

# The party speaks for you

Foreign interference and the Chinese  
Communist Party's united front system

Alex Joske



## About the author

**Alex Joske** is an Analyst working with the International Cyber Policy Centre.

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Policy brief  
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## What's the problem?

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is strengthening its influence by co-opting representatives of ethnic minority groups, religious movements, and business, science and political groups. It claims the right to speak on behalf of those groups and uses them to claim legitimacy.

These efforts are carried out by the united front system, which is a network of party and state agencies responsible for influencing groups outside the party, particularly those claiming to represent civil society. It manages and expands the United Front, a coalition of entities working towards the party's goals.<sup>1</sup> The CCP's role in this system's activities, known as united front work, is often covert or deceptive.<sup>2</sup>

The united front system's reach beyond the borders of the People's Republic of China (PRC)—such as into foreign political parties, diaspora communities and multinational corporations—is an exportation of the CCP's political system.<sup>3</sup> This undermines social cohesion, exacerbates racial tension, influences politics, harms media integrity, facilitates espionage, and increases unsupervised technology transfer.

General Secretary Xi Jinping's reinvigoration of this system underlines the need for stronger responses to CCP influence and technology-transfer operations around the world. However, governments are still struggling to manage it effectively and there is little publicly available analysis of the united front system. This lack of information can cause Western observers to underestimate the significance of the united front system and to reduce its methods into familiar categories. For example, diplomats might see united front work as 'public diplomacy' or 'propaganda' but fail to appreciate the extent of related covert activities. Security officials may be alert to criminal activity or espionage while underestimating the significance of open activities that facilitate it. Analysts risk overlooking the interrelated facets of CCP influence that combine to make it effective.<sup>4</sup>

## What's the solution?

Governments should disrupt the CCP's capacity to use united front figures and groups as vehicles for covert influence and technology transfer. They should begin by developing analytical capacity for understanding foreign interference. On that basis, they should issue declaratory policy statements that frame efforts to counter it. Countermeasures should involve law enforcement, legislative reform, deterrence and capacity building across relevant areas of government. Governments should mitigate the divisive effect united front work can have on communities through engagement and careful use of language.

Law enforcement, while critically important, shouldn't be all or even most of the solution. Foreign interference often takes place in a grey area that's difficult to address through law enforcement actions. Strengthening civil society and media must be a fundamental part of protecting against interference. Policymakers should make measures to raise the transparency of foreign influence a key part of the response.



# Introduction

The United Front ... is an important magic weapon for strengthening the party's ruling position ... and an important magic weapon for realising the China Dream of the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation.

—Xi Jinping, at the 2015 Central United Front Work Meeting<sup>5</sup>

In recent years, groups and individuals linked to the CCP's United Front have attracted an unprecedented level of scrutiny for their links to political interference, economic espionage and influence on university campuses. In Australia, businessmen who were members of organisations with close ties to the United Front Work Department (UFWD) have been accused of interfering in Australian politics. In the US, at least two senior members of united front groups for scientists have been taken to court over alleged technology theft. Confucius Institutes, which are overseen with heavy involvement from the UFWD, have generated controversy for more than a decade for their effects on academic freedom and influence on universities. Numerous Chinese students and scholars associations, which are united front groups for Chinese international students, have been involved in suppressing academic freedom and mobilising students for nationalistic activities.

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has also highlighted overseas united front networks. In Australia, Canada, the UK, the US, Argentina, Japan and the Czech Republic, groups mobilised to gather increasingly scarce medical supplies from around the world and send them to China.<sup>6</sup> Those efforts appear linked to directives from the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese, a united front agency.<sup>7</sup> The party's Central Committee has described the federation as 'a bridge and a bond for the party and government to connect with overseas Chinese compatriots'.<sup>8</sup> After the virus spread globally, united front groups began working with the CCP to donate supplies to the rest of the world and promote the party's narratives about the pandemic.

Regardless of whether those activities harmed efforts to control the virus, they appeared to take governments by surprise and demonstrate the effectiveness of united front work. The CCP's attempts to interfere in diaspora communities, influence political systems and covertly access valuable and sensitive technology will only grow as tensions between China and countries around the world develop. As governments begin to confront the CCP's overseas interference and espionage, understanding the united front system will be crucially important.

This paper dissects the CCP's united front system and its role in foreign interference. It describes the broad range of agencies and goals of the united front system, rather than focusing only on the UFWD. It examines how the system is structured, how it operates, and what it seeks to achieve. It reveals how dozens of agencies play a role in the united front system's efforts to transfer technology, promote propaganda, interfere in political systems and even influence executives of multinational companies.<sup>9</sup> The united front system has nearly always been a core system of the CCP.<sup>10</sup> For most of its history it's been led by a member of the Politburo Standing Committee—the party's top leadership body.

However, Xi has emphasised united front work more than previous leaders, pushing it closer to the position of importance that it occupied in the party's revolutionary era by elevating its status since 2015. That year, he established high-level bodies and regulations that signalled a greater emphasis on



and centralisation of united front work. Later, the Central Committee's UFWD was expanded by giving it authority over religious, ethnic and Chinese diaspora affairs.<sup>11</sup> The united front system and the UFWD in particular have also been given a central role in coordinating policy on Xinjiang, where the darkest side of the party's political security efforts are on full display.

The CCP originated as a chapter of the Soviet Comintern in 1921. It is itself a product of Lenin's international united front efforts. In 1922, it began carrying out its own united front work by proposing a united front of supporters of democracy.<sup>12</sup>

The party credits China's victory in the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) to the 'favourable conditions' created through its united front with the Kuomintang. This arguably prevented the CCP's annihilation by shifting the focus of the Kuomintang military from the CCP to Japan.<sup>13</sup> It also enabled the party to infiltrate the Kuomintang and subvert it from inside. In the lead-up to the establishment of the PRC in 1949, the party successfully co-opted influential religious figures, intellectuals, engineers and political leaders. Many of them were organised into party-led civil society groups and eight political parties (often referred to as China's 'minor parties' or 'satellite parties') that were promised a say in a post-liberation democratic China. Those parties officially accept the leadership of the CCP as a precondition for participation in China's 'multiparty cooperation and political consultative system'. They now serve as platforms for united front work.<sup>14</sup>

During the 'reform and opening period', the United Front played an important role in supporting China's economic development. Businesspersons, including those from the Chinese diaspora, were encouraged to invest in China and integrated into the United Front through platforms such as the UFWD-run All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce (中华全国工商业联合会).<sup>15</sup> According to united front expert Gerry Groot, 'economic construction required vast numbers of technicians, scientists and administrators', and groups in the United Front helped reform China's education system and attract foreign experts and technology.<sup>16</sup>

To this day, the united front system helps the CCP claim legitimacy, mobilise its supporters and manage perceived threats. It plays a central role in developing policy on highly sensitive issues such as Xinjiang, Tibet, religion and ethnic affairs. It also oversees the CCP-led political model of 'multiparty cooperation and political consultation' that's been in place since 1949.<sup>17</sup> This consultation takes place through the annual Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC, 中国人民政治协商会议), which is chaired by the Politburo Standing Committee member responsible for the united front system and attended by more than 2,000 party-approved representatives from different sectors of PRC society.<sup>18</sup>

The CCP claims that its system of political consultation and multiparty cooperation is a democratic model.<sup>19</sup> However, it operates as a way for the CCP to falsely claim that it represents the full breadth of Chinese society. The CCP serves as China's ruling party while other groups, such as the eight minor political parties (officially known as 'democratic parties') that accept the CCP's leadership, offer advice to it through the CPPCC. Organisations that claim to speak for different interest groups—the China Association for Science and Technology and the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese, for example—are official components of the CPPCC.<sup>20</sup> In practice, those organisations are controlled by the CCP. Their leaders are often party members, and, historically, some have been manipulated through inducement and coercion, including blackmail.<sup>21</sup>

In recent years, Xi Jinping has been promoting the United Front's 'multiparty cooperation and political consultative system' as a 'new type of party system'. It also serves as an inspiration for the CCP's engagement with political parties around the world.<sup>22</sup> A 2018 foreign policy editorial by the *People's Daily* claimed that Xi Jinping's 'systematic elaboration on the super advantages of China's party system has enlightened the whole world.'<sup>23</sup> The chaos of Western societies shows that the CCP 'is providing the world with ... a China solution on how to seek a better political system', the piece concluded. This point is echoed in training material for united front cadres, which warns that 'Western hostile forces' seek to overthrow the CCP and that their influence on overseas ethnic Chinese must be undone.<sup>24</sup>

The fact that the United Front is a political model and a way for the party to control political representation—the voices of groups targeted by united front work—means its overseas expansion is an exportation of the CCP's political system. Overseas united front work taken to its conclusion would give the CCP undue influence over political representation and expression in foreign political systems.

### Key terminology

The **United Front** (统一战线) is a coalition of groups and individuals working towards the CCP's goals.

**United front work** (统一战线工作) refers to the CCP's efforts to strengthen and expand the United Front by influencing and co-opting targets.

The **United Front Work Department** (中央统一战线工作部) is a CCP Central Committee department that coordinates and carries out united front work.

The **united front system** (统一战线系统 or 统一战线工作系统) is the grouping of agencies, social organisations, businesses, universities, research institutes and individuals carrying out united front work.

### United front work is political work

In the words of the UFWD's director:

The United Front is a political alliance, and united front work is political work. It must maintain the party's leadership throughout, having the party's flag as its flag, the party's direction as its direction, and the party's will as its will, uniting and gathering members of each part of the United Front around the party.<sup>25</sup>

It's designed to bring a diverse range of groups, and their representatives in particular, under the party's leadership.<sup>26</sup>

These activities focus on building relationships. Xi Jinping has emphasised that 'the United Front is about working on people.'<sup>27</sup> Co-opting and manipulating elites, influential individuals and organisations is a way to shape discourse and decision-making.

United front work encompasses a broad spectrum of activity, from espionage to foreign interference, influence and engagement (see box). There's no clear distinction between overseas and domestic work. Premier Zhou Enlai, one of the PRC's founding revolutionaries and a pioneer of the CCP's United



Front, advocated ‘using the legal to mask the illegal; deftly integrating the legal and the illegal’ (利用合法掩护非法·合法与非法巧妙结合), ‘nestling intelligence within the United Front’ (寓情报于统战中) and ‘using the United Front to push forth intelligence’ (以统战带动情报).<sup>28</sup>

The scope of united front work is constantly evolving to reflect the CCP’s global ambitions, assessments of internal threats to its security, and the evolution of Chinese society. Today, the overseas functions of united front work include increasing the CCP’s political influence, interfering in the Chinese diaspora, suppressing dissident movements, building a permissive international environment for a takeover of Taiwan, intelligence gathering, encouraging investment in China, and facilitating technology transfer.

### Key united front groups and events linked to foreign interference

The **Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference** is the peak united front forum, bringing together CCP officials and Chinese elites.

The **China Overseas Friendship Association** is a group run by the UFWD that recently subsumed the China Overseas Exchange Association.

The **China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification** is an organ of the UFWD with numerous overseas branches.

The **All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese** is a peak united front body for ethnic Chinese with overseas links.

The **Western Returned Scholars Association** is the UFWD’s primary body for interacting with ethnic Chinese scholars and scientists.

The **Forum on the Global Chinese Language Media** is a biennial meeting of overseas Chinese-language media outlets convened by the UFWD.

**Chinese students and scholars associations** are overseen by Ministry of Education officials and often seek to speak for, influence and monitor Chinese students abroad.

**Local equivalents**, such as the provincial Guangdong Overseas Friendship Association, exist for most major united front groups.

