

# Chinese Communist Party Influence in Australian Universities

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Recent events at the University of Queensland have brought into sharp relief the Chinese Communist Party's influence activities on Australian campuses. Tensions arising from the mass protests in Hong Kong have prompted democracy activists in the West to speak out, but they have also inflamed nationalist sentiment among some Chinese students, to the point where here and other places around the world they have engaged in angry confrontation and even violence against pro-Hong Kong protesters.

This has left many Australians asking what is going on, so I hope tonight to give some context that helps explain recent events. In particular, I will suggest that the University of Queensland has itself created an enabling environment for the aggressive counter-protests we saw.

In *Silent Invasion*, I argued that the Chinese Communist Party has for some 20 years been engaged in a systematic campaign to shift elite opinion in Australia so that decision-makers act in ways conformable with Beijing's wishes. The elites include those who run our universities. The CCP has a deep understanding of the importance of ideas and ideological struggle in the contest for political power, so ideas and those who generate them are a central target of the CCP's influence work.

Universities are a vital front for the Party to change the global conversation about China and its role in the world in the long run. While much of the debate has focused on Confucius Institutes, the Party's global "thought management" project is much more ambitious and is pursued through many subtle channels at foreign universities.

It exerts pressure by:

- direct lobbying from Chinese embassies and consulates
- the usually unspoken threat of cutting off the flow of cash from Chinese students
- threatening to cancel joint programs and lucrative executive training classes
- funding and controlling Confucius Institutes
- threatening to withhold visas to researchers too critical of the CCP, and
- encouraging Chinese students to report on university activities and to organize protests.

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University administrators have structural incentives to seek out cooperation agreements with Chinese institutions while knowing very little about the CCP's objectives and modus operandi, and so they often unwittingly facilitate the CCP's influence operations.

## The United Front

To carry out this campaign of overseas influence the Party has over some decades built a complex network of agencies tasked with exerting influence abroad. Their work, known as United Front work, deploys sophisticated techniques to influence, persuade and coerce others to act in ways approved by Beijing. The techniques have been refined over decades and are far more extensive, intrusive and secretive than those used by other nations. In the words of CCP expert James To, the psychological techniques used in United Front work are effective tools for “intensive behavioural control and manipulation” while appearing to be “benign, benevolent and helpful”.<sup>2</sup>

Under President Xi Jinping, United Front work has assumed much greater prominence in the CCP's conduct of foreign relations. Xi has echoed Mao Zedong's description of United Front work as one of the Party's three “magic weapons” (along with Party building and military activities).

In the West, United Front work has traditionally been aimed at suppressing dissidents, winning overseas Chinese to the CCP cause and mobilising them to act in support of Beijing's political and strategic interests. But over the last decade or so, United Front work has increasingly been oriented towards promoting a more favourable view of the PRC in the Australian mainstream. Most of the efforts have been directed at non-Chinese Australian elites—political, business, media and academic. In the words of a party newsletter, *News of the Communist Party of China*, the key targets of overseas influence activity “are representative individuals with political influence, economic power, high social standing and academic status, as well as community leaders.”<sup>3</sup>

Figure 1 presents an organisational chart of the United Front Work Department and how its operations are structured in Australia. United Front work falls under the aegis of the Politburo of the CCP Central Committee.<sup>4</sup>

It has four main agencies—from right to left in Figure 1, the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (OCAO), the China Overseas Friendship Association, the China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification (CCPPNR), and the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese. The last is an agency formally of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), a large political advisory body run by the UFWD. Its membership includes overseas Chinese who direct United Front bodies abroad or who use their wealth to acquire political influence.

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<sup>2</sup> James Jiann Hua To, Qiaowu: Extra-Territorial Policies for the Overseas Chinese, 2014

<sup>3</sup> 海外统一战线工作对象是台湾同胞、港澳同胞、国外侨胞及一切热爱中华民族的人们。重点是政治上有影响、经济上有实力、社会上有声望，学术上有造诣的代表性人士和社团领袖。

<https://web.archive.org/web/20190410115632/http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64107/65708/65722/4444411.html>

<sup>4</sup> For an excellent, recent commentary see Alex Joske, ‘Reorganizing the United Front Work Department: New Structures for a New Era of Diaspora and Religious Affairs Work,’ *China Brief*, 19:9, May 2019.

