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SPECIAL ISSUE: CHINA'S UNITED FRONT OPERATIONS AROUND THE WORLD

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Editor's note: This is a special theme issue of China Brief, focused on China's “united front” (tongyi zhanxian, 统一战线) influence operations throughout the world. Many of the Chinese government's united front activities are entrusted to a specific organization: the Communist Party's United Front Work Department (UFWD), which handles a broad range of policy portfolios ranging from ethnic and religious affairs within China, to seeking influence over ethnic Chinese communities and governments in foreign countries. However, in a much broader sense, the “united front” also represents a series of political strategies and tactics, employed by a variety of Chinese state-affiliated organizations, to pursue the interests of the Chinese Communist Party throughout the world.

In our first article, Anne-Marie Brady helps to frame the issue by examining the nature of “united front work,” and the language employed in reference to these activities. Next, Alex Joske discusses recent organizational changes within the UFWD as a specific institution. Then, my own contribution profiles the worldwide expansion of one of the UFWD's leading front organizations. Last but certainly not least, authors Martin Hala, and Wai Ling Yeung and Clive Hamilton, provide case studies of Chinese united front political influence efforts in, respectively, the Czech Republic and Australia. The Jamestown Foundation hopes that this special edition will contribute towards a greater public understanding of these complex issues—and benefit policymakers, scholars, business leaders, and others seeking to come to grips with the challenges posed by the Chinese government's global united front efforts.

—John Dotson, Editor, China Brief

On the Correct Use of Terms for Understanding “United Front Work”

By Anne-Marie Brady

Introduction

In 2017 a Chinese company, CEFC China Energy, made international headlines when Patrick Ho Chi-ping, the General Secretary of its non-profit wing China Energy Fund Committee, was arrested in the United States on charges of bribing officials at the United Nations, in Chad, and in Uganda ([Hong Kong Free Press](#), November 21, 2017). CEFC China Energy is nominally a private company, albeit one with close government connections ([Fortune](#), September 28, 2016). It epitomizes the close party-state-military-market nexus of the political system in China, wherein corporate interests serve the political agenda of the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP). CEFC China Energy has been involved in energy investments with the military’s “princeling” elite, and its affiliate China Energy Fund Committee is a pro-CCP think tank with ties to retired military intelligence officers ([South Sea Conversations](#), January 17, 2017).

CEFC China Energy and its subsidiary appear to have used investments and other economic inducements to buy local influence over policies in a number of states ([Sinopsis](#), June 26, 2018). In the Czech Republic, CEFC chairman Ye Jianming was even installed as a “special adviser” to the Czech president ([Sinopsis](#), February 8, 2018). Not long after Patrick Ho’s downfall, Ye Jianming was detained for questioning in China ([SCMP](#), March 1, 2018). All CEFC’s assets have now been transferred to the state-owned CITIC group, underlining the company’s close connections to the CCP government ([Global Voices](#), March 15).

The CEFC story is a well-documented case study of the CCP’s foreign interference activities via “red capitalist” proxies in pursuit of wider foreign policy goals. The topic of foreign interference and foreign influence has occupied a prominent place in the media spotlight over the last two years, and it has become an issue of deep concern for many governments. Commentators have struggled to summarize the CCP government’s foreign interference activities with a catch-all term that makes sense to the rest of the world. Being able to describe and define a phenomenon is essential for being able to address concerns about it. However, the activities described above do not neatly fit standard political science definitions of foreign policy, nor the foreign affairs approaches followed by most other governments.

Outside commentators frequently use the terms “foreign interference” or “foreign influence” to describe CCP-directed efforts to impact politics in other countries, prompting debates as to which term is best used when raising alarm bells about this phenomenon ([RUSI](#), February 20). Sometimes “political warfare” is also used to describe such activities ([The Strategist](#), June 5, 2018). Military and strategic analysts tend to use the term “gray zone strategies” ([The National Interest](#), May 2, 2017). Some writers, including many CCP-affiliated ones, try to use the characterization of “soft power” to describe the CCP’s activities ([The Wilson Center](#), September 18, 2017); however, Joseph Nye, who invented the soft power concept, rejects the PRC (and Russian) arrogation of his terminology ([Foreign Policy](#), April 29, 2013). The U.S. National Endowment for

Democracy has coined the phrase “sharp power” to describe the influence activities of authoritarian governments, while Russian scholars prefer “smart power” ([International Forum for Democratic Studies](#), December 6, 2017). [1]

However, among Sinologists there has long been an emphasis on the need to use the CCP’s own terms when trying to understand the policies and intentions of the Chinese party-state. [2] If we seek to understand the People’s Republic of China (PRC), we must first endeavor to understand the CCP, its institutions, its policies, and its political terms. The CCP itself is very concerned about the correct terminology (*tifa*, 提法) employed in describing political matters. Emphasis on the correct use of terms on politically sensitive topics is an effective way of constraining public debate. [3]



Image: CCP officials in Hebei Province gather for a conference on united front work, November 2015. (Source: [Hebei News Network](#))

What Is the Nature of “United Front Work”?

Whatever the term applied by outside observers, the term used by the CCP itself to describe such phenomena is “united front work” (*tongyi zhanxian gongzuo*, 统一战线工作). [4] This in turn can be broken down into “international united front work” (*guoji tongzhan gongzuo*, 国际统战工作), “foreign affairs work” (*waishi gongzuo*, 外事工作), and “overseas Chinese affairs work” (*qiaowu gongzuo*, 侨务工作) ([Renminwang](#), March 14). [5] United front work is also a very important task within China’s domestic politics—and as with the CCP’s modernized propaganda activities, the boundaries between domestic united front work and internationally-oriented united front work are no longer distinct. [6]

The united front is a Leninist concept, which was further developed in Soviet and Communist Chinese practice. In his 1920 tract “Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder,” Lenin stated:

The more powerful enemy can be vanquished only by exerting the utmost effort, and most thoroughly, carefully, attentively and skillfully making use without fail of every, even the smallest, “rift” among the enemies, of every antagonism of interest among the bourgeoisie of the various countries and among the various groups or types of bourgeoisie within the various countries, and also by taking advantage of every, even the smallest, opportunity of gaining a mass ally, even though this ally be temporary, vacillating, unstable, unreliable and conditional. [7]

Although some agencies of China’s party-state-military structure are more involved than others, united front work is an “all-of-Party activity” (*quan dang de gongzuo*, 全党的工作), and therefore a core task in which all Party members are required to participate ([Xinhua](#), May 25, 2015). [8] The activities of entities engaged in united front work are subject to coordination and direction throughout the CCP-led political system, as captured by the slogan: “under unified leadership, coordinated, but working across a range of sectors” (*tongyi lingdao, fenkou guanli, fenji ziren, xietiao peihe* / 统一领导, 分口管理, 分级负责, 协调配合). [9]

CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping is a strong promoter of united front work tactics, and has increased the resourcing and prominence for such efforts within the CCP political system ([China Brief](#), April 24, 2018). Xi-era united front work activities fall into four primary categories:

1. Efforts to control the Chinese diaspora, to utilize them as agents of Chinese foreign policy, and to suppress any hints of dissent.
2. Efforts to coopt foreigners to support and promote the CCP’s foreign policy goals, and to provide access to strategic information and technical knowledge.
3. Supporting a global, multi-platform, pro-PRC strategic communication strategy aimed at suppressing critical perspectives on the CCP and its policies, and promoting the CCP agenda.
4. Supporting the China-centered economic, transportation, and communications strategic bloc known as the Belt and Road Initiative.

United front work has an important role in the PRC’s increasingly assertive foreign policy, which follows a three-pronged approach: (1) state-to-state interactions; (2) employment of military force; and (3) covert operations conducted via international united front work agents and organizations. In the latter category, a range of proxies engage in united front work with extra-Party forces, to include: “red capitalists,” Hong Kong and Taiwan “compatriots” (*tong bao*, 同胞—literally “same womb”), and the Chinese diaspora, as well as foreign political parties and foreign political, business and education leaders. Key organizations engaged in these functions include the CCP United Front Work Department (UFD), which now directly controls the main organizations devoted to co-opting the Chinese diaspora; as well as the CCP International Liaison Department (ILD), which is more focused on “party-to-party” dialogue ([Renminwang](#), July 31, 2015). The range of organizations involved in CCP united front work will differ somewhat from country to country: for example, in countries where the Chinese diaspora is small in number, the activities of the International

Liaison Department, or proxy companies such as CEFC China Energy, may be more prominent than the UFDW.

Under Xi Jinping, the CCP has also sought to reassert its control over the business sector, where Party control is now to the fore ([EJI Insight](#), December 18, 2017). Nearly all of China's listed internet companies have Party committees. Close to 70 percent of the CEOs of China's major corporations are now CCP members ([SCMP](#), November 25, 2018), and 70 percent of foreign companies working in China have a CCP cell ([Bloomberg](#), March 12, 2018). This means that China's corporate sector must also engage in united front work activities.

What Should Be Done in Response?

The CCP's covert operations via united front work activities represent a massive challenge to the sovereignty of many states. Concerned governments should fund in-depth research on CCP united front work in their respective countries, and talk to the public on national security matters such as CCP united front work approaches and organizations. In this way the public, and especially political and business elites, will be able to have eyes wide open when engaging with the CCP and its proxies—and make better choices. Society has an important role in national security, and an informed society is the means to engage in total defense.