To those ends, united front work draws on hundreds of thousands of united front figures and thousands of groups, most of which are inside China. This report refers to members of united front groups—organisations guided or controlled by parts of the united front system—as ‘united front figures’. The most readily identifiable united front groups are China-based organisations officially supervised by united front agencies. For example, the China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification—which has chapters in at least 91 countries or territories around the world—and the China Overseas Friendship Association are both directed by the UFWD.<sup>29</sup> Members of China-based united front groups often run united front groups abroad. Many China-based united front groups have overseas branches.

## United front work: a Xi family business

United front work runs deep through Xi Jinping's life and family history. His father, Xi Zhongxun, was a central figure carrying out united front work directed at Tibet, seeking to influence the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama. As a Politburo member in the 1980s, he continued to spend most of his time supervising united front work. He was reportedly seen still wearing a watch given to him by the Dalai Lama three decades earlier.<sup>30</sup> Two of Xi Jinping's siblings were involved in political warfare work for the Chinese military.<sup>31</sup>

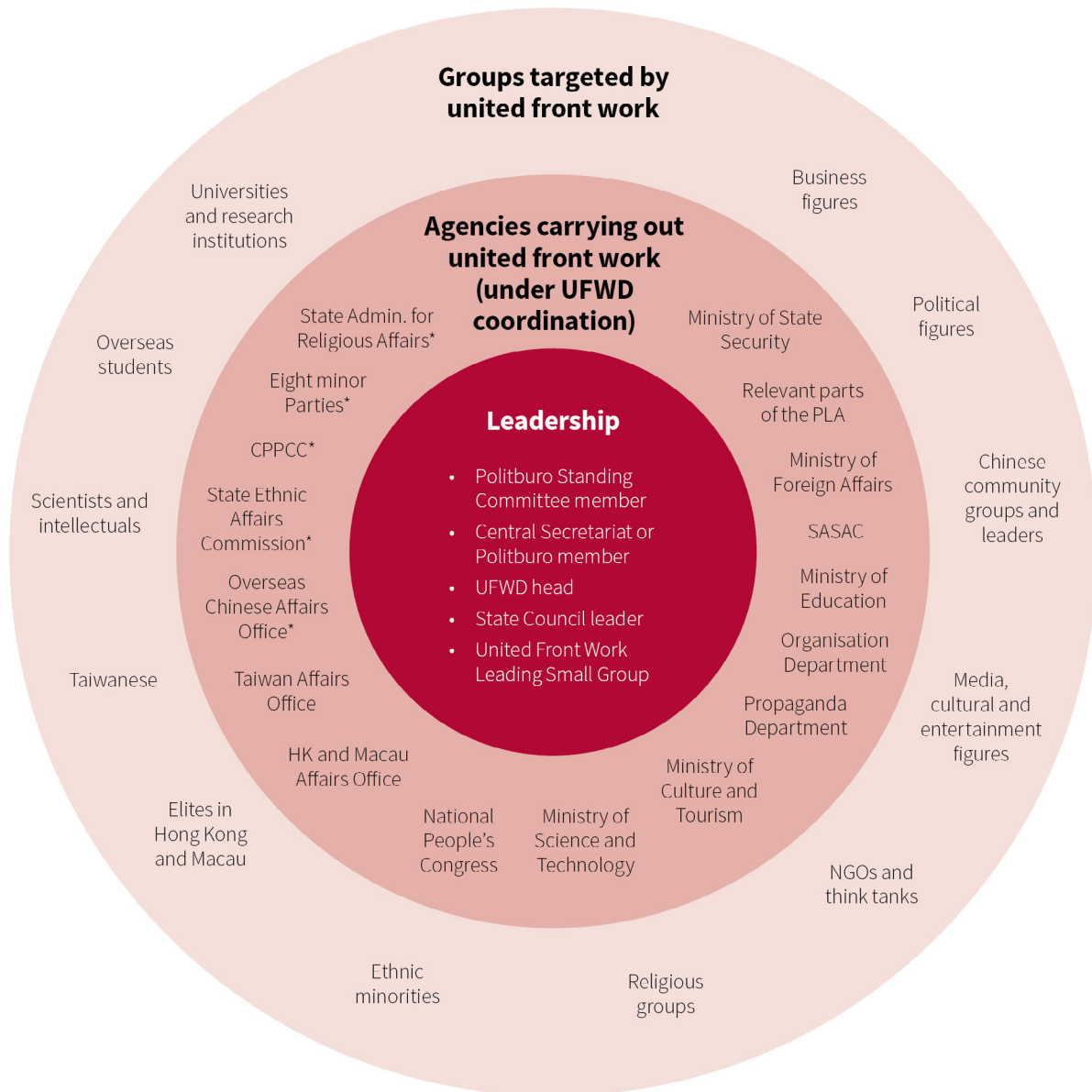
Xi Jinping himself spent 15 years climbing the CCP ranks in Fujian Province—a hotbed of united front and intelligence work targeting Taiwan and the Hokkien-speaking diaspora. In 1995, as a municipal party secretary, he penned a paper on united front work on the Chinese diaspora.<sup>32</sup>

Two decades later, in 2015, Xi moved to implement many of the ideas he advocated in the paper—greater emphasis on united front work by the party's leadership and the integration of efforts across the party and bureaucracy. That year, at the Central United Front Work Conference, he repeated Mao Zedong's famous 1939 description of the United Front as one of three 'magic weapons' (法宝) for achieving victory in the communist revolution.<sup>33</sup> This was nothing new. Party leaders since the founding of the PRC have consistently run united front conferences and emphasised the United Front as a 'magic weapon', with the exception of the Cultural Revolution period.<sup>34</sup> But, unlike his predecessors, Xi Jinping has reinvigorated the United Front by launching the greatest reforms of the united front system in at least a generation.

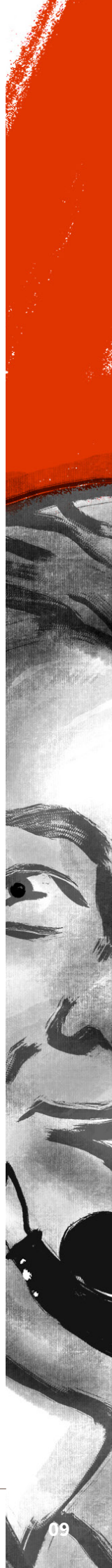
The December 2014 purge of Ling Jihua (令计划), who headed the UFWD and was a close ally of former president Hu Jintao, set the scene for Xi Jinping's reform of the united front system.<sup>35</sup> After positioning Ling as a scapegoat for the department's problems, Xi began pursuing the 'Great United Front' (大统战)—a program for ensuring that united front work is carried out by the entire party and with greater centralisation, coordination and direction.<sup>36</sup> He established a 'leading small group' for united front work that brought together dozens of agencies to inspect and improve united front work across the country, formally raised the status of the Central United Front Work Conference, reorganised the UFWD, and introduced the first regulations for united front work.<sup>37</sup>

In his report to the 19th Party Congress, Xi Jinping referred to the United Front as being about drawing the largest concentric circle around the party.<sup>38</sup> Under the direction of the united front system's leaders, agencies of the united front system seek to co-opt influential individuals and groups in a range of areas, including business, politics and science. Party committees, whether in multinational companies, research institutes or embassies, have been directed by Xi to follow the Central Committee's directions and regulations on united front work.<sup>39</sup> Figure 1 shows the system.

**Figure 1: The united front system**



\* Asterisks denote agencies subordinate to the UFWD.



# Leadership and agencies

**Figure 2: Wang Yang**



Source: Xinhua.

The united front system's leader is Wang Yang (汪洋), the fourth-ranked member of the seven-man Politburo Standing Committee, the party's top leadership body. Wang chairs the most important united front forum: the CPPCC. He also heads the Central United Front Work Leading Small Group.

Sun Chunlan (孙春兰), a Politburo member and vice premier who holds culture, health, sport, religion and education portfolios, may also be involved in supervising the government's (as opposed to the party's) contributions to united front work.<sup>40</sup> Sun was previously head of the UFWD and currently chairs the council of Confucius Institute Headquarters, overseeing the global Confucius Institute program.<sup>41</sup>

The presence of State Council Secretary-General Xiao Jie (肖捷) at a recent leading small group event indicates that he may now be responsible for government agencies' involvement in united front work.<sup>42</sup>

The status of the UFWD's director, a key member of the system's leadership, has been elevated in recent years. You Quan, the current head of the UFWD, is one of seven members of the Central Secretariat, which carries out the Politburo's day-to-day work.<sup>43</sup> His predecessor sat on the Politburo while heading the department.

Leaders of the united front system and representatives of relevant agencies sit in the Central United Front Work Leading Small Group.<sup>44</sup> At least 26 agencies were represented in the leading small group's activities in 2017.<sup>45</sup> Agencies involved in united front work include the Propaganda Department, the Organisation Department, the Ministry of Education, the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission and the Ministry of State Security, which is the PRC's civilian intelligence agency.<sup>46</sup>

## The United Front Work Department

'With everyone doing [united front work] together, there must be division of labour', a senior UFWD official wrote in 2016.<sup>47</sup> The UFWD acts as a coordinating agency for united front work. In practice, China's bureaucracy is famously stovepiped and it's difficult to determine how successful the UFWD's coordination efforts are.

The CCP Central Committee has authorised the department to manage all overseas Chinese affairs, religious affairs and ethnic affairs work. Nominally, it oversees actions by other departments, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in those areas. Since March 2018, it has controlled three relevant government agencies: the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, the State Ethnic Affairs Commission and the State Administration for Religious Affairs.<sup>48</sup>



Together with the Taiwan Affairs Office, the UFWD and 11 of its subordinate agencies had more than 600 officials at the level of bureau chief or above in 2016 (Figure 3). Bureau chiefs are ranked just under vice ministers and deputy heads of provincial governments. They're roughly equivalent to first assistant secretaries in the Australian Public Service or assistant secretaries in the US Government.<sup>49</sup>

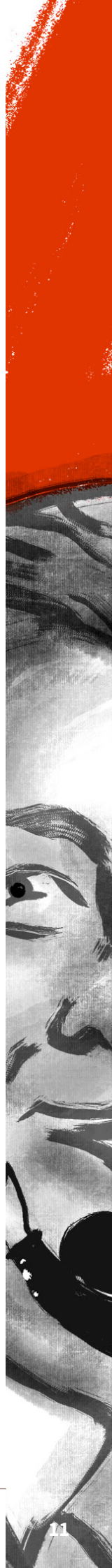
**Figure 3: The UFWD's 12 bureaus**



\*Asterisks denote unofficially named bureaus. Note: Bureaus 6 and 8–12 were all created after 2015.

The UFWD runs the offices of the central coordination groups on Tibet and Xinjiang affairs and coordinates policy on the two regions.<sup>50</sup> The establishment of the UFWD's Xinjiang Bureau, which doubles as the office of the Central Coordination Group on Xinjiang Work (中央新疆工作协调小组), coincided with the rapid expansion of re-education and detention camps there in 2016.

United front work departments are found at lower levels of government across China. Provincial, city and even district party committees typically oversee their own UFWDs.