Importantly, each of the four agencies has provincial, city and county counterparts throughout China, and these have a direct role in maintaining and cultivating links with provincial and hometown associations of overseas Chinese in Australia and elsewhere.

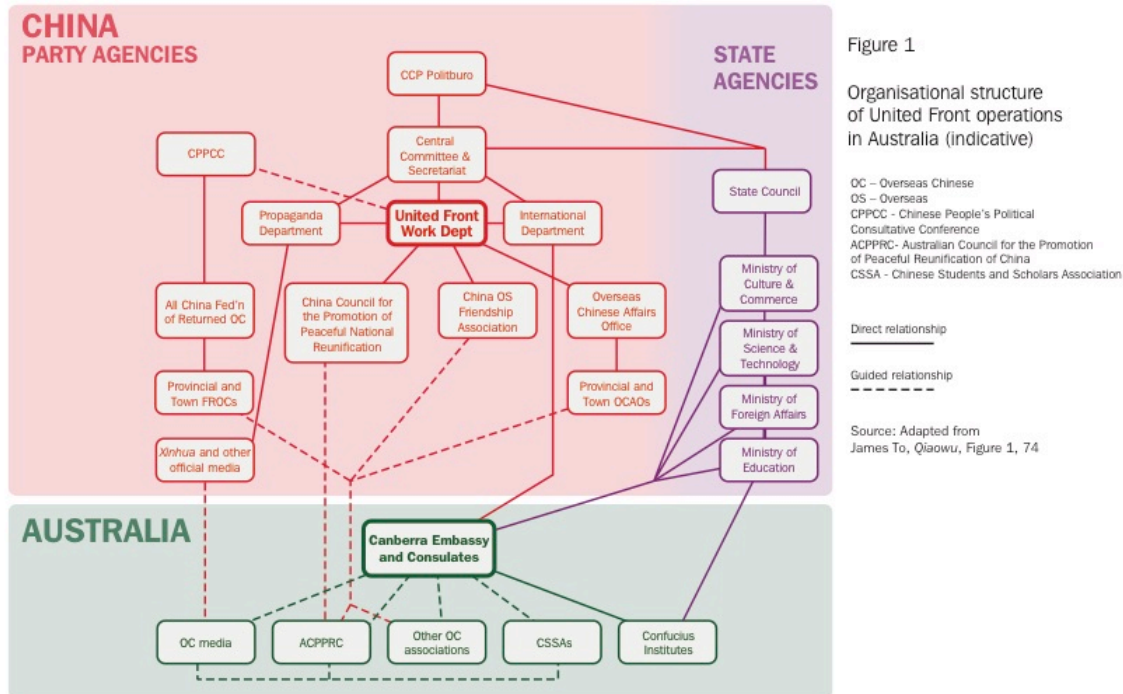


Figure 1  
Organisational structure of United Front operations in Australia (indicative)

OC – Overseas Chinese  
OS – Overseas  
CPPCC - Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference  
ACPPRC- Australian Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification of China  
CSSA - Chinese Students and Scholars Association

Direct relationship  
Guided relationship

Source: Adapted from James To, Qiaowu, Figure 1, 74

Examples include the Australian Guangdong Chamber of Commerce and the Australia Fujian Association.

The China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification (CCPPNR) has been especially important for its work in Australia where it is represented by the Australian Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification of China (ACPPRC), described by expert Gerry Groot as “the overarching organisational vehicle in Australia for helping coordinate smaller bodies”.<sup>5</sup>

Media attention on the activities of the ACPPRC and its controversial former president Huang Xiangmo—now banned from entering Australia because of his CCP links—has been instrumental in raising public awareness of the United Front in Australia. The ACPPRC has state-based subsidiaries, with Tasmania being the last state to acquire one, in October 2017.

In the third box from the left we find a range of United Front organisations, including:

- hometown associations;
- business associations, such as the Australia China Economic, Trade and Cultural Association (ACETCA);

<sup>5</sup> Gerry Groot, <https://soundcloud.com/user-340830825/how-to-make-friends-and-influence-people-inside-the-magic-weapon-of-the-united-front>, minute 9.30

- ethnic Chinese professional and scientific associations, such as the Federation of Chinese Scholars in Australia (FOCSA); and
- cultural and religious groups, such as dance troupes, writers' organisations and certain Buddhist sects.

Chinese Students and Scholars Associations (CSSAs) are a further category.

