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CMSI Note 26: Easy Infiltration: The Rise of PRC Small Boat Landings on Taiwan

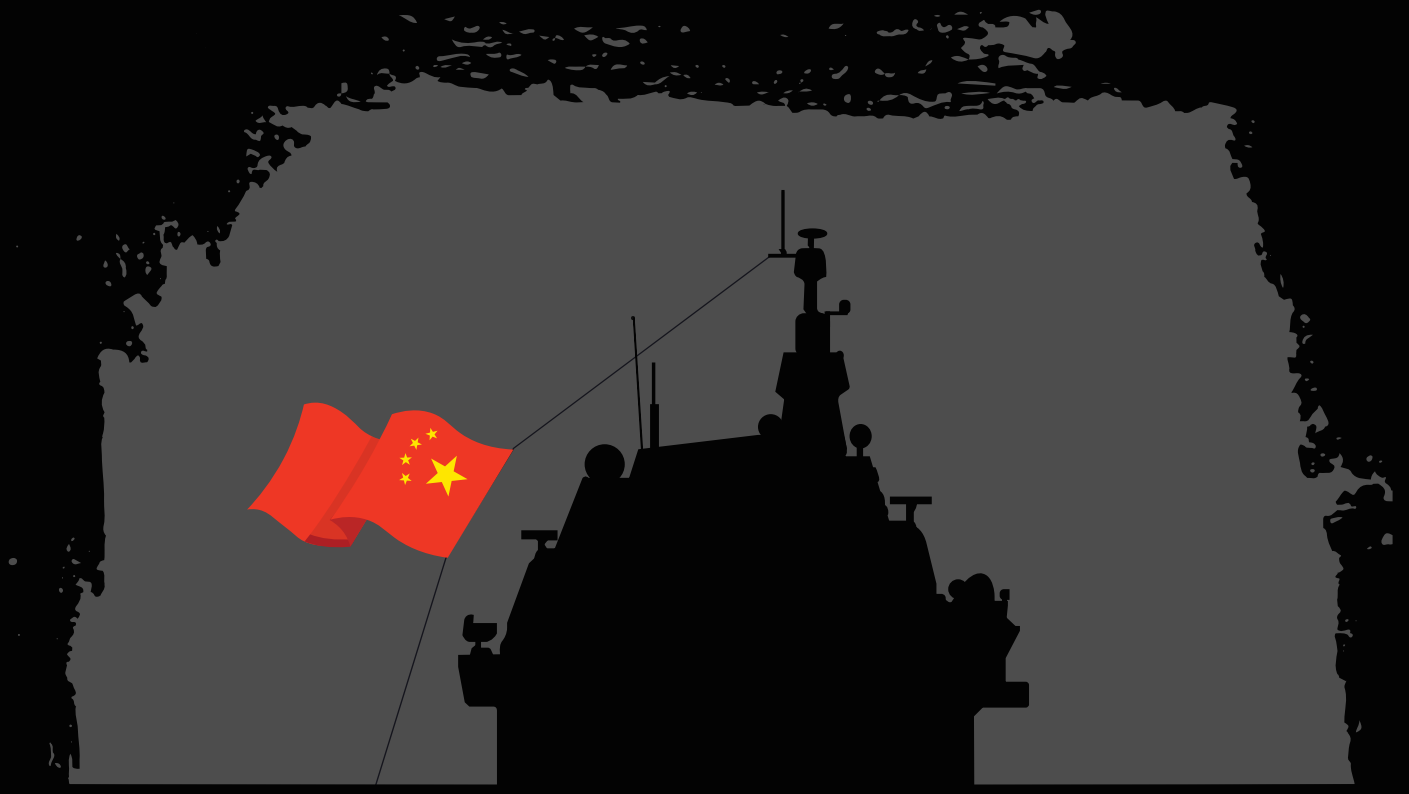
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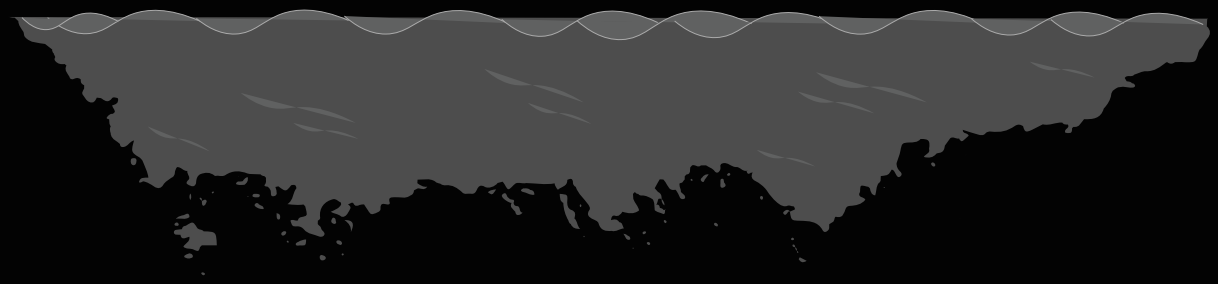
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Easy Infiltration:

The Rise of PRC Small Boat Landings on Taiwan

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CMSI NOTE # 26 /// 3 November 2026

Easy Infiltration:
The Rise of PRC Small Boat Landings on Taiwan

Ian Easton[1]

Key Takeaways:

- The People's Liberation Army (PLA) appears to have a doctrine that calls for infiltrating undercover operatives into Taiwan to collect intelligence and to conduct special missions, according to its textbooks.
- Research shows that cross-Strait small boat landings seem to have begun in 2021, and at least eight Chinese men have been arrested on Taiwan in connection with these cases.
- Each reported landing occurred at a sensitive location. Five of the eight happened on a known invasion beach. The other three happened at ports and river deltas believed to be of high interest to war planners in the PLA.
- None of the reported incidents occurred near Hsinchu, the most likely place for a civilian to land a small boat because it has the closest proximity to China, a suitable port, and long beaches.
- Taiwanese national security officials have said the landings seem to be associated with Taiwan's annual war games and military exercises.
- There are many possible explanations for these landings, such as smuggling, espionage, or human trafficking. Reconnaissance by the PLA, however, cannot be ruled out.
- American cooperation with Taiwan's armed forces on military engineering, counter infiltration, and coastal defense may enable the Taiwanese military to enhance its preparedness for potential infiltration.
- Actions such as closing vulnerable sections of Taiwan's coast to the public, establishing coast watcher communities, and fortifying coastal garrisons in peacetime could reinforce Taiwan's defenses against infiltration and help to mitigate this potential threat.

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[1] Ian Easton is an associate professor at CMSI. The views expressed or implied within are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official views of the U.S. Naval War College, the Department of the Navy, the Department of War, or any other U.S. Government entity. The author thanks Chris Sharman, Ryan Martinson, K. Tristan Tang, Joel Wuthnow, and Louis McCray for their helpful comments and edits on earlier drafts of this article. Any errors or omissions are his alone.