Internally, the department has 10 leaders, at least six of whom hold ministerial rank or higher (see Appendix 1 for further information about the department's leaders). It has 12 bureaus, half of which were created after 2015. Bureaucratic changes in 2018 that brought overseas Chinese affairs under the UFWD's 'unified management' also injected dozens if not hundreds of officials with substantial overseas experience into the department.<sup>51</sup> Jinan University, Huaqiao University and the Central Institute of Socialism in Beijing are all subordinate to the UFWD and carry out research and training to support its efforts.<sup>52</sup> Additionally, the UFWD runs dedicated training facilities, such as the Jixian Mountain Estate (集贤山庄), which is a complex in the outskirts of Beijing used for training China Overseas Friendship Association cadres.<sup>53</sup>

The department supervises more than 80 'civil groups' at the national level, and more than 3,000 organisations are overseen by local UFWDs (see Appendix 2). Many of them, such as the China Overseas Friendship Association, are officially described as 'united front system work units' and operate like bureau-level organs of the UFWD.<sup>54</sup> At least two of them have held special consultative status as NGOs in the UN Economic and Social Council.<sup>55</sup> In 2014, an official from one of them, the China Association for Preservation and Development of Tibetan Culture (中国西藏文化保护与发展协会), was barred from a UN human rights hearing after he intimidated a woman testifying about her father, political prisoner Wang Bingzhang.<sup>56</sup>

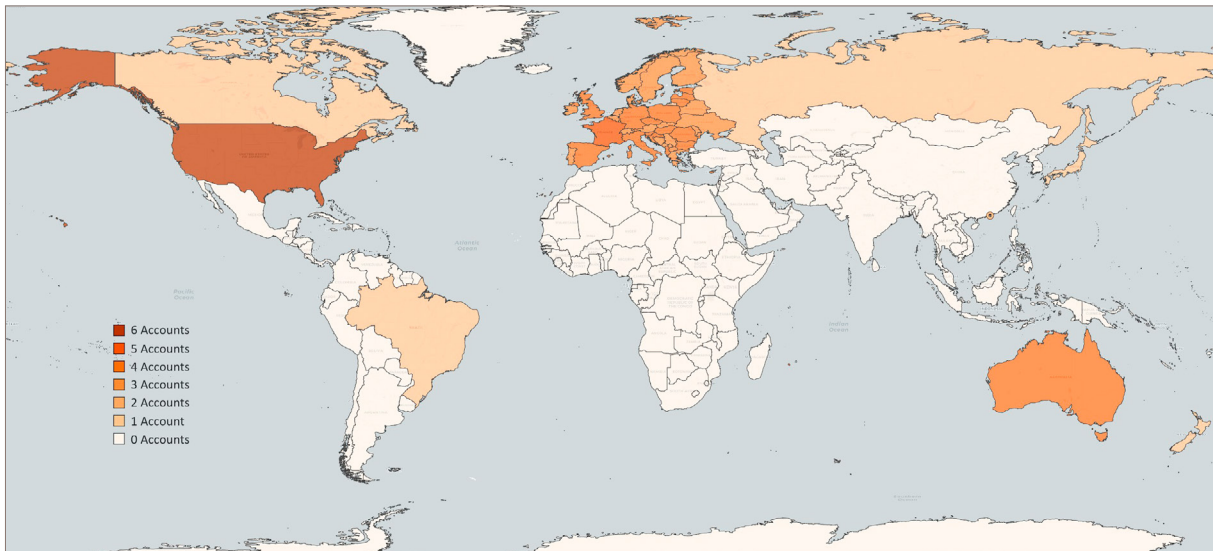
## Propaganda work by the United Front Work Department

The UFWD commands substantial resources for propaganda efforts targeting the Chinese diaspora. It runs China News Service (中国新闻社), one of the CCP's largest media networks, which has dozens of overseas bureaus.<sup>57</sup>

Several overseas Chinese-language media outlets are owned or controlled by the UFWD through China News Service, including Qiaobao (侨报) in the US and Australia's Pacific Media Group (大洋传媒集团).<sup>58</sup> At least 26 WeChat accounts run by nine Chinese media outlets are in fact registered to a subsidiary of China News Service.<sup>59</sup> The accounts operate in all Five Eyes countries, the European Union, Russia, Japan and Brazil. They include accounts registered to Qiaobao and Pacific Media Group, indicating that they may all belong to companies supervised by the UFWD. Many of the accounts appear to have tens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands of followers.



**Figure 4: At least 26 overseas Chinese-language media WeChat accounts are registered to a company that's ultimately owned by the UFWD**



China News Service engages with foreign media through its biennial Forum on the Global Chinese Language Media (世界华文媒体论坛). The event has drawn hundreds of overseas media representatives, including some from Australia's national broadcaster.<sup>60</sup> Training classes on topics such as 'How to tell the Belt and Road Initiative's story well' are held on the sidelines of the forum.<sup>61</sup>

## Agencies carrying out united front work

Party committees at all levels must place united front work in an important position.

—Xi Jinping, speaking at the 2015 Central United Front Work Conference<sup>62</sup>

Party members are expected to play a role in the 'Great United Front' by carrying out work in their relevant areas.<sup>63</sup> Dozens of party and government agencies are involved in united front work. More and more party committees in state and private companies, universities and research institutes are engaging in united front work. Representatives of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) also attended the 2015 Central United Front Work Conference, indicating that the military is involved in united front work.<sup>64</sup>

### Education

The Ministry of Education and party committees in Chinese universities lead united front work on campuses.<sup>65</sup> The ministry works with the UFWD to hold regular conferences on 'university united front work' and maintains its own database of united front work targets, including relatives of overseas Chinese.<sup>66</sup> Education officials also study official guidance on united front work and describe the education system as 'an important battlefield' for that work.<sup>67</sup>

Most Chinese universities have UFWDs responsible for the full breadth of united front work.<sup>68</sup> For example, Xiamen University's UFWD oversees religious affairs work at the university, which includes building a database of religious believers, managing student informants and monitoring students'

phones.<sup>69</sup> Dalian University of Foreign Languages' UFWD establishes alumni associations around the world and runs a database of overseas students and alumni as 'a basis for overseas united front work'.<sup>70</sup>

## Foreign affairs

United front work targeting the Chinese diaspora involves several agencies. Major 'overseas Chinese affairs' events are usually presided over by representatives of:

- the UFWD (or the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office that it subsumed in 2018)
- the National People's Congress Overseas Chinese Affairs Committee
- the CPPCC Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau and Overseas Chinese Committee
- the China Zhi Gong Party (致公党)
- the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese
- the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>71</sup>

The first five of those organisations are often called the 'five Overseas Chinese' (五侨).<sup>72</sup>

Most, if not all, of China's embassies have several diplomats tasked with interfering in the diaspora—a kind of activity that's officially under the 'unified management' of the UFWD.<sup>73</sup> The decision to place diaspora affairs under the UFWD's leadership came in March 2018 and 'effectively resolved the problem of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UFWD's overlapping responsibilities', according to the People's Daily.<sup>74</sup> Embassies hold meetings with local united front leaders where the leaders receive directions to influence public opinion, such as by coordinating rallies in support of Chinese Government policy or visiting officials.<sup>75</sup>

Increasing numbers of diplomats responsible for diaspora work now come from the UFWD rather than the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For example, China's ambassador to Sri Lanka has a background not in the foreign affairs system but as a united front official.<sup>76</sup>

Indeed, the UFWD was an important foundation for China's foreign affairs bureaucracy. The International Liaison Department (the party agency managing party-to-party relations) was formed on the basis of a UFWD bureau in 1951.<sup>77</sup> The International Liaison Department still has united front characteristics, although it isn't known whether any of its activities are guided by the united front system.<sup>78</sup> A former head of the department from the 1990s stated that he views its work as an international version of united front work. In an interview, he compared its interactions with foreign political parties to the CPPCC—the primary platform for the United Front's so-called 'system of multiparty cooperation and political consultation led by the CCP'.<sup>79</sup>

## Intelligence and political warfare

Intelligence agencies carry out and take advantage of united front work. The networks, status and relationships built through united front work, as well as information gathered through it, facilitate intelligence activity. The integration of intelligence and united front work runs deep through the party's

history: at a 1939 Politburo meeting, CCP leader Zhou Enlai advocated ‘nestling intelligence in the United Front’ and ‘using the United Front to push forth intelligence’.<sup>80</sup>

The Ministry of State Security (MSS), which is China’s civilian intelligence agency, is involved in and benefits from united front work. Official accounts state that the MSS was created in 1983 by combining parts of four agencies, including the UFWD.<sup>81</sup> One of its fronts, the China International Cultural Exchange Center (中国国际文化交流中心), carries out united front work. In 2004, a committee member at the centre said that the scope of its ‘domestic and overseas united front work activities is extremely broad’.<sup>82</sup> At the time, its nominal director was a former UFWD minister.<sup>83</sup>

The China International Cultural Exchange Center may have been an important part of the MSS’s overseas operations. It’s linked to the MSS’s Social Affairs Bureau (社会联络局 or 社会调查局), also known as the 12th bureau. In their book *Chinese communist espionage*, Peter Mattis and Matthew Brazil describe the bureau as handling ‘MSS contributions to the CCP’s united front work system’.<sup>84</sup> One of the bureau’s former chiefs, Mao Guohua (毛国华), was double-hatted as the centre’s secretary-general (Figure 5).<sup>85</sup> Mao was the handler of Katrina Leung, a triple agent who successfully gained the trust of the US Federal Bureau of Investigation in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>86</sup>

**Figure 5: Retired MSS officer Mao Guohua in 2018**



Source: ‘前国安部社会调查局局长说,“奉化的长处的短板是……” [The former chief of the Social Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of State Security said, ‘The shortcomings of Fenghua’s strengths are ...’], *Sohu*, 15 October 2018, [online](#).

Similarly, the political warfare arm of the PLA—the Political Work Department Liaison Bureau (政治工作部联络局), formerly the Liaison Department of the General Political Department (总参谋部政治部联络部)—has been described by experts as ‘most closely aligned with the united front system’.<sup>87</sup> Like the International Liaison Department, this agency uses united front tactics (such as the use of prominent front groups, an emphasis on co-opting influential individuals, and efforts to discredit those who aren’t aligned with the CCP’s goals) but it’s unlikely that it’s part of the institutionalised united front system. The China Association for International Friendly Contact (中国国际友好联络会) is a united-front-style

group run by the Liaison Bureau that seeks to build ties with foreign groups and individuals. Those it has interacted with include an Australian mining magnate, a former Australian ambassador to China, a new-age religious movement in Japan, and retired generals and bureaucrats from the US.<sup>88</sup>

Intelligence officers have used united front positions as cover. The overseas Chinese affairs consul in San Francisco during the 2008 Olympic torch relay was a suspected MSS officer, according to former US intelligence officials.<sup>89</sup> Guangdong State Security Bureau Director Zhou Yingshi (周颖石) may have claimed to be a Guangdong UFWD vice minister as a form of cover in the past.<sup>90</sup> An officer from the PLA's Liaison Bureau was concurrently serving as a division head in Guangzhou city's UFWD.<sup>91</sup>

There's also evidence that the UFWD itself has recently carried out clandestine operations involving the handling of people covertly reporting to it. The Taiwanese Government is currently prosecuting a father-son pair who were allegedly recruited by an official from the Fujian Province UFWD.<sup>92</sup> The father heads a united-front-linked political party in Taiwan, while his son is a retired lieutenant colonel. Unverified reports have claimed that, like China's intelligence agencies, the department is allowed to recruit Taiwanese as agents.<sup>93</sup>

## Groups targeted by united front work

CCP regulations on united front work define 12 broad groups to be targeted:

1. members of China's eight minor parties
2. individuals without party affiliations
3. non-CCP intellectuals
4. ethnic minorities
5. religious individuals
6. non-public-economy individuals (private businesses)
7. new social strata individuals (urban professionals)
8. overseas and returned overseas students
9. people in Hong Kong and Macau
10. Taiwanese people and their relatives in the PRC
11. overseas ethnic Chinese and their relatives in the PRC
12. any other individuals who need uniting and liaising.<sup>94</sup>

Work on the targeted groups is designed to bring them under the party's leadership not merely to neutralise any opposition they may pose, but also to have them serve as platforms for further efforts. Once groups or individuals have been integrated into the united front system, they can be used to co-opt and influence others. They're also used to support the party's claim that it represents and consults various constituencies not just in China but increasingly beyond China's borders.



