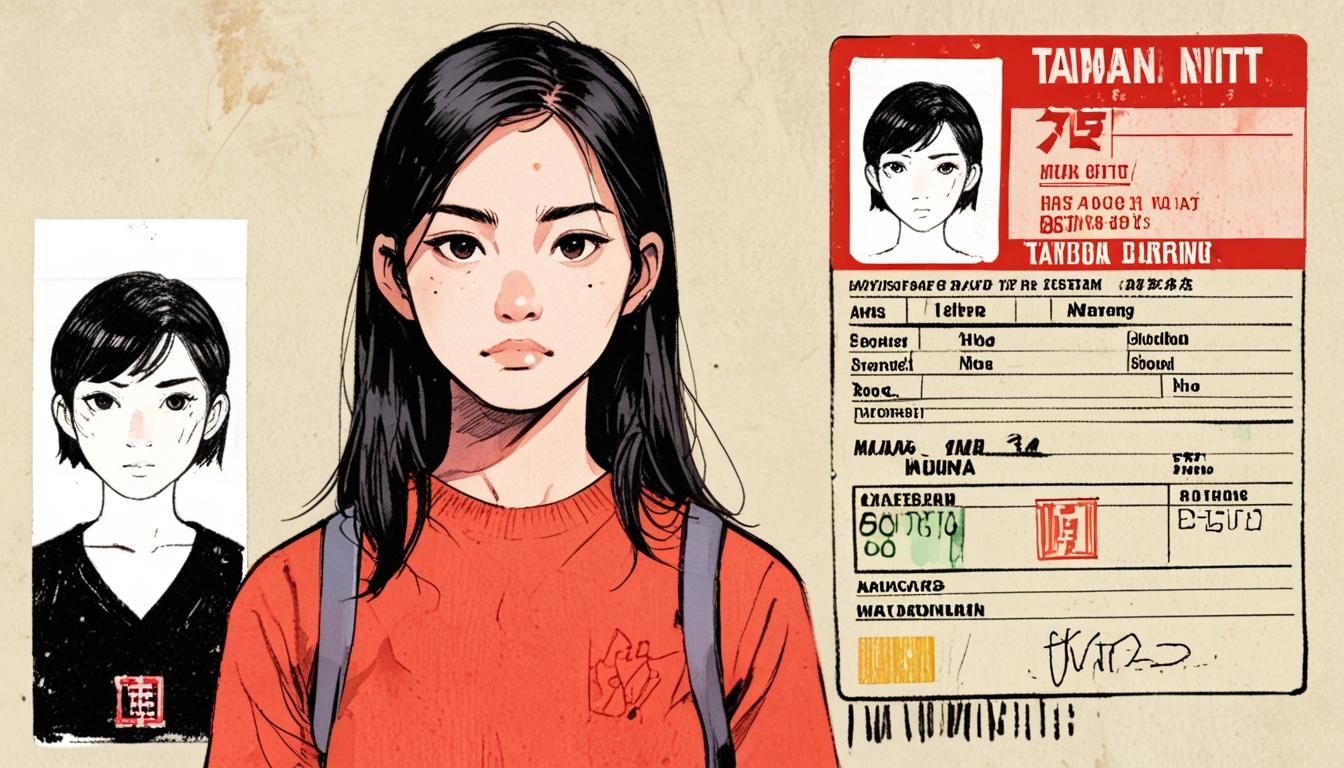
# Taiwan intensifies crackdown on holders of illegal Chinese identity documents amid security concerns



Taiwan has embarked on a stringent crackdown against holders of illegal Chinese identity documents, leading to the revocation of Taiwanese citizenship for more than 20 individuals and placing tens of thousands of Chinese-born residents under government scrutiny. This intensified campaign has stirred significant public debate on issues of identity, loyalty, and the balance between political freedoms and national security on the island.

The legal backdrop to this effort is Taiwan’s prohibition against its citizens holding Chinese identity documents. Over the past ten years, this law has led to hundreds of Taiwanese having their papers or passports annulled for also possessing Chinese IDs, effectively stripping them of citizenship. However, recent heightened enforcement has resulted in increased controversy, particularly following the public expulsion of three Chinese-born women accused of advocating for a hostile Chinese takeover of Taiwan, as well as threats to the permanent residency status of over 10,000 Chinese-born spouses residing in Taiwan.

The government's current crackdown gained momentum after the release of an online documentary in December, which exposed Chinese authorities clandestinely offering identity cards to Taiwanese individuals. Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) condemned this programme as “part of China’s evil united front work that attempts to … create an illusion that it has authority over the nation.” The documentary highlighted three such cases involving Taiwanese who had relocated to China’s Fujian province and obtained Chinese identity cards.

One such individual, Su Shih-er, chose Fujian for its sizeable Taiwanese community and favourable subsidies for entrepreneurs. Initially attracted by these benefits, Su applied for a Chinese ID card, citing convenience for his company. However, Su acknowledged that this was illegal under Taiwan’s laws, which require Chinese household registration (‘hukou’) for the card—a status barred under Taiwan’s cross-strait relations act. He described himself as “a victim of their political games” and claimed many Taiwanese with Fujian IDs exist.