Figure 1: Taiwan's Major Cities, Rivers, and Surrounding Islands.[2]

Background:

On July 23, 2026, at approximately 2 a.m., a pair of military-age males from the PRC arrived in Taiwan. The men, Mr. Luan (欒先生), age 35, and Mr. Yu (于先生), age 44, had crossed of the Taiwan Strait in a small rubber motorboat and landed on Bali Beach (八里海岸), a known invasion beach that is located just north of the Port of Taipei.[3] The men stowed their boat and slipped past nearby Taiwanese army sentries and coast guard patrols. They then began a remarkable trip around northern and central Taiwan. Two days later, a concerned fisherman examined the strange Chinese boat on Bali Beach and decided to call the authorities. After a week-long manhunt, the PRC men were arrested by Taiwanese investigators in Chaoyang Forest Park (朝陽森林公園) in Taoyuan, a major city near Taipei. They are being held without visitation rights.[4]

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[2] Central Intelligence Agency, "Country Map - Taiwan," *The World Factbook*, https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/taiwan/.

[3] 洪哲政 [Hong Je-Cheng] 反制共軍登陸 國軍砸近百億於「複合式紅色沙灘」建彈藥庫 ["National Military Drops Almost 10 Billion to Build Ammo Caches for 'Composite Red Beaches' to Counter PLA Landing"], 聯合報 [*United Daily News*], 3 January 2026, https://udn.com/news/story/10930/9242564; and 北台灣有多處具戰略意義的紅色沙灘? ["How Many Strategic Red Beaches are in Northern Taiwan?"], 中央廣播電臺 [*Radio Taiwan International*], 3 December 2023, https://www.rti.org.tw/programnews?uid=4&pid=46173.

[4] 林昭彰 [Lin Chao-chang], 大陸橡皮艇又登陸北部海岸海巡署證實 2 偷渡客羈押、署長道歉 ["Another Chinese Rubber Boat Lands on North Coast, Coast Guard Confirm 2 Illegals Arrested, Director-General Issues Apology"], 聯合報 [*United Daily News*], 11 August 2026, at https://udn.com/news/amp/story/7315/9683674.

Early reports in the Taiwanese press speculated that the men may have launched their small boat from a PRC "mothership."[5] This hypothesis is given some credibility by the small outboard motor on their rubber boat, which on its own might not have been able to make the crossing. It was initially believed that a third individual was onboard their rubber zodiac, but DNA testing conducted by Taiwan's Criminal Investigation Bureau indicates only two men were probably involved.[6] The fisherman who reported the suspicious boat to the authorities was reportedly asked to coverup the incident, and the public in Taiwan was not notified of the landing until after the men were apprehended, leading to a public outcry and an apology from the Taiwan Coast Guard.[7]

The men from China reportedly told investigators they set off from Fujian Province on a fishing trip and ended up in Taiwan after getting lost at sea. At the time of their arrest, they were carrying New Taiwan Dollars, raising suspicions.[8] According to Taiwanese prosecutors, the two men began their journey to Taiwan in the PLA Navy town of Qingdao, in northeastern China. From there, they traveled a distance of approximately 1,440 kilometers (895 miles) by car, before boarding a boat outside Fuzhou on 22 July at around 4 a.m. After landing in the outskirts of Taipei some 22 hours later, the men visited locations in downtown Taipei, Hsinchu, Taichung, and Taoyuan, where they were finally arrested.[9]



Figure 2: Two PRC Men Arrested by Taiwanese Authorities in Chaoyang Park.[10]

[5] 吳仁捷 [Wu Ren-jie], 台北港上岸 2 偷渡客傳是中國海警！ 疑點重重 恐有第 3 人潛伏 ["The Two Illegal Mainlanders Who Landed at Taipei Port Rumored to be Chinese Coast Guard! Suspicions Abound, Third Individual Feared to Remain in Hiding"], 自由時報 [*Liberty Times*], 11 August 2026, https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/politics/breakingnews/5536479.
[6] 程子奕 [Cheng Zi-liang], 還有第 3 人？ 2 陸籍偷渡客船留 3 件救生衣　海巡 DNA 結果出爐 ["Still a Third Man? Two Chinese Illegals Left Three Lifejackets Behind in Boat, Coast Guard DNA Results are Out"], *TVBS News*, 11 August 2026, https://news.tvbs.com.tw/local/4005678.
[7] Tsao Ya-yen and Lee Hsin-Yin, "Coast Guard apologizes for failures in illegal Chinese dinghy entry case," *Focus Taiwan News*, 11 August 2026, https://focustaiwan.tw/society/202608110014.
[8] Ma Sheng-chieh, "2 Chinese men in custody after crossing Taiwan Strait in dinghy," *Formosa News*, 11 August 2026, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fsit_d_IB0U.
[9] "Prosecutors seek two years for Chinese who entered Taiwan by dinghy," *Taipei Times*, 25 September 2026, https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2026/09/25/2003864872.
[10] Ibid.

Taiwanese defense experts said they believed that the two men could be PLA operatives. Dr. Su Tzu-yun, a national security expert at the Institute for National Defense and Security Research (INDSR), a think tank funded by Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense, said that the men landed near a Taiwanese military base. "The successful illegal landing may have been a test," Su said, noting China's military might use small boat landings in a future conflict to infiltrate commandos ashore for direct action missions including sabotage.[11] Dr. Shen Ming-shih, a PLA expert at INDSR, said the timing of the incident was suspicious; it occurred before Taiwan was to begin its annual Han Kuang field exercises, a ten-day war game testing plans to defend against an enemy amphibious invasion. "The possibility is becoming increasingly high that it was intended to gather intelligence on specific Han Kuang exercise activities or military targets," Shen said.[12]

This case raises numerous questions. What does the PLA's doctrine say about the infiltration of Taiwan? Was the recent illegal entry of Taiwan by two PRC men an anomaly, or have similar cases happened before? If so, who are involved, and where are they landing? How many have been arrested, and how many might have escaped detection? What are the potential security implications of these events? And how might future small boat landings be prevented?