### **Confucius Institutes**

Although Confucius Institutes are ostensibly devoted to teaching Chinese language and promoting Chinese culture, they are in fact a part of the CCP's broader program of "discourse management" abroad. And so former propaganda chief Li Changchun has said that Confucius Institutes are "an important part of China's overseas propaganda set-up." He added: "Using the excuse of teaching Chinese language, everything looks reasonable and logical."<sup>6</sup>

In 2010 Minister of Propaganda Liu Yunshan was reported as saying "we should actively carry out international propaganda battles ... We should do well in establishing and operating overseas cultural centers and Confucius Institutes."<sup>7</sup>

A recent report produced by the UFWD of the Dalian Municipal Party Committee concerning Dalian University of Foreign Languages is revealing. The university, in Liaoning Province, trains many teachers to be sent abroad to Confucius Institutes.<sup>8</sup> The report was prepared for central office in Beijing and concerns the innovative United Front work of the university.

The Party Committee writes that the University has actively developed new approaches to United Front activity abroad. As part of its United Front efforts, it has established ten Confucius Institutes overseas since 2007. It says that Dalian University of Foreign Languages Confucius Institute staff have "promoted the Confucius Institute brand and blazed a new path for united front work overseas." It also keeps a data base of overseas alumni of Dalian University of Foreign Languages and helps establish alumni associations as part of its United Front work. Since 2011, it has established seven overseas alumni of Dalian University of Foreign Languages, including one in Sydney.

There are more than 500 Confucius Institutes worldwide. In the western world, the largest number of Confucius Institutes is to be found in English-speaking countries. Unlike Goethe Institutes, British Councils and cultural institutes of other nations, Confucius Institutes are mostly embedded in foreign universities.<sup>9</sup> This gives them leverage over the host institutions. Selection of academic staff and the curriculum are decided in Beijing, leading China scholar John Fitzgerald to observe:

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<https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/PSI%20Report%20China%27s%20Impact%20on%20the%20US%20Education%20System.pdf> p. 20

<sup>7</sup> Shaomin Li, *Bribery and Corruption in Weak Institutional Environments*, CUP, 2019, p. 210

<sup>8</sup> <http://archive.today/2019.03.18-053516/http://www.zyztb.gov.cn/tzcx/291691.jhtml>

<sup>9</sup> This has not always been the case, but some institutions that did not follow this arrangement have faced problems for precisely this reason. For instance, the CI Lyon was founded as an independent not-for-profit organisation in 2009. However, three years later, Hanban began demanding the CI be integrated into the University of Lyon, suspending its annual subsidy for the institute without warning. The institute was closed in 2013 after the two sides failed to find a solution. Website of Gregory Lee, the former director, <https://www.gregorylee.net>

Universities that accept [Confucius Institutes] on Beijing's terms, with all the compromises they entail, signal they are willing to set aside academic principles to build good relations with China [and] indicate normal due diligence does not apply to relations with Chinese universities and firms.<sup>10</sup>

In the United States, the National Association of Scholars (NAS) commissioned a thorough review of Confucius Institutes in 2017.<sup>11</sup> It reported many professors associated with the institutes speaking of 'immense pressure to stay on the good side of Confucius Institute directors and university administrators affiliated with the Confucius Institute.'<sup>12</sup>

In March this year, a report by Human Rights Watch noted that academics reported pressure from senior administrators to avoid saying anything critical of China, and invitations have been cancelled for speakers talking about 'sensitive' topics.<sup>13</sup> Moreover:

Many expressed discomfort with the presence of Confucius Institutes on their campuses. They said the presence of such institutions fundamentally compromised their institution's commitment to academic freedom.

The boards of the Institutes often include people with close links to United Front organisations, including Party secretaries. And there have been credible reports that some institutes facilitate spying.<sup>14</sup>

Some people have opened their eyes. Between 2015 and 2016, three of Sweden's four Confucius Institutes were shut down.<sup>15</sup> In the U.S. at least 16 Confucius Institutes have been closed down over the last 18 months, with Arizona State University being the latest.<sup>16</sup>

Some say there is no evidence of political interference or censorship from Confucius Institutes. This is untrue. The head of Hanban Xu Lin has said that teachers sent abroad must obey China's laws.<sup>17</sup> A number of reports make it clear that a range of topics uncomfortable for Beijing are off-limits. The institutes are actively involved in promoting the Belt and Road Initiative, but you will never see them host a seminar on the treatment of Uyghurs. Everything a CI does supports Beijing.

