VICTIM AND ACCOMPLICE? THE ROLE OF OVERSEAS CHINESE IN CHINA’S FOREIGN INTERFERENCE ACTIVITIES IN THE XI JINPING ERA

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ABSTRACT

Drawing upon previous diaspora studies’ findings and a wide range of primary data including government policy documents, archives, and news articles, this paper first provides an overview of the history and origins of overseas Chinese affairs (qiaowu) and the United Front Work Department. Secondly, it examines the changing demographics of the overseas Chinese (OC) population and its implications. Thirdly, it identifies the tactics that United Front Work uses to influence the overseas Chinese community and analyzes their implications through case studies on exposed Chinese interference operations in Australia and New Zealand. Lastly, it offers some potential ways to counter China’s interference activities. This paper argues that different generations of overseas Chinese have been targeted differently by the Chinese government, which underscores both an important evolution and in United Front Work and a more complicated picture of the CCP’s relations with the diaspora than is generally assumed. While the younger generation of overseas Chinese is often being targeted and mobilized to interfere with their host countries’ local politics, the active older generation is being silenced and suppressed.
The research and writing of this thesis
is dedicated to everyone who helped along the way.

Many thanks,

Qin Mei
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Introduction

During the past two decades, there has been a growing body of literature on the impact of China’s rise on international affairs. Policymakers and scholars genuinely worry that the rise of China will undermine the Western-dominated international order.¹ Since Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, more countries have become vigilant about China’s growing assertiveness in foreign policy, especially in the South China Sea. China’s authoritarian system also raises doubts among democratic countries about China’s intentions on whether China is trying to export its authoritarian ideology and interfere with foreign countries’ politics. Aware of this reputation problem, China has been trying to promote its national image, control the international narrative, and shape foreign countries’ perceptions in a pro-China direction. Collectively, these efforts are known as “influence activities,” or what the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) refers to as the “great external propaganda.”²

The CCP’s United Front Work Department is the agency responsible for coordinating China’s influence activities overseas. “United Front Work” is a strategy the CCP learned from the former Soviet Union, and President Xi Jinping has placed great emphasis on it since 2012.³ In 2017, Xi Jinping announced that overseas Chinese are essential to the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and that United Front Work Department needs to take qiaowu (overseas Chinese affairs work) to the next level.⁴ Xi Jinping further instructed a major reorganization of the United Front Work Department in 2018, which further empowered the department. Xi Jinping’s actions

¹ Glaser and Medeiros 2007; Ross 2008; Ikenberry 2008
² Cai 2008
³ UFW 2014
⁴ Cui 2018
reflect the CCP’s increasing desire to communicate, influence, and control the overseas Chinese community.

China has one of the largest overseas communities in the world. Currently, there are about 60 million overseas Chinese living in over 100 countries over the globe. For centuries, they have maintained all kinds of ties with their motherland and have, in recent decades, become the targets of outreach by the Chinese government. However, due to the recent pushback that China has received on the international stage, China has shifted its outreach policy toward the overseas Chinese from its previous economic-centered policy. China now wishes to influence them with Chinese values and culture and foster their support for China. Some of these efforts fall into the category of normal public diplomacy as often pursued by many other countries. However, others involve the use of “coercive or corrupting methods to pressure individuals and groups” and thereby interfere in the functioning of the targeted countries’ civil and political life.

The CCP’s efforts towards overseas Chinese have received increasing attention in the Western policy circles, particularly in international relations and security-related issues. People who follow the traditional idea believe that diaspora communities pose national security threats to their host countries. Some politicians and mainstream media have started to raise questions over the loyalty of their ethnic Chinese citizens and long-term residents, suggested that those overseas Chinese are susceptible to Beijing’s influence and implied that they could be turned into agents to facilitate Beijing’s interests. For example, former Australian prime minister John Howard warned Beijing’s persuasive power over Chinese-Australians in his 2018 speech. He

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5 Song 2019; Heath 2018
6 Diamond and Schell 2018, 5; Turnbull 2017
7 See Weiner 1990 and Huntington 1997
8 Wang 2018
said that Chinese-Australians were “terrific Australian citizens” but implied that they could be surrogates for the CCP as China was “very interested in the capacity to use these people to further her power and her influence.”

