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China's influence in Australia and New Zealand: making the democratic world safe for dictatorship

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Located on the peripheries of both the “Western world” and China’s sphere of influence in Asia, Australia and New Zealand have been primary targets for the united front operations of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) over the past four decades. Seeing peaceful evolution toward liberal democracy as an existential threat, the CCP aims to weaken criticisms of its rule and shape political discourse about and thus policy toward China in the democratic world.

Australia and New Zealand have presented relatively soft targets for such infiltration for decades. First, the CCP has taken advantage of the open, multicultural, democratic environment in these states to incorporate its own anti-democratic influence into the two countries’ media and political systems. Second, the two countries’ national pride in maintaining an independent foreign policy has been exploited by the CCP to weaken their friendship with the United States in particular and the world democratic alliance in general. And third, the governments of these two countries have adopted pseudo-pragmatic policies to the CCP’s accommodate political activities on their soil, enabling the CCP-state to cultivate substantial influence on the Chinese diaspora, academia and politics.

As a result, China has created extensive networks of local pro-China collaborators that have effectively silenced criticism against its autocratic dictatorship among overseas Chinese communities, while infiltrated business, media, academia, and government in both Australia and New Zealand. Yet the seeming success of these operations has produced in recent years a growing counter-mobilization. It remains to be seen whether these two countries can successfully meet the challenges inherent in engaging with the post-totalitarian CCP regime (Linz & Stepan, 1996; Feng, 2008),¹ which seeks to perpetuate its control not only over politics at home, but also over narratives about China abroad.

19.1. China's influence in Australia and New Zealand: direct and indirect influence mechanisms

Australia and New Zealand both established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China in December of 1972. Since that moment, China's relations with these two Oceanic powers have shifted considerably as the PRC has transformed from a politically and economically marginal dictatorship to an economic superpower that nevertheless still clings to its dictatorial ways. Whereas optimists once assumed that economic development would fundamentally change China's political system, the Chinese Communist Party has in fact very efficiently harnessed its economic dynamism to serve continued political control. The assumed tensions between economic openness and political closure have instead been felt primarily in democratic countries developing close trade relations with China. Perhaps nowhere in the Western world are these tensions more apparent than in Australia and New Zealand.

Why, though, would Australia and New Zealand be of interest to the Chinese Communist Party? Australia hosts a wealth of strategic resources, such as iron ore and natural gas, imperative for China's development (Brady 2017). As China's economic power has continued to expand, the PRC has become Australia's number one trading partner, with two-way trade totalling over \$180 billion in 2017 (Needham 2018). New Zealand's relatively cheap arable land and vibrant dairy industry appeal to an overpopulated China facing persistent concerns about safety in its dairy industry. China has thus also become New Zealand's largest trading partner, with trade increasing three-fold in the past decade, coming to \$26.1 billion dollars in two-way trade in 2018 (Stats NZ 2018).

These seemingly win-win mutually beneficial economic relationships, however, have also raised a number of increasingly pressing questions about China's direct and indirect political influences. Both Australia and New Zealand are situated on the Southern edge of the Pacific: a nexus for FONOP patrols in response to China's growing aggression in the South China Sea. The northern Australian city of Darwin, for example, has served as a base for US operations in the region. In 2015, however, the Northern Territories government leased the strategically important Port of Darwin to Landbridge, a nominally private company with close links to the Chinese state, raising serious questions about the impact of PRC trade on national security (Smee and Walsh 2016).

Both countries are also members of the Five Eyes alliance, wherein the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand share intelligence with one another. As the debate about PRC espionage has intensified in recent years, fractures in this long-standing alliance have begun to show. In 2018, analyst Peter Mattis raised questions about whether New Zealand should continue to be included in the alliance, due to the expansion of PRC influence in the country's political system (discussed in more detail below)(Roy 2018a).

Such developments signal the real risks of the China model, which has transferred its tenacious domestic formula of economic incentives and political controls onto the international stage with considerable success. Yet over the past three years, the CCP's political interference activities in the "peripheral sovereign states" of Australia and New Zealand have drawn increasing attention, with one shocking revelation after another emerging since 2017 (Hamilton, 2018; Power and Influence, 2017; Brady, 2017). Clive Hamilton provided a succinct summary of these mounting revelations as possible when he asserted at the start of his controversial book *Silent Invasion* that "Australian institutions – from our schools, universities and professional associations to our media; from industries like mining, agriculture and tourism to strategic assets like ports and electricity grids; from our local councils and state governments to our political parties in Canberra – are being penetrated and shaped by a complex system of influence and control overseen by agencies serving the Chinese Communist Party" (Hamilton, 2018, p.3). The real question raised by these revelations is whether liberal democracies like Australia and New Zealand defend their political values while still developing increasingly close economic partnerships with an increasingly aggressive dictatorship?