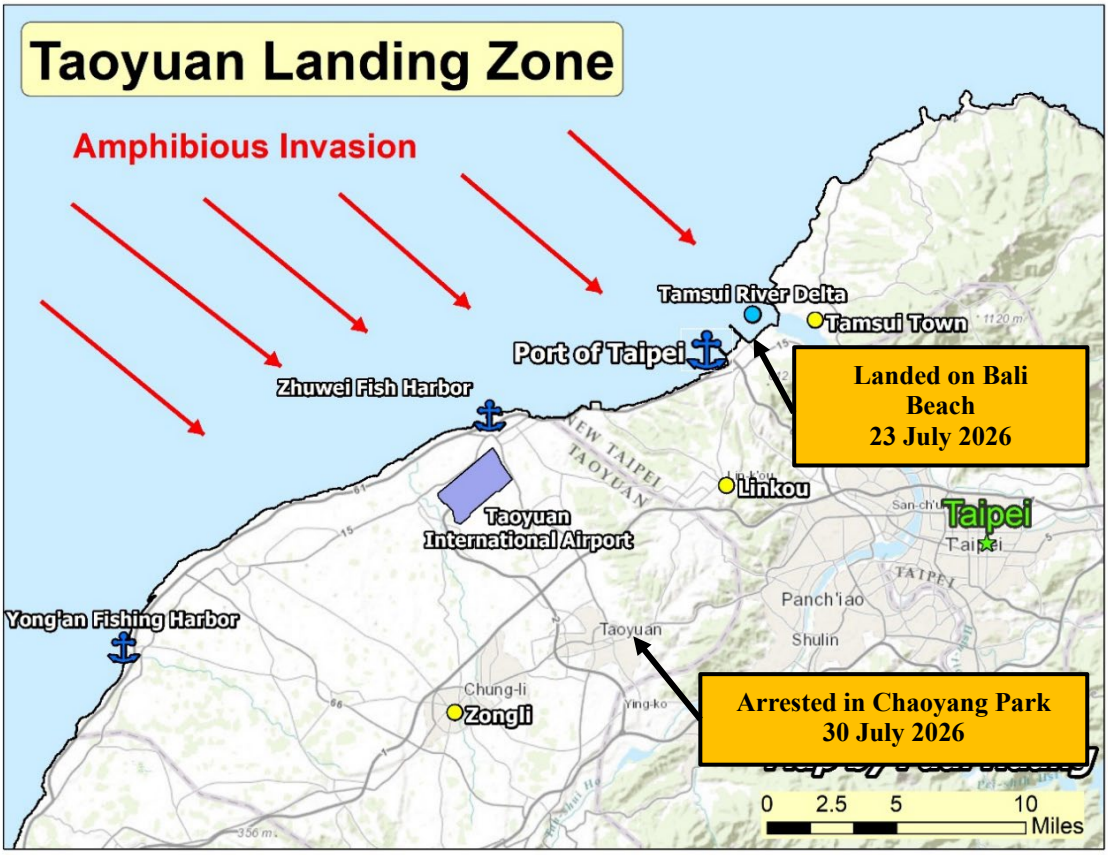


Figure 3: Small Boat Landing and Subsequent Arrest of PRC Men in the Taoyuan Invasion Zone.[13]

[11] Lawrence Chung, "Fishing trip mishap or grey-zone test? Taiwan arrests men after boat slips past defences," *South China Morning Post*, 14 August 2026, https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3363688/fishing-trip-mishap-or-grey-zone-test-taiwan-arrests-men-after-boat-slips-past-defences.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Background map of Taoyuan Landing Zone by Paul Huang, with updates by the author. For details on the strategic importance of this area, see Ian Easton, *The Chinese Invasion Threat: Taiwan's Defense and American Strategy in Asia* (Arlington, Virginia: Project 2049 Institute, 2017), pp. 147-164.

PLA Doctrine on Infiltration:

PLA textbooks suggest the PLA has a doctrine that calls for infiltrating undercover operatives into Taiwan to collect intelligence and to conduct special missions. To date, no evidence has been produced that show the men listed above are military or intelligence operatives, and fears of a worst-case scenario are probably overwrought. Nonetheless, the PLA does have naval commando units that routinely train in the use of rubber boats for coastal infiltration.[14] The PLA has heavily researched clandestine insertions in historic military case studies, such as the British military's use of island infiltration during the Falklands War. In addition, the PLA is doing frogmen training and developing new silent insertion methods via small submersibles.[15]

PLA documents that appear to be indicative of doctrine call for infiltrating undercover operatives into Taiwan to collect intelligence and conduct special missions. According to one such document, *Research on Joint Attack Operations Against the Large Island*, "Carrying out special operations on the island [Taiwan] will be advantageous for accelerating the speed with which the entire island can be captured. Typically, special forces units will infiltrate into the island's depths to conduct special reconnaissance, obtaining detailed intelligence information that cannot be gotten by satellites or reconnaissance aircraft."

The textbook continues, "[special forces units will] investigate and expose deployments in core areas on the island, providing targeting for our joint firepower strikes, and [they will] search for top enemy leaders, providing intelligence on their movements." The document further envisions PLA commandos raiding Taiwan's command posts and attacking key units to weaken the defender's ability to repel major amphibious attacks. In the words of the text, these small unit operations "could potentially obtain force-multiplying effects."[16]

Another PLA document, *The Coursebook on Special Operations Studies*, states that, "There are many reconnaissance methods … including secretly entering important target areas in disguise using a false identity (化装身份) and using turned agents inside enemy units (策反敌内部人员)."[17] Infiltration is crucial to such activities.[18]

"Close-in reconnaissance is when special forces infiltrate via parachute, overland, and sea crossing methods to gain secret access to preplanned locations to carry out reconnaissance," according to *The Coursebook on Special Operations Studies*.[19] In an invasion of Taiwan, PLA special forces units will collect intelligence via special reconnaissance on "high value enemy targets, mobile targets, and hidden

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[14] See also John Chen and Joel Wuthnow, "Sea Dragons: Special Operations and Chinese Military Strategy," *CMSI Red Book*, No. 18. (2025), pp. 17-22, https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-red-books/18.

[15] The author thanks Dr. Joel Wuthnow for this insight.

[16] 曹正荣, 孙龙海 , and 李宗昆 [Cao Zhengrong, Sun Longhai, and Li Zongkun, eds.], 大型岛屿联合进攻作战研究 [*Research on Joint Attack Operations Against the Large Island*], (Beijing: National Defense University Press, 2015), 260-261. See also "In Their Own Words: Science of Military Strategy 2020," *China Aerospace Studies Institute*, January 2022, 355, https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/CASI/documents/Translations/2022-01-26%202020%20Science%20of%20Military%20Strategy.pdf.

[17] 郭明 [Guo Ming, ed.] 特种作战学教程 [*The Coursebook on Special Operations Studies*] (Beijing: Academy of Military Sciences Press, 2013), p. 109.

[18] According to a former deputy director of Taiwan's Military Intelligence Bureau, Lieutenant General Weng Yen-ching (翁衍慶), Beijing's national-level espionage and covert actions against Taiwan are principally conducted by the Ministry of State Security (MSS) Fourth Bureau, and MSS recruits officers that can speak Taiwanese Hokkien, the most-spoken native language of Taiwan. 翁衍慶 [Weng Yan-ching], 中共情報組織與間諜活動 [*CCP Intelligence Organizations and Spy Operations*] (Taipei, Taiwan: Emerging Creative and Cultural Press, 2018), pp. 109-115.

[19] Guo Ming, ed. *The Coursebook on Special Operations Studies*, pp. 109-110.

targets." After making clandestine landings, they will infiltrate close to targets and "paint" or illuminate them for precision strikes with laser-guided bombs. They will scout locations for airborne assaults and air assaults. They will conduct raids on landing beaches to knock out enemy weapons systems, clear minefields, and destroy beach obstacles. They will also carry out feints and deception operations in support of large-scale amphibious assaults.[20]

The Coursebook on Special Operations Studies suggests that PLA special forces units will raid and seize Taiwanese command posts, government buildings, airfields, ports, traffic junctions, and other critical targets to support the overall amphibious landings and occupation campaign. Special mission units in the PLA will abduct or assassinate Taiwanese military and government leaders, weapons experts, and especially important science and technology experts, according to the textbook.[21]

Taiwanese military studies anticipate the danger and warn readers that PLA special forces are likely to infiltrate into Taiwan prior to an invasion via submarines, fishing boats, small boats, low-level parachute jumps, and other means. Some will wear ROC (Republic of China, ROC Taiwan) military uniforms, possibly allowing them to access rear-area command posts and "pull the plug out" of Taiwan's military nervous system (a euphemism for the assassination of key leaders). Other PLA commandos will raid a wide variety of targets to sow chaos and confusion. They will conduct operational and tactical-level deception operations, for example, by attacking beach defenders, clearing obstacles, and marking landing zones along certain coastal areas the PLA *does not* intend to assault.[22]