Although a growing number of journalists and politicians have asserted that overseas Chinese are part of China’s influence activities, there is still a lack of academic research on the role of overseas Chinese in China’s foreign interference activities. Current research often focused on the connection between the Chinese diaspora and China and how Beijing used the diaspora to facilitate China’s domestic development in history. Other scholars focus on how China constructs the diasporic identity. Sheng Ding argues that Xi Jinping’s diaspora engagement policies aim to improve China’s international image and engage overseas Chinese with a shaped diasporic identity. However, because of China’s poor human rights record and the lack of the rule of law, he believes that it is unlikely that China will appeal to the majority of the Chinese diaspora, and China still has a long way to go before it can effectively implement engagement policies.

Few scholars focus directly on China’s foreign interference activities and their connections with overseas Chinese. In a study of China’s foreign political interference activities in New Zealand, Anne-Marie Brady argues that Chinese-New Zealanders are being used for United Front work. China encourages politically acceptable wealthy Chinese-New Zealanders to subsidize activities that support China's political agenda. China also promotes political engagements in overseas Chinese communities. Brady further argues that the Chinese government works with Chinese diaspora community organizations and ethnic Chinese media as

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9 Miller 2018
10 Liu 2011
11 Ding 2015
part of the United Front strategy to advance Chinese political and economic interests in New Zealand. Overall, this topic requires more scholarly research.

Although Xi Jinping’s speeches indicate that the CCP has made different plans for different categories of overseas Chinese, the existing studies examining the role of overseas Chinese in China’s foreign interference activities usually overlook the differences within the overseas Chinese community. In order to fully understand China’s goals of its foreign interference activities, it is necessary to explore the CCP’s categorization of overseas Chinese and the difference between their roles. This essay examines United Front Work policies in the Xi Era on overseas Chinese and argues that different generations of overseas Chinese have been targeted differently by the Chinese government, which underscores both an important evolution and in United Front Work and a more complicated picture of the CCP’s relations with the diaspora than is generally assumed. While the younger generation of overseas Chinese is often being targeted and mobilized to interfere with their host countries’ local politics, the active older generation is being silenced and suppressed.

Countries with a large overseas Chinese population need to acknowledge the nuanced differences between the younger and older generations to identify China’s interference activities more efficiently. If host countries view all overseas Chinese as accomplices of the CCP, they could unintentionally propagate the “China threat” theory and push the diaspora community closer to the CCP. Moreover, host countries could overlook other forms of political interference activities that have no connection with the overseas Chinese community. Therefore, having an

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12 Brady 2017
13 To 2014. 114-115
accurate assessment of the role of overseas Chinese in China’s foreign interference activities is critical.

**Research Design**

Drawing upon previous diaspora studies’ findings and a wide range of primary data including government policy documents, archives, and news articles, this paper first provides an overview of the history and origins of overseas Chinese affairs (qiaowu) and the United Front Work Department. Secondly, it examines the changing demographics of the overseas Chinese (OC) population and its implications. Thirdly, it identifies the tactics that United Front Work uses to influence the overseas Chinese community and analyzes their implications through case studies on exposed Chinese interference operations in Australia and New Zealand. Lastly, it offers some potential ways to counter China’s interference activities.

The author chooses Australia and New Zealand as case studies because these are the top two host countries for new Chinese emigrants.14 Moreover, the study of China’s United Front Work tactics on the overseas Chinese community is a relatively new topic. Most of the media coverage and public discussion happened in Australia and New Zealand. Therefore, choosing these two countries allow the author to gain a larger scope of sources and evidence.

The author chooses to focus on political interference activities instead of the broad influence activities because normal public diplomacy activities, such as visitor programs, cultural and educational exchanges, paid media advertisements, sponsored cultural events, and government lobbying, are accepted methods used by many governments to spread their influence

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14 Poston and Wong, 2016, 369
abroad. Those activities are mostly legitimate in large measure because they are operated with transparency.\textsuperscript{15} However, many of China’s influence activities in the Xi era have gradually moved away from legitimate standards. Those activities involve the “use of coercive or corrupting methods to pressure individuals and groups” and should be identified as interference activities since they interfere in the functioning of the targeted country’s civil and political life.\textsuperscript{16} As the result, China is exploiting Western democracies’ openness to advance its aims and seek influence while impeding Western counterpart institutions’ legitimate efforts to engage Chinese society on a reciprocal basis. It is important to separate legitimate influence activities from inappropriate interference activities.

\textbf{Demography of Overseas Chinese}

The general definition of diaspora is a group of people who migrated from their home country to a foreign land while maintaining psychological or material links with their motherland. Those who share the same links have the potential to be used to influence their host countries and home countries.\textsuperscript{17} China counts all ethnic Chinese who left China and reside outside of China (including Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan) as its diaspora.