In three sections below, we first examine China's interference in Australia and New Zealand focused on three primary targets: the Chinese diaspora, the higher education sector, and the political system. Having established a basic summary of the nature of these interference operations, we will conclude by describing how said interference has generated a counter-mobilization, putting Australia and New Zealand on the front lines of the global debate on China's interference in open societies.

19.1.1. Targeting the diaspora

A Chinese-language newspaper engaged in open and critical reporting on contemporary Chinese matters found its private business advertisers placed under unprecedented state pressures. One after another, advertisers were confronted by agents of the Chinese government, and gradually, under government pressure, these private advertisers backed out from further advertising. In one case, a migration agency that had been placing ads in the newspaper for years was forced to cease advertising after China's state security essentially camped out in the agency's Beijing office and prevented its employees from doing any work.

Such deployment of commercial pressures on papers are familiar tactics in the Greater China Region. Yet this newspaper is not based in China, nor even in Hong Kong- through such threats, Beijing was in fact able to extend its suppression of independent media all of the way to Sydney, Australia (Chan, 2018).

China's most determined and successful infiltration efforts have been focused on exerting control over the Chinese diaspora by bringing Chinese language media, Chinese community organizations, Chinese community leaders, and local politicians of Chinese heritage into its sphere of influence (Feng, 2017). According to the latest census in 2016, there were more than 1.2 million ethnic Chinese in Australia, accounting for 3.9% of the entire population. In the census in New Zealand in 2013, the size of the Chinese New Zealander population stood at approximately 171 thousand, accounting for 3.6% of the entire population. Well aware of the power of democracy, the CCP-state aims to ensure that the majority of overseas Chinese are its active or passive supporters and that those who promote liberal values and democratisation of China are effectively isolated: a second front in the CCP's seemingly limitless state security spending, which from 2011 onward has in fact exceeded reported military spending (Zenz, 2018; Buckley, 2011). The CCP's united front work has

been so successful that the ideological orientation and political identity of the majority of Chinese migrants since the 1980s have been transformed from enthusiasm for democracy to enthusiasm for a race-based pan-Chinese nationalism (Feng, 2011).

Toward this ambitious goal of establishing “discursive power” (*huayuquan*), or rather control, in the world, the CCP has extended its direct and indirect media controls to dominate local Chinese media in Australia and New Zealand. Through its Grand External Propaganda Program (*dawaixuan*), the CCP has provided billions of dollars (at least 45 billion yuan, or roughly 6.6 billion USD) for major state media outlets to establish branches overseas and for connected businesspeople to set up pro-CCP media outlets (Ye, 2018; Radio Free Asia, 2015; Brady, 2015). In addition to such direct funding, the Chinese regime also uses indirect, although certainly no less blunt, means to control media through their advertising. The regime may offer or deny business opportunities in China for the owners of overseas media outlets; they may also exercise pressure to block advertisements by Chinese companies and community organisations in overseas Chinese media outlets that are perceived to be unfriendly.

Through coercion or favour, the Chinese authorities have thus created a financial structure and political imperatives for Chinese media outlets in Australia and New Zealand to “tell the China story well” on behalf of the party (Global Times, 2016). In terms of major Chinese language media outlets, including newspapers, television and radio, an insider at a pro-regime media outlet has estimated that over 90% of Chinese-language media in Australia are under CCP influence, especially keeping out any politically sensitive or unfavourable coverage of the CCP regime (Munro & Wen, 2016; Brady, 2017). To provide a concrete example of what this looks like for readers unfamiliar with these media, major sections of the *Australian New Express Daily* owned by Chau Chak Wing are copied directly from his *New Express Daily* and other newspapers in China, whose content is under the full control of PRC propaganda officials. Other major Chinese language Newspapers in Australia, such as *Fortune Weekly*, *Daily Chinese Herald*, *Australian Chinese Daily*, *Sing Tao Daily* and *Pacific Times*, which were previously independent, have all since the 2000s changed to accommodate CCP influence and pressures.