Governments must also institute a whole of government approach to upskill the public sector in knowledge of the CCP political system, and they should invest in Chinese language skills. They should employ more Chinese-speaking staff—while being mindful and protective of them due to the political pressure the CCP government puts them under to cooperate ([Xinhua](#), February 17, 2017).

Chinese language skills should be mainstreamed in our education systems, but governments must stop co-subsidizing Confucius Institutes—which even CCP leaders describe as a “propaganda tool” of the CCP, aimed at shaping the public discourse on China ([The Economist](#), October 22, 2009). The Confucius Institutes should be encouraged to move out of our universities and join the Goethe Institutes, British Council, Alliance Française, in the community. Their local subsidies can be transferred to local Chinese language programs—ones that are not required to follow the CCP's censorship guidelines.

In the present day, not understanding the CCP and how it rules China is like not being able to read and write. These are crucial skills, and understanding starts with using the correct terms.

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**Reorganizing the United Front Work Department:
New Structures for a New Era of Diaspora and Religious Affairs Work**

By Alex Joske

Introduction—The Growing Role of the CCP’s United Front Work

The structure and functions of organizations within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) are often poorly documented. However, buried inside a January 2019 *Global Times* article was a reference to “a deputy head of the 12th bureau of the United Front Work Department” ([Global Times](#), January 6), or UFWD. This mention of a previously unknown bureau hinted that over the past four years the UFWD has undergone one of the most substantial restructurings seen in any of the CCP’s core civilian departments since the early 1950s.

Western analysts have frequently downplayed the significance of united front work and the department coordinating it—the UFWD—or overlooked it altogether. [1] But in recent years, the global discussion about CCP interference has drawn greater attention to united front activities and the UFWD ([Wilson Center](#), September 2017). Without question, united front activities have taken on renewed importance under General Secretary Xi Jinping, who has been working to ensure that all relevant parts of the CCP bureaucracy carry out united front work ([Lowy Institute](#), November 2017; [China Tibet Net](#), October 28, 2016). The past four years have seen united front work expand in scope, resourcing and top-level coordination ([Central Institute of Socialism](#), May 7, 2017; [China Brief](#), April 24, 2018).

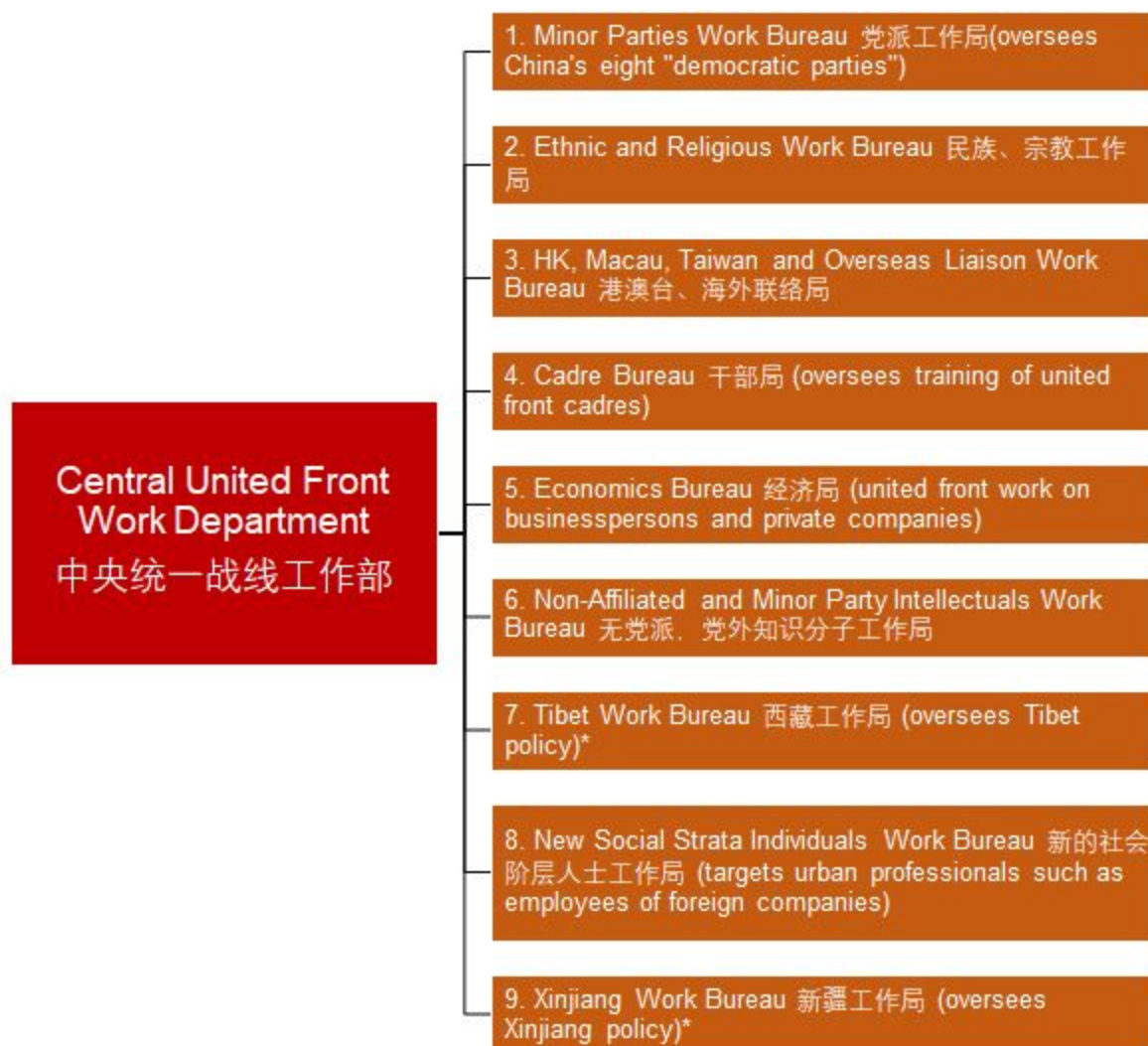
United front work (*tongzhan gongzuo*, 统战工作) is the process of building a “united front” coalition around the CCP in order to serve the Party’s objectives, subordinating targeted groups both domestically and abroad. United front work is viewed by Party leaders as a crucial component of the CCP’s victory in the Chinese Civil War (1945-1949), and is now central to controlling and utilizing domestic groups that might threaten the CCP’s power, as well as projecting influence abroad. Building a greater understanding of united front work is essential to countering political influence and interference conducted by the CCP.

New Bureaus in the United Front Work Department

Prior to restructuring, the UFWD had nine bureaus ([UFWD](#), May 3, 2017), as depicted in the graphic below:

Figure 1: The UFWD's Former Organizational Structure

**Asterisks denote bureaus where names are unofficial, and are based on the author's assessment of their designated responsibilities.*



However, analysis of recent Chinese-language sources reveals that the department underwent a major reorganization up to October 2018. Four new bureaus responsible for what the CCP terms “Overseas Chinese” and religious groups were created, while one existing bureau responsible for training united front members appears to have been downgraded. [2] The new bureaus reflect the UFWD’s absorption of two State Council agencies responsible for overseas Chinese and religious affairs—the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (OCAO) and the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA)—as announced in March 2018 ([Xinhua](#), March 21, 2018). A third agency, the State Ethnic Affairs Commission, was formally placed under the leadership of the UFWD at the same time; but unlike the OCAO and SARA, it has not been dissolved ([Xinhua](#), March 21, 2018; [China Brief](#), October 10, 2018).

The UFWD now has a total of twelve professional bureaus (*yewuju*, 业务局) with responsibilities ranging from policy in Xinjiang and Tibet, to businesspeople and Chinese diaspora communities. This new organizational structure is as follows:

Figure 2: The New Organizational Structure of the UFWD

**Asterisks denote bureaus where names are unofficial, and are based on the author's assessment of their designated responsibilities.*



Why Were the New Bureaus Created?

The recent creation of four new bureaus follows the establishment of two bureaus in 2016 and 2017: one responsible for Xinjiang, and another for efforts targeting members of “new social strata” (*xin de shehui jiecheng*, 新的社会阶层) such as new media professionals and managerial staff in foreign enterprises ([China.com.cn](#), May 5, 2017; [The Paper](#), July 4, 2016). This means that the UFWD has added six bureaus to its structure in the past three years. These renovations are significant because they increase the Party’s power to directly influence religious groups and overseas Chinese—and may indicate a more controlling approach to the former, as well as a greater international focus on the latter. According to a UFWD article on the March restructuring, “These reforms of united front departments have only one objective: to strengthen the party’s centralized and unified leadership of united front work. Under the setting of united front work, related work will be unified in deployment, planned together and coordinated” ([qq.com](#), January 21).

Twelve official categories of united front work targets exist, yet only three were singled out for overhaul in 2018: religion, ethnic affairs, and the ethnic Chinese diaspora. [3] This prioritization likely reflects the Party’s assessment of its own political vulnerabilities, and the policy areas of greatest strategic importance for the Party’s ruling position. The tightening political control that has defined the Xi years has been particularly pronounced in each of the subject areas of the new bureaus ([SCMP](#), August 28, 2018).

Scholars have documented an extreme turn in the CCP’s approach to religion, particularly in regards to Islam as practiced by the Uighur minority ([China Brief](#), October 10, 2018). [4] This shift, exemplified by the concentration camps in Xinjiang ([ASPI](#), November 2018), has coincided with criticisms levelled at SARA for being too soft: a 2016 CCP Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) report on SARA identified failings in its leadership, implementation of policy, and control of religious groups. “The problems discovered by this inspection,” the report stated, “were at their root caused by a weakening of party leadership and deficiencies in party building” ([CCDI](#), June 8, 2016).