There have been instances of active censorship.<sup>18</sup> At Melbourne's Victoria University last December, the screening of a documentary critical of Confucius Institutes was cancelled at

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<sup>10</sup> Alexander Bowe, *China's Overseas United Front Work: Background and Implications for the United States*, U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, August 2018, p. 13

<sup>11</sup> Rachele Petersen, *Outsourced to China: Confucius Institutes and soft power in American higher education*, New York: National Association of Scholars, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Petersen, *Outsourced to China*, p. 88.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/03/21/china-government-threats-academic-freedom-abroad>

<sup>14</sup> Ghoreishi, 'Beijing uses Confucius Institutes for espionage, says Canadian intelligence veteran'.

<sup>15</sup> <https://jichanglulu.wordpress.com/2018/10/21/localisation/>

<sup>16</sup>

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?shva=1#label/China+list/WhctKJVZIQfGLfcBLdcccZFOGVvJbfQNDwSzZDSXflnqLgzThhxlfMBSrxzWJkFfCKNmRtv>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-30567743> Minute 1.13

<sup>18</sup> The banning of any discussion of Chinese politics, including topics like the three Ts, has led in Australia to the bizarre situation where the universities have registered their American studies centers (part-funded by Washington) under the new foreign influence transparency scheme but do not see the need to register their Confucius Institutes because they do not discuss politics, even though they host seminars extolling the benefits of the Belt and Road Initiative and the 'culture' they teach is shaped by the Party's ideology.

the last moment. The organisers had rented one of the university's theatres for the purpose.<sup>19</sup> Evidence emerged that the Australian director of the campuses' Confucius Institute, Professor Colin Clark, warned the university of an impending problem when the Chinese consulate applied pressure. When the university contacted the film's promoter to say the screening had been cancelled it lied by saying the room was double-booked and no other rooms were available.

On the scheduled day a number of other rooms were empty. The irony was not lost: a documentary arguing that the presence of Confucius Institutes gives them political leverage over their hosts was banned because of the political leverage of a Confucius Institute over its host. Victoria University's code of conduct declares the university to be 'a place of independent learning and thought, where ideas may be put forward and reasoned opinion expressed freely while maintaining respect for others.'<sup>20</sup>

In 2013, the prestigious University of Sydney was accused of cancelling a visit by the Dalai Lama to avoid damaging its ties with China, including the funding it received for its Confucius Institute.<sup>21</sup> When the event was pushed off-campus, and use of the university logo forbidden, Vice-Chancellor Michael Spence said it was "in the best interests of researchers across the university."<sup>22</sup>

In 2018 Spence would say that government and media concern about CCP influence in Australia was no more than "Sinophobic blathering." He has dismissed concerns about covert PLA scientists working in Australian universities as "anti-China hysteria." Last weekend Spence attacked those defending democracy and human rights as "anti-China", "Sinophobic", and wanting a return to the "White Australia Policy".<sup>23</sup> This was despite the fact that the demonstrators are for the most part of Chinese ethnicity, or Tibetans, or Uyghurs.

The protests and the broader debate in Australia are not about race, and Spence is insulting and attempting to silence all of those in Australia from mainland China, Hong Kong, Tibet and Xinjiang who are speaking up against Beijing's oppression and subversion, often putting themselves in danger. When Spence says it's all xenophobia, anti-China hysteria and the re-emergence of the White Australia Policy he is in fact mouthing the slogans put into his head by the CCP's Propaganda Department. Chinese diplomats and Party organs like the *Global Times* repeatedly use these terms.

## UQ's Confucius Institute

The initial contract for UQ's Confucius Institute was signed in 2009. Of all CI contracts in Australia, the UQ one provides the most latitude to Hanban. Article 4 stipulates that its scope includes "Other activities as proposed *and approved* by the [Hanban] HQ". In other words, the University allowed the Hanban in Beijing to approve whatever it wants.

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<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/foreign-influence-showdown-as-universities-decline-to-register-china-funded-confucius-institutes-20190315-p514kq.html>

<sup>19</sup> Henry Jom, 'Victoria Uni Cancelled Documentary Due to Chinese Consular Pressure, Documents Reveal', *NTD*, 3 December 2018

<sup>20</sup> <https://policy.vu.edu.au/document/view.php?id=176&version=2>

<sup>21</sup> Anon., 'Sydney University criticised for blocking Dalai Lama visit', *The Guardian*, 18 April 2013.