In New Zealand, Chinese-language media are also being rapidly incorporated into China’s system of media control. In 2002, the *New Zealand Chinese Herald*, a newspaper backed by the Chinese authorities, sued the *News Times Weekly*, a pro-democracy newspaper, for defamation after the latter

criticized the former for being too close to the CCP. The resulting endless legal fees eventually forced the *News Times Weekly* into bankruptcy in 2012 (Schmitz, 2018). In 2011, Auckland's only Chinese-language 24-hour radio station FM 90.6 was taken over by a subsidiary of PRC propaganda agency China Radio International.² And as debates about CCP interference heated up in New Zealand in 2018, in clear service to the party in disservice to the community, Chinese language media carried opinion pieces with inflammatory rhetoric reminiscent of the Cultural Revolution, including calling supporters of democratization in China “anti-Chinese sons of bitches” (Redden, 2018).

As media has fallen under the sway of the CCP, so too have community organizations: almost all Chinese community organisations in these two countries are in the hands of pro-CCP community leaders, except for tiny groups of Chinese democracy advocates, Falun Gong, Tibetans, Uighurs, and Taiwanese. Local branches of the Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China are the flagship of these Chinese community organisations identified by the CCP-state as “patriotic overseas Chinese organisations” engaged in united front work. This council also enlists the most active “patriotic overseas Chinese leaders” chosen by the CCP-state, holding positions of considerable influence simultaneously in both Australia and China.

William Chiu, the founding president of the ACPPRC for its first six terms from 2000 to 2014,³ also served as founding president of China Federation for Overseas Chinese Merchants, state patron of the NSW Branch of the Australia China Business Council, standing council member of the China Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China, and as a representative to the 10th, 11th and 12th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

Chiu's successor Huang Xiangmo, president of the ACPPRC from 2015 to 2017, also served as president of Australia-Guangdong Chamber of Commerce,⁴ president of the Australian Federation for Guangdong Associations (China News, 2014), standing council member of the China Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China (Yuhu Group, 2015), standing council member of the China Overseas Exchange Association (COEA, 2017), and as a member of the Jieyang City Standing Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (Fang Zhang Gui, 2009).

The fact that these figures have been appointed to positions of importance in local communities as well as within the CCP-state bureaucracy is clearly indicative of the problematic relationship between the Beijing regime

and ostensibly independent Chinese community groups overseas (which do not just purely coincidentally share the regime's perverse obsession with annexing Taiwan).

Perhaps the most remarkable achievement of the CCP united front operations in Australia and New Zealand is the increasingly prominent role played by regime linked migrants in national governments. The emergence in recent decades of successful politicians of Chinese heritage in these multicultural democracies has certainly been an encouraging trend that has the potential to remedy inadequate political participation among Chinese migrants (Feng, 2016). However, these encouraging developments have been given a malignant twist on account of China's intervention in local political processes.

Ernest Wong, for example, is an Australian politician of Hongkongese heritage with decades of service: first as a member of Burwood City Council for 15 years, and then as an Australian Labour Party member of the New South Wales Legislative Council from 2013 through 2019.⁵ Alongside these many distinguished positions in Australia's democratic system, Wong also served as an "honorary adviser" to ACPPRC, a CCP-linked organization openly dedicated to the annexation of a democratic polity by a dictatorship. Wong also encountered a scandal in 2017 for failing for years to disclose his directorship of the CCP-backed Federation of Australian Guangdong Community Ltd., which was set up to "promote collaboration between Guangdong-originating organisations in Australia and the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of Guangdong province" (McKenzie, Smith, & Hunter, 2018). Only when publicly questioned about his affiliation with these CCP-linked organizations did Wong disclose them, soon thereafter resigning both positions.

In New Zealand, the story of Yang Jian, a National Party member of New Zealand Parliament from 2011 to the present, reveals the challenges posed by Party-state influence (Jennings & Reid, 2017; Anderlini, 2017; BBC News, 2017). In 2011, Yang Jian was encouraged by National Party President Peter Goodfellow to become the country's second ethnically Chinese MP. Before leaving China, Yang had studied and taught at the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Foreign Language Institute at Luoyang, one of the PLA's two military intelligence agencies affiliated to the Third Department of the Joint Staff Headquarters of the PLA. This was not a casual coincidence: Yang was trained in, and subsequently worked as an instructor within, a central training platform for the CCP's intelligence services (Jennings & Reid, 2017). Since entering parliament in New Zealand, Yang has played a central role in shaping the New Zealand National government's China strategy. From 2014-2016, Yang Jian was

a member of the Parliamentary Select Committee for Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, and accompanied PM John Key and his successor PM Bill English on trips to China, as well as in meetings with senior Chinese leaders when they visited New Zealand. This role granted Yang privileged access to New Zealand's China policy briefing notes and positions.