There's no clear distinction between domestic and overseas united front work: all bureaus of the UFWD and all areas of united front work involve overseas activities. This is because the key distinction underlying the United Front is not between domestic and overseas groups, but between the CCP and everyone else.<sup>95</sup> For example, the UFWD's Xinjiang Bureau plays a central role in policy on Xinjiang but is also involved in worldwide efforts to whitewash the CCP's internment of an estimated 1.5 million people in Xinjiang, primarily ethnic Uyghur Muslims, as an anti-terrorism and vocational training effort.<sup>96</sup>

State-owned enterprises and research institutions often have mature united front work departments. For example, Baowu Steel (宝武钢铁), one of the world's largest steel producers, has an internal UFWD and has established united front organisations for Taiwanese people and ethnic Chinese who have lived abroad.<sup>97</sup> The company's united front work evidently earned it praise—its CEO from 2007 to 2016 has been a UFWD vice minister since 2017.<sup>98</sup>

Large numbers of leading Chinese scientists were educated abroad and are members of China's eight minor parties or have no party affiliation, making them another priority of united front work.<sup>99</sup> The Chinese Academy of Sciences—one of the world's largest research organisations, with more than 60,000 researchers—has a UFWD and a united front work leading small group that provides oversight of the academy's united front work.<sup>100</sup>

Both Chinese and foreign private enterprises are increasingly targeted by united front work. In 2015, 'new social strata individuals'—a category covering urban professionals such as managerial staff and NGO workers—became a new focus of united front work because of their growing influence in Chinese society and strong links to the West.<sup>101</sup> For example, JD.com, one of the world's largest e-commerce companies, is an official pilot site for united front work in private companies. In 2018, CEO Richard Liu announced the establishment of two united front groups within JD.com (Figure 6).<sup>102</sup>

**Figure 6: Richard Liu (right) unveiling a plaque for JD.com's united front work pilot site**



‘Multinational companies such as the ‘Big Four’ accounting firms are also targets of united front work.<sup>103</sup> Deloitte China established a united front association for young and middle-aged employees in 2016, headed by its CEO.<sup>104</sup> At the association’s founding, a Deloitte partner thanked the UFWD for its support and promised: ‘The Deloitte Young and Middle-aged Intellectuals Association will comply with the Trial Regulations on United Front Work’.<sup>105</sup>

According to a government website, the Shanghai UFWD ‘took a liking’ (看上了) to a Deloitte partner, Jiang Ying, during its visits to Deloitte’s office.<sup>106</sup> Senior members of China-based united front organisations are typically selected by local UFWDs. Jiang is now deputy CEO of Deloitte China, is a delegate to the CPPCC and was recently awarded a commendation from the Shanghai UFWD.<sup>107</sup> In total, at least eight Deloitte China executives are delegates to the CPPCC or its local equivalents.<sup>108</sup>

United front structures within multinational companies provide additional channels for influencing the companies beyond party committees. United front groups often target people who aren’t members of the CCP, especially those who have spent time abroad. Under the ‘Trial regulations on united front work’, the UFWD is supposed to direct ‘relevant civil organisations’, such as Deloitte’s united front group, ‘to play a role in Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan and overseas united front work’.<sup>109</sup> After anonymous employees of the Big Four paid for a Hong Kong newspaper ad supporting protests there, all four companies released statements in support of the Chinese Government’s actions and were pressured to fire those responsible for the ad.<sup>110</sup>

In 2017, Deloitte partnered with the Australian Financial Review for an infrastructure forum in Melbourne, at which a Deloitte China executive who is also a delegate to the Shandong Committee of the CPPCC warned that Australia’s refusal to sign up to the Belt and Road Initiative was hurting business.<sup>111</sup> His role in the united front group doesn’t seem to have been disclosed in the conference agenda.

**Figure 7: Deloitte China Deputy CEO Jiang Ying at the CPPCC.**



Source: ‘德勤声音——全国政协委员蒋颖在两会上踊跃谏言 多份提案吸引媒体高度关注’ [Deloitte’s voice—CPPCC member Vivian Jiang enthusiastically offers advice at the two sessions], *Deloitte*, no date, [online](#).



# Foreign interference and the united front system

This section of the report describes several aspects of united front work abroad, and particularly efforts to influence politics and think tanks, collect data and transfer technology. United front work generally involves covert activity and is a form of interference that aids the CCP's rise and reduces resistance to its encroachment on sovereignty.<sup>112</sup>

It will be important for future studies to examine overseas united front work in Asia, North America and Europe. Efforts targeting scientific communities, religious groups and Chinese-language education remain understudied. Outside of Australia, New Zealand and the Czech Republic, there are very few detailed country-specific studies of influence and technology-transfer efforts linked to the united front system.<sup>113</sup>

Many CCP agencies, such as the International Liaison Department, the MSS, the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries and the PLA, engage in their own foreign interference efforts. Those activities often overlap with or take advantage of those of the united front system, and draw on the tradition of united front work, but they're probably carried out independently.

## Political influence

When it seeks to build political influence, united front work primarily targets political actors rather than political systems. Democracies subjected to united front work might retain democratic structures and processes, while representation and political participation are ultimately manipulated by the CCP. Independent researcher Jichang Lulu has referred to this as a process of 'repurposing democracy' (see box).<sup>114</sup>

Understanding CCP influence, a prerequisite to any sound policy formulation, thus necessitates the analysis of the foreign activities of China's entire political system, rather than decontextualised aspects of the work of its more familiar agencies. Such analysis would be vitiated by an a priori compartmentalisation guided by, e.g., distinctions between 'influence' and 'interference', 'benign' and 'malign', or 'legal' and 'illegal'. While relevant to target-country policy responses, such categories may not be useful in the actors' Leninist context. A narrow focus on the hostile leaves much influence work unaccounted for. Influence work as described in this study does not seek to disrupt democratic structures, but to repurpose them as tools facilitating the advancement of the policies of a totalitarian, expansionist régime.

—Jichang Lulu, *Repurposing democracy: The European Parliament China Friendship Cluster*, Sinopsis, 26 November 2019, online.

The role of the CCP in these activities is often covert. United front figures typically deny any links to the united front system. Australian-Chinese businessman and political donor Chau Chak Wing, for example, claimed he had never heard of the UFWD, despite mentioning it in a speech and being pictured meeting with its officials.<sup>115</sup>

Ethnic Chinese communities are a focus of united front work.<sup>116</sup> In activities directed at diaspora communities, the CCP seeks to co-opt, control and install community leaders, community groups, business associations and media. It seeks to collapse the diversity of Chinese communities into a fictional homogeneous and ‘patriotic’ group united under the party’s leadership.<sup>117</sup> Successful united front work wedges the party between ethnic Chinese communities and the societies they live in, expanding the party’s control of those communities’ channels for representation and mobilisation. Members of Chinese communities who want to participate in community activities may unwittingly become associated with united front groups. Combined with the party’s surveillance and censorship of the Chinese social media app WeChat, this has smothered independent Chinese media outlets and community groups.<sup>118</sup>

Interference in Chinese communities harms genuine and independent political participation in politics by ethnic Chinese. In countries such as Australia, where united front work is quite mature, it’s proven difficult for politicians to avoid associating with united front groups and implicitly legitimising them as representatives of the broader Chinese community.<sup>119</sup> For example, both major party candidates for a seat in parliament during the 2019 Australian federal election had reportedly either been members of united front groups or had travelled on united-front-sponsored trips to China.<sup>120</sup> Both contenders for leadership of the NSW Labor Party in 2019 had attended events run by united-front-linked groups.<sup>121</sup>

### Case study: Huang Xiangmo

Huang Xiangmo (黄向墨) is one of the most informative cases of united-front-linked influence efforts. Ironically, his active efforts to influence Australian politics became a catalyst for the Australian Government’s introduction of counter foreign interference legislation and his own expulsion from the country.

Huang, also known by his legal name, Huang Changran (黄畅然), was born in 1969 in a small village in the Chaoshan region of Guangdong Province. According to a hagiographic account of his life published in 2012, he grew up in poverty and left school at an early age.<sup>122</sup> Despite that, he worked hard and read widely. In 1998, he was working for the state-owned China Railway Construction Corporation.<sup>123</sup> He soon founded a property development company named after his home village, Yuhu, and prospered amid rapid economic growth in the province.<sup>124</sup>

By 2012, Huang was ranked as China’s 420th richest person, worth an estimated ¥4.5 billion (roughly A\$700 million at the time).<sup>125</sup> He also donated generously to public projects—specifically, those favoured by the Jieyang Party Secretary, Chen Hongping (陈弘平), such as the massive Han dynasty-inspired Jieyang Tower in the city’s central square.<sup>126</sup> Huang also gained social standing, reflected in his appointment to the Jieyang People’s Political Consultative Conference—the city’s peak united front forum.<sup>127</sup>

In July 2012, Huang's allies ran up against the CCP's anticorruption machine. Party Secretary Chen was taken into the extralegal 'shuanggui' investigation process.<sup>128</sup> Five years later, Chen received a suspended death sentence for corruption.<sup>129</sup> He took down at least six associates, including the Guangzhou Party Secretary, with him.<sup>130</sup> Among his sins, the People's Daily reported, was his obsession with grand cultural and spiritual projects, including the Jieyang Tower and a lavish personal mausoleum.<sup>131</sup> The next year, 17 police officials in Jieyang were fired, under suspicion of tipping off suspects about investigations.<sup>132</sup>

Shortly before the scandal erupted, Huang Xiangmo began relocating to Australia, building an investment portfolio in Sydney and purchasing a \$12.8 million mansion. It's reported that several business associates followed him, buying nearby properties provided they were cheaper and lower down the hill than his. Huang denies being involved in the Jieyang corruption case.<sup>133</sup>

It would be nearly a decade before Huang was next spotted in the Chinese mainland. However, his connections to Chinese authorities didn't end with the corruption case and his arrival in Australia. As early as February 2012, Huang became an honorary president of the Australian Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China (ACPPRC, 澳洲中国和平统一促进会), despite having no known substantial links to Australia before then.<sup>134</sup> The reunification council is closely linked to the UFWD-run China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification, which promotes the PRC's annexation of Taiwan.<sup>135</sup> Huang eventually became president of the Australian reunification council and a senior director of the UFWD-run China Council.<sup>136</sup> The China Council's president is Wang Yang, the Politburo Standing Committee member who oversees the united front system. Its senior vice president is the UFWD minister.<sup>137</sup>

As Philip Wen and Lucy Macken wrote in the Sydney Morning Herald in 2016, 'Huang arrived in Australia in near-total obscurity. But big spending and relentless networking behind closed doors has seen him swiftly ingratiate himself with Australia's most powerful politicians'.<sup>138</sup>

After arriving in Australia, Huang hired long-time ACPPRC member Eng Joo Ang (洪永裕) as an adviser to his company. Ang accompanied Huang as he met with former prime minister Kevin Rudd in December 2012 (Figure 8).