Similarly, the CCP’s “Overseas Chinese work” has become an area of greater emphasis for the CCP—even as it has come under greater international scrutiny by democracies concerned about foreign political interference efforts. In 2015, Xi Jinping emphasized Chinese students abroad as a new focus of united front work, and the CCP continues to call on ethnic Chinese to support its growing international ambitions ([Xinhua](#), March 20, 2015; [SCIO](#), July 7, 2015). As with SARA, CCDI inspectors found weaknesses in the Party’s leadership over the OCAO, suggesting that its work on diaspora communities may have been softer than that of the UFWD ([CCDI](#), October 14, 2016).

Between March and October 2018, officials from the OCAO and SARA were in limbo. Rather than receiving new appointments, they were simply referred to as former OCAO or SARA officials. For example, Chen

Zongrong (陈宗荣), now secretary-general of the UFWD, was previously deputy head of SARA. At an April 2018 event he spoke about the changes since March, saying: “My old position is gone, but my new position also hasn’t been clarified, so now I’m attending this event as former deputy head of SARA” ([Sina.com](#), November 12, 2018). By October 2018, OCAO and SARA officials had been moved into the four new UFWD bureaus incorporating the functions of their old agencies. Two former OCAO deputy directors became UFWD vice ministers in March 2018, but it is unclear how oversight of overseas Chinese work is divided between them.



Image: Visiting personnel from the “Overseas Chinese Affairs Bureau” (Qiaowu Shiwu Ju, 侨务事务局) —newly organized as the Tenth Bureau of the CCP United Front Work Department—meet with representatives of an educational center for ethnic Chinese during a visit to the Philippines, November 2018. (Source: [Philippine Dragon Media Network](#)).

The Increasing Focus on “Overseas Chinese Work”

Much is still unknown about the bureaucracy behind united front work targeting diaspora communities, but the UFWD reorganization shows an increased focus on these tasks. Three of the UFWD’s twelve bureaus (Bureaus 3, 9 and 10), and two of its eight vice ministers, are now tasked with overseas work. This appears to reflect the Party’s greater aspirations to influence Chinese diaspora communities, and a sense of dissatisfaction with the state organs (the OCAO and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) that previously performed these primary liaison roles. Far more resources are now directly available to the UFWD to support overseas activities, and the absorption of the OCAO has brought dozens of officials with overseas experience into the department.

In matters of overseas Chinese policy, the March 2018 announcement effectively subordinated the state Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Party’s UFWD. This gives the UFWD greater control over attachés and consuls responsible for overseas Chinese work at China’s diplomatic missions, more of whom will now be drawn from the UFWD. Government conferences on overseas Chinese work were once hosted by senior foreign affairs officials like Yang Jiechi (杨洁篪) ([OCAO](#), January 16, 2015; [Xinhua](#), January 23, 2018); however, in February 2019, the UFWD ran the first-ever National Conference on United Front System Overseas Chinese Work ([Fuzhou UFWD](#), February 26). Local governments quickly followed with meetings

to implement the recommendations of the national conference, and to oversee the absorption of overseas Chinese affairs offices by UFWD branches at the local level ([Zhongguo Qiaowang](#), April 12; [Fujian UFWD](#), March 26; [Hainan UFWD](#), March 18).

The Ninth Bureau is the new Overseas Chinese Affairs General Bureau (*Qiaowu Zonghe Ju*, 侨务综合局) ([Wencheng County Government](#), November 12, 2018). This new bureau is headed by the previous chief of the UFWD Third Bureau (which was responsible for Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan and overseas united front work), although all its known senior staff come from the OCAO ([Chinanews.com](#), January 4). Many cadres in the new bureau come from the OCAO's Overseas Department, which had a wealth of overseas experience because many of its officials had been posted overseas. For example, one of the Ninth Bureau's most senior officials worked in the OCAO Overseas Department's division for Europe and Africa, and may have been posted to Washington DC and Toronto ([CTU Alumni Association](#), 2017; [NewStarNet.com](#), April 29, 2011). The Ninth Bureau also has specific regional responsibilities, including an Americas and Pacific Division, which were probably carried over from the old OCAO Overseas Department ([qizhiwang.org.cn](#), February 18; [OCAO](#)).[5]

The new Tenth Bureau, known as the Overseas Chinese Affairs Bureau (*Qiaowu Shiwu Ju*, 侨务事务局), is headed by the previous head of the OCAO Propaganda Department ([zh.gov.cn](#), November 19, 2018; [SCIO](#), March 15, 2017; [Zhongguo Qiao Wang](#), January 4). The backgrounds of Tenth Bureau personnel suggest that it has taken up the OCAO's media, educational and cultural responsibilities. This includes managing the OCAO's international media network, China News Service—which covertly runs overseas media organizations ([ABC](#), March 29, 2018)—and efforts to influence and promote Chinese language education around the world ([SIIC.it](#), November 28, 2018).

Greater responsibilities may now fall under the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese (ACFROC), a key united front organization active overseas. The March 2018 restructuring document stated that: “the OCAO's responsibilities for friendship with overseas Chinese associations will now be exercised by ACFROC” ([Xinhua](#), March 21, 2018). Numerous OCAO officials have also been reassigned to positions in ACFROC. They include the deputy head of ACFROC's liaison department—who trained and worked as a military intelligence officer before being posted to Canada and the United States as an OCAO official ([Prague Chinese Times](#), December 21, 2018; [Sina.com.cn](#), October 30, 2010).

The Third Bureau was previously known as the Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and Overseas Liaison Work Bureau (*Gang-Ao-Tai Haiwai Lianluo Ju*, 港澳台海外联络局). However, it has since been referred to as the “Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan United Front Work Bureau” (*Gang-Ao-Tai Tongzhan Gongzuo Ju*, 港澳台统战工作局), indicating that it no longer oversees united front work beyond greater China ([Macao Government](#), January 25). Nearly all its recent media references have related to Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. [6]

It is important to recognize that while these three bureaus primarily target overseas groups, all areas of united front work and all bureaus of the UFWD have overseas functions. This is a consequence of the united front being a way for the CCP to control and influence social groups outside the Party—the key distinction is not between domestic and overseas activities, but rather between the Party and everyone else. Senior Xinjiang Bureau officials, for example, travelled to Finland in July 2018 where they met with a local united front group ([FAPPRC](#), January 4). Similarly, the Non-Affiliated and Minor Party Intellectuals Work Bureau oversees the Western Returned Scholars Association, a platform for interacting with ethnic Chinese scientists and promoting technology transfer ([People's Daily](#), January 23).

The UFWD's Growing Role in Religious Affairs Work

The reorganization of the UFWD has occurred in parallel with a renewed drive by the CCP to “sinicize” (*zhongguohua*, 中国化) Islam and other religions even more tightly under state control ([Global Times](#), January 6; [China Brief](#), April 9). Religious affairs work is now to be carried out by Bureaus 11 and 12, which are almost entirely staffed by former SARA officials. Both bureaus interact with members of various religious groups, and the exact division of labor between these bureaus is unclear. However, the Twelfth Bureau has a Protestantism division ([Gospel Times.cn](#), December 13, 2018), Daoism division ([China Net](#), December 20, 2018) and a Buddhism division ([Dangdai Fojiang.cn](#), December 26, 2018), as well as other divisions that may focus on Islam and Catholicism. No references to similar divisions in the Eleventh Bureau exist—which may indicate that the Twelfth Bureau has responsibilities for specific religions, while the Eleventh Bureau may instead have functional responsibilities (such as overseeing religious schools) in order to avoid duplication of work ([Central Institute of Socialism](#), November 29, 2018).

Like all UFWD bureaus, these bureaus appear to have some international responsibilities, seeking to influence religious activities around the world. One Twelfth Bureau official spoke last year at the founding of the Australia China Buddhist Council ([qq.com](#), April 14, 2018)—which has as its honorary president Huang Xiangmo, a PRC billionaire who had his Australian visa revoked for being “amenable to conducting acts of foreign interference” ([Australia China Buddhist Council](#), April 13, 2018; [Financial Review](#), February 8). In January 2019, an Eleventh Bureau official led a Chinese Buddhist delegation to a forum in New York ([Renmin University](#), March 1).

Conclusions

Much remains to be seen in regards to the consequences of this restructuring of the UFWD. However, it has brought more cadres and policy responsibilities directly under the UFWD's supervision. Overseas united front figures have already reported increases in the coordination and energy of united front work ([People's Daily](#), October 19, 2018). This strengthens the Party's ability to carry out and integrate united front work across the bureaucracy as the CCP takes a radical turn, as demonstrated by the UFWD's central role in Xinjiang and Tibet. The restructuring has further coincided with efforts to deepen the CCP's control

of religion and to eradicate independent Uighur culture. If the UFWD's hardening approach to religion is any indication, its interference in overseas Chinese communities is likely to grow in brazenness, intensity, and intolerance.

Just as many nations are beginning to grapple with PRC interference in politics and Chinese diaspora communities, the CCP has moved to strengthen the resourcing and management behind its interference activities. The UFWD now has far greater overseas experience among its cadres, and a stronger hand to coordinate united front work carried out by various parts of the government, including staff in PRC diplomatic missions. In the words of China's ambassador to Fiji, the restructuring means that "China's overseas Chinese work will only grow stronger" ([PRC Fiji Embassy](#), December 4, 2018).