China has a long diaspora history. The first wave of emigration occurred in the 7\textsuperscript{th} and 8\textsuperscript{th} centuries to Taiwan. The second wave happened in the 15\textsuperscript{th} century when a large group of Chinese moved to Southeast Asia for business reasons. The third wave involved the emigration of laborers to Southeast Asia from 1850 to 1950. During this period, the term “overseas Chinese”

\textsuperscript{15} Diamond and Schell 2018, 6
\textsuperscript{16} Diamond and Schell 2018, 5; Turnbull 2017
\textsuperscript{17} To 2014, 2; Sheffer 1986, 1-15
began to appear and became associated with the group. During the fourth wave (1950-1980), a new pattern emerged as the Chinese migrated to Western democratic countries such as the United States, Australia, and Western Europe. Finally, there were roughly 15 million migrants who left China since reform and opening started in 1978. Together, these groups constitute the global overseas Chinese community.\textsuperscript{18}

There are many sub-categories under the overseas Chinese. According to the CCP’s official definition, \textit{huaqiao} are PRC nationals who live outside of China and have become permanent residents of their host countries but have not given up their Chinese nationality.\textsuperscript{19} Beijing expects them to be patriotic to China and represent China’s interests while abroad. If a PRC national becomes the citizen of his/her host country, then this person and his/her children will all be counted as \textit{huaren}.\textsuperscript{20} However, \textit{huaqiao} only made up about 5\% of the total amount of overseas Chinese by the late 1970s.\textsuperscript{21} In order to reach the majority of overseas Chinese, the CCP widened its scope by appealing to both \textit{huaqiao} and \textit{huaren}, and \textit{huaren} became the major target of China’s Overseas Chinese Affairs Work. Internally, the CCP also treated both \textit{huaren} and \textit{huaqiao} the same. Externally, however, Beijing is publicly very explicit in drawing a distinction between people of Chinese descent (\textit{huaren}) and overseas PRC nationals (\textit{huaqiao}), so as to “minimize other countries’ sensitivities about overseas Chinese loyalty and ensure that \textit{huaren} maintain a safe livelihood abroad.”\textsuperscript{22}

Since the 1980s, about 15 million people have left China and become migrants. They were mostly born, raised, and educated in wealthy Chinese cities and left the country for work,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{18} Hamashita, Selden, and Grove 2008, 33; Liu and Dongen 2013; Heath 2018
\textsuperscript{19} OC Affairs Office of the State Council 2015
\textsuperscript{20} OC Affairs Office of the State Council 2015
\textsuperscript{21} To 2014, 109
\textsuperscript{22} To 2014, 113
\end{flushright}
higher education, or business. They have been categorized as xinqiao (new migrants) by the CCP, whereas those who left China before the 1980s are considered laoqiao (old migrants). The new migrants have gradually changed the demographic composition of the global overseas Chinese community. They are younger and have received better education. They maintain close links with friends, family, and business contacts in China. They also “maintain their Chinese language, values and, culture, and have a tendency to live in metropolitan areas of their host countries.” Moreover, they tend to participate in China-related activities more voluntarily than the old migrants and are more sympathetic to the CCP’s agenda. Because of their unbroken language and cultural links with China, the new migrants continue to use their Chinese networks and absorb information through Chinese media. Thus, the growing number of new migrants provides a perfect opportunity for Beijing to unite them and conduct influence activities through them. In response, starting in the 2000s, the United Front Work Department began to concentrate its energy on the new migrants, especially the “distinguished scholars, entrepreneurs with efficient management ability, and directors of the leading interest groups organized by migrants after the opening-up policy in 1978.”

**United Front Work in the Xi Jinping Era**

Xi Jinping has seen this large overseas Chinese population’s value and called on the whole community to support China’s agenda. The importance that the CCP places on overseas Chinese can be seen in how often the group arises in his speeches. In 2015, Xi Jinping officially

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23 To 2014, 114-115
24 Heath 2018
25 Kang 2015
stated that overseas Chinese should be one of the three main focuses of United Front Work.\textsuperscript{26} He further asked the Department to focus on the “elites” of the new migrants and accordingly established a new department just for them.\textsuperscript{27} He later identified Chinese students studying abroad as another focus of United Front Work.\textsuperscript{28} In 2017, Xi gave instructions to the United Front Work Department and officially stated at the 19\textsuperscript{th} Party Congress that “the realization of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation requires the joint efforts of Chinese sons and daughters at home and abroad.”\textsuperscript{29} The focus on strengthening ties with overseas Chinese in the Xi era signals a major shift away from Beijing’s previous economic-focused and more hands-off approach to diaspora relations.