Sam Dastyari, then general secretary of the New South Wales Labor Party, also appeared at the meeting.<sup>139</sup> Dastyari was known as a prolific fundraiser, and his relationship with and patronage from Huang Xiangmo led to the downfall of both. As Dastyari later said, 'There is an arms race for donations between the parties. And when you've got individuals like Huang who are prepared to fork out millions of dollars they get listened to.'<sup>140</sup>

**Figure 8: Eng Joo Ang, Kevin Rudd, Huang Xiangmo and Sam Dastyari, December 2012**



Source: '玉湖集团(澳洲)公司领导拜会澳大利亚前总理' [Yuhu Group Australia leaders meet Australia's former prime minister], *Yuhu Group*, 19 December 2012, [online](#).

Huang and his companies, associates and employees donated a total of over \$3 million to both sides of politics.<sup>141</sup> He also stepped in to pay a legal bill for Sam Dastyari, by then a senator.<sup>142</sup> Another businessman—a CPPCC delegate and member of the UFWD’s China Overseas Friendship Association—helped Dastyari settle the difference when the senator overspent his parliamentary travel budget.<sup>143</sup> Huang also partnered with CCP agencies, including the International Liaison Department, to organise and sponsor parliamentarians to travel to China.<sup>144</sup>

Former prime minister Rudd was only one in a long list of political figures with whom Huang networked. Huang secured meetings with the prime minister and opposition leader. At least four political figures—a former New South Wales Labor general secretary, a former New South Wales Labor treasurer, a former federal Liberal minister, and a former media adviser to a different federal Liberal minister—were hired by Huang and helped him build influence.<sup>145</sup> Senior representatives of both major parties attended his daughter’s wedding in 2016.<sup>146</sup>

It seems that politicians treated Huang Xiangmo as a wealthy Chinese community leader and didn’t think too much about the political objectives contained in the very name of the reunification council he ran. Rather than alerting politicians to his links to the CCP, Huang’s leadership of united front groups was misinterpreted as a marker of his influence among Chinese-Australians. When Huang took over leadership of the reunification council when its original president died in 2015, senior Liberal Party politician Philip Ruddock appeared to gloss over the council’s founding purpose, remarking that it ‘has a rather strange name . . . Some people are very interested in the title. My emphasis is always on “peaceful”’.<sup>147</sup>



Roughly a dozen reunification council members have stood for election or gained jobs as political staffers. Chief among them was Ernest Wong (王国忠), whose predecessor in the New South Wales Legislative Council house was hired by Huang's company.<sup>148</sup> In a 2014 article attributed to him, he copied, word for word, advice on political participation from the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office—a core united front system agency that's since been absorbed by the UFWD.<sup>149</sup> In a line that also appears verbatim in the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office document, the article recommends: '[one of the ways for Chinese to participate in politics is] by pushing changes in policy and influencing government positions by working on politicians and elites.'<sup>150</sup> Wong held positions in several united front bodies in both China and Australia and was reportedly a target of cultivation by Chinese intelligence officers.<sup>151</sup>

Consistent with the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office's guidance, Wong and Huang sought to mentor young Chinese-Australians with political aspirations.<sup>152</sup> The pair organised the Australia Young Leadership Forum for Chinese university students, which worked to train future political talent.<sup>153</sup>

Huang also engaged in philanthropic activities and gave generously to universities. He established centres in two Australian universities: the Australia–China Relations Institute (ACRI) at the University of Technology Sydney and the Australia–China Institute for Arts and Culture at Western Sydney University. Huang claimed to have personally selected a former Australian foreign minister as director of ACRI, which has attracted controversy since its founding in 2014.<sup>154</sup> ACRI hosted a senior united front official in 2016 and also organised trips to China, supported by the Propaganda Department, for Australian journalists.<sup>155</sup>

**Figure 9: Huang Xiangmo, surrounded by leaders of the reunification council and the Australia China Economics, Trade and Culture Association, shakes hands with Politburo member and former UFWD director Liu Yandong in 2012**



Source: 'Liu Yandong, member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, meets with Australian overseas Chinese', news release, Yuhu Group, 19 December 2012, [online](#).

Huang caught the Australia Security Intelligence Organisation's attention by 2015. That year, the agency's director-general reportedly warned about Huang's potential links to the CCP in briefings to Australian political parties.<sup>156</sup>

As investigative journalists began scrutinising Huang's activities, his transactional dealings with political parties became clearer. In 2016, Huang reportedly withdrew a promised \$400,000 donation to the Labor Party after its defence spokesman criticised China's militarisation of the South China Sea.<sup>157</sup> The next week, Senator Dastyari stood beside Huang at a press conference for Chinese-language media and urged Australia to remain neutral in the territorial dispute, which he described as 'China's own affair'.<sup>158</sup>

Dastyari eventually quit politics after it emerged that he'd warned Huang that Huang's phone was probably bugged.<sup>159</sup> Dastyari admitted in 2019 that Huang may have been an 'agent of influence' for the Chinese Government.<sup>160</sup>

Public figures began distancing themselves from Huang and his reunification council as controversy surrounding him grew. Several members had their names removed from the group's public membership list.<sup>161</sup> A Victorian state politician who had previously been a member of the council said, 'I know what this organisation is about so I keep 100 miles from them.'<sup>162</sup> Tim Xu, a former assistant to Huang, testified in 2019 that the reunification council is a front for the CCP.<sup>163</sup>

According to media reporting, some of Huang's associates may have been involved in organised criminal activity. In July 2019, it was reported that two of Huang's reunification council members were running illegal gambling junkets for Crown Casino and involved in money laundering. Huang himself gambled \$800 million in one year with Crown Casino.<sup>164</sup> In October, the Australian Taxation Office accused him of underpaying tax by \$140 million, ordering his assets to be frozen.<sup>165</sup>

The growing scrutiny of Huang's activities culminated in his residency in Australia being cancelled while he was in Hong Kong. His citizenship application was denied and his residency rescinded after the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation reportedly concluded that he was 'amenable to conducting acts of foreign interference'.<sup>166</sup> Huang later complained to the state-owned Global Times that Australia has 'the innate characteristics of a giant baby'.<sup>167</sup>

Huang's story, however, hasn't ended. His political donations, some of which were allegedly disguised through proxies, are being investigated by the New South Wales Independent Commission Against Corruption.<sup>168</sup> In May 2019, Huang reappeared in mainland China for the first time in years—as a delegate to a united front meeting attended by Xi Jinping.<sup>169</sup> In November 2019, Wang Liqiang, a Chinese defector to Australia, alleged that Huang had met with a PLA intelligence officer.<sup>170</sup> Wang is now being sued by a former reunification council member.<sup>171</sup> Huang's networks, and united front networks more generally, are still active in Australia, and more than 120 organisations protested his expulsion.<sup>172</sup>



## Recognising united front groups

There's no foolproof way to identify a united front group, but the following activities may indicate that an organisation is associated with the united front system:

- Its executives hold positions in China-based united front groups.
- It advocates for the 'reunification' of China.
- It associates frequently with the local PRC diplomatic mission.
- It participates in pro-PRC political rallies.
- It hosts visiting CCP officials from the united front system.
- It issues statements or holds events in coordination with known united front groups.

Asking a knowledgeable friend in the Chinese community for advice can also be helpful.

Because of the opacity of some aspects of united front work, it's difficult to know the degree of direction party officials exercise over united front figures. Even within each overseas united front group there appears to be variation in the relationships that members and executives have with PRC officials. To the extent that they're directed, many of their united front activities are likely to be supervised by provincial or even municipal UFWDs, some of which have a greater overseas focus than the central UFWD.

It's also possible that a small number of united front figures are ultimately directed by the MSS or PLA as intelligence assets, using united front work as a platform for intelligence activity. The two organisations are better resourced for and more experienced in serious political interference work than the UFWD.<sup>173</sup> Both have records of using united front roles as cover. They may also be better positioned to wield leverage over individuals who are wanted for crimes in China.

Nonetheless, many united front figures aren't acting spontaneously out of patriotic sentiments and an independent desire to please Beijing. Overseas united front figures frequently meet with united front system officials, receive directions and study relevant guidance. A Sydney man reportedly set up the Australian Jiangsu China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification (澳洲江苏中国和平统一促进会) at the direction of a senior UFWD official.<sup>174</sup> The Australian Guangxi Business Association (澳洲广西总商会) was reportedly founded in 2011 under the 'coordination' of a provincial UFWD.<sup>175</sup>

When the PLA Navy made a visit to Sydney Harbour on 3 June 2019, a day before the 30th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre, it was met by a welcoming crowd from the Sydney Beijing Association (悉尼北京会) bearing a custom-made banner.<sup>176</sup> The visit hadn't been publicly announced, indicating that the group had been notified beforehand by the Chinese Government.

In July 2015, the president of a Sydney-based association said his group 'will strengthen its use of Xi Jinping's spirit at the Central United Front Work Conference to go further in demonstrating our special characteristics'.<sup>177</sup>

In Australia and Taiwan, the CCP has used organised crime groups to carry out united front work.<sup>178</sup> Several cases suggest that criminal activity may be tolerated by the Chinese Government and even used as leverage in exchange for participation in political influence operations.<sup>179</sup> For example, media have reported that a prolific gambling junket operator involved in money laundering also runs three prominent united front groups in Melbourne, one of which is officially endorsed by the UFWD, and served as an honorary president of the ACPPRC.<sup>180</sup> At the same time, he was a business partner of a former adviser to the Victorian Premier.<sup>181</sup>

In 2008, Sydney man Frank Hu (胡扬) was charged with importing 250 kilograms of cocaine.<sup>182</sup> However, Hu was known to the public as a ‘Chinese community leader’ who was close to the PRC Consulate and ran a cultural association that took parliamentarians on tours of China.<sup>183</sup>

Similarly, Chang An-lo (张安乐), a Taiwanese gangster also known as ‘White Wolf’, is the founder of the Chinese Unification Promotion Party. The party has been raided by the Taiwan Government as part of investigations into political parties illegally accepting money from the Chinese Government.<sup>184</sup>

The lack of any clear distinction between domestic and overseas united front work means that changes in how that work is carried out in China could have important implications for foreign interference. While the UFWD has long worked with Chinese security agencies, links between those worlds appear to be deepening.<sup>185</sup> In 2018, Ministry of Public Security Vice Minister Shi Jun was reassigned as a UFWD vice minister and now oversees the department’s work on Xinjiang.<sup>186</sup> The UFWD plays a central role in the securitisation of Xinjiang, including the disappearance of approximately 1.5 million Uyghurs and other minorities into concentration camps.<sup>187</sup> It has worked with the National Counter-Terrorism Office on security in the lead-up to major political meetings and runs campaigns with the MSS and the Ministry of Public Security to crack down on Christianity.<sup>188</sup> This may foreshadow an increase in the brazenness, intolerance and intensity of united front work abroad, helped by the party’s increased ability to coordinate and direct that work.<sup>189</sup>

## Case study: The British Chinese Project

The kinds of united front work observed in Australia, the US<sup>190</sup> and New Zealand<sup>191</sup> can be clearly seen in other Five Eyes countries and across Europe. In the UK, for example, the British Chinese Project (BC Project, 英国华人参政计划) is a group that says it seeks to foster the political participation of ethnic Chinese and build their influence on policy.<sup>192</sup> It provides advice to, and acts as the secretariat for, the All-Party Parliamentary Chinese in Britain Group. The parliamentary group had six members in 2018.<sup>193</sup>

However, the BC Project’s close links to the united front system call into question its independence and ability to genuinely represent ethnic Chinese. Its chair and founder, Christine Lee (李贞驹), is an executive member of the China Overseas Friendship Association and a committee member of the CPPCC, which are both run by the UFWD (Figure 10).<sup>194</sup> Lee is also a legal adviser to several Chinese Government organs, including the Chinese Embassy in London, the UFWD’s Overseas Chinese Affairs Office and the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese.<sup>195</sup> Her law firm claims to be the only British one authorised by the Chinese Government to practise as a foreign law firm in China.<sup>196</sup>

**Figure 10: Christine Lee at a 2019 united front meeting for overseas Chinese. United front system leader Wang Yang is seated directly in front of her**



Source: 'Xi Jinping meets with representatives of the Ninth Conference for Friendship of Overseas Chinese Associations and the Fifth Council of China Overseas Friendship Association', *YouTube*, 28 May 2019, [online](#).

