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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 Hála, 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

ChinaBrief Å Volume 19 Å Issue 9 Å May 9, 2019ê

On the Correct Use of Terms

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 fuze, 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 (UFWD), 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 UFWD.

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).

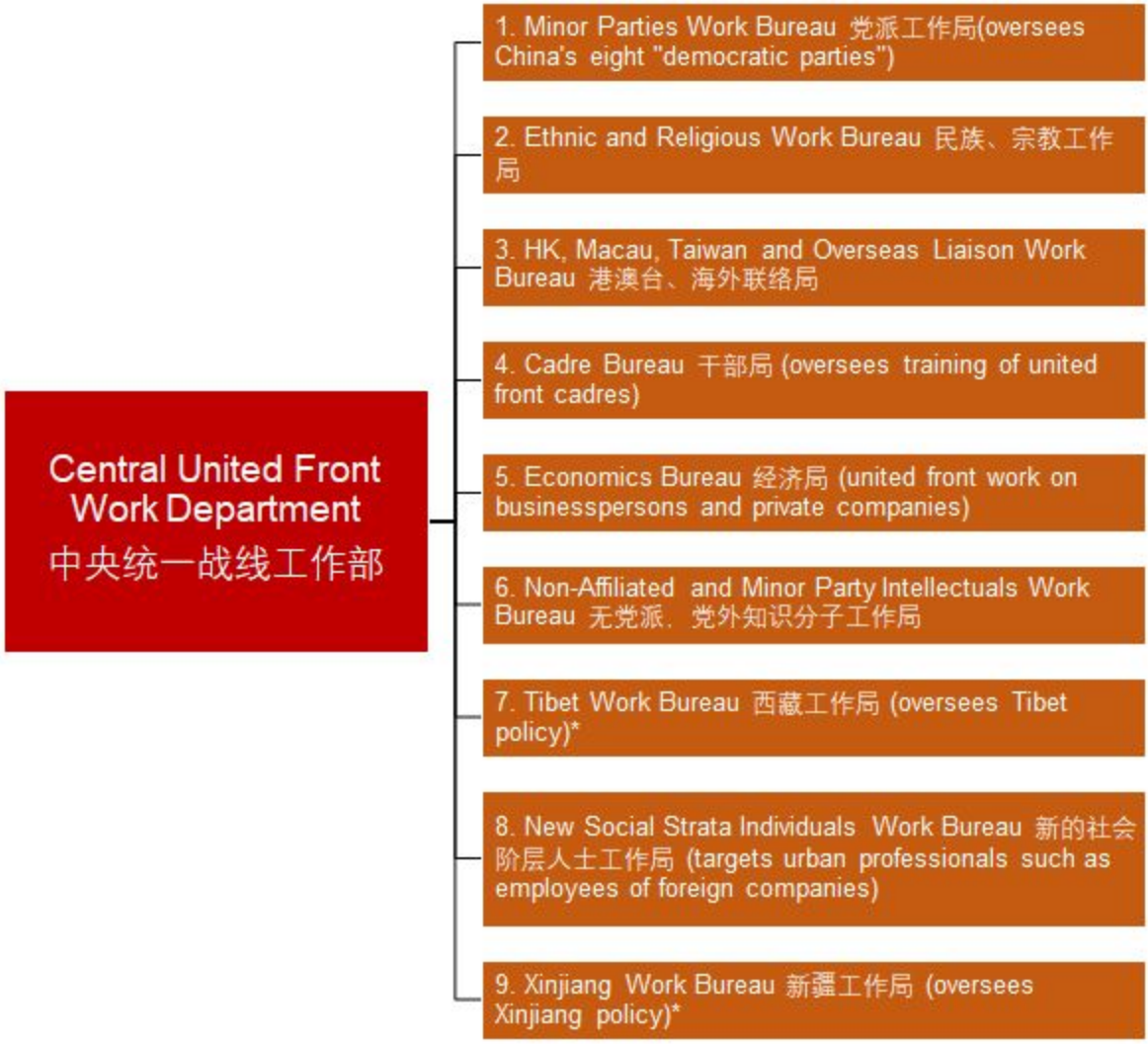
United front work (*tongzhan gongzuo*, 统战工作) is the process of building a "united front" coalition around the CCP in order to serve the Party's objectives, subordinating targeted groups both domestically and abroad. United front work is viewed by Party leaders as a crucial component of the CCP's victory 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 jieceng*, 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, "7%0¦ %0•) *—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 (9÷?•(!) (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 Fojiao.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 (*Ganbu Ju*, ¸ 4Š•). 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).

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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.*

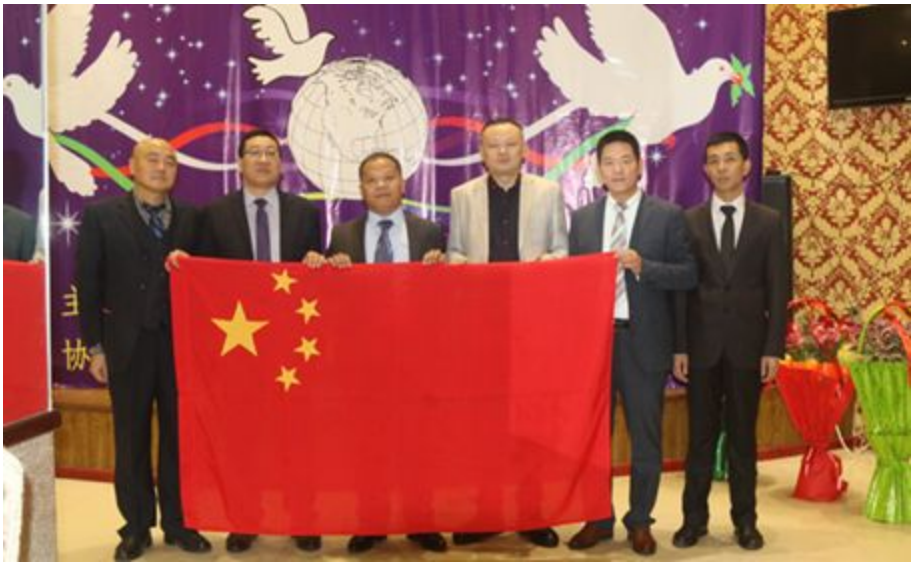

Image: Members of the Kyrgyzstan chapter of the Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China pose with a PRC flag during a conference in May 2018. (Source: Kyrgyzstan CPPRC)

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.