

# The 52<sup>nd</sup> MAC Advisory Committee Meeting

## Highlights of Discussion by Advisory Members\*

News Reference Material

Date: December 8, 2023

The Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) recently held the 52<sup>nd</sup> Advisory Committee Meeting on the topic of "Observations on the Recent Strategies of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) towards Taiwan in Cultural and Religious Exchanges." Key statements and discussion points of the participating committee members are as follows:

1. The introductory report presented by the scholars indicated that for the past decade, the CCP has centered its strategy towards Taiwan on a "comprehensive united front campaign" and has been bolstering the party machine's direct leadership and oversight of cross-Strait exchanges. Despite the appearance of a significant thaw in cross-Strait cultural and religious exchanges since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, the nature of such exchanges has changed recently under the CCP's development strategy to "Sinicize religion." That is, to create the image of a "religious motherland" and attract believers to visit mainland China, such exchanges are increasingly organized by the authorities, infused with various forms of united front or political language, and less likely to see active involvement of the civil society. Superficially, these activities may still be cross-Strait exchanges in form; substantively, however, a qualitative change has occurred.

2. Some committee members observed that "security" was mentioned no fewer than 91 times in the report of the 20<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CCP. With its current fixation on political security, the CCP frequently integrates "security" factors

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\*The MAC Advisory Committee Meeting is formed of experts and scholars in related fields. The views and opinions expressed in the meetings or excerpted in this article belong solely to the speakers.

in cross-Strait cultural and religious exchanges. The party has intensified its official leading role, strengthened united front efforts, and hollowed out and formalized exchange activities. For example, when the CCP invites Taiwanese religious groups to mainland China, it invariably emphasizes a "shared mindset" and "integrated development." Religious and cultural activities officially organized by the CCP consistently convey political messages, such as "seeking unification for the country" and "achieving rejuvenation for the nation." The party even uses religious exchanges as part of its intelligence efforts to gather information on popular sentiment in Taiwan.

3. Some committee members further stated that since the CCP advocates atheism, asserts its leadership above all, and subordinates religion to the party, its cultural and religious exchanges with Taiwan are also integrated in the party's internal political development and policy needs. For instance, the main areas that the CCP has advanced in religious exchanges with Taiwan range from the early promotion of "direct cross-Strait transportation links for religious exchanges" to mainland China's current policies of a "religious motherland," "both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to one family," and "integrated development." The CCP has established more than 20 cross-Strait exchange bases related to religion. It shows that the CCP is far more interested in the political utility of religion to expand its influence over Taiwan than in the substance of religious faith.

4. Some committee members indicated that the CCP has exploited religious and cultural exchanges for united front purposes and infiltration of Taiwan. In light of a succession of recent incidents involving the infringement of the personal freedom and safety of Taiwanese citizens visiting mainland China, the government should proactively interact with relevant persons and groups in Taiwan's religious circles and provide guidelines for exchange-related travel to mainland China. It should also fully disclose information on the CCP's united front tactics and security issues and risks involved in exchanges with mainland China to help civil groups avoid risks to personal safety when visiting mainland China.

5. Some committee members also pointed out the disruption in continuity of religious traditions in mainland China due to the Cultural Revolution. Given that religious culture and rituals in Taiwan remain intact, Taiwan has an absolute advantage in the aspect of religious freedom. Cross-Strait religious exchanges should be guided more by religious faith. Taiwan should capitalize on its religious soft power and advantages and spread religious freedom and pluralistic values to achieve the intended benefits of cross-Strait religious exchanges.