Since 2009, Lee has donated hundreds of thousands of pounds to Labour Party shadow secretary of state for international trade Barry Gardiner.<sup>197</sup> Reports by *The Times* in February 2017 scrutinised Lee and Gardiner's relationship, but appeared to have little effect on their activities.<sup>198</sup> Lee's son, Daniel Wilkes, has worked for Gardiner since 2015.<sup>199</sup> Gardiner has been the chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Chinese in Britain Group since its inception in 2011.<sup>200</sup>

As shadow energy secretary, Gardiner was an outspoken advocate of a controversial proposal for Chinese Government involvement in the Hinkley Point nuclear reactor project. He argued that it was important to sign the agreement to show the UK's acceptance of Chinese investment, even if it was a bad deal in financial terms.<sup>201</sup> The Chinese partner on Hinkley Point, China General Nuclear Power Company (CGNPC), is a state-owned nuclear company that's been involved in espionage and is subject to a US Government export ban because of its history of diverting nuclear technology to the Chinese military.<sup>202</sup> The US Government has warned that CGNPC uses nuclear technology to aid the Chinese military, including through the development of floating nuclear reactors and reactors for submarines.

### Technology transfer

The united front system is a central component of the PRC's legal and illicit technology-transfer efforts. United front technology-transfer efforts seek to establish or co-opt professional associations with members in universities, governments and private companies. The groups then help recruit overseas scientists and promote technology transfer to China.<sup>203</sup> Some of them are also tasked with building

databases on overseas scientists.<sup>204</sup> The role of the united front system in technology transfer will be detailed in a forthcoming report by the ASPI International Cyber Policy Centre.

Exemplifying the united front system's involvement in technology-transfer efforts, the UFWD's Western Returned Scholars Association (WRSA, 欧美同学会) runs the official association for participants in the Thousand Talents Plan (千人计划专家联谊会), which is a flagship CCP talent recruitment program for foreign scientists.<sup>205</sup> China's Minister of Science and Technology from 2007 to 2018 was also a senior united front official and chair of the Zhi Gong Party (致公党), which is a minor party supervised by the UFWD that draws its membership from Chinese who have returned from abroad.<sup>206</sup>

The party and country respect the choices of overseas students. If you return to China to work, we will open our arms to warmly welcome you. If you stay abroad, we will support you to serve the country through various means. Everyone must remember: no matter where you are, you are sons and daughters of China.

—Xi Jinping, in his speech to the Western Returned Scholars Association, 2013

Some united-front-linked overseas professional associations have been implicated in economic espionage. For example, Yang Chunlai (杨春来), a programmer at a US mercantile exchange company, was convicted in 2015 of trade secret theft after stealing source code to set up a business in China. Yang had been president of the USA Association of Chinese Scientists and Engineers, which frequently meets with united front officials, and served on an advisory committee to the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office.<sup>207</sup>

In 2006, Yang visited Beijing for a 'young overseas Chinese leaders' united front training course.<sup>208</sup> During the course, he said that his employer would never outsource work on its proprietary source code, but that 'everyone is still looking for a suitable entrepreneurial opportunity to return to China.' Three years after the training course, an opportunity may have presented itself when he met an investment and talent recruitment delegation from a Chinese county government. The source code he later stole, some of which he sent to the county government, was meant to help grow the business he established in the county's free trade zone.<sup>209</sup>

More than a dozen groups in Australia are involved in technology transfer and talent recruitment work for the Chinese Government.<sup>210</sup> For example, the Federation of Chinese Scholars in Australia (全澳华人专家学者联合会) was established in 2004 to promote scientific exchange between Australia and China. Its organising meeting was held in the PRC Embassy's Education Office. Speaking at its founding, the Chinese Ambassador expressed her hope that its 'experts and scholars would be able to transfer advanced technology achievements to China.'<sup>211</sup> The federation and many of its members are associated with united front system organs, such as the WRSA.<sup>212</sup> Its hundreds of members include several senior university officials and professors, most of whom have joined Chinese government talent recruitment programs.



## Data collection

United front work is supported by the united front system's growing use of information technology. United front groups can build databases that may support the CCP's political influence and technology-transfer efforts. For example, the Melbourne Huaxing Arts Group (墨尔本华兴艺术团) writes biannual reports back to the UFWD, keeps a database of political figures, public figures, and community groups, and has internal 'secrecy regulations'.<sup>213</sup> One part of the united front system even claims to hold data on 2.2 million ethnic Chinese scientists abroad.<sup>214</sup> The Chinese Government has also provided overseas united front groups with lists of possible members, such as Chinese PhD students in America who have the same home town, to help their expansion.<sup>215</sup>

United front agencies are encouraged to take advantage of the internet and big data in their work.<sup>216</sup> In November 2019, the UFWD partnered with the Central Cyberspace Administration to hold the first-ever meeting for united front work on 'online figures' such as social media influencers and live-streamers.<sup>217</sup>

## Think tanks

The UFWD seeks to engage with foreign think tanks through the WRSA, which is the primary united front group for Chinese scientists and scholars who have lived abroad. The association's secretary-general is a UFWD official, and it's described as a 'united front system work unit'.<sup>218</sup>

The association is active in both influence and technology-transfer efforts. It holds international think tank forums while also playing a key role in the Thousand Talents Plan—a CCP recruitment scheme for overseas scientists that's been linked to economic espionage.<sup>219</sup>

One of the WRSA's most successful activities has been the establishment of the Center for China and Globalization (CCG, 中国与全球化智库), which claims to be an independent think tank.<sup>220</sup> The centre is headed by Wang Huiyao (王辉耀), a prominent international commentator who is also an adviser to the UFWD, a member of several united front groups and an important figure in the development of China's talent recruitment strategy.<sup>221</sup>

Wang's united front links first attracted widespread attention when he was scheduled to speak at a May 2018 Wilson Center panel on CCP influence. The event's description didn't mention his position in the united front system and claimed that discussions on CCP influence were 'often poorly defined, exaggerated, and abused.'<sup>222</sup> After Senator Marco Rubio wrote a letter to the Wilson Center asking it to disclose Wang's united front links, Wang pulled out of the panel.<sup>223</sup>

But, since then, several Australian politicians have been taken to visit the CCG. In both 2018 and 2019, Australian NGO China Matters took several Australian politicians on trips to China, where they met with people from the centre.<sup>224</sup> Australia's then shadow treasurer repeated the CCG's claim of being China's largest independent think tank in a press release about the trip.<sup>225</sup> On one of these trips, participants were also taken to meet the assistant president of the MSS's University of International Relations.<sup>226</sup> In 2019, Australia's Trade Minister also gave a speech at the think tank.<sup>227</sup>

Aside from using the WRSA to engage with think tanks and scholars, united front figures have established and funded overseas think tanks. Thai united front figure Dhanin Chearavanont (谢国民), who is regularly given the seat of honour at major united front events, established Georgetown University's Initiative for US–China Dialogue on Global Issues.<sup>228</sup> A foundation run by Tung Chee-hwa (董建华), a vice chair of the CPPCC and former chief executive of Hong Kong, has funded research at several prominent American think tanks, including the Brookings Institution and the Center for Strategic and International Studies.<sup>229</sup> The University of Texas turned down funding from the foundation after commentators highlighted Tung's united front links.<sup>230</sup>

## Chinese students and scholars associations

Overseas Chinese students, as well as returnees from abroad, have long been a target of united front work. This was reiterated in 2015 when Xi Jinping designated them a 'new focus of united front work'.<sup>231</sup> These efforts seek to maintain the CCP's influence over Chinese students even when they are overseas and ensure that some can be mobilised when needed.

Chinese students and scholars associations (CSSAs) are the primary platform for united front work on overseas students. Most CSSAs operate under the guidance of Chinese embassies and consulates.<sup>232</sup> A 2013 *People's Daily* article describes Australian CSSAs as 'completing their missions ... under the direct guidance of the Embassy's Education Office'.<sup>233</sup> Globally, they have become the dominant bodies claiming to represent Chinese students at universities. At the same time as they provide useful services to students, CSSA executives have also been found reporting on dissident students, organising rallies and promotional events in coordination with the Chinese Government and its talent recruitment programs, and enforcing censorship.<sup>234</sup>

CSSAs primarily interact with Chinese Ministry of Education officials, but there's evidence that this is a form of united front work carried out by the Ministry of Education. For example, Korea University's CSSA claims on its website that the UFWD is responsible for 'overall guidance on overseas student associations'.<sup>235</sup> This is supported by a 2013 statement made by China's Ambassador to Australia, who urged 'outstanding CSSA cadres' to study Xi Jinping's remarks on the 100th anniversary of the founding of the UFWD-run WRSA.<sup>236</sup> A UFWD deputy bureau chief was posted as the education attaché in Chicago between 2013 and 2016, indicating substantial overlap between the work of Chinese education officials abroad and UFWD cadres.<sup>237</sup> In 2011, the UFWD led a delegation of Ministry of Education and university officials to the UK to study the establishment of associations for Chinese students, meeting with the chairman of the CSSA-UK.<sup>238</sup> The CSSA-UK, a peak body for Chinese students in the UK, is a member organisation of the WRSA.<sup>239</sup>



# Recommendations

Responses to united front work must engage governments, civil society and ethnic Chinese communities. They should seek to couple punitive measures for agents of interference with a positive agenda of support for and engagement with communities affected by united front work. Effective efforts to counter foreign interference are essential to protect genuine participation in politics by ethnic Chinese citizens. Counter-interference work can complement engagement with the PRC when carried out properly by helping to ensure that it aligns with national interests and isn't used as a platform for interference.

**This report recommends that governments pursue the following measures.**

## **1. Recognise and understand the problem**

- Carry out detailed studies of united front work across the country as well as in specific sectors or regions.
- Develop analytical capacity in government and the private sector for tracking and responding to foreign interference.

## **2. Develop high-level guidance and policy on countering foreign interference, issuing statements, policy documents and funding to establish it as a priority across relevant parts of the bureaucracy**

## **3. Raise awareness of united front work and foreign interference**

- Effectively implement transparency-building measures such as the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme.
- Political leaders should improve how they frame efforts to counter foreign interference, making clear that they are not targeting minority communities, and seek to publicly attribute major cases of foreign interference.
- Intelligence agencies should produce regular case studies and public reports on political interference threats, naming and describing the activities of major actors.
- Intelligence agencies should increase their outreach to influential figures, such as retired politicians.
- Expand intergovernmental channels for discussing foreign interference.

## **4. Ensure that legislation, resourcing and political will exist to build transparency and prosecute agents of interference**

- Existing laws and policies on espionage, foreign agents, external employment, conflicts of interest and foreign interference must be enforced.
- Laws that introduce criminal offences for foreign interference and seek to expand transparency, such as registers of foreign agents, should be introduced and refined.
- Ban foreign political donations where they are currently permitted.
- Introduce real-time reporting of political donations.