<sup>22</sup> Adam Harvey, 'Uni under fire for pulling pin on Dalai Lama event', *ABC News online*, 18 April 2013.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/education/china-debate-raises-spectre-of-white-australia-policy-says-uni-chief-20190823-p52k67.html>



UQ's vice chancellor Peter Høj became a senior consultant to the Hanban in 2013.<sup>24</sup> At a meeting that year he met with Hanban chief Madam Xu Lin,<sup>25</sup> who is notorious for arriving at the 2014 conference of the European Association of China Studies in Portugal where she seized all copies of the conference program and tore out a page referring to a Taiwanese foundation.

In 2015 UQ News announced that Professor Høj had been honoured by the Hanban with the Outstanding Individual of the Year Award. This “prestigious award” was “in recognition of his contribution to the global Confucius Institute Network.” China's Vice-Premier Madam Liu Yandong presented the award herself.

In July 2019, the vice chancellor led a UQ delegation to China. He met Tsinghua University's Party Secretary Chen Xu. In 2016, Chen Xiqing, deputy director of the Central UFWD, said Tsinghua has a “glorious tradition of doing united front work” and encouraged the university to play a leading role in advancing united front work in universities.<sup>26</sup> Tsinghua University's United Front Work Department targets students studying abroad, as well as returned students, taking a special interest in the prominent ones. It says that overseas students who are also party members are particularly useful in carrying out united front work among students studying abroad.<sup>27</sup>

In July 2016, UQ hosted a joint conference of Oceanian Confucius Institutes.<sup>28</sup> In a speech, Chinese diplomat Xu Xiao told those gathered that the institutes should tell a good China story and tell the story of contacts between China and foreign countries well.<sup>29</sup> Peter Høj has taken the injunction to heart. In 2015, at the 10<sup>th</sup> Confucius Institute conference in Shanghai, Professor Høj said:

Although our settings are different, we have no conflicts and we have shared interests. .... we must be prepared for questions raised by people in Australia and Germany, and by journalists.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> According to UQ News Hanban invites ‘well-known scholars, public figures and entrepreneurs’ to be senior consultants. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190422055518/https://www.uq.edu.au/news/article/2013/11/uq-gains-seat-key-china-table>

<sup>25</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20190422055518/https://www.uq.edu.au/news/article/2013/11/uq-gains-seat-key-china-table>

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[https://web.archive.org/web/20171114170754/http://www.tsinghua.edu.cn/publish/thunews/10303/2016/20160331162456873581712/20160331162456873581712\\_.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20171114170754/http://www.tsinghua.edu.cn/publish/thunews/10303/2016/20160331162456873581712/20160331162456873581712_.html)

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[https://web.archive.org/web/20190826010357/http://www.tyxx.tsinghua.edu.cn/publish/tzb/4574/2010/20101215103618798943464/20101215103618798943464\\_.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20190826010357/http://www.tyxx.tsinghua.edu.cn/publish/tzb/4574/2010/20101215103618798943464/20101215103618798943464_.html)

<sup>28</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20190308011754/https://confucius-institute.centre.uq.edu.au/article/2016/07/uq-hosts-conference-oceanian-confucius-institutes>

<sup>29</sup> <http://archive.today/2019.08.08-113342/http://www.edu-australia.org/publish/portal72/tab5536/info127166.htm>

驻澳使馆教育处徐孝公参在致辞中指出孔子学院在促进中外文化交流、传播中国文化和促进民心相通等方面起着越来越大的作用，孔子学院的在讲好中国故事的同时，也需要讲好中外交流的故事。

<sup>30</sup> [http://archive.today/2019.08.27-015419/http://www.hanban.org/article/2015-12/07/content\\_626413.htm](http://archive.today/2019.08.27-015419/http://www.hanban.org/article/2015-12/07/content_626413.htm)  
<http://archive.today/2019.08.08-112609/http://conference2017.chinesecio.com/2015/?q=node/414>

Madam Liu Yandong, Vice Premier of the State Council and Chairwoman of the Council of the Confucius Institute Headquarters, also attended the event. Liu Yandong used to be head of Central UFWD (2002-2007). [http://archive.today/2019.08.27-015703/http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-12/06/c\\_128503399.htm](http://archive.today/2019.08.27-015703/http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-12/06/c_128503399.htm)

## The Confucius Institute of Science and Technology

In July this year Professor Hoj told *The Australian* that the role of the UQ Confucius Institute is “to promote the learning of Chinese language and culture, and a broader understanding of China, at the university and in the community.”<sup>31</sup> But is it? When we look more closely at UQ’s Confucius Institute we notice something odd.