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Notes

[1] See, for example: Report of the Working Group on Chinese Influence Activities in the United States, *Chinese Influence and American Interests: Promoting Constructive Vigilance* (Hoover Institution, 2018), pp. 151-162,

https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/16_diamond-schell-chinas-influence-and-american-interests_appendix-1-chinese-influence-operations-bureaucracy.pdf; and Richard McGregor, *The Party* (Penguin Books, 2010).

[2] The fourth bureau was previously the Cadre Bureau (*Gugan Ju*, 干部局). While the cadre bureau has occasionally been referenced since October 2018, it appears to have been downgraded ([Returned Scholars Association](#), October 11, 2018). This is likely because many of its functions for training united front members, such as religious leaders, were being carried out by other professional bureaus and the UFWD's Central Institute of Socialism ([UFWD](#), July 6, 2018).

[3] The targets, laid out in the 2015 Trial Regulations on United Front Work are: members of minor parties, individuals with no party affiliation; non-party intellectuals; ethnic minorities; religious figures; private businessmen; new social strata individuals; overseas and returned overseas students; people from Hong Kong and Macau, Taiwanese and their relatives in the mainland; overseas Chinese, returned overseas Chinese, and relatives of overseas Chinese; and "any others who need to be liaised with and united" ([Peoples Daily](#), September 23, 2015).

[4] The controversial deal brokered last year between the CCP and the Vatican shows that concerns about Party control over religion are not confined to Islam. The agreement progressed the re-opening of official relations between the Party and the Holy See and gave the Party the ability to nominate bishops.

[5] Other divisions in the OCAO Overseas Department included an Asia Division and an Africa and Europe Division.

[6] One exception is a Third Bureau division head inspecting poverty alleviation ([Hezhang County Government](#), March 15, 2019).

The United Front Work Department Goes Global: The Worldwide Expansion of the Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China

By John Dotson

Author's note: This article follows from an article previously published in China Brief in February 2018: "[The United Front Work Department in Action Abroad: A Profile of The Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China](#)" (February 13, 2018). That article presented evidence that the Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China (CPPRC)—a nominal grassroots civic organization, with chapters in many countries worldwide—is in fact a front organization subordinate to the United Front Work Department of the Chinese Communist Party. [1] Building upon that earlier China Brief article, this article profiles the expansion of international chapters of the Council in countries throughout the world—to include its presence within the United States—and examines some of the ways that the CPPRC is used by the Chinese government as a vehicle for propaganda and influence efforts, and as a means to co-opt and control ethnic Chinese communities abroad.



Image: Members of the Kyrgyzstan chapter of the Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China pose with a PRC flag during a conference in May 2018. (Source: [Kyrgyzstan CPPRC](#))

Introduction

In January 2019, chapters of the Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China (*Zhongguo Heping Tongyi Cujin Hui*, 中国和平统一促进会), or CPPRC, were convened throughout the world to review a speech on Taiwan policy by Chinese Communist Party (CCP) General Secretary Xi Jinping ([China Brief](#), February 15). Amid a push by People's Republic of China (PRC) state media and officials to publicize the speech, representatives of CPPRC chapters from around the globe were lined up to issue fawning praise for Xi and his comments:

- From Africa, Feng Zhenyu, chairman of the CPPRC in Tanzania, stated that Xi's policies are aligned with "national core interests...and will further promote the process of the peaceful reunification of the motherland." Chen Jiannan, chairman of the CPPRC in Egypt, said that "overseas Chinese will firmly uphold the great cause of peaceful reunification of the motherland and make contributions to this end" ([Xinhua](#), January 3).
- Zhu Liangwei, secretary-general of the U.K. Chinese Association for the Promotion of National Reunification, called Xi's speech "informative, powerful and passionate, with far-reaching influence on the prospects of the peaceful development of cross-Strait relations" ([Xinhua](#), January 3).
- At a January 25th banquet co-sponsored by the Thailand chapter of the CPPRC, chairman Wang Zhimin was among the speakers who stated that "Chairman Xi Jinping's important speech profoundly made clear the development of cross-Strait relations and the historical trend of China's eventual reunification, giving inspiration to overseas Chinese everywhere" ([Thailand CPPRC](#), January 29).
- In the United States, the Chicago-area chapter of the CPPRC—"The Chinese American Alliance for China's Peaceful Reunification"—was also featured in this media campaign: at a January 5th meeting, "Chairwoman Wang Yeqin, Honorary Chairman Li Hongwei, Chairwoman Zheng Zheng, Chairman Fang Yanhui and others discussed their reflections on President Xi's speech, saying that it boosted the morale of all Chinese throughout the world and reinforced everyone's confidence in the peaceful reunification of the nation" ([Consulate-General of the PRC in Chicago](#), January 5).



Image: Liu Jun (head of the table, center), the PRC Consul General in Chicago, speaks at a January 5th, 2019 event organized by the "Chinese American Alliance for China's Peaceful Reunification"—the Chicago-area chapter of the CPPRC. Liu praised Xi Jinping's speech of January 3rd for stressing that "the future of Taiwan lies in national reunification and the welfare of our Taiwanese compatriots is intimately connected to national rejuvenation" ([Consulate-General of the PRC in Chicago](#), January 5).



Image: Members of a chapter of the CPPRC in Brazil gather for a meeting on January 13th, 2019. The banner reads: “Symposium to Study the Spirit of the Important Speech of Chairman Xi Jinping Delivered on the 40th Anniversary of the ‘Letter to Taiwan Compatriots’” ([Baxi Qiaowang](#), January 13).

The Global Expansion of the CPPRC

Revelations about CPPRC activities in Oceania over the past two years ([China Brief](#), February 13, 2018; [Wilson Center](#), September 2017)—and perhaps, recent revelations from Florida in the United States (see *below*)—indicate an organization that is becoming more active in covert political influence efforts on behalf of the Chinese government. Although the CPPRC is only one out a broad array of front organizations employed by the United Front Work Department (UFWD) and other PRC government agencies, it is the largest and most prominent—and arguably, the one that has come to exercise the greatest influence over ethnic Chinese communities abroad, as well as domestic politics in the countries where the CPPRC operates.

Furthermore, the examples of the January events cited above help to illustrate the extent to which chapters of the CPPRC have proliferated worldwide over the past two decades. Research for this article indicated the presence of CPPRC chapters in at least 91 countries or territories around the world; additionally, five transnational, regional chapters were also identified. These numbers cannot be considered conclusive: this list likely omits countries with active chapters that were not identified within the limited scope of this research effort; additionally, the list likely includes chapters that have a declared existence, but which may engage in little to no real-world activity. In order to arrive at a more definitive figure, further research would be required. [2] However, this list provides some sense of the global reach of the CPPRC, and the extent to which the UFWD now maintains a presence throughout the world. The list of 91 countries, divided by geographic region, is provided below.

Worldwide Chapters of the Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China:

- An asterisk (*) represents chapter activity as indicated by chapter website, media article, or [other](#) source
- A plus sign (+) represents the reported existence of multiple chapters within that country

Trans-National Chapters

All-Africa Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China (Johannesburg)
West Africa Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China (Lagos)
Asia Region Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China (Bangkok)
Oceanic Alliance of the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China, Inc. (Sydney)
Latin America Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China (Panama)

Africa

North Africa: Egypt*, Mali
West Africa: Benin, Cameroon*, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Senegal
East Africa: Ethiopia*, Kenya, Somalia, Uganda
South Africa: Angola*, Botswana*, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique*, Namibia*, South Africa*+, Tanzania*, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Asia and the Pacific Region

Chinese-Speaking Polities: Hong Kong*, Macao*, Taiwan*
Northeast Asia: Japan+, South Korea+
Southeast Asia: Cambodia*, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines*+, Thailand*+
Oceania: Australia*+, New Zealand*, Papua New Guinea*, French Polynesia*(FR), New Caledonia*(FR)
Indian Ocean: Mauritius, Seychelles
Central Asia: Kyrgyzstan*

Europe

Western Europe: Austria, Belgium*, France*, Germany*, Ireland, Italy*, Luxembourg, Netherlands*, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland*, United Kingdom+
Central Europe: Bosnia, Croatia, Czech Republic*, Hungary, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovakia
Scandinavia: Denmark*, Finland, Norway, Sweden,
Eastern Europe: Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Romania+, Russia+

Latin America:

North America / Central America: Mexico+, Costa Rica, Honduras, Panama*
South America: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil*+, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru*, Surinam*
Caribbean: Trinidad & Tobago

Middle East:

Kuwait*, United Arab Emirates*

North America:

Canada*+, United States*+

CPPRC Chapters in the United States

The parent organization of the CCPRC has identified 36 chapters of the organization within the United States, located across ten states (California, Illinois, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Washington), as well as Washington D.C. and the territories of Puerto Rico and Guam. [3] The largest and most active chapters are located in urban areas with larger ethnic Chinese populations: two such examples are the “Chinese for Peaceful Reunification—Northern California” ([CPR-NC](#), undated), and the “Greater Los Angeles Region Alliance for the Promotion of China’s Unification” ([Consulate of the PRC in Los Angeles](#), April 12, 2016).