The issue here, we must emphasize, is not the ethnicity of the involved politicians, but rather the multiple indications of their conflicted loyalties. These cases also remind us that CCP influence on the diaspora does not happen in a separate universe: rather, it provides foundations for building influence over society as a whole, a clear goal for the Party-state.

19.1.2. Domesticating academia

The Australia-China Relations Institute (ACRI) was established in 2014, with major start-up funding from the CCP-aligned property developer Huang Xiangmo. Huang reportedly personally chose a retired politician with no academic background to head the research institute. Through its seminar series, regular briefings, opinion pieces, annual reports, and commissioned papers, ACRI is openly devoted to promoting “an unabashedly positive and optimistic view of the Australia-China relationship” (O'Malley, Wen, and Koziol 2016). In 2015, the institute's head met with deputy director of the Propaganda Bureau Sun Zhijun to iron out an agreement on cooperation on media coverage. Then in 2016, Liu Qibao, the director of the Central Propaganda Department, attended a signing ceremony with the institute's director, in which the institute signed an agreement “with a party-led agency to work on the Propaganda Bureau's behalf” (Fitzgerald 2018).

Unsurprisingly, considering the blatantly politicized nature of the institute from its inception, one academic reviewing its output argues that “the quality of ACRI's research output is patchy at best, with far more examples of political advocacy than rigorous, independent research.” (Leibold, 2017) Such a finding would not be particularly surprising for any research institute in China today, in an era in which such official ideologies as Xi Jinping Thought and the Belt-Road Initiative are assumed to provide the answers to research projects before the research has even begun.

ACRI, however, is not a China-based research institute. It was established at the University of Technology Sydney, and remains there even after years of criticism and increasingly discomfiting revelations raising doubts about the independence of its analyses.

The relationship between the Beijing regime and global academia is, to say the least, complicated. On the one hand, the People's Republic of China is arguably the greatest enemy of academic freedom worldwide today. Although academic freedom in China has been tightly constrained since the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the rise to power of Xi Jinping and the promulgation of Document #9 dictating an exhaustive list of topics that are not to be discussed in the classroom has effectively made the suppression of academic freedom a state priority. On the other hand, China is clearly a market with which the global academic community wishes to engage. With newfound wealth, China is a major source of students for the Australian tertiary education sector, as well as a major academic market for joint ventures. Beijing is also becoming increasingly proactive in providing financial support to universities and researchers at a time when academia around the world is facing a series of unforgiving cuts. Unfortunately, these two sides of Beijing's relationship to academia cannot coexist completely independently of one another: as Beijing's wealth and thus influence in the academic sector grows, its determined hostility to academic freedom, and in particular its opposition to open and honest discussion of contemporary China, must have very real implications for academics in Australia.

No phenomenon embodies these contradictions more clearly than Confucius Institutes. Currently there are 14 Confucius Institutes in Australia and 3 in New Zealand. The institutes are joint ventures in partnership between Australian and Chinese universities, ultimately reporting to and overseen by the Office of Chinese Language Council International (Hanban), under the PRC Ministry of Education. Rather than providing stand-alone services like the Alliance Francaise or the Japan Society, Confucius Institutes as extensions of the CCP-state are integrated directly into host universities. The curricula of these Confucius Institutes vary notably, ranging from language and culture to business management and traditional Chinese medicine, but are invariably limited by China's ban on views that do not comply with its ideology. Beyond legitimizing fundamentally illegitimate academic restrictions, Confucius Institutes furthermore incentivize universities to act on Beijing's behalf in order to safeguard the funding provided by these programs. For example, when the Dalai Lama visited Sydney in 2013, a speech planned on the University of Sydney campus was instead held off-campus, and no university insignia were to be displayed onsite. Vice-chancellor Michael Spence claimed that the move was "in the best interests of researchers across the university," (Hamilton, 2018, p.216) leaving one to wonder how such censorship serves the interest of any

researcher. The establishment of a Confucius Institute on a university campus in democratic countries like Australia and New Zealand is in itself a compromise on values, lending legitimacy to China's state-controlled and taboo-laden vision of academia and welcoming such interference in our own universities to maintain a "healthy" and "positive" relationship with the Chinese government (Mattis, 2012; Fitzgerald, 2017; Kwok, 2018).