- Agencies responsible for investigating and prosecuting cases of interference must be sufficiently resourced.
- Ban accepting support from or providing material support to foreign interference agencies (in addition to intelligence and security agencies).
- Australia should reform its defamation laws, such as by introducing a national security defence.
- The Australian Public Service should introduce and enforce a unified conflict of interest and external employment policy.

## **5. Protect those exposing interference**

- Police should be trained to handle and respond to politically motivated stalking and harassment.
- Establish and promote reporting mechanisms for foreign interference.

## **6. Engage with universities to develop responses to related issues, such as monitoring and mobilisation by Chinese Government-backed student associations, technology transfer, economic coercion and censorship**

## **7. Support and engage Chinese diaspora communities**

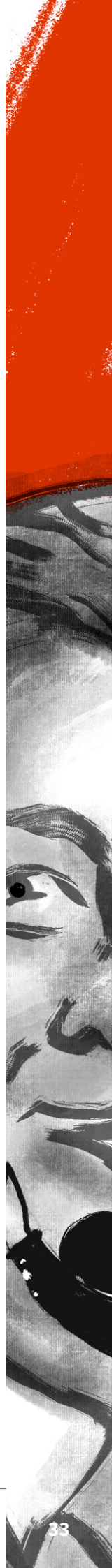
- Politicians and public officials should seek to engage with independent Chinese community groups and avoid legitimising united front groups and figures.
- Politicians and public officials should ensure that they use precise language that distinguishes between ethnic Chinese communities, Chinese citizens and the Chinese Communist Party, as explained in John Fitzgerald's report for ASPI's International Cyber Policy Centre, *Mind your tongue*.<sup>240</sup>
- Support new and independent Chinese community groups.
  - Emerging independent Chinese civil society groups must be priorities for protection from interference.
- Security, migration and homeland affairs agencies should hold workshops and produce targeted, multilingual informational materials on interference.
- Support independent Chinese-language media.
  - Ensure the independence of government Chinese-language media, such as Australia's SBS Mandarin.
  - Award grants to independent Chinese-language media.
  - Place government notices in independent Chinese-language media outlets as a way to provide advertising funding to them.
  - Pay for local outlets to have the right to republish articles from independent Chinese-language media outlets in Hong Kong or Taiwan.
  - Establish scholarships for Chinese students to study journalism.
- Explore ways to ensure freedom of speech and freedom from surveillance on WeChat, including through legislation.

## **8. Build expertise on China, Chinese people, the CCP and foreign interference**

- Commission and sponsor research on foreign interference and the CCP.
- Fund research institutions to establish courses and workshops on foreign interference and the CCP.
- Invest in greater Chinese-language training in schools, universities and government.

## **9. Deny visas for or expel agents of foreign interference**

- Visa applications by united front system officials and united front figures should be approached with a presumption of denial.
- Foreign nationals, including diplomats, shown to have been involved in foreign interference should be expelled.



# Appendix 1: Leaders of the United Front Work Department

Name	Image	Responsibilities	Biographical information
You Quan (尤权)		Member of the Central Secretariat and UFWD minister (2017 – present); probably deputy head of the Central United Front Work Leading Small Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Born in Hebei Province in January 1954</li> <li>Party Secretary of Fujian Province (2012–2017)</li> <li>Deputy secretary-general of the State Council (2008–2012)</li> <li>Chairman of the State Electricity Regulatory Commission (2006–2008)</li> </ul>
Ba Te'er (巴特尔)		UFWD deputy minister; vice chairman of the CPPCC; director of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission (2016 – present); member of the Central Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Born in Liaoning Province in 1955</li> <li>Ethnic Mongolian</li> <li>Deputy Party Secretary of Inner Mongolia (2009–2016)</li> </ul>
Zhang Yijiong (张裔炯)		UFWD senior deputy minister (2012 – present), overseeing the day-to-day operation of the department; member of the Central Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Born in Shanghai in 1955</li> <li>Worked in Qinghai Province from 1972 to 2006</li> <li>Deputy Party Secretary of Tibet (2006–2010)</li> <li>Secretary of the Political and Legal Affairs Commission of Tibet (2010)</li> </ul>
Xu Yousheng (许又声)		UFWD deputy minister; director of the State Council Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (2018 – present); member of the Central Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Born in Fujian Province in 1957</li> <li>Apart from a period in the Party Committee of Hunan Province (2012–2017), has worked mostly in the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office since 1982</li> </ul>
Xu Lejiang (徐乐江)		UFWD deputy minister; party secretary and senior deputy chairman of the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce (2017 – present); member of the Central Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Born in Shandong Province in 1959</li> <li>Worked in China Baowu Steel Group, one of the world's largest steel manufacturers from 1982 to 2016; chairman and party secretary from 2014 to 2016</li> <li>Ministry of Industry and Information Technology vice minister (2016–2017)</li> </ul>
Wang Zuo'an (王作安)		UFWD deputy minister (2018 – present); director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Born in Jiangsu Province in 1958</li> <li>UFWD policy researcher (1983–1987)</li> <li>State Administration for Religious Affairs official (1987–present)</li> <li>Author of China's religious issues and policies (中国的宗教问题和宗教政策) (2002)</li> </ul>



Name	Image	Responsibilities	Biographical information
Tan Tianxing (谭天星)		UFWD deputy minister (2018 – present), responsible for international united front work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Born in Hunan Province in 1963</li> <li>Worked in the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office and the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese from 1991 to 2018</li> <li>Attaché at the Chinese Embassy in Washington DC (1998–2002)</li> <li>PhD in history from Peking University (1991)</li> <li>Author of Reflections on history (历史的思考) (2015)</li> </ul>
Shi Jun (侍俊)		UFWD deputy minister (2018 – present); director of the Office of the Central Coordinating Small Group on Xinjiang Work (中央新疆工作协调小组).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Born in Jiangsu Province in 1962</li> <li>Worked in Sichuan Province from 1978 to 2016</li> <li>Party Secretary of Ngaba County (2007–2012); oversaw a crackdown on Tibetan Buddhism that led to a wave of self-immolations</li> <li>Sichuan Province Public Security Bureau chief (2013–2015)</li> <li>Central Political and Legal Commission deputy secretary-general (2016–2017)</li> <li>Ministry of Public Security vice minister (2017–2018)</li> </ul>
Zhou Xiaoying (周小莹)		Central Commission for Discipline Inspection representative in the UFWD (2018 – present); member of the Central Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Born in Yunnan Province in 1960</li> <li>Worked in Qinghai Province (1975–2008)</li> <li>Central Commission for Discipline Inspection representative in the State Ethnic Affairs Commission (2016–2018)</li> </ul>
Zou Xiaodong (邹晓东)		UFWD vice minister (2018 – present); National People's Congress delegate; responsible for united front work on intellectuals, scientists and universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Born in Shandong Province in 1967</li> <li>Worked and studied at Zhejiang University (1984–2018), apart from a period as deputy director of the Zhejiang Provincial Organisation Department (2016–2017)</li> <li>Party Secretary of Zhejiang University (2017–2018)</li> </ul>

Sources: All information and images taken from the UFWD's website, [online](#) or Joske, *The Central United Front Work Leading Small Group: institutionalising united front work*, Sinopsis, 23 July 2019, [online](#).

## Appendix 2: National-level social organisations run by the UFWD or its subordinate agencies

The Ministry of Civil Affairs' database of officially registered social organisations recorded the groups listed here in August 2019.<sup>241</sup> These groups claim to be NGOs but are registered under various united front agencies.

On 11 August 2019, in addition to the organisations listed here, the Ministry of Civil Affairs database also recorded 5,432 organisations registered to local religious affairs bureaus, 3,089 registered to local UFWDs, 324 registered to local returned overseas Chinese federations (归国华侨联合会) and 288 registered to local overseas Chinese affairs offices (侨务办公室).

### Registered under the United Front Work Department

- China Warmth Project Foundation (中华同心温暖工程基金会)
- Elion Green Foundation (亿利公益基金会)
- Oceanwide Foundation (泛海公益基金会)
- China Overseas Study Talent Development Foundation (中国留学人才发展基金会)
- Across the Strait Taiwanese Exchange Association (两岸台胞民间交流促进会)
- China Foundation for Guangcai Program (中国光彩事业基金会)
- China Glory Society (中国光彩事业促进会)
- China Association for Preservation and Development of Tibetan Culture (中国西藏文化保护与发展协会)
- China Sun Yat-sen Cultural Exchange Association (中华中山文化交流协会)
- China Civil Chamber of Commerce (中国民间商会)
- Wu Zuoren International Foundation of Fine Arts (吴作人国际美术基金会)
- China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification (中国和平统一促进会)
- Alumni Association of the Huangpu Military Academy (黄埔军校同学会)
- China Overseas Friendship Association (中华海外联谊会)
- China Association of Zen Tea (中国茶禅学会)
- China Research Association of the 1911 Revolution (中国辛亥革命研究会)
- Chinese Private Economy Research Association (中国民营经济研究会)
- Chou Pei-yuan Foundation (周培源基金会)
- China United Front Theory Research Association (中国统一战线理论研究会)
- Taiwan Scholar Association (台湾同学会)
- Western Returned Scholars Association / Overseas-educated Scholars Association of China (欧美同学会/中国留学人员联谊会)
- China Siyuan Foundation for Poverty Alleviation (中华思源工程扶贫基金会)

The UFWD also runs the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce (中华全国工商业联合会), the All-China Federation of Taiwan Compatriots (中华全国台湾同胞联谊会), the China Soong Ching Ling Foundation (中国宋庆龄基金会) and the China Vocational Education Association (中华职业教育社); however, these are referred to as ‘united front system work units’ and are not social organisations registered under the Ministry of Civil Affairs.<sup>242</sup>

### **Registered under the State Administration for Religious Affairs**

- Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation (慈济慈善事业基金会)
- China Religious Culture Communication Association (中华宗教文化交流协会)
- Buddhist Association of China (中国佛教协会)
- Bishops Conference of the Catholic Church in China (中国天主教主教团)
- National Committee of Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China (中国基督教三自爱国运动委员会)
- China Christian Council (中国基督教协会)
- China Islamic Association (中国伊斯兰教协会)
- Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association (中国天主教爱国会)
- Taoist Association of China (中国道教协会)
- Young Men’s Christian Association of China (中华基督教青年会全国协会)
- Young Women’s Christian Association of China (中华基督教女青年会全国协会)

### **Registered under the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce**

- China Cultural Chamber of Commerce for the Private Sector (中国民营文化产业商会)
- National Federation of Industry and Agriculture Industry Chamber of Commerce (全联农业产业商会)
- China Chamber of Commerce for Metallurgical Enterprises (全联冶金商会)
- China Environment Service Industry Association (全联环境服务业商会)
- China Real Estate Chamber of Commerce (全联房地产商会)
- China Education Investors Chamber of Commerce (全联民办教育出资者商会)
- China International Chamber of Commerce for the Private Sector (中国民营经济国际合作商会)
- China Science and Technology Equipment Industry Chamber of Commerce (全联科技装备业商会)
- China Mergers and Acquisitions Association (全联并购公会)
- Chamber of Folk Culture Artefacts and Artworks (全联民间文物艺术品商会)
- China Book Trade Chamber of Commerce (全联书业商会)
- China New Energy Chamber of Commerce (全联新能源商会)
- China Chamber of Tourism (全联旅游业商会)
- China Urban Infrastructure Chamber of Commerce (全联城市基础设施商会)
- China–Africa Business Council (中非民间商会)

## Registered under the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference

- Silk Road Planning Research Center (丝路规划研究中心)
- China Institute of Theory on the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (中国人民政协理论研究会)
- China Economic and Social Council (中国经济社会理事会)
- China Committee on Religion and Peace (中国宗教界和平委员会)