Xi did not content himself with speeches. He has significantly centralized overseas Chinese affairs into one agency and provided extra resources to it. Xi called for a major reorganization of the United Front Work Department in 2018. The Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, which was previously responsible for overseas Chinese affairs and “people-to-people exchanges”, was absorbed into the United Front Work Department.\textsuperscript{30} The reorganization resolved the previous overlapping responsibilities among the United Front Work Department, the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and expanded the United Front Work Department’s authority.\textsuperscript{31} The reorganized United Front Work Department has placed increasing emphasis on overseas Chinese affairs. Three of the twelve bureaus of the United Front Work Department (Bureaus 3, 9, and 10) and two of its eight vice ministers are

\textsuperscript{26} Heath 2018  
\textsuperscript{27} Xinhua 2015  
\textsuperscript{28} Xinhua 2015  
\textsuperscript{29} Cui 2017; Qin 2018  
\textsuperscript{30} Xinhua 2018  
\textsuperscript{31} Qu and Liu 2018
now responsible for overseas work.\textsuperscript{32} This reflects the CCP’s greater desire to communicate, influence, and control the overseas Chinese community.

Like other foreign policies in the Xi Era, the United Front’s work is motivated by China’s core interests: maintaining CCP rule and national unity.\textsuperscript{33} While the intensity of Xi’s efforts is new, there is some continuity with the past. In 1978, the CCP established the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council (OCAO) to “protect, mobilize and communicate with all overseas Chinese around the world.”\textsuperscript{34} Li Xiannian, the Vice-Chairman of CCP, became the first Director of OCAO. Since then, China’s policy towards Overseas Chinese has been focused on attracting them to contribute to China’s development. The main emphasis of the United Front Work Department remains to boost China’s appeal among overseas Chinese and their related international audiences. However, it has evolved “from attracting the remittance and donations of overseas Chinese to welcoming their direct investments and from facilitating scientific exchange and technology transfer to wooing overseas Chinese talents to return to their motherland”.\textsuperscript{35}

The United Front Work policy in the Xi Jinping era has basic persistence with Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao eras’ policies. However, the CCP under the Xi administration has developed a more vigorous United Front Work policy and actively targeted the overseas Chinese community. One of Xi’s most important steps is to designate the United Front as a “whole party” movement. This has resulted in a tremendous increase in the number of United Front assignees to posts at the top level of the Party and the government since 2015. Another consequence has been that there are now United Front Work Department officials stationed at almost all Chinese

\textsuperscript{32} Joske 2019  
\textsuperscript{33} Zhou 2019  
\textsuperscript{34} Ding 2015, 235  
\textsuperscript{35} Ding 2015, 235
embassies globally who conduct more influence activities on overseas Chinese communities.\textsuperscript{36} The new teaching manual of the United Front Work Department stated that “the unity of Chinese at home requires the unity of the sons and daughters of Chinese abroad.”\textsuperscript{37} The teaching manual recommended various ways to influence overseas Chinese. Some focus on the emotional ties that overseas Chinese have with their motherland. Others focus on the pride of participating in the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese people”. But mainly, the manual recommended providing material incentives, such as funding or other resources to “selected overseas Chinese groups and individuals deemed valuable to Beijing’s cause”.\textsuperscript{38}

Xi Jinping strengthened the CCP’s control over study-abroad Chinese students. Overseas-Educated Scholars Association of China (OESAC) is a government-affiliated organization responsible for the implementation of the United Front Work for study-abroad talents. In 2013, Xi attended the 100\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of OESAC and delivered a speech. Xi said that study-abroad students must keep the spirit of patriotism and act as diplomats to convince foreign people of China’s official discourse. Even if they decide not to return after graduation, there are ways to serve China abroad, and they will always be China’s daughters and sons.\textsuperscript{39} As listed on the United Front Work Department Henan Office’s website, one of the possible ways is that “qualified study-abroad students should join local overseas Chinese organizations to establish personal connections with local, new migrants.”\textsuperscript{40}

The United Front Work Department in the Xi era focuses more on establishing relations with social organizations founded by new migrants. In 2019, the United Front Work Department