Rising Security Concerns:

Illegal entry into Taiwan from China has a long history. For decades, cross-Strait smugglers have brought PRC nationals into Taiwan illegally, with the individuals often ending up working in criminal establishments. In 1993, Taiwanese authorities reportedly arrested and deported over 6,700 PRC nationals.[23] In 2003, that number dropped to 3,458. And by 2023, the number of illegals from China was down to 15, according to a press report.[24] In April 2026, Taiwan's interior ministry reported that the number of human smuggling cases was rising again, and a total of 54 PRC nationals had been arrested over the past three years, sparking security concerns.[25]

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[20] Ibid., p. 183.
[21] Ibid., p. 184.
[22] 蔡和順 [Tsai Ho-Hsun], 剖析共軍聯合登陸戰役 ["Examining the Communist Military's Joint Landing Campaign"], *ROC Army Journal*, Vol. 50, No. 537, October 2012, pp. 44-45. See also Ian Easton, "Foggy with a Chance of Surprise: PLA Amphibious Deception in a Taiwan Scenario," *CMSI China Maritime Report*, (No. 50), 23 September 2025, https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-maritime-reports/50/.
[23] 陳鴻偉 [Chen Hong-wei], 偷渡陸客 30 年前 6700 人 近年大減 ["30 Years Ago There Were 6,700 Illegal Mainlanders, Recent Years Have Seen Big Drop in Numbers"], 中视新闻 [*China Times*], 14 September 2024, https://tw.news.yahoo.com/%E5%81%B7%E6%B8%A1%E9%99%B8%E5%AE%A230%E5%B9%B4%E5%89%8D6700%E4%BA%BA-%E8%BF%91%E5%B9%B4%E5%A4%A7%E6%B8%9B-201000530.html.
[24] Ibid.
[25] 針對近期中國籍小型船隻非法侵 入我國領海之偵搜漏洞檢討、科技監 偵設備建置進度與精進作為」 專題報告 [Special Report on "Recent Chinese Small Boats Illegally Entering Our Nation's Costal Waters, Gaps in Reconnaissance, Surveillance Technology, and Equipment Deployments, and Measures for Enhancement"], 內政部 中華民國 [*Ministry of the Interior, Republic of China*], 13 April 2026, https://lis.ly.gov.tw/lydbmeetr/uploadn/115/1150413/203.pdf; and 張曼蘋 [Zhang Man-pin] 近 3 年查獲 311 人偷渡來台 陸籍去年較前年增 2.2 倍 ["In Past Three Years 311 People Found Smuggled into Taiwan, Chinese Nationals Up 2.2 Times Over Part Two Years"], 聯合報 [*United Daily News*], 11 April 2026, https://udn.com/news/story/7331/9435273. For details, see 表 5-1 查獲非法入出國統計—按月份分 ["Table 5-1: Statistics on Illegal Entry/Exit Arrests—by Month"], 海洋委員會海巡署 [*Coast Guard Administration, Ocean Affairs Council*], July 2026, https://www.cga.gov.tw/GipOpen/wSite/ct?xItem=168895&ctNode=13508&mp=999.



Figure 4: Taiwanese Media Report on Coastal Infiltration Cases.[26]

Small boat landings are commonplace on Taiwan's outer islands near the PRC coast, such as Kinmen and Matsu.[27] But the Taiwan Strait's dangerous sea conditions have historically made it unusual for anyone to attempt travel from China to Taiwan in a similar fashion. That seems to have changed in 2021, when a lone PRC man landed a rubber boat in the Port of Taichung, where he was detained. Research indicates that from 2021 to the time of this writing, eight men from the PRC have been arrested after landing on Taiwan.[28] Of these cases, four men appear to have made the landings alone, and four men arrived in pairs of two. None of the landings occurred at the same location twice, and all occurred at a sensitive location. Four of the six landings happened at a known invasion beach.[29] The other two occurred at ports believed to be of high interest to war planners in the People's Liberation Army

[26] 中國橡皮艇 7 月成功偷渡台北港 海巡署坦承疏失將究責 ["In July, Chinese Rubber Boat Successfully Infiltrated Port of Taipei, Coast Guard Admits Lapse, Promises Accountability"], 公視新聞 [*Taiwan Public News Network*], 11 August 2026, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mDI_I9VCLH4.

[27] Tessa Wong, "Taiwan arrests men who travelled from China in small boat," *BBC News*, 21 May 2025, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cq5447gw3wdo; Devin Tsai and Wesley Lewis, "Kinmen Coast Guard Detains Chinese Man for Possible Intrusion," *TaiwanPlus News*, 14 October 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYC0Jh4nV7E; and 陳冠霖 [Chen Guan-lin], 陸籍偷渡客在大膽島自拍 洩漏行蹤遭逮 ["Illegal Chinese National Arrested After Taking Picture of Self on Dadan Island, Revealing Whereabouts"], 金門日報 [*Kinmen Daily*], 25 April 2018, https://www.kinmen.gov.tw/News_Content2.aspx?n=98E3CA7358C89100&sms=BF7D6D478B935644&s=1D37558E33A4AE4E.

[28] Hiroyuki Sugiyama, "Mystery of man from China who came to Taiwan by rubber boat deepens," *The Japan News*, 3 October 2021, https://japannews.yomiuri.co.jp/world/asia-pacific/20211003-32217/.

[29] 洪哲政 [Hong Je-Cheng] 反制共軍登陸 國軍砸近百億於「複合式紅色沙灘」建彈藥庫 ["National Military Drops Almost 10 Billion to Build Ammo Caches for 'Composite Red Beaches' to Counter PLA Landing"], 聯合報 [*United Daily News*], 3 January 2026, https://udn.com/news/story/10930/9242564; and 北台灣有多處具戰略意義的紅色沙灘? ["How Many Strategic Red Beaches are in Northern Taiwan?"], 中央廣播電臺 [*Radio Taiwan International*], 3 December 2023, https://www.rti.org.tw/programnews?uid=4&pid=46173.

(PLA).[30] None of the reported incidents occurred near Hsinchu, the easiest place for a civilian to land a small boat because it has the closest proximity to China, a suitable port, and long beaches.[31]

Not all cases have been solved. Abandoned motorboats from China have been reportedly discovered along Taiwan's west coast at two locations, one of them a known invasion beach, the other near a river delta. Despite police investigations, no suspects were found, suggesting PRC nationals may have successfully infiltrated into Taiwan.[32]

The first unsolved case occurred on 9 August 2021, when local residents reported seeing an abandoned Chinese speed boat on Da'an Beach, a known invasion beach north of the Port of Taichung. According to a media report, grainy surveillance video footage showed a suspicious car parked nearby the night before. Extensive police and coast guard searches of the area failed to locate any suspects.[33] The second instance happened on 26 March 2026, when an abandoned Chinese motorboat with unused fuel tanks was found in Luermen, near a coastal radar site by the mouth if the Zengwen River. The boat was taken into custody by Taiwan's Coast Guard, and at the time of this writing no suspects have been apprehended.[34]

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[30] Ian Easton, "Hostile Harbors: Taiwan's Ports and PLA Invasion Plans," in Andrew S. Erickson; Conor M. Kennedy; and Ryan D. Martinson (eds.), *Chinese Amphibious Warfare: Prospects for a Cross-Strait Invasion* (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 2024), pp. 341-370, https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-studies/8.