Until recently, a Florida-based chapter of the CPPRC was also in existence: this chapter garnered media attention in spring 2019, when it came to light that Cindy Yang, a Chinese-American fundraiser for Republican Party causes in Florida and a frequent visitor to President Trump’s Palm Beach property Mar-a-Lago, was a former vice-chair of the Florida CPPRC ([Palm Beach Post](#), March 16, 2019). This chapter, the “Florida Association for China Unification Inc.,” has filed for dissolution as a legal entity ([Florida Dept. of State](#), March 11, 2019); however, it remains to be seen whether this chapter will eventually reappear under a different name, and perhaps with different leadership.

The CPPRC as Tool for Organizing and Mobilizing Chinese Communities Overseas

Promotional media surrounding international chapters of the CPPRC has revealed a number of striking factors about the organization. For one, PRC government officials maintain a close supervisory relationship with individual chapters, and are prominently featured as speakers at CPPRC events. [4] Additionally, CPPRC-affiliated websites and other media are primarily in Chinese, rather than the language(s) of the host country; and photos of group meetings indicate a membership that is overwhelmingly composed of ethnic Chinese persons, with (at least thus far) little apparent effort to recruit beyond the scope of Chinese immigrant communities. These factors suggest that a key purpose behind the proliferation of chapters of the CPPRC is the intent of the Chinese government—with the United Front Work Department acting as one of its key executive agents—to exert control over ethnic Chinese communities abroad. This effort dates back to the aftermath of the Tiananmen Massacre in 1989, when CCP leaders found themselves alarmed by the strength of support for the pro-democracy movement among the Chinese diaspora—and began a long-term, determined effort to assert control over organizations and discourse in overseas Chinese communities. [5]

Suspensions regarding the potential dual loyalties (or suspected primary loyalty to Beijing) among ethnic Chinese communities have been a point of controversy in countries including the United States, and have prompted criticisms that such suspicions are unfounded and represent racial profiling ([Committee of 100](#),

April 7). However, it is unmistakable that Chinese government agencies are actively seeking to recruit agents of influence within ethnic Chinese communities, and to control discourse within these communities. The Chinese government seeks to create a propaganda feedback loop: using a variety of inducements, it creates synthetic civic organizations under its control to assert leadership of overseas Chinese communities, and then cites these organizations as evidence of a Chinese diaspora in lockstep support of the CCP. [6]

Conclusions

Front organizations such as the CPPRC represent one of the primary mechanisms employed by the CCP in its patient, long-term campaign to undermine the democratic norms and open debate—not only within China itself, but internationally—that the CCP views as threats to its own hold on power. In response, democratic societies targeted by the corrosive influence operations of authoritarian governments like the PRC must come to grips with this challenge, and take renewed efforts to defend themselves—through measures such as the reform of campaign finance laws, more stringent enforcement of foreign agents registration requirements, and exposure through independent media of front organizations and covert lobbying directed at political policymakers. However, in the end it may well be dissident voices within overseas Chinese communities who are most at risk of being intimidated into silence or drowned out by the megaphone wielded by rapidly expanding, state-controlled PRC front organizations such as the Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China.

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Notes

[1] In addition to the author's previous article as cited, readers interested in the linkages between the Council and the Chinese government could consult a number of other references, to include: Anne-Marie Brady, "Magic Weapons: China's Political Influence Activities Under Xi Jinping," Wilson Center, Sep. 2017 (pp. 16-17), https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/for_website_magicweaponsanne-mariesbradyseptember2017.pdf; Mark Eades, "China's 'United Front' Seeks to Undermine U.S. Support for Taiwan," *International Policy Digest*, Sep. 11, 2017, <https://intpolicydigest.org/2017/09/11/china-s-united-front-seeks-to-undermine-u-s-support-for-taiwan/>; and Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, "China Built an Army of Influence Agents in the U.S.," *The Daily Beast*, July 18, 2018, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/how-china-built-an-army-of-influence-agents-in-the-us?ref=scroll>.

[2] A total of 76 country chapters were identified from the official Chinese-language homepage of the parent organization of the CPPRC (www.zhongguotongcuhui.org.cn). From this list, levels of chapter activity could not always be determined—meaning that some of the listed chapters might exist largely on paper, with minimal real-world activity. This source also indicated the existence of multiple chapters in some countries. (Of note, this central CPPRC website was apparently taken down in early March 2019, and remains down as of the publication of this article. The reasons for this are unknown. The data used in the preparation of this article was gathered prior to the website going dark.) In addition to the 76 national chapters identified on the CPPRC homepage, research for this article indicated 15 additional countries (or overseas territories) with CPPRC chapters (as indicated through either web presence or media references), for a total of 91. The author may answer specific questions about this list upon request.

[3] This list of U.S. chapters was obtained from the official Chinese-language homepage of the parent organization of the CPPRC (www.zhongguotongcuhui.org.cn). (See comments in endnote #2, above.)

[4] Many examples of this could be referenced. For two such examples, see: (1) PRC Consul (Douala, Cameroon) Zhang Daxing addressing the Cameroon chapter of the CPPRC during a November 2015 meeting: "Cameroon Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China Studies the Spirit of the 'Xi-Ma Meeting'" [喀麦隆中国和平统一促进会学习“习马会”精神], Cameroon CPPRC, 2015-11-26, <http://www.ccpr-cameroon.com/news/associationNews/65.html>; and (2) PRC Consul Wu Baofeng's connections to the New Caledonia chapter of the CPPRC, as mentioned in: "Consul Official Assigned to the Vanuatu Embassy Provides Consular Services to New Caledonia" [驻瓦努阿图使馆领事官员赴法属新喀里多尼亚提供领事服务], PRC Foreign Ministry, May 22, 2009, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gj_676203/dyz_681240/1206_681890/1206x2_681910/t564002.shtml.

[5] U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2009 Annual Report to Congress* (U.S. Government Printing Office, Nov. 2009), pp. 163-165.
https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/annual_reports/2009-Report-to-Congress.pdf.

[6] One noteworthy example of this was observable in March 2005, when PRC state media cited comments from CPPRC chapters around the world as evidence of overwhelming support from overseas Chinese communities for the PRC's "Anti-Secession Law" directed at Taiwan. See: "Overseas Chinese Communities Back Anti-Secession Law," *Xinhua News Agency* (in English), March 16, 2005. <http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/ff/123150.htm>.

**United Front Work by Other Means:
China's "Economic Diplomacy" in Central and Eastern Europe**

By Martin Hála

Introduction—A New Approach to United Front Work in Central and Eastern Europe

In the era of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) General Secretary Xi Jinping, "united front work" (*tongyi zhanxian gongzuo*, 统一战线工作) has taken on greater significance and a global scale ([China Brief](#), April 24, 2018; [China Brief](#), May 9). Traditionally, the main target of united front work outside the People's Republic of China (PRC) has been the Chinese diaspora. More recently, in countries with large and well-established "overseas Chinese" (OC) populations such as Australia and New Zealand, united front work has extended beyond ethnic Chinese communities to society at large—via means such as the cultivation of mainstream politicians and political donations to political parties ([Wilson Center](#), September 2017; [Australian Parliament](#), January 2018).

However, the rapid expansion of the PRC's foreign policy agenda under Xi has also brought CCP liaison activities to newer regions, where traditional approaches may need creative adaptation. Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), now prominent in the PRC's global plans through the "16+1" (or "17+1") framework ([China Brief](#), February 15), is a region that lacks significant OC communities. Local OC communities have been growing in these countries in recent years, but typically remain small and lack broad integration into the majority population. As in other countries, ethnic Chinese residents have been targeted by united front-related organizations, ranging from various hometown and commerce associations to local branches of the China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification (*Zhongguo Heping Tongyi Cujinhui*, 中国和平统一促进会). These organizational extensions of CCP power remain, for now, less influential in most CEE countries than might be the case elsewhere. [1]

Although much of the CCP's united front work is assigned to a dedicated policy system—with the Central United Front Work Department (*Zhongyang Tongzhan Bu* 中央统战部), or UFWD in a central role—other entities also serve this function. The united front is not just a specific "system" (*xitong*, 系统) within the CCP bureaucracy; it is also a basic principle for "all-party work" (*quan dang de gongzuo*, 全党的工作) ([People's Daily](#), undated). Under specific conditions like those in CEE, other organizations might supplement the United Front system, or even take the lead— as has been the case in the Czech Republic.

Forthright political liaisons with the CCP in regions like CEE might in themselves risk alienating populations that rejected their own Leninist party-state systems only a generation ago. Instead, the CCP has found a more palatable packaging for "friendly contacts", playing on the persisting economic differential between Europe's East and West. These efforts have been focused on the business activities of nominally private Chinese companies, under the label of "economic diplomacy." In the Czech Republic, this concept became almost exclusively the domain of one rather peculiar Chinese conglomerate, hailed at first as a "flagship of

Chinese investment” (see *below*). In the end, the company brought little investment, but managed to engage a significant segment of the local political establishment—often through direct employment offered to high-ranking politicians and civil servants ([Sinopsis](#), March 10, 2019).

