by Chan, and the Fujian Hometown Association, known for close ties with the PRC consulate. Speaking to the Fujianese association, Chen was flanked by two men who physically harassed anti-CCP demonstrators in San Francisco during Xi Jinping’s 2023 visit to the city ([Washington Post](#), September 3, 2024).

Both challengers, Chiu and Chen, had previously worked as community liaison officers. In 2014, Chiu served as former 38th district City Councilman Carlos Menchaca’s Asian community liaison, and has continued to solicit Asian community liaison jobs on Twitter with mayoral candidates ([X/@KennethChiuNY](#), October 15, 2020; [The Diplomat](#), December 2, 2021). Chen, meanwhile, served as Asian American Community Liaison Director for Assemblyman Philip Ramos ([World Journal](#), February 20, 2024). Both were active in grassroots political organizing, starting Democratic Party political clubs intended for Brooklyn’s Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community ([PoliticsNY](#), March 7, 2018; [X/@QCYD](#), January 22, 2023). Chen got his start working on a 2012 campaign for Congresswoman Grace Meng ([World Journal](#), February 20, 2024). There, Chen would have worked alongside Linda Sun, a former aide to two New York state governors recently charged with spying for the PRC ([Department of Justice](#), September 3, 2024).

The united front’s political machine has also been active in electoral reforms. In 2022, the city council’s Districting Commission proposed a preliminary redistricting plan that would have created the city’s first majority-Asian district while splitting up an existing Latino-dominated one. John Chan and his allies supported the proposal, likely because it would allow the united front’s political machine to lean on its existing clout among the Chinese-American population, rather than having to engage other groups. This put them in opposition to established Asian-American community groups, however, who advocated for maintaining a longstanding coalition with other minority groups ([The City](#), August 16, 2022). Chan framed the dispute in binary terms, calling for keeping the Asian community “whole.” “We have to elect our own representatives,” he argued ([The City](#), August 16, 2022). The Districting Commission’s eventual decision split the difference, though still with positive outcomes for the united front-linked actors. An Asian-majority district created as part of the reforms later elected Susan Zhuang, the councilwoman who has received open support from united front-linked organizations ([Redistricting & You: New York City](#), accessed May 23).

Conclusion

United front actors are impacting electoral politics in New York City. They are not wedded to a particular party or ideology but instead seek the easiest footholds to access the halls of power. While candidates rarely campaign on pro-Beijing positions, the political machine consolidates its influence by cultivating candidates who successfully mobilize ethnic Chinese voters on local social and political issues.

Building influence from the ground up can have a powerful trickle-up effect, whereby city and state politicians are increasingly aligned with Beijing's interests or beholden to CCP-linked actors. This could eventually influence the policy discourse of politicians at the federal level. For now, overseas Chinese are targeted not just as a threat but as a foothold on political power. Allowing united front organizations and individuals to dominate the political landscape in these areas, however, still disproportionately elevates Beijing's voice while repressing alternative viewpoints in a diverse Chinese-American community.

Audrye Wong is Jeane Kirkpatrick Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, and assistant professor of political science and international relations at the University of Southern California.

Francis de Beixedon is a research assistant at the American Enterprise Institute.

Notes

[1] Kang Xiaoli. "New Changes in Overseas Chinese in the Era of Globalization—And on the Inspiration for Overseas United Front Work." *Journal of Shaanxi Institute of Socialism* (2015)3: 23–30; Li Xiang and Mei Siyuan. "Basic Experience, Practical Challenges and Countermeasures of Overseas United Front Work in the New Era," *Journal of Hebei Institute of Socialism* (2023)2: 58–66.

[2] For additional versions of this logic, see Kang, *supra* [1], and Li and Mei, *supra* [1].

[3] For campaign finance data, see contributions by "John Chan" or "John S. Chan" on the New York State Board of Elections Public Reporting website, <https://publicreporting.elections.ny.gov/>.