Such collaboration not only compromises fundamental values. As a recent ASPI research report shows, such collaboration can also empower rival states. Alex Joske's (2018) report "Picking flowers, making honey: the Chinese military's collaboration with foreign universities" for the Australian Strategic Policy Institute details how researchers affiliated with the PLA have collaborated on research overseas on such sensitive military technologies as hypersonic missiles and navigation technologies. Of all of the Five Eyes countries, Australia has hosted the highest level of PLA research collaboration per capita, bringing in dozens of PLA scientists to work on the latest developments in dual-use fields that have substantial military applications (Joske, 2018). Such research collaboration is not only problematic for empowering a military that fired on its own people in 1989; such collaboration furthermore risks providing technologies that could in the future be used against the democracies of the world in a war over Taiwan or freedom of navigation in the South China Sea. The openness of research institutes is re-deployed to the advantage of the politically closed and territorially expansionist system that the PLA protects.

Another pressing concern for academia is the proactive nature of the various Chinese consulates in monitoring and applying pressure on how China is discussed in Australian classrooms. The two authors of this paper know all too well from experience, as well as from discussions with colleagues, the degrees to which Chinese consular officials monitor, comment on, and complain about representations of China in the classroom. In 2017, under pressure from the Chinese consulate in Melbourne, Monash University suspended Aaron Wjeratne after a quiz question in his human resources class referred to the popular Chinese saying that government officials only tell the truth when they are "drunk or careless." (Hamilton, 2018) A student complained about the question on Wechat, leading consular officials to raise the issue with Monash's administration, who subsequently fired the lecturer for an admittedly imperfect yet certainly not career destroying quiz question. This outcome shows real power held by the consulate over the academic community. Unsurprisingly, this case led to a series of such incidents targeting lecturers for

being “politically incorrect” on China-related matters in 2017, some with considerably less disconcerting outcomes (Xu 2017). Yet regardless of whether this uncertain alliance of aggrieved nationalistic students seeking to maintain a thought bubble, sensationalist Chinese-language news outlets like Sydney Today feasting on the resulting outrage, and consular officials dedicated to controlling the narrative actually succeeds in removing lecturers from their positions, lecturers are already well aware that this is happening and may unsurprisingly shift their presentation of China related matters in order to avoid such pressures.

The result, then, is a situation that mirrors the complexity of life in China today: it is unclear whether it is indeed censorship that maintains the taboo on a number of topics, or rather an always already internalized self-censorship that makes people collaborators in their own oppression. Whichever is the case, while academic exchange provides an ideal avenue for opening minds and generating new ideas, many features of Australia’s academic exchange with China appear to be doing the opposite: creating institutional reliance on outside funding that is openly hostile to academic freedom, building collaborations that empower a rival state and military, and opening the independent academic world to intervention and control by the CCP-state linked media and consular officials, who should have no say in what is taught in Australian classrooms.

19.1.3. Political power grows out of deep pockets

A political leader appears alongside a Chinese citizen with extensive ties with the CCP-state during a press conference open exclusively to Chinese media. When asked about China’s militarization and occupation of the South China Sea, the politician responds, in a refrain that will be familiar to anyone versed in the language of Chinese officialdom, that “the Chinese integrity of its borders is a matter for China.”

Yet the politician involved is no Chinese government official. He is Sam Dastyari, a Senator from Australia’s Labour Party. He continues, “the role that Australia should be playing as a friend is to know that we see several thousand years of history, thousands of years of history, where it is and isn’t our place to be involved... and as a supporter of China, and a friend of China, the Australian Labour Party is playing an important role in maintaining that relationship. And the best way of maintaining that relationship is knowing when it is and isn’t our place to be involved.” (McDermott, 2017) Dastyari’s comments went against Australian national policy, as well as even his own party’s policy on the South

China Sea. Yet most seriously, they provided an unfounded aura of legitimacy for China's militarist actions in the South China Sea.

The most alarming cases of China's influence take place in elite politics, ranging from political donations and manipulation of elections to co-option of political leaders and cultivation of politicians. Major political parties in Australia have received generous donations from Chinese entities, which according to a recent study provided 79.3 percent of foreign donations to Australian political parties between 2000 and 2016 (Gomes, 2017). Some of these donations came from business figures linked to the CCP-state via community organisations affiliated with its United Front Work Department, such as Huang Xiangmo and Chau Chak Wing. These donations have pushed money politics into uncharted territory. Rather than aiming to advance their commercial profits, these donors have used their money and connections to promote the political objectives of the Chinese government, as can be seen in the Dastyari scandal described above.