From its early days, all parties emphasised the Institute’s role in scientific exchange.<sup>32</sup> According to Hanban’s website, enhancing technological exchange between UQ and Chinese universities, especially Tianjin University, is part of UQ CI’s “cultural activities”.<sup>33</sup> Tianjin University has developed a new model of “building a culture stage to sing a science opera.”<sup>34</sup>

As UQ’s deputy vice-chancellor from 2009, Max Lu (Chinese name Lu Gaoqing) was closely involved in developing technological exchanges between UQ and Tianjin University through the Confucius Institute.<sup>35</sup> Max Lu is a leading nanotechnology expert and in 2017 became the vice chancellor of the University of Surrey. He remains an emeritus professor at UQ’s Australian Institute for Bioengineering and Nanotechnology.

In 2004 Max Lu was the founding president of the Federation of Chinese Scientists in Australia (FOCSA), a peak body of professional associations for ethnic Chinese scientists.<sup>36</sup> In October 2004 the *People’s Daily* celebrated the launch of FOCSA, noting that it began “with the energetic support and aid of the Chinese Embassy in Australia’s education office.” China’s ambassador in Australia, Fu Ying, was reported (in Chinese) as saying she “hoped that the specialists and scholars would be able to transfer advanced technological achievements back to China.” FOCSA has held its meetings at the Embassy education office in the Canberra suburb of O’Malley.

Max Lu has always maintained close connections with the Chinese state, including his membership of an Expert Consultative Committee of the ruling State Council.<sup>37</sup>

This raises questions about the role of Confucius Institute at the University of Queensland. In 2011, Chen Ping, then as now the director of the Institute, told the *People’s Daily* that UQ’s Confucius Institute actively helps UQ to enrol Chinese graduate students selected by the China Scholarship Council to study in faculty of science and faculty of engineering.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/politics/china-diplomat-slapped-down-over-uni-protest/news-story/7b0acc2e8b2b8541adc0f61e6a2e3a68>

<sup>32</sup> [http://archive.fo/2019.08.27-004144/http://ico.tju.edu.cn/xwzx/xwzx/201209/t20120921\\_161088.html](http://archive.fo/2019.08.27-004144/http://ico.tju.edu.cn/xwzx/xwzx/201209/t20120921_161088.html)

<sup>33</sup> [http://archive.today/2019.08.27-081654/http://www.hanban.org/node\\_6591.htm](http://archive.today/2019.08.27-081654/http://www.hanban.org/node_6591.htm)

<sup>34</sup> [http://archive.today/2019.08.27-083536/http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb\\_xwfb/s6192/s133/s157/201112/t20111212\\_127918.html](http://archive.today/2019.08.27-083536/http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xwfb/s6192/s133/s157/201112/t20111212_127918.html)

<sup>35</sup> [https://twitter.com/geoff\\_p\\_wade/status/1166161781040934912](https://twitter.com/geoff_p_wade/status/1166161781040934912) <https://archive.fo/2019.08.27-005030/http://brisbane.china-consulate.org/chn/jylx/jyl/t873911.htm>

<sup>36</sup> The following paragraphs are drawn from *Silent Invasion*, pp. 184-6

<sup>37</sup> According to a 2015 article by the United Front body the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese, “[Max] Lu Gaoqing after so many years has never stopped being interested in China and his native land. Having worked for 28 years in foreign nations, Lu Gaoqing said that his feelings towards the ancestral nation and his native land have “never changed”.’ <[www.chinaql.org/c/2015-12-14/485805.shtml](http://www.chinaql.org/c/2015-12-14/485805.shtml)>

<sup>38</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20110413210054/http://world.people.com.cn/GB/14327335.html>



The *People's Daily* described UQ's CI as "the Confucius Institute of Science and Technology."<sup>39</sup> So it's not just about teaching language and culture. It is also about facilitating the transfer of technology to China. This explains the backgrounds of some of the senior people associated with the Institute. They seem to have nothing to do with teaching language and culture.