\textsuperscript{36} Kynge et al. 2017
\textsuperscript{37} Kynge et al. 2017
\textsuperscript{38} Kynge et al. 2017
\textsuperscript{39} Xi 2013
\textsuperscript{40} UFW Xuchang 2019
announced that the China Overseas Exchange Association had been absorbed into the China Overseas Friendship Association and the number of its membership is over a thousand.\textsuperscript{41} The China Overseas Friendship Association is one of the major foreign affairs organizations under the United Front Work Department. The organization aims to promote friendship and mutual understanding between Chinese people and foreigners. It also helps interested overseas Chinese find positions in the CCP.\textsuperscript{42} The combination of the two organizations indicates the United Front Work Department is trying to establish closer relations with overseas Chinese and get them more involved with China’s political agenda.

Despite a sometimes turbulent relationship with the Overseas Chinese, such as the time after the Tiananmen Incident, Beijing’s intention was always to maintain communication and retain access to Overseas Chinese’ political and economic resources for facilitating China’s domestic development, boosting its international image, and challenging any “biased” foreign narratives. In the Xi Jinping era, the United Front Work Department has emphasized the new migrants and implemented more assertive political co-optation of local politicians, businessmen, and opinion leaders and reinforced China’s foreign influence through them.

**Case Studies**

Because the nature of United Front Work is to interfere through connections that are difficult to prove publicly, it is hard to identify the negative impact of those activities. Therefore, the author

\textsuperscript{41} Ye 2019
\textsuperscript{42} China Overseas Friendship Association 2019
uses case studies to demonstrate the tactics and effects of China’s foreign interference activities on a micro-level.

**Australia**

Australia has been at the forefront against China’s foreign interference activities since 2016. Australian journalists and sinologists revealed the risks of China’s activities, which have become increasingly covert, coercive, and corrupt. The Australian government took media investigations seriously and became the first to formulate a coherent and principled policy response to China’s political interference activities. Duncan Lewis, the director-general of the Australian Security Intelligence Organization, said the interference threat is “greater now than at any time during the Cold War”. Foreign interference activities range from “a foreign power using local Australians to observe and harass its diaspora community here in our country through to the recruitment and co-opting of influential and powerful Australian voices to lobby our decision-makers.”

The tactics used by the United Front Work Department in Australia, including suppressing critical voices, silencing uncooperative old migrants, promoting pro-Beijing views in mainstream and influential high-ranking politicians through political donations from new migrants.

According to Professor Clive Hamilton, whose book on CCP influence in Australia was canceled by three different publishers before finally published due to fears of upsetting Beijing,
trusted young individuals sympathetic to the CCP had infiltrated most of the established Chinese community groups and professional associations. Those old migrants who are unsympathetic to the CCP were forced out. Moreover, many new pro-Beijing organizations have been established, such as the Chinese student associations of various Australian universities.\textsuperscript{45}

Feng Chongyi, professor at the University of Technology Sydney, claims that Beijing now controls almost all the community associations and the majority of the Chinese-language media in Australia.\textsuperscript{46} According to an editor at a pro-Beijing publication in Australia cited by the \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, “Nearly 95% percent of the Australian Chinese newspapers have been brought in by the Chinese government to some degree.”\textsuperscript{47} Dr. Chau Chak Wing, a China-born Australian citizen, businessman, and member of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) who owns multiple Chinese language media in Australia has “made himself known as the point man for organizing the Chinese diaspora in Australia” using his “Beijing-friendly Chinese media empire.”\textsuperscript{48} According to research done by Australian National University professor Bates Gill and researcher Linda Jakobson, the newspaper owned by Dr. Chau, \textit{the Australian New Express Daily}, “never have any negative reporting about China.”\textsuperscript{49}

Because critical voices have been successfully suppressed, pro-Beijing people have become representatives of the Chinese-Australian community and interact with Australian politicians. For example, many Chinese festivals and cultural activities like Chinese New Year celebrations are hosted by pro-Beijing new migrants.\textsuperscript{50} When Australian politicians participate in

\textsuperscript{45} Hamilton 2018, 2  
\textsuperscript{46} Kynge et al. 2017  
\textsuperscript{47} Munro and Wen 2016  
\textsuperscript{48} Garnaut 2015  
\textsuperscript{49} Gill and Jakobson 2017  
\textsuperscript{50} Hamilton 2018, 5
those events, they establish personal relationships with those people and are gradually influenced by the pro-Beijing view.