Huang Xiangmo, the Chinese citizen and Australian permanent resident who stood next to Dastyari at that press conference, was a property developer serving as president of the Australian Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China (ACPPRC) from 2014 to 2017 and founding president of the Oceanic Alliance of the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification of China since 2016. These are premier front organisations directly under the United Front Work Department of the CCP Central Committee, working to increase the influence of China abroad and gather support for the Chinese government's political agenda. Huang has made political donations of two million Australian Dollars to the Liberal and Labour parties since 2012 (News, 2018). His relationship with Sam Dastyari, culminating in Dastyari's leaking confidential information that Huang's phone could be tapped, led to the former Labour senator's disgraceful downfall in September 2016 (Massola, 2016). Chau Chak-wing, an Australian citizen living in a vast luxury mansion in Guangzhou, is another super-rich property developer who has developed deep connections with the CCP-state and cultivated relationships with several Australian prime ministers through millions in donations to major political parties (Garnaut, 2009; Engelen, 2011; McKenzie & Baker, 2017).⁶ Chau has also aggressively used Australia's impractical defamation laws to silence discussion of his activities (Whitbourn 2019).

Similar stories in New Zealand about donations from Chinese entrepreneurs with close connections to the CCP-state are no less sensational, albeit on a slightly less massive scale. Steven Wong, a food producer and

president of the New Zealand Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China, and Che Weixing, deputy president of the Auckland Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China, are regular donors to New Zealand's major political parties (Brady, 2017; Jennings, 2017) Yikun Zhang, a property developer, ex-serviceman of the PLA and president of the Chao Shan General Association of New Zealand, even allegedly divided his NZ \$100,000 donation to the National Party into smaller payments to ensure that they would not have to be disclosed under New Zealand electoral law.⁷

The CCP-state has successfully nurtured and cultivated friends and supporters right up to the top echelon of the political class of the two countries. In both Australia and New Zealand, notable friends of the CCP-state include several retired prime ministers and ministers. Former Prime Minister Paul Keating has been appointed by the Chinese government to chair the International Council of the China Development Bank, and has become an eager apologist for the Party-state. He went so far as to state in 2017 that "Taking 600 million people out of poverty requires some means of central government and authority ... Or are we just hung up about the fact that some detainees don't get proper legal representation ... That government of theirs has been the best government in the world in the last thirty years. Full stop."⁸ On the other side of Australian politics, Andrew Robb, who served as trade minister for the Liberal-National Coalition government in 2013-2016, did all he could to facilitate a free trade agreement favourable to China and the controversial 99-year lease for the Port of Darwin to Landbridge, a Chinese company with close ties to the CCP-state. Right after his retirement Mr. Robb was named a consultant of Landbridge with a salary of nearly a million dollars a year, without obligating him to do anything (McKenzie & Massola, 2017). All of these senior ex-politicians and others have advocated policy positions preferred by China on issues such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and cooperation between Australian media and Chinese propaganda organs (Riordan, 2016; Xinhua Net, 2016). *Silent Invasion* identifies more than 40 former and current Australian politicians who Hamilton says are doing the bidding of China's government, many unwittingly. The CCP-state also recruits political leaders in New Zealand to serve its economic and political purposes, as detailed in Anne-Marie Brady's report *Magic Weapons*. (Brady, 2017).

Coming full circle, influence over the diaspora analysed in the first section of this paper can also be wielded in attempts to influence Australia and New Zealand's political systems. This can be seen most clearly in the December 2017 Australian federal by-election in Bennelong amid an ongoing debate about

Australian sovereignty and China's influence. During the campaign, a 1700-character letter in Chinese circulated on social media, accusing the Liberal Party of being "a far-right ruling party... privately against China, against Chinese, against ethnic-Chinese migrants and against Chinese international students," and calling on ethnic Chinese voters to "mobilise, share this message and use the ballots in the hands of us Chinese to take down this far-right Liberal Party ruling party" (O'Malley & Joske, 2017). The letter, posted on WeChat by Yan Zehua, a veteran "patriotic overseas Chinese leader" who serves as vice president of the ACPPRC, echoed coordinated attacks on the Liberal Party by Chinese state media. Despite this campaign, the Liberals emerged victorious, and proceeded to oversee the long-overdue passage of the National Security Legislation Amendment (Espionage and Foreign Interference) Act and the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Act 2018. These two laws represented a counter-mobilization against the constantly escalating interference detailed above, and a defining moment in the still ongoing debate about CCP influence.