## Registered under the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office

- China Overseas Exchange Association (中国海外交流协会)—now merged with China Overseas Friendship Association
- China World Association for Chinese Literatures (中国世界华文文学学会)
- Alumni Association of Huaqiao University (华侨大学校友会)
- Heren Foundation (河仁慈善基金会)
- China Language Education Foundation (中国华文教育基金会)

## Registered under the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese

- Overseas Chinese History Society of China (中国华侨历史学会)
- Jinlongyu Charity Foundation (金龙鱼慈善公益基金会)
- Silijiren Foundation (思利及人公益基金会)
- Huang Yicong Charity Foundation (黄奕聪慈善基金会)
- China Federation of Overseas Chinese Entrepreneurs (中国侨商联合会)
- Overseas Chinese Charity Foundation of China (中国华侨公益基金会)
- Overseas Chinese Literature and Art Association (中国华侨文学艺术家协会)
- China Society of Overseas Chinese Photographers (中国华侨摄影学会)
- China Association for International Cultural Exchanges with Overseas Chinese (中国华侨国际文化交流促进会)

## Registered under the State Ethnic Affairs Commission

- Alumni Association of the High School Affiliated to Minzu University of China (中央民族大学附中校友会)
- Minzu University of China Alumni Association (中央民族大学校友会)
- Chinese Association for Mongolian Studies (中国蒙古学学会)
- China Ethnic Medicine Association (中国民族医药协会)
- China Promoting Minority Culture & Art Association (中国少数民族文化艺术促进会)
- Nationalities Unity and Progress Association of China (中华民族团结进步协会)
- National Architecture Institute of China (中国民族建筑研究会)
- Association for Promotion of West China Research and Development (中国西部研究与发展促进会)
- China Ethnic Minorities' Association for External Exchanges (中国少数民族对外交流协会)
- Chinese Association for Ethnic Policy (中国民族政策研究会)



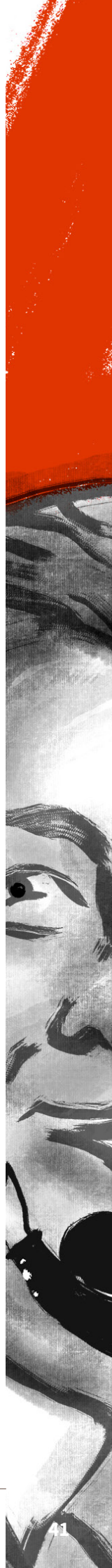
- Korean-Chinese Scientists and Engineers Association (中国朝鲜族科技工作者协会 / 중국조선족과학기술자협회)
- China Korean Language Society (中国朝鲜语学会)
- Taiwanese Ethnic Minorities Research Association (台湾少数民族研究会)
- China Association for Preservation of Ethnic Minorities' Relics (中国少数民族文物保护协会)
- China Korean Minority History Association (中国朝鲜民族史学会)
- Academic Society of the History of Philosophical and Social Ideas in Chinese Minorities (中国少数民族哲学及社会思想史学会)
- China Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (中国人类学民族学研究会)
- China Mongolian Studies Association (中国蒙古语文学会)
- Economic Promotion Association of Longhai & Lanxin Railway (陇海兰新经济促进会)
- Research Association of Bilingual Education for Chinese Minorities (中国少数民族双语教学研究会)
- China Association of Ethnic Economy (中国少数民族经济研究会)



# Notes

- 1 In 2019, I studied and discussed the concept of the united front system together with Peter Mattis, then a visiting fellow at ASPJ, and am deeply indebted to him for his analysis and insight on this issue.
- 2 The *Australian Security Intelligence Organisation Act 1979* ([online](#)) defines acts of foreign interference as activities taken on behalf of or in collaboration with a foreign power that involve a threat to any person or are clandestine or deceptive and carried out for intelligence purposes, for influencing government or political processes, or are otherwise detrimental to Australia's interests.
- 3 Xi Jinping, 'Secure a decisive victory in building a moderately prosperous society in all respects and strive for the great success of socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era', speech delivered at the 19th National Congress of the CCP, 18 October 2017, [online](#); See, for example, a former head of the CCP International Liaison Department's comparison between domestic united front work and the CCP's interactions with political parties around the world, discussed in Martin Hala, Jichang Lulu, *The CCP's model of social control goes global*, Sinopsis, 20 December 2018, [online](#). Julia Bowie and Nathanael Callan of the Center for Advanced China Research have also argued that China is offering the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), the primary platform for the United Front, as a political model for other countries. See Julia Bowie, Nathanael Callan, *China's 'new type of party system': a 'multiparty' system for foreign consumption*, Center for Advanced China Research, 21 August 2018, [online](#).
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- 10 The Cultural Revolution may have been the only extended period in which the party's united front work largely stopped.
- 11 '中共中央印发《深化党和国家机构改革方案》' [The CCP Central Committee issues 'plan for deepening the party and state's institutional reform'], *Xinhua*.
- 12 '关于“民主的联合战线”的议决案' [About the 'democratic united front' decision], 中国共产党历次全国代表大会数据库 [Database of the CCP's congresses], n.d., [online](#).
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- 14 China's eight minor parties were formed in the years before 1949, but are all socialist and have 'accepted the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party'. For a detailed study of these parties and the United Front, see Gerry Groot's *Managing transitions*, 2004. The eight minor parties are the Jiusan Society, the China Democratic League, the China National Democratic Construction Association, the China Association for Promoting Democracy, the Chinese Peasants' and Workers' Democratic Party, the Revolutionary Committee of the Chinese Kuomintang, the China Zhi Gong Party, and the Taiwan Democratic Self-Government League. These parties have different constituencies; for example, the China Zhi Gong Party was established in San Francisco as an alliance of overseas secret societies, and its members are overseas and returned overseas Chinese. See '中国共产党领导的多党合作是我国政治制度的一个特点和优点' [Our country's political system of multiparty cooperation under the CCP's leadership is a special characteristic and advantage], 中央统战部网站[Central United Front Work Department], 8 January 2009, [online](#); '中国共产党领导的多党合作和政治协商制度' [The system of political consultation and multiparty cooperation under the leadership of the CCP], 中国政府网综合 [PRC Government Online], 27 July 2017, [online](#).
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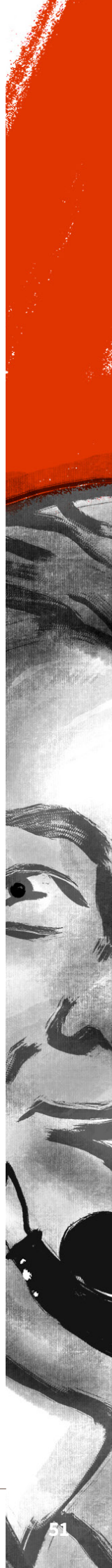
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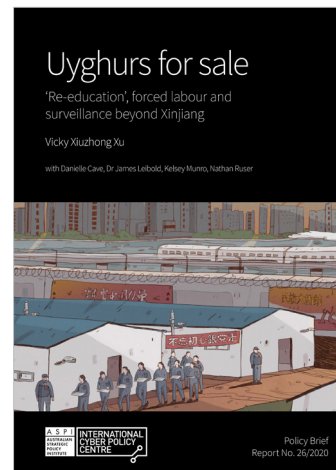
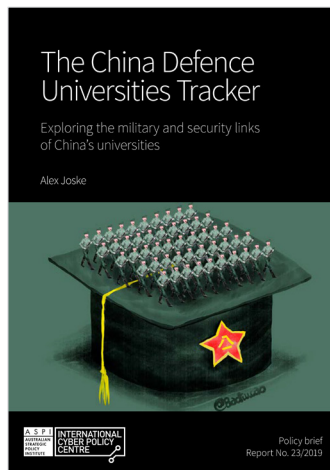
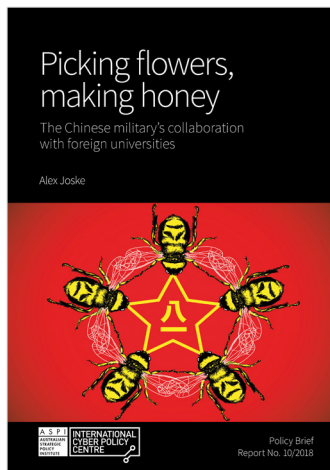
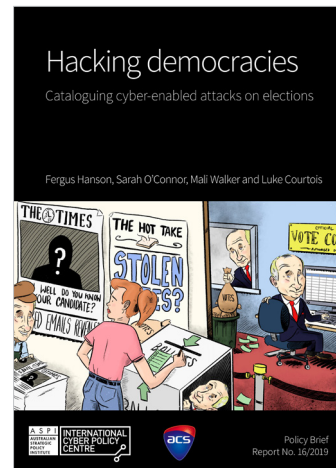
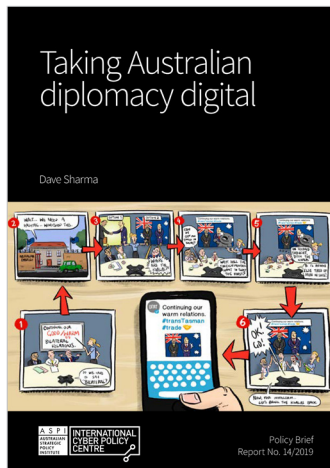
## Acronyms and abbreviations

ACRI	Australia–China Relations Institute
ACPPRC	Australian Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China
BC Project	British Chinese Project
CCG	Center for China and Globalization
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CGNPC	China General Nuclear Power Company
CPPCC	Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference
CSSAs	Chinese students and scholars associations
MSS	Ministry of State Security
NGO	non-government organisation
PLA	People’s Liberation Army
PRC	People’s Republic of China
UFWD	United Front Work Department
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
WRSA	Western Returned Scholars Association





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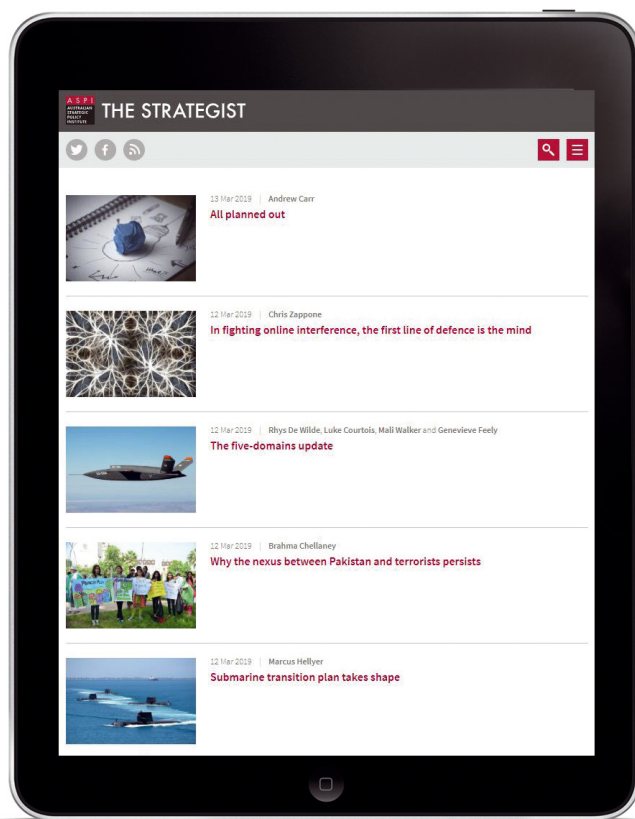


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