The Czech Republic: Economic Diplomacy with Political Outcomes

The Czech Republic made a rather abrupt shift towards a closer relationship with the PRC in 2014, which was justified by then newly-elected President Miloš Zeman as a pragmatic “economic diplomacy” that would help to attract large-scale investment from China. This invited swift responses from the PRC: the CCP International Liaison Department (*Zhongyang Duiwai Lianluo Bu*, 中央对外联络部), or ILD, which targets foreign parties and high-level political figures ([Sinopsis](#), August 2018; [Party Watch](#), October 2018), has become prominent in forging intense “friendly contacts” within the Czech political establishment. Despite repeated warnings from the Czech counter-intelligence agency BIS (Bezpečnostní informační služba) that the ILD is “a specific party intelligence organ” ([BIS](#), 2016), the ILD quickly became the primary contact for many Czech delegations visiting Beijing, and ILD personnel now frequent political and even nominally economic events in Prague. [2] The ILD’s leading role in high-level liaisons is supplemented by the UFWD: for example, former UFWD head Sun Chunlan (孙春兰) seems to have developed a particularly close relationship with Czech President Miloš Zeman and other Czech politicians ([Deník N](#), November 2018).

As a form of “economic diplomacy,” after five years the new approach can only be judged as a failure for the Czech Republic. It brought negligible economic results: the expected massive investment from China never materialized, and investment flows have actually declined since 2016. In any case, the cumulative value of PRC investment, estimated at between 0.7 and 1.1 billion U.S. dollars, remains macroeconomically insignificant ([Česká národní banka](#); [Lidové noviny](#), January 22, 2019; [Merics](#), March 6, 2019; [Sinopsis](#), March 10, 2019). Countries like Denmark are actually bigger investors in the Czech Republic than China, and the PRC’s much smaller *bête noire* Taiwan has invested 14 times more in manufacturing ([Česká národní banka](#); [Lukáš Kovanda](#), March 31, 2019; [BusinessInfo.cz](#), September 14, 2018). The paucity of Chinese investment is so striking that it provoked a mild complaint from Zeman in an otherwise laudatory CCTV interview before his trip to the BRI Forum in April 2019. [3]

Bilateral trade has increased, but only to further widen the Czech trade deficit: in 2018, imports exceeded exports by a factor of ten ([Ministerstvo průmyslu a obchodu](#), February 7, 2019). China remains insignificant both as an export destination and as a source of investment. In fact, investment from the Czech Republic to China has arguably been more significant, as both Czech-based Škoda Auto and Czech-owned PPF have large footprints in China. The former’s success in the PRC is unrelated to the 2014 policy change: Škoda had been expanding in China since the early 2000s, building on the market position of its parent company, Volkswagen Group ([Škoda Auto](#), 2007; [Česká televize](#), January 11, 2019; [Škoda Auto](#), April 19, 2019). The latter company, the financial conglomerate PPF, is by contrast intimately linked to the 2014 turn-around. As the largest Czech company that emerged from the privatization process in the 1990s—making its majority

owner Petr Kellner the richest person in the country—PPF has always exerted a disproportionate influence on Czech politics. PPF's interests in the PRC, namely a coveted national license for their consumer credit subsidiary Home Credit, drove the foreign policy U-turn ([Synopsis](#), March 10, 2017).

Home Credit duly obtained its national license in China in 2014, shortly after the new Czech policy towards the PRC was officially declared during a visit to Beijing by the Czech foreign minister Lubomir Zaorálek. Home Credit's business in the PRC has grown substantially, and China has become its main international profit center ([Bloomberg](#), March 2019). The company is, however, registered (and taxed) in the Netherlands, and it is unclear what benefit their PRC operations bring to the Czech Republic. At the same time, the company's influence on Czech politics essentially holds the country hostage to PPF's business activities in China. The favor of Beijing regulators can be withdrawn as quickly as it was won with the support from Zeman and his cohort.

In short, the U-turn in Czech policy towards China in 2014 has been justified in terms of economic diplomacy; however, on the Czech side it has only worked in those terms for a single private company registered in Holland. After five years, it has become painfully clear that there has been little economic impact for the country as a whole. The general public has grown frustrated with the lack of tangible economic results (as well as with occasionally embarrassing political theatrics). However, despite popular discontent, the narrative of "economic diplomacy" persists, propagated by a relatively narrow circle of Czech politicians and politically connected entrepreneurs. Some of these politicians were originally hired as lobbyists by PPF in its quest for regulatory approval in China. Many more, including some originally working for PPF, have ended up on the payroll of a mysterious (and by now internationally notorious) Chinese company called CEFC ([Synopsis](#), December 2016).

CEFC: The Flagship of Political Cooptation

CEFC China Energy (*Zhongguo Huaxin Nengyuan*, 中国华信能源), hailed by the Czech President as "the flagship of Chinese investments in the Czech Republic" ([China Digital Times](#), February 8, 2018)—and linked to PRC military "political work" through the company's connections to the China Association for International Friendly Contact (*Zhongguo Guoji Youhao Lianluo Hui*, 中国国际友好联络会), or CAIFC ([South Sea Conversations](#), June 7, 2013; [Project 2049](#), October 2013)—effectively dominated the Czech-China relationship from 2015 through 2018. The company's chairman Ye Jianming (叶简明) was even appointed an "honorary advisor" to Czech president Miloš Zeman in early 2015 ([Renmin wang via qq.com](#), April 2015). Ye still officially holds that position ([Český rozhlas](#), April 28, 2019), even in his conspicuous absence after disappearing a year ago—possibly due to investigation by the CCP's disciplinary apparatus ([Caixin via South Sea Conversations](#), March 29, 2018; [Beijing News](#), October 11, 2018).

In the end, CEFC's economic activities in the Czech Republic proved underwhelming. The company seemed less interested in business deals than in developing political relationships by hiring a plethora of former politicians and civil servants, including a former defense minister and a Czech Euro-Commissioner. This fits

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a broader pattern: outside the Czech Republic, CEFC has cultivated politicians from Serbia to Georgia, and also in Africa, while helping to advance the CCP's interests at the United Nations ([China Digital Times](#), June 24, 2018; [Sinopsis](#), March 12, 2018). After a spectacular rise, the company unraveled in similarly dramatic way: in November 2017 in New York, the FBI arrested former Hong Kong politician Patrick Ho (何志平), the head of CEFC's non-profit arm, on charges of bribing politicians at the United Nations and in Africa. Shortly afterwards, CEFC Chairman Ye Jianming disappeared in China. Simultaneously, CEFC has been exposed in Chinese media as an elaborate Ponzi scheme that accumulated billions in debt in China and abroad ([South Sea Conversations](#), March 29, 2018).



Image: Ye Jianming (front row, center), then-chairman of CEFC China Energy, with Czech President Miloš Zeman (to Ye's right) at CEFC corporate headquarters in Shanghai, Sep. 2015. During the visit, it was revealed that Ye Jianming had been earlier that year appointed as an "honorary adviser" to the Czech President. (Source: [Pražský hrad](#))

After the arrest of Patrick Ho in New York and the disappearance of Ye Jianming in China, CEFC became unable to raise any more credit to pay off its debts and quickly collapsed. Its distressed assets in the Czech Republic are being consolidated and sold off by the giant Chinese state investment fund CITIC.

Despite this, the narrative of economic diplomacy lives on: President Zeman has doubled down on his unconditional support for the PRC, substituting CITIC as his new economic champion. More recently, he has

also heavily invested himself in defending Huawei amid current international controversies ([TV Barrandov](#), January 10, 2019; [Sinopsis](#), January 12, 2019; [Respekt](#), May 2, 2019).

Conclusions: “Economic Diplomacy” and Elite Capture

The elite capture achieved by CEFC’s political work has helped the PRC to manage the fallout from the company’s economic meltdown, mobilizing the political connections that CEFC established in its heyday. The politicians directly hired or otherwise indirectly engaged by the company now spin a new narrative in which CEFC’s collapse was just the work of its faulty chairman: CITIC has now resolved CEFC’s “troubles,” and the economic diplomacy with China is back on track ([Deník N](#), November 14, 2018).

The peculiar kind of “economic diplomacy” demonstrated by CEFC in the Czech Republic is not an isolated case, and provides an illuminating example of the adaptation of old Leninist concepts for the present day. United front work as a tactic, without limitations in a specific bureaucratic system, can be innovatively employed through new channels towards the same end: temporary tactical alliances with local elites in areas beyond direct Party control. The resilience of the “economic diplomacy” narrative in the Czech Republic—despite the project being an obvious fiasco—is a testimony to the efficacy of the kind of elite capture performed by companies like CEFC. The company may have collapsed, but the local alliances it helped forge remain available when the CCP’s interests are at stake—as seen, for example, in the ongoing controversies surrounding Huawei ([Sinopsis](#), January 24, 2019).

In circumstances where the usual bottom-up united front approach through local ethnic Chinese communities is unavailable or impractical, engaging local elites through top-down “economic diplomacy” could yield similar (and perhaps better and faster) results than the more traditional forms of united front work. The ultimate goal, however, remains the same: forging temporary tactical alliances to advance the CCP’s strategic goals in environments that the Party cannot yet control by more direct application of force.

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Notes

[1] Individuals associated to the United Front system have, however, been active in political influence activities in CEE as well ([Sinopsis](#), June 2018).

[2] On ILD presence at events and contacts with Czech officials, politicians and even a university administrator, see [Sinopsis](#), November 21, 2016; [ILD](#), January 18, 2017; [ILD](#), February 21, 2017; [ILD](#), July

19, 2017; [ILD](#), September 9, 2017; [Sinopsis](#), December 10, 2017; [ILD](#), May 28, 2018; [Sinopsis](#), January 24, 2019.

[3] No more than the innocuous final section of the interview seems to have been broadcast on CCTV; a Xinhua summary likewise omits Zeman's mild complaint and mention of CEFC ([Pražský hrad](#), April 18; [Xinhua](#), April 23; [Xinwen lianbo](#), April 25, 44:28 to 45:02; [Deník Referendum](#), April 29).