Relations between Taiwan and China remain highly strained. Beijing asserts Taiwan as a Chinese province and has not ruled out the use of military force to achieve reunification. Espionage and infiltration by pro-Communist Party operatives within Taiwan’s society, government, and military constitute ongoing security risks. Nonetheless, close social and familial ties persist: in 2022, approximately 170,000 Taiwanese resided in China, and some 380,000 Chinese-born individuals lived in Taiwan, about half holding permanent residency, many being spouses of Taiwanese nationals.

In March this year, Taiwan’s President Lai Ching-te introduced new measures aimed at countering malign Chinese activities, including a more rigorous review of cross-strait travel and settlement. The same month, three Chinese-born women were accused of using their social media platforms to promote views favouring a hostile Chinese takeover. Taiwan revoked their residency visas, forcing them—and their Taiwanese families—to leave the island. This action prompted criticism from opposition parties and academics, who alleged the government was deporting individuals without due process for merely expressing dissenting views. A group of local academics expressed concern that President Lai was “rapidly compressing the space for free speech.”

However, government officials countered these criticisms. Premier Cho Jung-tai stated at a press conference, “There are limits to freedom of speech, and the limits are the country’s survival,” describing the social media posts as enemy war propaganda not protected under free-speech rights. These deportations reportedly enjoyed popular approval among sections of the public, with chants of “go home!” being directed at the women during a press event.

Two local academics, Michelle Kuo and Albert Wu, reflected on the predicament facing Taiwan, writing, “Imagine a world where an ally of China expels a Taiwanese immigrant for advocating Taiwanese independence. We would fight to the death for that person to stay in the country.” Yet they acknowledged the severity of Taiwan’s security threats, questioning whether human rights principles around family unity and freedom of speech could be fully upheld given the existential risks.

Following revelations that the scale of individuals holding or seeking Chinese IDs was larger than anticipated, the Taiwanese government moved to broaden its scrutiny. Officials argued that indistinct identities across the Taiwan Strait threatened “national security and social stability.” In March, the MAC sent questionnaires to public sector workers, university staff, and military personnel, requiring disclosure of any past Chinese ID possession. Officials described this as an opportunity for individuals to “demonstrate their loyalty.”

Earlier this month, the National Immigration Agency (NIA) contacted over 10,000 Chinese-born spouses, asserting they had failed to provide adequate proof of renouncing their Chinese hukou—a precondition for permanent residency in Taiwan. This demand provoked outcry on social media, with many affected individuals and their families expressing feelings of being unfairly targeted and suddenly unwelcomed, including people who had lived in Taiwan for decades before such proof was mandated.

The process of rescinding Chinese hukou requires attendance in person in China, a complicated and sometimes perilous task. A prominent example cited is Li Yanhe, a Chinese-born publisher based in Taiwan who critically addressed the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Li was arrested in Shanghai in 2023 while reportedly there to rescind his hukou and is currently imprisoned on charges related to “inciting secession.”

In one recorded interaction shared online, a woman relayed how her mother, who had resided in Taiwan for 22 years and submitted proof of hukou renunciation to authorities upon arrival, was informed by an NIA agent that no record existed. The agent threatened her with loss of Taiwanese rights and residency should she fail to cooperate. Another case involved a woman whose mother, living in Taiwan for 33 years with a valid Taiwanese ID, passport, and a history of tax and insurance contributions, was similarly asked to supply proof.

Responding to public concerns, Liang Wen-chieh, deputy head of the MAC, asserted that officials were exercising “utmost leniency towards such individuals.” The government has since announced case-by-case exemptions, particularly for elderly individuals, those who have not returned to China in over a decade, or who fear persecution.

Thus far, the campaign has resulted in the revocation of Taiwanese documentation for at least 19 people possessing Chinese IDs, effectively cancelling their citizenship. The NIA indicated those who revoke their Chinese hukou may apply for permission to “restore their [Taiwan] status” and return.

Nonetheless, critics warn that the crackdown may further fracture Taiwan’s already divided society. Professor Liu Mei-jun of Taiwan’s National Chengchi University commented, “It is obvious that a negative impact is to tear Taiwan apart and push people to the opposite side, which is of no benefit to Taiwan’s security.”

Kuo and Wu also noted the potential propaganda gains for Beijing, with Chinese state media accusing Taiwan’s ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) of “tearing families apart” and selectively applying “freedom” only to supporters of Taiwan independence. The Taiwan Affairs Office criticised the DPP for bullying tactics.

Conversations with individuals within or close to the Taiwanese government reveal a prevailing sense that security concerns outweigh the political backlash. Kuo and Wu highlighted the demographic significance of Chinese spouses in Taiwan: “More than 360,000 Chinese spouses live in Taiwan today. While they may appear to be a demographic minority, their family networks make up a significant portion of society – one the government now risks alienating.”

The unfolding situation underscores the complex intersection of cross-strait relations, individual rights, and national security in Taiwan’s ongoing challenges.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

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