Political donations made by new migrants to parties and politicians’ offices have influenced high-ranking politicians. One of the most influential cases is the Chinese billionaire and ACPPRC president Huang Xiangmo, who reportedly demanded that the Labor Party (ALP) change its policy on the South China Sea if it wanted to receive a promised $400,000 donation. Mr. Huang’s Australian residency was canceled in 2019, and was barred from returning to Australia. Huang Xiangmo established the Yuhu Investment Development Company in Shenzhen, Guangdong in 2001 and formed close connections with the provincial government. He moved to Australia in 2011 and claimed to have been seeking new business opportunities and a better place to raise his children, but he constantly flew back to Hong Kong to take care of his business there. Mr. Huang’s identity as a wealthy new migrant who has business in China and good relations with the local government made him a perfect candidate for the United Front Work’s foreign activities.

From 2014-2017, Mr. Huang served as the head of the Australian arm of the Chinese Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China (ACPPRC). Although Mr. Huang claimed that the ACPPRC is an NGO with no relations to the CCP, its Beijing headquarter manages a “global outreach” project overseen by the United Front Work Department. The Council has also openly supported Beijing’s view on Taiwan and Hong Kong’s independence movements and China’s disputed claims over the South China Sea. Mr. Huang himself has accompanied Qiu Yuanping, the head of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the

51 Malone 2017; McKenzie et al. 2017; SCMP Asia Desk 2019
52 Fan 2019
53 McKenzie et al. 2017
PRC’s State Council, during her visit to Australia with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang. According to Professor Feng Chongyi, Mr. Huang is “a key member supported by the Chinese authorities, including the embassy or the consulate here. His council role affords him immense influence and status, as well as a launching pad into Australian politics.”

Mr. Huang and his close associates or employees made at least $2.6 million of donations to Australia’s major parties. His donation to an Australian senator, Sam Dastyari, put him on the radar of Australian journalists and the security intelligence officers. In 2016, Mr. Huang promised the ALP he would donate $400,000 to fund its campaign. However, shortly after that, an ALP spokesman, Stephen Conroy, stated that the party was open to the Australian Navy conducting freedom-of-navigation exercises in the area. This statement directly challenged China’s core interests in foreign policy, and Beijing was very unhappy about it. Mr. Huang called the ALP fundraising officials, saying that he could not deliver the promised donation because of Mr. Conroy’s comment. One day later, Senator Dastyari showed up with Mr. Huang at a press conference attended by Chinese language media and endorsed China’s stance on the South China Sea. He stated in his speech that “The South China Sea is China's own affair. On this issue, Australia should remain neutral and respect China's decision.”

Senator Dastyari has accepted donations from Chinese-Australians with CCP connections in the past. In 2015, his office accepted money from Top Education Institute to cover its travel budget. The principal of Top Education Institute, Minshen Zhu, is a delegate representing “Overseas Chinese” at the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and a senior adviser at the

54 Beumelle 2017
55 McKenzie et al. 2017
56 McKenzie et al. 2017
57 McDermott 2017
University of Sydney's Confucius Institute. Although there is no direct evidence that can prove that Senator Dastyari made his statement about the South China Sea for the $400,000 donation, the fact that a senator is willing to make a statement that is against his own party’s stance at a Chinese event shows that the United Front Work Department’s strategy of using new migrants to influence political elites’ view is working.

The Australia case study shows that the United Front Work Department has been suppressing uncooperative voices from the old migrants and intentionally grooming pro-Beijing new migrant businessmen and encouraging them to accept the benefits offered by China. The United Front Work Department and the overseas organizations it liaises with play an important role in shaping political attitudes in their host countries and developing contacts for the Chinese government and businesses. Even if those businessmen are not receiving explicit direction, the Chinese tradition of getting status, prestige, and face through networking with the government will make them “feel some sense of obligation, or indeed to make the right impression on the powers that be in China, to demonstrate that they’re being good members of the party, that they're pursuing the party's interests.”