[31] Note that Taiwanese authorities are unlikely to disclose everything they know. Official disclosures are often intended to raise awareness, both domestically and internationally, rather than provide a complete dataset for research. Although Hsinchu is the closest points to China across the Strait, we cannot rule out the possibility that other covert landings have taken place there but either went undetected or were never publicly disclosed by the Taiwanese government. The author thanks Mr. K. Tristan Tang for this insight.

[32] 王捷 [Wang Chieh], 獨家》中國小艇海巡雷達站旁搶灘？ 只見空船不見人影 ["Exclusive: Chinese Small Boat Landed Next to Coast Guard Radar Site? Only Empty Boat Found, No Trace of People"], 自由時報 [*Liberty Times*], 2 April 2026, https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/politics/breakingnews/5390618; and 白珈陽 [Bai Chia-yang], 又有偷渡客上岸？南莊岸際出現不明快艇, 海巡加設臨檢站查緝 ["Another Illegal Lands? Unknown Speed Boat Discovered Off Nanzhuang Coast, Coast Guard Sets Up Additional Checkpoint"], *ETtoday*, 10 August 2021, https://www.ettoday.net/news/20210810/2052437.htm.

[33] 白珈陽 [Bai Chia-yang], 又有偷渡客上岸？南莊岸際出現不明快艇, 海巡加設臨檢站查緝 ["Another Illegal Lands? Unknown Speed Boat Discovered Off Nanzhuang Coast, Coast Guard Sets Up Additional Checkpoint"], *ETtoday*, 10 August 2021, https://www.ettoday.net/news/20210810/2052437.htm.

[34] 王捷 [Wang Chieh], 獨家》中國小艇海巡雷達站旁搶灘？ 只見空船不見人影 ["Exclusive: Chinese Small Boat Landed Next to Coast Guard Radar Site? Only Empty Boat Found, No Trace of People"], 自由時報 [*Liberty Times*], 2 April 2026, https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/politics/breakingnews/5390618.

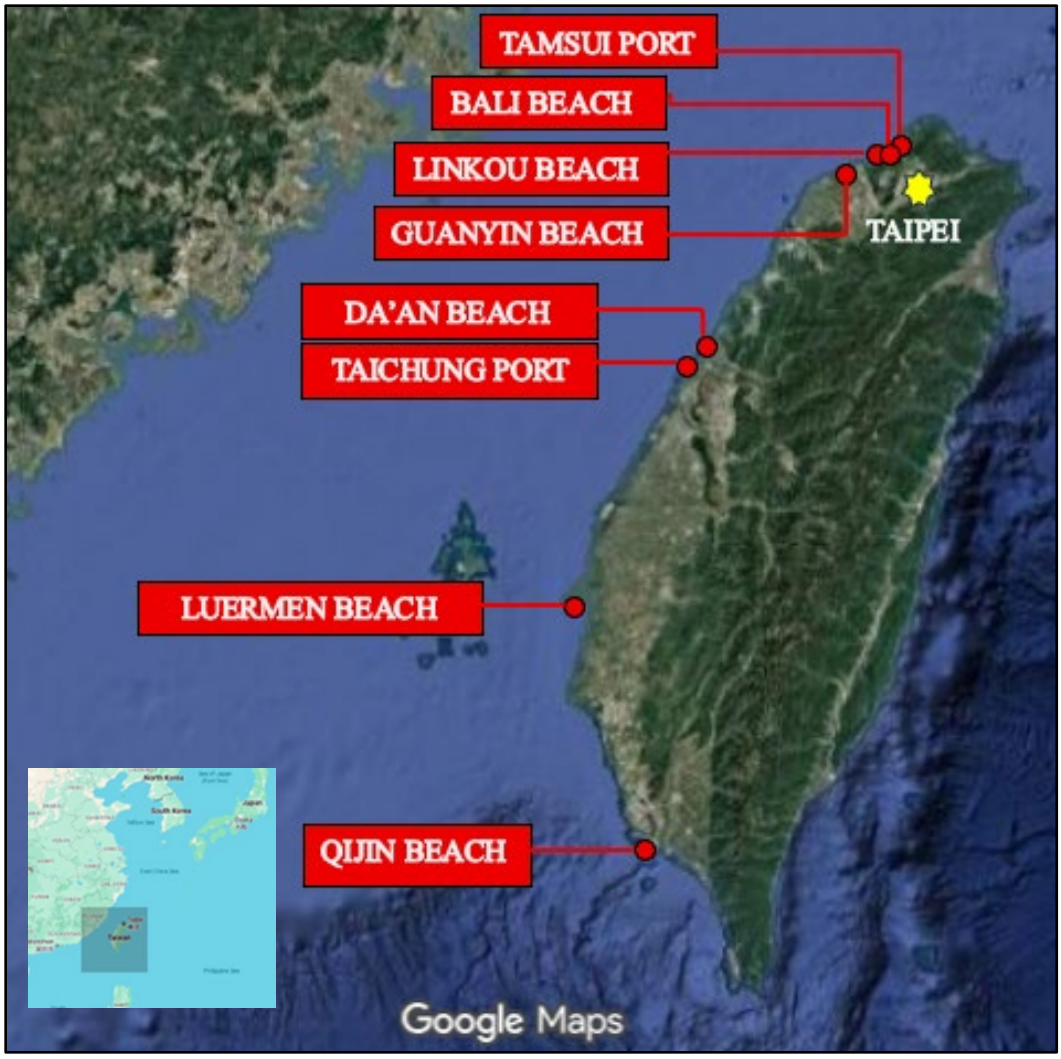


Figure 5: Map of Small Boat Landing Sites.[35]

Who Are These Guys?

The eight PRC men that have been arrested were unarmed at the time of capture, and none of them resisted arrest, according to press reporting. Some turned themselves into the authorities. They do not generally seem to have had a credible story or rational motive for undertaking such a dangerous mode of transport across the Strait (see Table 1 for details).

The first landing occurred just before midnight on 30 April 2021, when a man identified as Mr. Zhou (周先生), age 33, landed at the Port of Taichung and called out for help, saying he was hungry and the conditions in China were terrible.[36]

[35] Map by Ian Easton. Made with images from Google Maps.
[36] Hiroyuki Sugiyama, "Mystery of man from China who came to Taiwan by rubber boat deepens," *The Japan News*, 3 October 2021, https://japannews.yomiuri.co.jp/world/asia-pacific/20211003-32217/; 白珈陽 [Bai Chia-yang], 又有偷渡客上岸？南莊岸際出現不明快艇, 海巡加設臨檢站查緝 ["Another Illegal Lands? Unknown Speed Boat Discovered Off Nanzhuang Coast, Coast Guard Sets Up Additional Checkpoint"], *ETtoday*, 10 August 2021, https://www.ettoday.net/news/20210810/2052437.htm.

