

Taiwan: JAIL SENTENCES HANDED DOWN FOR SPYING ON TIBETAN, TAIWANESE INDEPENDENCE ACTIVISTS

Thursday 1 August 2024, by [HIOE Brian](#) (Date first published: 24 July 2024).

IN AN UNUSUAL CASE, a Taiwanese businessman named Fang Hsiang and his associates have become implicated in espionage charges. Fang, who served as the head of a business association in Hainan for Taiwanese businessmen in China and is in his seventies, is accused of spying on Taiwanese and Tibetan independence activists in Taiwan.

Specifically, Fang and his associates are accused of spying on associates of former president Chen Shui-bian, Tibetans in Taiwan, and Taiwanese government officials whose work pertains to Tibetans. Fang was recruited as a spy after becoming acquainted with the apparent director of the National Security Department of Hainan province, which is part of the Ministry of State Security, [a man surnamed Hou](#).

Though some reports state that Fang did not know Hou's true identity and was only aware that he was a senior official, Fang recruited several individuals after returning to Taiwan. This included a man surnamed Chen [working in the Mongolian and Tibetan Cultural Center in Taipei](#), which is part of the Ministry of Culture. At one point, Chen recorded a conversation with the director of the Mongolian and Tibetan Culture Center to try and gain information on Tibetan groups in Taiwan and what coordination exists between the government and such groups as pertaining to refugee policy.

Likewise, Fang aimed to recruit a Taiwanese independence activist associated with political groupings aligned with Chen Shui-bian, [trying to convince him to run for office](#) in return for cash payments. Associates of Fang were flown to China to meet with Hou at various points.

In general, details are scarce on the case, and some details that have been reported on are inconsistent. But what details have emerged point to espionage within Taiwan against Taiwanese and Tibetan independence activists. It would not surprise if Hongkongers and Uyghurs, too, are being surveilled.

The pattern of recruiting Taiwanese businessmen working in China as Chinese agents is familiar. Yet Fang's actions have been understood as indicating that Chinese authorities continue to be interested in the activities of former president Chen Shui-bian and his associates, as well as that they are interested in links between Tibetans and the Taiwanese government.

Much of the information about Chinese espionage in Taiwan surfaces only after sentences are handed down by courts. This has been the case here, in that Fang was sentenced to five and a half years in jail, while Chen was sentenced to three years in jail, and many details known about the case are from the indictment. Fang's wife, a Chinese national, has not been sentenced due to lack of evidence.

Among the higher-profile cases of espionage in past years include [the Wang Liqiang case](#), involving

a Chinese man who sought political asylum in Australia in November 2019 and claimed to have directed a spy ring in Taiwan. Likewise, in 2018, several youth spokespersons for the New Party were accused of [attempting to set up a Chinese spy ring](#) through a news website they ran.

Nevertheless, the most common Chinese espionage cases that one hears about in Taiwan are most often those involving former Taiwanese military who meet with Chinese counterparts. This may involve passing along details of Taiwan's defense, or classified information. KMT lawmakers such as Legislative Yuan defense committee co-chair Ma Wen-chun have also been accused of [leaking the details of confidential defense programs](#) to China, such as regarding Taiwan's domestic submarine program.

It is less common for details to emerge regarding Chinese efforts to spy on civil society groups. Sometimes the cases that do come to light appear to be amateurish, raising questions about if more serious efforts by China simply never come to light. This is to be seen. It is not exactly hard for the Chinese government to gain intelligence on Taiwan which is, after all, a free and democratic society. But, on the whole, it is unclear to what extent civil society groups are surveilled or monitored, except that this does occur.

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