**New Zealand**

China’s foreign interference activities have been arguably more successful in New Zealand. Besides the regular tactics of suppressing critical voices, promoting pro-Beijing views in the mainstream, and supporting new migrants to make political donations, China is trying to

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58 Borrello 2016; Hunter 2016  
59 McKenzie et al. 2017
groom pro-Beijing new migrants to become policymakers in the New Zealand government. Unlike that of Australia, the New Zealand government has taken few steps to counter foreign interference in its internal affairs.\textsuperscript{60} The fact that Yang Jian is still in the Parliament in 2020 is a perfect example. United Front expert Jichang Lulu argues that New Zealand is an example of the United Front Work Department’s domination of overseas Chinese communities, especially those in politics.\textsuperscript{61}

Yang Jian is a China-born New Zealand politician, International Relations academic, and member of the National Party and the New Zealand Parliament. According to the CCP’s categorization, Mr. Yang is a typical new migrant. He left China in the 1990s for higher education. While attending Australia National University in the 1990s, Mr. Yang was the president of the university’s CSSA, an organization with close ties to the Chinese embassy and the United Front Work Department.\textsuperscript{62} He moved to New Zealand, naturalized, and entered politics in the early 2000s. In 2017, it was disclosed that Yang Jian, who to date remains a member of Parliament, concealed his previous CCP affiliations. He spent 15 years studying and working at the Luoyang Foreign Languages Institute, which trains spies, and the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force Engineering Academy before becoming a New Zealand citizen.\textsuperscript{63} He omitted this history on his English-language resume for his position at the university, his permanent residency and citizenship applications, and his parliamentary position. He only disclosed his history selectively to Chinese speakers.\textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{60} Bowe 2018, 16-17
\textsuperscript{61} Lulu 2017
\textsuperscript{62} Greene 2017
\textsuperscript{63} Greene 2017
\textsuperscript{64} Brady 2017, Diamond and Schell 2018
Since entering the New Zealand government, Mr. Yang “has been a central figure promoting and helping to shape the New Zealand National government's China strategy” and was a member of the Parliamentary Select Committee for Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade from 2014 to 2016, which would have given him privileged access to sensitive intelligence on China.\(^6^5\) According to the *Financial Times*, Mr. Yang has “consistently pushed for closer ties with Beijing and for international policies and positions echoing those Beijing favors.”\(^6^6\) Christopher Johnson, a senior fellow at CSIS, argues that China is likely using New Zealand as a “testing ground” for “cultivating people at the grassroots political levels of western democracies and helping them to reach positions of influence” and if successful, China will do the same thing in other countries in the future.\(^6^7\)

What is more unsettling than discovering the secret connections between the CCP and a candidate before the 2017 election was that his Party did not initiate any investigation on Yang Jian or his direct political adversaries in the Party all remained silent. The New Zealand elites formed a “near-complete cone of silence around the Jian Yang scandal”.\(^6^8\) As a result, Mr. Yang successfully won the 2017 election and has been allegedly reselected by National in March 2020.\(^6^9\) Mr. Yang’s direct adversary at the time was Labor Party’s Raymond Huo (Huo Jianqiang). Both Mr. Yang and Mr. Huo were competing for the Chinese-community electorate. Although Yang Jian was tainted by hiding the fact that he has worked for the PLA in the past, Raymond Huo remained silent.\(^7^0\) A possible explanation for Mr. Huo and other Australian elites’

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\(^6^5\) Brady 2017  
\(^6^6\) Anderlini 2017  
\(^6^7\) Anderlini 2017  
\(^6^8\) Reddell 2017  
\(^6^9\) Sachdeva 2020  
\(^7^0\) Lulu 2017
behavior is that none of them want to speak up against the United Front Work Department’s interests.

Like Yang Jian, Raymond Huo is also a typical new migrant who grew up in China and came to New Zealand in the 1990s for higher education. According to Anne-Marie Brady’s research, Raymond Huo works very publicly with China’s United Front Work organizations in New Zealand and promotes Chinese policies in English and Chinese.\(^{71}\) In 2009, at a meeting organized by the Peaceful Reunification of China Association of New Zealand, which is a United Front Work Department affiliated organization aimed to connect with overseas Chinese, to celebrate Tibetan Serf Liberation Day, Mr. Huo said that: “as a Chinese person I know that Tibet is always part of China… I would promote China’s Tibet policies to the New Zealand Parliament.”\(^{72}\) At a 2014 meeting promoting Chinese Language Week in New Zealand, Huo said in his speech that “Advisors from Chinese communities will be duly appointed with close consultation with the Chinese diplomats and community leaders.”\(^{73}\) Raymond Huo also does not deny the existence of the CCP’s influence in New Zealand and holds a welcoming view of it.