The second landing occurred at 10:19 a.m. on 9 June 2024, when a former PLA Navy captain, Ruan Fangyong (阮芳勇), age 60, landed his speed boat at a small port in the Tamsui River Delta and surrendered himself to the coast guard. Ruan said he wanted to defect and offered to provide intelligence on Chinese military bases near Taiwan.[37] His subsequent prosecution and imprisonment by the Taiwanese government suggests they did not find his claim credible.

The third landing occurred at approximately 6 a.m. on 14 September 2024, when a PRC man identified as Mr. Wang (王先生), age 32, ran his boat aground on rocks 100 meters offshore Linkou Beach and called the local emergency services for help on his cell phone. He was reportedly suffering from extreme dehydration caused by a long crossing and did not believe he could make it to the beach.[38]

The fourth landing reportedly occurred in September 2024, when a young PRC man identified as Mr. Li (李先生), from Fujian Province, landed a small boat on Qijin Beach outside of the Port of Kaohsiung. Li said he crossed the Strait in a fishing boat with the help of two snakeheads (human smugglers), who clandestinely transferred him to a ferry and finally to the small boat that he took to shore. After two months of living undercover out of a rented room on a bustling street near the beach, Li reportedly turned himself in to the local authorities, saying he had been partying hard and was growing "bored."[39]

The fifth landing occurred on 15 May 2025, when two PRC men, Song Yuankun (宋元坤), age 41, and his 17-year-old son, landed at Guanyin Beach, near the Guantang LNG Terminal, at 5:30 p.m. The pair reportedly went to an ATM and withdrew cash to buy dinner. The next day at 8:00 a.m., they turned themselves in to the police, allegedly after running out of money.[40]

The sixth landing, discussed above, occurred on 23 July 2026, when two PRC men landed on Bali Beach.

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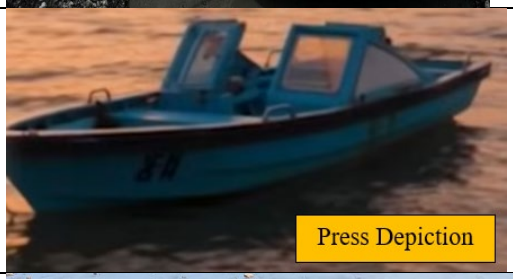
[37] 前中国海军艇长因未经许可进入台湾被起诉 ["Former Chinese Navy Captain Arrested for Entering Taiwan Without Permission"], 美国之音 [*Voice of America*], 14 August 2024, https://www.voachinese.com/a/chinese-ex-naval-captain-charged-with-illegally-entering-taiwan/7742095.html.

[38] 差 100 公尺就上岸！ 中國男偷渡林口後坑溪 ["Only 100 Meters to Shore! Chinese Man Illegally Enters Near Linkou's Houkeng Creek"], 台視新聞 [*TTV News*], 14 September 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrmzRh4ewIk.

[39] 宋珮文 [Song Pei-wen], 福建男搭漁船再轉貨輪, 偷渡台灣玩 2 個月, 玩膩了再自首 ["Fujian Man Takes Fishing Boat, Transfers to Ferry, Then Infiltrates into Taiwan to Play for 2 Months, Gets Bored and Turns Self In"], *TVBS News*, 21 May 2025, https://news.tvbs.com.tw/local/2877667.

[40] "Man sentenced to 8 months for illegally entering Taiwan," *Taipei Times*, 27 August 2025, https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2025/08/27/2003842748; and 陈恩惠 [Chen En-hui], 陆父子驾橡皮艇偷渡台湾 通过测谎无涉国安 ["Father and Son Who Drove a Rubber Boat Across Taiwan Strait Illegally Pass Polygraph, No Threat to National Security"], 世界日報 [*World Daily News*], 17 August 2025, https://www.worldjournal.com/wj/story/121220/8944819?zh-cn.

Table 1. Selected PRC Small Boat Landings.[41]

Location	Date	Details*	Small Boat
Bali Beach, New Taipei City	23 July 2026	A Mr. Luan (欒先生), age 35, and Mr. Yu (于先生), age 44, landed at Bali Beach at 2 a.m. and infiltrated inland. They were arrested a week later at a park in Taoyuan, 27 kilometers away.	
Luermen Beach, Tainan	26 March 2026	An abandoned Chinese motorboat with extra unused fuel tanks was found near a radar site and taken into custody by the coast guard. No suspects were found.	
Guanyin Beach, Taoyuan	15 May 2025	Two PRC men, Song Yuankun (宋元坤), age 41, and his 17-year-old son, landed at Guanyin Beach near the Guantang LNG Terminal at 5:30 p.m. Reportedly, they soon ran out of money and turned themselves in at 8 a.m. the next day.	

[41] Tsao Ya-yen and Lee Hsin-Yin, "Coast Guard apologizes for failures in illegal Chinese dinghy entry case," *Focus Taiwan News*, 11 August 2026, https://focustaiwan.tw/society/202608110014; 王捷 [Wang Chieh], 獨家》中國小艇海巡雷達站旁搶灘？ 只見空船不見人影 ["Exclusive: Chinese Small Boat Landed Next to Coast Guard Radar Site? Only Empty Boat Found, No Trace of People"], 自由時報 [*Liberty Times*], 2 April 2026, https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/politics/breakingnews/5390618; "Man sentenced to 8 months for illegally entering Taiwan," *Taipei Times*, 27 August 2025, https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2025/08/27/2003842748; 陈恩惠 [Chen En-hui], 陆父子驾橡皮艇偷渡台湾 通过测谎无涉国安 ["Father and Son Who Drove a Rubber Boat Across Taiwan Strait Illegally Pass Polygraph, No Threat to National Security"], 世界日報 [*World Daily News*], 17 August 2025, https://www.worldjournal.com/wj/story/121220/8944819?zh-cn; 宋珮文 [Song Pei-wen], 福建男搭漁船再轉貨輪, 偷渡台灣玩 2 個月, 玩膩了再自首 ["Fujian Man Takes Fishing Boat, Transfers to Ferry, Then Infiltrates into Taiwan to Play for 2 Months, Gets Bored and Turns Self In"], *TVBS News*, 21 May 2025, https://news.tvbs.com.tw/local/2877667; "Sentence upheld for Chinese speedboat arrival," *Taipei Times*, 24 January 2025, at https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2025/01/24/2003830781; 差 100 公尺就上岸！ 中國男偷渡林口後坑溪 ["Only 100 Meters to Shore! Chinese Man Illegally Enters Near Linkou's Houkeng Creek"], 台視新聞 [TTV News], 14 September 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrmzRh4ewIk; 前中国海军艇长因未经许可进入台湾被起诉 ["Former Chinese Navy Captain Arrested for Entering Taiwan Without Permission"], 美国之音 [*Voice of America*], 14 August 2024, https://www.voachinese.com/a/chinese-ex-naval-captain-charged-with-illegally-entering-taiwan/7742095.html; Hiroyuki Sugiyama, "Mystery of man from China who came to Taiwan by rubber boat deepens," *The Japan News*, 3 October 2021, https://japannews.yomiuri.co.jp/world/asia-pacific/20211003-32217/; 白珈陽 [Bai Chia-yang], 又有偷渡客上岸？南莊岸際出現不明快艇, 海巡加設臨檢站查緝 ["Another Illegal Lands? Unknown Speed Boat Discovered Off Nanzhuang Coast, Coast Guard Sets Up Additional Checkpoint"], *ETtoday*, 10 August 2021, https://www.ettoday.net/news/20210810/2052437.htm.