19.4. Counter- mobilization:

In search of the appropriate responses to China's influence

2017 was a turning point in Australia-China relations, registering a major change in Australian attitudes toward China and the beginning of a counter-mobilization against the CCP's interference. This watershed soon extended across the Tasman Sea to New Zealand, making China's influence a topic of public interest in the region over the past three years. The resulting heated debates have focused on three main issues: the nature of the challenge posed by China's influence, the extent of this challenge, and the appropriate response.

In Australia, the ground-breaking June 2017 joint report by the ABC investigative TV program Four Corners and Fairfax Media newspapers launched the public debate on China's influence in a country that, just a few months prior, was actively considering an extradition treaty with the Chinese government. Based on careful review of official documents and wide-reaching interviews, this report shocked the Australian public by uncovering how the CCP-state had been secretly infiltrating the country through covert actions on Australian soil, tracking the activities and efforts of organisations and individuals backed by Beijing to intimidate and silence critics of the Chinese government (Power and Influence, 2017). Following this lead, a series of investigative reports on topics as diverse as political donations and

international academic research collaborations contributed to unprecedented awareness of the extent of China's political operations in Australia. The discussion in New Zealand also surged in September 2017 with the publication of Anne-Marie Brady's report *Magic Weapons: China's political influence activities under Xi Jinping*, alongside reports investigating the curious political career of National MP Jian Yang.

The Australian government led by Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull responded to revelations of interference by introducing new national security legislation to Parliament on 7 December 2017. Although China already has considerably more severe laws banning espionage and international interference which it uses without discretion, the Chinese government responded angrily to the proposed legislation. The Chinese Embassy in Canberra issued a statement on 5 December 2017, two days ahead of the introduction of the new foreign interference bills in the Australian Parliament, dismissing "the so-called Chinese influence and infiltration in Australia" as "fabricated news stories" that were "filled with Cold War mentality and ideological bias, reflected typical anti-China hysteria and paranoia" and were guilty of wronging the Chinese government, vilifying the Chinese community in Australia with racial prejudice, and tarnishing Australia's reputation as a multicultural society.⁹ *Global Times*, a state-run nationalistic tabloid, joined by labelling the proposed legislation "new McCarthyism." (Tan, 2017)

The debate on the legislation culminated in the first half of 2018, as the Australian government solicited submissions on the draft laws. Media, academia, political groups, think tanks, industry, vested interests, NGOs, community organisations and lobby groups all weighed in. For supporters of the new legislation, the risks presented by the united front operations in Australia and New Zealand are salient in three areas. First, by silencing dissenting voices and controlling Chinese language media and associations of the Chinese diaspora, China has violated basic human rights and hindered mainland China migrants from identifying with the political culture and institutions of liberal democracy in their new home (Feng, 2011). Second, by building pro-China local collaborator networks and institutions in media and academia, China has extended its discursive power into the media and educational institutions in Australia and New Zealand, compromising fundamental freedoms (Fitzgerald, 2017). And third, by intervening in election processes and co-opting the political elite, they have undermined liberal values and democratic institutions (Brady, 2017; Garnaut, 2018; Fitzgerald, 2018; APPS, 2018a). These steps by the CCP-state to use open societies to promote

their closed vision of politics requires careful legislation, balancing citizens' rights and freedoms with effective measures to protect these rights and freedoms against threats from outside actors.

Although critics of the new bills claimed to want to distance themselves from the Chinese government, their positions echoed the Party's false accusations and deliberate misrepresentations discussed above. Critics of the legislation downplayed the nature and scale of China's challenge: many interpreted China's coordinated united front operations in Australia and New Zealand as simply a succession of isolated or random incidents.¹⁰ While it is undoubtedly necessary to be vigilant against conspiratorial thinking, this vigilance does not by nature disprove the reality of any and all conspiracies: the United Front Work Department is, according to its own mission, engaged in conspiratorial activities.

Critics of the legislation also failed to recognise the inherently oppressive CCP regime as a dictatorship, engaging in illogical comparisons of political actors by comparing the CCP-state's interference to American influence in Australia (Brophy 2018).

Critics of the legislation failed to see China's unbridled assaults on universal values and brutal repression of democracy and human rights activists as acts reminiscent of the Soviet Union in the Cold War, but instead echoed the CCP-state's propaganda machine labelling Beijing's critics as stuck in a "Cold War mentality" and sparking a "new Cold War" (Carr, 2018; Drysdale & Denton, 2018).

Critics seemed unconcerned about the China's transnational racialization of all people of Chinese descent as its subjects, combined with the Party's racial discrimination against these same subjects by envisioning people of Chinese descent as incapable of democracy and the rule of law. Rather, they accuse those calling for protection of people of Chinese descent in Australia from the Chinese government's abuses of being anti-Chinese racists engaged in the "stigmatisation of Chinese Australians" (APPS, 2018b; Sun, 2018).