When Xi Jinping visited New Zealand in 2014, Huo commented that “generally the Chinese community is excited about the prospect of China having more influence in New Zealand. Many Chinese community members told him a powerful China meant a backer, either psychologically or in the real sense.”\(^{74}\) Raymond Huo also established a New Zealand Belt and Road Think Tank and foundation to “help promote the idea and educate New Zealanders on the Belt and Road initiative”. It has “linked up with China’s National Development and Reform Commission, as

\(^{71}\) Brady 2017, 21
\(^{72}\) China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification (CCPPNR) 2009
\(^{73}\) France 2014
\(^{74}\) Acland 2014
well as Chinese construction companies and private equity firms to look at opportunities.” Ramond Huo’s Belt and Road advocacy was widely reported by Chinese government organs, such as the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese, which is United Front Work affiliated.75

It is clear that Raymond Huo, just like Yang Jian, also has a strong connection with the CCP’s United Front Work. Huo is even more open about his pro-Beijing stance. This explains why Huo remained silent about Yang Jian’s scandal in 2017 because they are not opponents judging from Beijing’s perspective. The New Zealand case study shows that the CCP’s United Front Work tactics are very successful in interference with New Zealand’s politics. China has successfully groomed new migrants to enter politics and become policymakers. It even ensured long-term control of the Chinese-New Zealand community politics by establishing relations with rival politicians and successfully hedged against power shifts due to elections.

Conclusion

As China rises on the world stage, it has focused more and more on spreading its influence and modifying the international narratives about China. In the Xi Jinping era, China becomes more assertive about its foreign policy. It now wants to influence people’s perceptions and behaviors in a pro-Beijing direction, and we are seeing more and more foreign political interference activities disguised as ordinary influence activities. Institutions of democratic countries are being used to serve the authoritarian political agenda of China. The overseas

75 Lulu 2017
Chinese community is chosen to be the platform because of its large population. Among them, new migrants who have closer ties to mainland China are more likely to be approached by the United Front Work Department. China has tried grooming new migrants who are more sympathetic to Beijing’s policy to participate in their host countries’ politics and has achieved some success in countries like New Zealand and Australia.

However, the United Front Work Department’s preference for overseas Chinese should not result in a “witch hunt” against all Chinese immigrants. First of all, the CCP controls every aspect of the Chinese society, and people, especially businessmen, are used to interact with government officials. When Chinese people immigrate to other countries, some might still keep interacting with Chinese government officials for economic benefits, but this does not mean that they are voluntarily helping the CCP to interfere with their host countries’ politics. Moreover, the overseas Chinese community can be conducive to identifying the CCP’s political interference activities. The Australian debate about China’s interference activities originated from the Chinese-Australian community. Ethnic Chinese journalists, scholars, and activists used their bilingual skills and understanding of the CCP to draw the nation’s attention to the CCP’s efforts to suppress the diversity of their opinions through surveillance, coercion, and co-option.76

76 Joske 2018

The case studies on Australia and New Zealand show that the CCP in the Xi era has evolved from ordinary influence activities to interference activities aimed to shape Western countries’ policy towards China. Overseas Chinese are being used as the medium for interference. The new migrants are often being targeted and mobilized to interfere with their host countries’ local politics while the active old migrants are being silenced and suppressed.
Australia can be seen as a successful example of countering the CCP’s United Front Work operations. In order to counter the CCP’s interference activities, Western countries should continue embracing the idea of transparency, taking media investigations and diaspora communities’ voices seriously, and formulating new policies in response to the CCP’s activities. The media should undertake more detailed and fact-based investigative reporting of China’s influence and interference activities. Journalists with Chinese background should interact more with the local Chinese communities to see if they sense anything new. Most importantly, the government should investigate large donations to politicians and major institutions more carefully and constantly update the legal standard for donations.

To conclude, Western countries should not overreact to China’s influence efforts because most of them fall into the category of normal public diplomacy as often pursued by many other countries. The governments should focus on those involving the use of “coercive or corrupting methods to pressure individuals and groups” and prevent them from interfering in the functioning of the targeted countries’ civil and political life. Countries should not alienate their Chinese communities. Although some of the new migrants, such as Huang Xiangmo and Yang Jian, as shown in the case studies, chose to become accomplices for the CCP while the majority of overseas Chinese are just victims of the CCP’s assertive foreign policy. Overseas Chinese are part of the solution, not the problem for the CCP’s foreign interference activities.

77 Diamond and Schell 2018, 5; Turnbull 2017
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