Qijin Beach, Kaohsiung	September 2024 (specific date not reported)	Mr. Li (李先生), a young man from Fujian, PRC, landed on a known invasion beach outside Taiwan's largest port with the help of local criminals. He lived undocumented for two months before turning himself into the authorities.	Image unavailable.
Linkou Beach, New Taipei City	14 September 2024	A Mr. Wang (王先生), age 32, ran aground 100 meters off the coast between Linkou Beach and the Port of Taipei, at 6 a.m. and was arrested after he called the local authorities for help.	
Tamsui Docks, New Taipei City	9 June 2024	A former PLA Navy captain, Ruan Fangyong (阮芳勇), age 60, landed in a speed boat at a small ferry terminal at 10:19 a.m. and surrendered to the coast guard. He said he wanted to defect and offered to provide intelligence on Chinese military bases near Taiwan.	
Da'an Beach, Taichung	9 August 2021	Local residents reported seeing an abandoned Chinese speed boat on a beach near the Port of Taichung. Grainy surveillance video footage showed a suspicious car parked nearby the night before. No suspects were ever found.	Image unavailable. The vessel was taken into custody for police and military inspection.
Port of Taichung	30 April 2021	A Mr. Zhou (周先生), age 33, landed at one of Taiwan's largest ports at 11:50 p.m. and turned himself in, saying he was hungry and the conditions in China were terrible. The landing occurred amid the PRC's draconian Covid-19 lockdowns.	
*Note that this list is believed to be current as of October 2026. However, it is probably incomplete and only encompasses those cases that have been reported by the press.			

Open Questions:

There are many possible explanations for these landings, such as espionage, criminal smuggling, or "patriotic" thrill seeking. Reconnaissance by the PLA, however, cannot be ruled out. While it is possible the PRC men that have landed on Taiwan are Beijing-controlled agents, the limited availability of source materials would seem to suggest that analytical circumspection is warranted. Many questions remain open, and there are logical inconsistencies and gaps in the individual PRC men's stories. For example, why would anyone want to cross the Taiwan Strait in a small rubber boat when there are likely cheaper and less risky means of travel available? Why haven't any of the landings happened near the narrowest point in the Strait?

Did the men actually make the crossing without the help of a mothership? Images of captured PRC rubber boats suggest that several of them had mere 15-horsepower or 20-horsepower outboard motors, which have limited tactical utility and are generally not used for long-range trips. With several extra cans of fuel onboard, a long and unassisted trip over the open sea seems possible but unlikely. Significant danger would have attended the operators as they struggled to navigate such tiny craft amid the heavy shipping traffic – especially at night.[42] The above factors would seem to increase the plausibility of the theory that some of the men might have deployed from offshore "dark fleet vessels" that conceal their locations on public tracking systems. Large clusters of these ships have been lurking off the coast of Taiwan.[43]

The motivations of the PRC men are not known publicly. Why did some turn themselves in after making such a risky trip and avoiding detection? Does their behavior suggest criminal activity, such as smuggling or human trafficking? Did they genuinely believe they could defect to Taiwan, as some alleged? Or does it indicate something went awry amid their illegal activities or covert missions? The Taiwanese government's handling of these men may provide important (albeit indirect) insights into their motivations. Most have reportedly been sentenced to serving prison time and afterwards quietly deported. None appear to have been given asylum, let alone rewards for providing intelligence.

While highly speculative, some of these men might have been low-level operatives employed to create noise or diversions, drawing attention away from priority criminal, PLA, or MSS landings elsewhere that were never discovered. It is also possible they were involved in efforts to extract spies. Taiwanese organized crime groups and underground Chinese intelligence networks can help individuals wanted by Taiwanese authorities flee the country relatively quickly, often by sea.[44] For example, Chang Chun-chieh, the former office director of Legislator Kao Chin Su-mei, reportedly fled Taiwan in September 2026 amid a spy scandal.[45]

In addition, it seems possible that some of the men might have been involved in the transportation of high-value military weapons or sensing capabilities that could not have been safely moved via normal

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[42] The author thanks Captain Louis McCray for this insight.
[43] "Unexplained Ship Clusters Anchoring off Taiwan," *The Maritime Executive*, 22 October 2026, at https://maritime-executive.com/editorials/unexplained-ship-clusters-anchoring-off-taiwan; and Cadence Quaranta, "The Foreign-Flagged Ships That Linger Off Taiwan's Southwest Coast," *Taiwan Plus News*, 29 July 2026, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BP82cGKwIjI.
[44] The author thanks Mr. K. Tristan Tang for this insight.
[45] 羅添斌 [Lo Tien-bin], 數十人助張俊傑潛逃製造斷點 退將研判：典型中國諜報「橋樑」手段 ["Dozens of Individuals Helped Chang Chun-shieh Flee by Creating Trail Breaks, Retired General Assesses: Classic Chinese Spy 'Bridging' Tactic"], 自由時報 [*Liberty Times*], 22 October 2026, https://def.ltn.com.tw/article/breakingnews/5614927.

smuggling routes. Or perhaps, in some cases, they were instructed to get captured on political grounds, perhaps to erode sovereignty norms and the Taiwanese public's confidence in their government.



Figure 6: From left to right: Song Yuankun, Ruan Fangyong, and Mr. Zhou.[46]

Coastal Harassment:

On April 13, 2026, Taiwan's parliament, the Legislative Yuan, held a hearing on the small boat landings and asked senior government officials to submit reports and testify on the record. During the hearing, Taiwan's intelligence chief, Dr. Tsai Ming-yen, said the timings of the small boat landings seemed to be associated with Chinese military exercises in the Taiwan Strait, and based on the locations of the landings, it was possible that China was probing for weaknesses in Taiwan's coastal defense capabilities.[47]

In his testimony, Tsai said that the National Security Bureau (NSB) suspected the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was conducting "grey zone" coercion operations against Taiwan. While the arrested individuals typically claimed that were seeking political asylum, such rhetoric was likely a cover for their actual criminal intentions. "This move by the Chinese Communists to frequently employ small boats to harass our coastal areas has already begun to seriously affect our national security," Tsai said.[48] "Our Bureau will continue to employ all special projects and mechanisms to … strengthen our coastal security and ability to counter infiltration and sabotage."[49]

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[46] 王宏舜 [Wang Hong-shun], 雲南人網購橡皮艇帶兒偷渡桃園只花 29.5 公升油 二審仍判 8 月徒刑 ["Yunnan Man Who Bought Rubber Zodiac Online to Take Son Illegally to Taoyuan Only Used 29.5 Liters of Gas, Sentenced to 8 Months in Prison After Appeal"], 聯合報 [*United Daily News*], 11 November 2025, https://udn.com/news/story/7320/9131535; "Sentence upheld for Chinese speedboat arrival," *Taipei Times*, 24 January 2025, https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2025/01/24/2003830781; and 劉蕙瑀 [Liu Hui-yu], 台中又有偷渡客？大安海域驚見不明快艇、陸物資 ["Another Illegal Lands in Taichung? Da'an Coast Shocked by Sight of Unknown Speed Boat, Chinese Materials Found Inside"], *TVBS News*, 10 August 2021, https://news.tvbs.com.tw/local/1562618; and James Giffiths and Yong Xiong, "Chinese man dodges two navies to cross Taiwan Strait by rubber dinghy in search of 'freedom and democracy,'" *CNN*, 2 May 2021, https://www.cnn.com/2021/05/02/asia/china-taiwan-strait-defector-intl-hnk/.