Critics of the legislation dare not speak out against the systematic censorship practised by the CCP regime and self-censorship resulting from China's intimidation, but denounce the counter interference laws in Australia, designed to protect free expression, as an attack on freedom of speech (Brophy, 2018).

Overcoming these baseless criticisms, the historic new counter foreign interference laws were passed in the Australian Parliament on 28 June 2018.¹¹ As these laws have begun to come into effect over the course of 2019 and 2020,

it remains to be seen how effective they will be in halting China's extraterritorial interference. Meanwhile, in New Zealand, a call has been made for the similar laws to deal with China's interference and infiltration. On 8 October 2018, a petition was sent to the House of Representatives, asking for an inquiry into foreign influence in New Zealand politics and the need for new laws to protect New Zealand's values and electoral system (New Zealand Parliament, 2018). Recent revelations of threats to Anne-Marie Brady, the author of *Magic Weapons*, including break-ins into her home and office and dangerous tampering with her car, have also brought new and perhaps unprecedented pressures on the New Zealand government to push back against China's influence and protect freedom of speech (Roy, 2018).

19.5. Conclusion:

How to engage China economically while resisting its political influence?

Protecting democratic institutions and liberal values from foreign interference and suppression by a close economic partner presents unprecedented challenges for Australia and New Zealand. The two western countries that were once the primary targets of China's influence have since emerged as pioneers in the global discussion on and resistance to the CCP-state's interference. In the period since this chapter was first written, ever more events in the region have highlighted the tensions inherent in this balance: the expulsion of Huang Xiangmo from Australia, violence against pro-Hong Kong protestors across the country, and the revelations of defector Wang Liqiang about the PRC intelligence services' operations overseas. It remains to see whether these two countries can successfully meet the challenges inherent in engaging economically with the politically repressive CCP regime, whose quest for control knows no bounds: and thus for whom such bounds must be established by the democracies of the world.

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elected as the executive director [中国和平统一促进会第九届理事大会召开 澳洲中国和统会会长黄向墨当选常务理事]. [online] Available at: <http://www.yuhugroup.com/v2010/newsdetails.asp?id=491> [Accessed 29 Nov. 2018]. (in Chinese)

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ENDNOTES

¹ Post-totalitarian in the sense that the CCP maintains monopoly on political power but allows some plural space for personal autonomy, market economy and cultural diversity.

² <https://app.companiesoffice.govt.nz/companies/app/ui/pages/companies/4951539/directors> (Access is limited)

³ <http://www.acpprc.org.au/schinese/ben.asp>

⁴ <http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/article/i/jyjl/1/201409/20140900749449.shtml> (Access Closed)

⁵ <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/state-politics/labor-to-axe-mp-and-critic-of-interference-laws-ernest-wong/news-story/48e0c53cc88f49587080519dbf6bc6e1> [Access Closed]

⁶ Australian citizen Chau Chak Wing's interactions with UF officials are widely documented on Chinese government websites. Weirdly, Chau claims to have 'no idea what [the UFWD] is'.

⁷ 'China donations claims throw New Zealand politics into turmoil', <https://www.ft.com/content/7f1eba1c-d1e8-11e8-a9f2-7574db66bcd5>. [subscriber only]

⁸ Speech of Keating at La Trobe University in April 2107 as quoted in Hamilton (2018, p.261).

⁹ Riordan, P., Benson, S. and Callick, R. 'Beijing lashes Canberra in diplomatic row', <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/foreign-affairs/beijing-lashes-canberra-in-diplomatic-row/news-story/ee5f6342ec1ab0a2a5c6dd2c7258ef09> [Subscriber only]

¹⁰ Bob Carr, 'One Chinese political donation does not a scandal make', *The Australian*, 10 June 2017. [subscriber only]

¹¹ This legislation package includes three bills: the *Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Bill*, where anyone "engaging with the Australian political landscape on behalf of a foreign state" must register as a foreign agent and the failure to disclose ties may be a criminal offence; the *National Security Legislation Amendment (Espionage and Foreign Interference) Bill*, introducing new criminal penalties for covert, deceptive or coercive foreign participation in political processes; and the *Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Funding and Disclosure Reform) Bill*, banning foreign donations to political parties.

http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/legislation/bills/r6022_aspassed/toc_pdf.

The *Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Funding and Disclosure Reform) Bill* has not been passed yet.