How Beijing is Shaping Politics in Western Australia

By Clive Hamilton and Wai Ling Yeung

Introduction—The United Front and “Mixing Sand” in Australia

Political organizations with links to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) are active inside Australia's two main political parties and using their growing influence to promote Beijing's interests. Unlike Russia, which the U.S. intelligence community has concluded carried out an ambitious campaign of interference intended to benefit Donald Trump in the 2016 U.S. presidential election ([U.S. Director of National Intelligence](#), January 2017), the CCP is bipartisan in its activities in Australia: it aims to build influence across the political spectrum, and to sway whomever wins. Although the activities of real estate mogul Huang Xiangmo have attracted the greatest attention ([ABC News](#) (Australia), April 6, 2019), Huang represents only part of a much larger effort on the part of People's Republic of China (PRC)-affiliated “united front” organizations to influence politics in Australia and beyond.

Beijing is exploiting multiculturalism as a cover for its policy of “Chinese participation in politics” (*huaren canzheng*, 华人参政) ([People's Daily Overseas Edition](#), July 31, 2018; [The Daily Beast](#), July 18, 2018). Organizations working on behalf of the Chinese government are following the advice laid out in 2010 by a CCP strategist for maximizing political influence in Western democracies: build ethnic Chinese-based political organizations, make political donations, support ethnic Chinese politicians, and deploy votes to swing close-run elections ([Jinan University United Front Department](#), May 5, 2010). James To, a New Zealand academic, has gained access to a trove of documents in Beijing—one of which, dated 2004, described cultivating ethnic Chinese in countries like Australia to vote as a bloc, join parties, and stand for public office. [1] This approach is related to the “mixing sand” (*chan shazi*, 掺沙子) tactic advocated by Mao Zedong: plant trusted people in the enemy's ranks in order to weaken them ([People's Daily](#), October 29, 2013).

Many of the persons and organizations prominent in Australia's *huaren canzheng* movement have identifiable linkages with the influence network of the CCP's United Front Work Department (UFWD) or other Chinese government agencies. The UFWD is a powerful branch of the CCP tasked with influencing and controlling groups outside the party, including groups located abroad. [2] Chinese President Xi Jinping has famously described united front work as a “magic weapon” of the CCP, and he has overseen a dramatic increase in

personnel and resources for the UFWD ([China Brief](#), April 24, 2018; [Australian Centre on China in the World](#), 2018). UFWD organizations appear to be grooming a new generation of young Chinese-Australians for entry into politics, either through mentoring or “educational seminars.” [3] Candidates recruited and supported by such organizations will be expected to put ethnic Chinese voters’ interests first ([Western Australia Chinese Liberal Club](#), September 10, 2017). Huang Xiangmo has written of the need to nurture those with bilingual skills “who can walk through the revolving door of politics, business and academia at ease” ([Australian CPPRC](#), July 2015).

Efforts by Chinese-Australians, as well as citizens from other underrepresented ethnic groups, to further engage in politics should be welcomed. However, Australia and other democratic societies must also recognize when organizations, and persons affiliated with them, are susceptible to influence from authoritarian foreign governments. This is particularly true when these groups are dominated by members with close links to the CCP, and are in a position to influence policymakers and other leaders to adopt positions favored by Beijing.

Up to the present, New South Wales (NSW) has been seen as the epicenter of CCP influence in Australia: for example, some of those associated with Chinese Friends of Labor in NSW are now the focus of an Independent Commission Against Corruption investigation for allegedly concealing the sources of political donations ([ABC News \(Australia\)](#), February 3). However, NSW is not unique, and pro-Beijing influence activities are especially well-organized in Western Australia (WA). These activities have met with little scrutiny and resistance in WA in part because pro-Beijing lobbyists have powerful friends in the business community, in politics, and in the media. In public and behind closed doors, these lobbyists attack CCP critics as “anti-Chinese,” and pressure political leaders to be “friends of China”—meaning, in this context, to support policies that favor the Chinese government.

“The Australian Chinese Labor Association” and the United Front

The Australian Chinese Labor Association (ACLA) was established in Perth in 2015. Its founder was Pierre Yang (Yang Shuai), a Chinese-Australian who is now the Labor Party chief whip in the upper house of the Western Australia state parliament. Tellingly, the formation of the ACLA was announced on the website of the central UFWD in China ([UFWD](#), March 16, 2015; [Xinhua](#), March 16, 2015). Pierre Yang is reported to have recruited 500 new members to the WA Labor Party, substantially boosting the party’s membership of 7,000 as well as Yang’s own clout in the party ([The Australian](#), December 5, 2018).

Pierre Yang has had a charmed run through the ranks of the Australian Labor Party (ALP), bypassing the rank and file with the backing of powerful figures from the WA union movement ([Australian Chinese Times](#), August 22, 2013; [ABC News \(Australia\)](#), March 18, 2016). Yang has said that he entered politics to counter Australia’s lamentable history of anti-Chinese racism. He has also said that the social status of Chinese Australians is “inseparable from the development of the motherland,” and an article in a pro-Beijing Perth

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newspaper wrote of him: “Hot Chinese blood courses through the veins of this refined and cultured-looking handsome man” ([Australian Chinese Times](#), August 22, 2013). Following recent media exposure of his ties to UFWD-affiliated groups ([The Australian](#), December 3, 2018) Yang has stated that he resigned from his various positions with those organizations ([The West Australian](#), January 2).



Image: Founding members and supporters of the Australian Chinese Labor Association pose for a photo in March 2015 at Parliament House with Mark McGowan (center, fourth from right), current Premier of Western Australia. Ben Pan is second from left; Pierre Yang stands to the immediate left of McGowan, and Edward Zhang holds the now-premier's other hand. (Source: [Wesousou.com](#))

Pierre Yang's mentor is Edward Zhang (Zhang Ye), whom Yang describes as “like an uncle to me” ([Pierre Yang Inaugural Speech](#), May 25, 2017). According to his own newspaper, Edward Zhang is an advisor to the Australian Chinese Labor Association ([Australian Chinese Times](#), March 26, 2015). Zhang is chief editor of the pro-PRC Chinese-language newspaper *Australian Chinese Times*, and a leading figure in Western Australia's Chinese community. Last December, 600 people turned up to a gala to celebrate the 20th anniversary of his newspaper, with both the Western Australia premier and the opposition leader attending ([The Australian](#), December 13, 2018). As a further measure of his influence, Zhang has been appointed by the McGowan government to the Ethnic Communities Council of WA ([Western Australia Chinese Chamber of Commerce](#), June 27, 2018).

Zhang has been linked to five Perth-based organizations affiliated with the UFWD ([The Australian](#), December 13, 2018), including the Northeast China Federation and the Association of Great China. Most prominently, he is the honorary chairman of the WA branch of the Australian Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China (ACPPRC). The CPPRC is the most prominent international front organization of the UFWD, with chapters located worldwide ([China Brief](#), February 13, 2018; [China Brief](#), May 8). The Australian national chapter is based in Sydney, and was headed until recently by Chinese billionaire Huang Xiangmo

([The Australian](#), December 13, 2018), whose Australian permanent residency has been revoked due to alleged involvement in political interference efforts on behalf of the PRC ([Sydney Morning Herald](#), February 5).

Ben Pan (Pan Bangzhao) was another supporter present on the founding day of the ACLA. He's also the President of the Western Australia branch of the ACPPRC, and executive vice president of the national body ([Western Australia CPPRC](#), undated; [Australian CPPRC](#), undated). Apart from Huang Xiangmo, Ben Pan is the only person from Australia known to have held an executive title with the parent body in China ([Guizhou Province CPPRC](#), May 9, 2014). Under the leadership of Pan, the WA branch of ACPPRC has sought to mobilize Perth's Chinese diaspora for demonstrations in support of Beijing's positions: it has organized protest rallies against the visit of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the free Tibet movement, and the inauguration of Taiwan president Tsai Ing-wen ([Western Australia CPPRC](#), July 11, 2014; [Western Australia CPPRC](#), June 14, 2015, [Western Australia CPPRC](#), May 27, 2016). The organization has even gone so far as to organize a "singing red songs in Western Australia" (*hong ge chang xiang Xi Ao*, 红歌唱响西澳) concert in praise of the Chinese Communist Party ([People's Daily](#), June 27, 2011).

Pan is also one of the founders and the honorary president of the Western Australia Fujian Association (WAFJA), perhaps the most powerful "hometown association" in Western Australia ([Western Australia Fujian Association](#), undated; [Iyo News](#), March 23, 2015; [Twitter](#), December 4, 2018). The current president is Tom Wang (Wang Qunhua) whose company donated \$33,000 to the ALP in 2014 ([Western Australia Fujian Association](#)), part of a \$260,000 donation to the party organized by media tycoon Tommy Jiang, who has been described as the operator of "one of Australia's largest pro-Beijing media organisations" ([Australian Broadcasting Corporation](#), April 5, 2019) and as "Beijing's chief propagandist in Australia" ([Sydney Morning Herald](#), December 15, 2017).