[47] The full hearing is available at LIVE 中國小型船非法侵入我領海 國安局長蔡明彥備詢 ["Live: China's Small Boats Illegally Entering Our Territorial Waters, National Security Bureau's Tsai Ming-yen Gives Testimony"], 台視新聞 [TTV News], 13 April 2026, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QK2jjN6PdsA. Tsai's testimony begins at minute 53:00.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.



Figure 7: Taiwanese Tanks Conduct Exercise on Bali Beach, Site of a Small Boat Landing.[50]



Figure 8: Taiwan Army Reservists Conduct Target Practice on Linkou Beach, Site of a Small Boat Landing.[51]

[50] 洪哲政 [Hong Je-Cheng], 反制共軍登陸 國軍砸近百億於「複合式紅色沙灘」建彈藥庫 ["National Military Drops Almost 10 Billion to Build Ammo Caches for the 'Composite Red Beaches' to Counter PLA Landing"], 聯合報 [*United Daily News*], 3 January 2026, https://udn.com/news/story/10930/9242564.
[51] Matt Yu and Joseph Yeh, "2026 Han Kuang highlights: U.S.-type methods, new tanks, more reserves," *Focus Taiwan News*, 2 August 2026, https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202608020004.

Implications:

The recent PRC small boat landings and infiltration cases described here suggest that dangerous gaps exist in Taiwan's coastal defense architecture. There is not enough public evidence to link known landings to the PLA. Nonetheless, these incidents show that ostensibly untrained and ill-equipped men can get ashore and stay in Taiwan, suggesting that PLA Navy commandos could easily infiltrate if Beijing decided to invade.[52] China's infiltration capabilities already appear to be quite extensive, not only in terms of getting people into Taiwan, but also getting them out. Local networks may already have considerable organizational capabilities, and Taiwan also faces a significant problem with illegal firearms.[53]

Taiwan's coast guard maintains a line of observation points along the shore, but it suffers from personnel shortages and budgetary constraints. Recent small boat landings come at a time when the force is being asked to respond to a large and growing number of threatening PLA Navy, Coast Guard, and Maritime Militia operations that are encroaching on Taiwan's exclusive economic zone and, more recently, its contiguous zone.[54]



Figure 9: Coast Guard lookout station near Port of Taichung.[55]

For its part, Taiwan's army has a significant number of brigades assigned to the coastal defense mission. They sometimes practice operations to defend ports and beaches, but their peacetime posture is thin along the coast and offers little in the way of defense.[56] The ROC military reportedly remains stuck with

[52] The author thanks Professor Ryan Martinson for this insight.
[53] The author thanks Mr. K Tristan Tang for this insight.
[54] Ryan D. Martinson, "The New Normal East of Taiwan," *CMSI Note,* (No. 21), 6 July 2026, https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-notes/21; Ryan D. Martinson, "Testing Boundaries: The Lan Hai 201 Mission East of Taiwan" (2026). *CMSI Note,* (No. 22), 28 July 2026, https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-notes/22; and K. Tristan Tang, "PLA Navy Enhances Realistic Combat Training: Observations of PLA Navy Operations Around Taiwan," *CMSI Note* (No. 13), 13 March 2025, https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-notes/13.
[55] Photo by author.
[56] Taiwanese Army officers writing in professional military journals have expressed what appears to be a widespread concern that the areas around their country's invasion beaches (also known as "red beaches") are unsatisfactorily fortified. In peacetime these beaches are open to the public for recreational purposes, and army combat engineers are not allowed to establish minefields and defense works until the government issues emergency alert orders. By that time, they argue, it may

outdated designs for beach obstacle systems, and the once powerful fortification systems that were built on Taiwan during World War Two and the Cold War have atrophied.[57]

The ability to detect PLA infiltration of Taiwanese coastal areas is vital to Taiwan's defense, and the recent small boat landings reveal that existing surveillance capabilities are far from adequate for that purpose. As we have seen, PLA documents that appear to be indicative of doctrine call for infiltrating undercover operatives into Taiwan ahead of an invasion to collect intelligence and conduct special operations. It seems likely that the frequency of such activities would spike prior to the onset of a major PLA amphibious assault. If discovered, small boat landings could provide Taiwan's defenders critical warning intelligence.

American cooperation with Taiwan's armed forces on military engineering, counter infiltration, and coastal defense may enable the Taiwanese military to enhance its preparedness for potential infiltration. Actions such as closing vulnerable sections of Taiwan's coast to the public, establishing coast watcher communities, and fortifying coastal garrisons in peacetime could reinforce Taiwan's defenses against infiltration and help to mitigate this potential threat. Beaches and ports could be encased behind concrete walls topped with concertina wire and guard towers. Coastal garrisons could be reinforced and positioned inside permanent defense works. To augment regular army troops and coast guard personnel, volunteer coast watchers – civil defense volunteers such as those trained by Taiwan's Kuma Academy – could patrol nearby.



Figure 10: Taiwanese Army Command Post on Bali Beach.[58]

be too late to do everything necessary to make it difficult for the PLA to land. According to one study, Taiwan's current mobilization plan only allows combat engineers enough time to build thin fortification lines using relatively simple capabilities, resulting in defense works that will be insufficient for the protection of frontline troops during the PLA's pre-invasion bombardment. Having suffered attrition, coastal defenders could then be unable to hold off the first wave of enemy storming the beaches. See 葉守逸 [Yeh Shou-yi], 1944 年日軍陣地編成之研析-以台灣為列 [Analyzing the Japanese Military's Fortifications in 1944 – The Case of Taiwan], *ROC Ministry of National Defense*, Undated, p. 21.

[57] 張佑菁 and 朱栢鴻 [Chang You-jing and Chu Bai-hong], "以二戰時期提路計畫美日攻防探討國土防衛作戰可行性" [Examining Homeland Defense Operations Through the Lens of U.S.-Japan Attack and Defense Plans Surrounding Operation Causeway in World War Two], *ROC Army Combat Engineer Journal*, No. 158 (Spring 2021), p. 17.

[58] 闕敬倫 [Kuan Jing-lun], 為漢光演習做足準備 八里營區披偽裝網、沙灘架「鋼刺蝟」["Fully Prepared for Han Kuang Exercises, Bali Beach Garrison Area Camouflaged and Czech Hedgehogs Emplaced in Coastal Sands"], 自由時報 [*Liberty Times*], 11 July 2023,

Given the likelihood of PLA infiltration attempts, and their potential consequences in wartime, the U.S. military leaders could consider sending a large contingent of combat engineers to support Taiwanese efforts to improve the resilience of the island's coastal defenses. While it might be unrealistic to hope for an airtight seal against PLA infiltration and special reconnaissance operations, collaboration focused on meeting the threat now matter more than ever. The driver behind the rising PRC small boat landings on Taiwan remains unclear. Military professionals in the United States and Taiwan can nonetheless continue researching these cases and draw their own conclusions and insights as they prepare for an uncertain future.

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