"The Western Australia Chinese Liberal Club" and the United Front

The WA Chinese Liberal Club was launched in 2017 ([WAMN News](#), November 8, 2017; [Western Australia Chinese Liberal Club](#), August 3, 2017). The club's first president is Lily Chen, who was elected as a Liberal candidate to the Perth City Council in 2011, and re-elected in 2015 ([Migrate & Study](#); [ABC News \(Australia\)](#), March 21, 2017). Chen is well-connected to Perth's united front network. On May 6, 2011 she attended a meeting convened by the PRC Consul General in Perth to discuss the formation of a WA branch of the ACPPRC ([Xinhai Revolution](#), May 8, 2011). This led to Chen, along with Labor's Ben Pan, Edward Zhang and others, founding the WA branch of the ACPPRC in May 2011. To officiate at the inaugural meeting, they invited senior officials from the PRC as well as William Chiu, the then-chairman of the ACPPRC from Sydney headquarters ([Xinhai Revolution](#), May 18, 2011). When Chiu died in 2015, the *People's Daily* hailed him as "a great China patriot," and he was buried in a Beijing cemetery reserved for revolutionary heroes. [4]

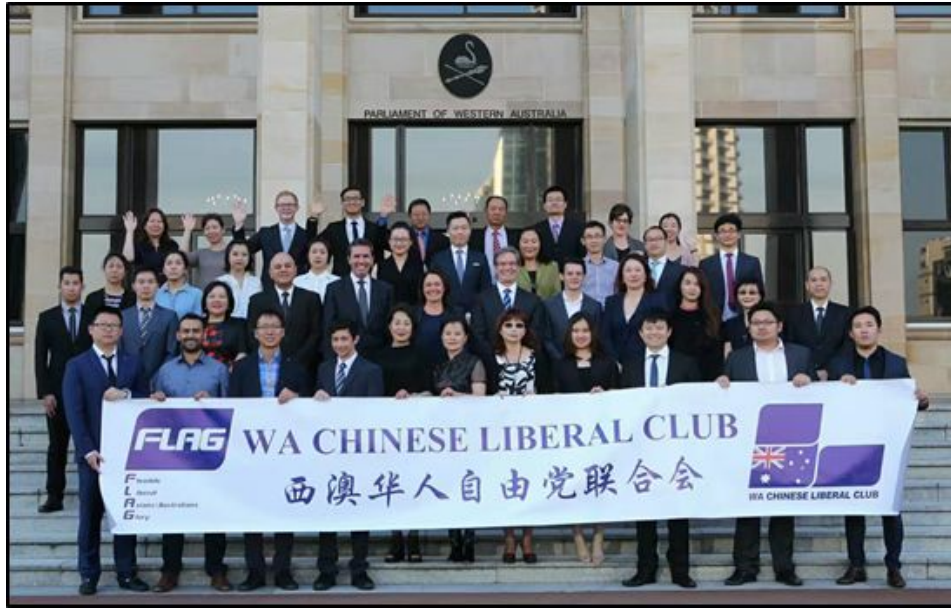


Image: The [launch of the Western Australia Chinese Liberal Club in front of the Western Australia Parliament](#). John Jiang is 2nd from left in the 2nd row; Lily Chen is 3rd from the left in the 2nd row; and Tom Wang is 5th from right in the third row (wearing a light blue tie). (Source: [Facebook](#))

In September 2012, Chen acted as a media liaison for a protest rally organized by the WA branch of ACPPRC that aimed to “resolutely support China in defending her sovereignty [over] the Diaoyu Islands and [the] affiliated islands.” [5] Two years later, she attended a dinner party hosted by Ben Pan to welcome a Communist Party delegation from Beijing. In his speech on this occasion, Pan praised PRC President Xi Jinping’s “Chinese Dream,” saying that “we work for the development of China as well as to make contributions to Australia” ([Western Australia CPPRC](#), June 11, 2014). In September 2015, Lily Chen joined four other Perth Chinese community leaders—including Ben Pan—to attend a massive military parade in Beijing to commemorate the 70th anniversary of victory in the War of Resistance Against Japan. They were seated in an area reserved for special guests (see accompanying photo).



Image: Ben Pan (left) and Lily Chen (right) attending a military parade in Beijing, September 2015. (Source: [AoWeiBang](#))

In addition to Lily Chen, another figure prominent in the WA Chinese Liberal Club is Ding Shaoping, who moves between both the Liberal and Labor parties as a lobbyist and organizer. His links with the WA Chinese Liberal Club were apparent last October when the Liberal member for Canning, Andrew Hastie, addressed the club in Perth. (Notably, Hastie spoke about the need for the new foreign interference and transparency laws, and the associated safeguards intended to protect the rights of Chinese-Australians.) Ding was in attendance at the event, along with Lily Chen and the former PLA officer John Jiang ([Facebook](#), October 3, 2018).

Ding was a founding member and honorary president of the powerful WA Fujian Association, whose senior members also include Labor's Ben Pan and Labor donor Tom Wang ([Western Australia Fujian Association](#); [Western Australia Fujian Association](#)). Additionally, the Chung Wah Association (CWA), Western Australia's oldest community organization, was taken over by Ding's management team ([Australian Chinese Times](#), August 29, 2015), an event that occurred under murky circumstances. [6] Ding was later appointed as a director of a PRC-based committee of the China Association for International Cultural Exchanges with Overseas Chinese, another organization under the United Front umbrella ([All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese](#), September 13, 2016).

Under the leadership of Ding Shaoping, the CWA has become an active propaganda outlet for the PRC, issuing statements of support for Beijing's policies on issues such as the South China Sea. In July 2016, the WA branch of the ACPPRC convened a joint forum with the CWA, which issued a declaration "resolutely" defending China's occupation of islands in the South China Sea ([ACPPRC](#), July 10, 2016): "The over 150,000 Chinese people in West Australia... are sons and daughters of ethnic Chinese who have an unshakable duty to defend our motherland's security and dignity." The resolution further called on the Australian government to support "the Chinese people and Australian Chinese people's ... tireless efforts in defending Chinese sovereignty in the South China Sea." The forum itself saw an outpouring of Chinese nationalist sentiment. Ding Shaoping informed those present that "if someone is hatching a sinister plot, we will do our utmost to support the motherland in her fight for justice." Edward Zhang declared that "We overseas Chinese are the first line of defence for our motherland" ([Australian Chinese Times](#), July 11, 2016).



Image: The Western Australia CPPRC's July 2016 South China Sea forum (showing, left to right, Ding Shaoping, Ben Pan and Edward Zhang). The banner in the background reads: "The Voices of Overseas Chinese Support Protecting the Motherland's Sovereignty in the South China Sea."

(Source: [Australia CPPRC](#))

Conclusions

The PRC's united front tactics have real consequences: for example, the influence of pro-PRC lobby groups on WA government decisions was apparent last year, when the McGowan administration ignored warnings from Canberra about the security risks posed by awarding a contract to Huawei for installation and maintenance of the communications network for Perth's rail system ([ABC News \(Australia\)](#), July 9, 2018; [The Australian](#), December 11, 2018). This occurred even though the federal government has banned the Chinese telecom equipment-maker from the nation's 5G network, and other nations are following suit.

Australian voters may wonder why leaders of both the Labor and Liberal Parties in Western Australia openly endorse organizations that seem to be dominated by leaders who have pledged allegiance to a foreign government, and that have advocated positions that contradict their parties' policies on regional security issues. The concerns raised here go far beyond sincere disagreements over matters of public policy: instead, the examples presented in this article provide further evidence of a large-scale effort, directed by agencies of the Chinese government, to shape Australian public opinion and government policies in directions conducive to the interests of the PRC.

Chinese-Australians are under-represented in Australian politics, and greater participation by citizens of Chinese heritage should be encouraged. However, individuals joining parties or running for office in order to promote covertly the political agenda of a foreign power ought to have their associations exposed. The influence activities occurring in Western Australia are also occurring in other states of Australia. Whether

Australia's new laws relating to foreign interference, and other measures intended to defend civil society and the integrity of government, will prove to be effective remains to be seen.

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Notes

[1] James Jiann Hua To, *Hand-in-Hand, Heart-to-Heart* (PhD thesis, University of Canterbury, 2009), pp. 40-41.

[2] Clive Hamilton and Alex Joske, Submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security, Inquiry into the National Security Legislation Amendment (Espionage and Foreign Interference), Bill 2017.

[3] For example, on May 23, 2015, the Youth Committee of ACPPRC organized a *huaren canzhen* "educational seminar" ([Zhongguo Qiao Wang](#), May 26, 2015). James Zhou, vice president of ACPPRC, later that year wrote of the "creative and visionary program that provides an express channel to inspire, scout for, nurture and recommend elite young Chinese-Australians to participate in politics" ([ACPPRC](#), March 2017).

[4] Clive Hamilton, *Silent Invasion* (Melbourne: Hardie Grant Books, 2018), pp. 30-31.

[5] In the course of Ms. Chen's 2015 election campaign, this was one of the activities listed in a Chinese publication as one of her notable past achievements ([WA Chinese Liberal Club](#), September 11, 2015). Although Lily Chen was listed as a legal advisor for the WA ACPPRC between 2012-18, (for examples, see: [WA ACPPRC](#), May 28, 2011; [WA ACPPRC](#), February 13, 2014), her name was recently removed from its website.

[6] Ding Shaoping was installed as the new president of the Chung Wah Association when a competing team suddenly withdrew ([Australian Chinese Times](#), September 3, 2015). The circumstances leading to the final leadership change are shrouded in mystery because the Association's electronic records prior to 2015 have reportedly been destroyed ([AoWeiBang](#), September 10, 2015).