For example, Professor Jin Zou, the Institute's deputy director, holds a chair in nanoscience. He's also a member of FOCSA. Geoff Wang, an associate fellow, specializes in process metallurgy. Institute associate fellow Yuan Zhiguo is a water treatment expert with a PhD in aeronautical engineering. He is the current president of FOCSA. According to a 2016 article published in a Chinese language magazine, Yuan Zhiguo believes he should contribute everything he has learned to his motherland.<sup>40</sup> And the new Tianjin University representative on the UQ Confucius Institute team, Professor Cui Zhenduo, is intimately involved in military-civil helicopter development and UAV.<sup>41</sup>

This gives context to the news story earlier this week reporting that a University of Queensland professor, Shen Hengtao, created a company that develops advanced artificial intelligence technology that is being used for surveillance of Uighurs in Xinjiang. Professor Shen developed the technology and the company, Koala AI Technology, while receiving generous ARC funding at UQ. He had been recruited by Beijing's Thousand Talents Program, which some U.S. government agencies and universities have banned staff from joining because of concerns about unauthorized IP transfer. Professor Shen remains and honorary professor at the university.

UQ's Confucius Institute seems especially important to China. Its director (in China) is Professor Jianping Liu, who was until 2016 the secretary of the CCP Committee at Tianjin University, the one UQ has partnered with. The Party secretary is the most powerful person at a Chinese university, so why send him to head a CI in Queensland?

## The Consul-General

Recently, UQ has been criticised for appointing the Chinese Consul-General Xu Jie as an adjunct professor of language and culture.<sup>42,43</sup> According to the website of the Chinese consulate in Brisbane, UQ's adjunct professorship is given to "very few scholars who play unique roles and make significant contributions, as well as prominent individuals" and "to date only given to very few people."<sup>44</sup> Curiously, while defending the appointment, Professor

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<sup>39</sup> 子非常重视和提倡相互交往。昆士兰大学孔子学院也正是秉承这一精神，不仅竭尽全力推动澳大利亚与中国的交流与合作，而且把科技作为交流与合作的实质内容，为此还获得“科技孔子学院”之称。

<https://web.archive.org/web/20110413210054/http://world.people.com.cn/GB/14327335.html>

<sup>40</sup> <http://archive.today/2019.08.14-065716/http://www.evalley.com.cn/Item/Show.asp?m=1&d=3880>

<sup>41</sup> [https://twitter.com/geoff\\_p\\_wade/status/1165586580074971136](https://twitter.com/geoff_p_wade/status/1165586580074971136)

<http://archive.today/2019.08.25-112105/http://society.people.com.cn/n1/2017/0913/c1008-29533061.html>

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/geopolitics/article/3020168/university-queensland-faces-heat-naming-chinese-diplomat>

<sup>43</sup> From 2012 to 2015, before his job as Brisbane Consul-General, Xu Jie was deputy mayor of China's South China Sea administrative centre Sansha City.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150715225819/http://www.chinanews.com/gn/2015/03-27/7163615.shtml>

<sup>44</sup> 昆士兰大学客座教授职称仅授予少数有独特作用和突出贡献的学者和知名人士，筛选和任命程序十分严格。迄今，只有少数人被授予这个称号。

<http://archive.today/2019.08.09-120234/http://brisbane.chineseconsulate.org/chn/zlgxw/t1187074.htm>

Hoj reassured us by saying that Professor Xu would not be doing any teaching. If he's of sufficient authority to be a visiting professor, why can he not give some lectures? It's strange.

I had believed the appointment of a serving diplomat to a professorship was unprecedented, but it turns out that Xu Jie is not the first Chinese diplomat to be honoured with a professorship at UQ. In 2014, UQ appointed the then Chinese Consul-General in Brisbane Zhao Yongchen as an adjunct professor in language and comparative literature.<sup>45</sup> In 2015, Professor Zhao gave a lecture at the university on prospects for Chinese-Australian cooperation.<sup>46</sup>

In 2013, UQ named Cao Zhouhua, China's consul in charge of technological affairs, as an honorary alumnus. It was to acknowledge Cao's "important contribution" to technology collaboration between UQ and China. The consulate said: "This is the first time for UQ to present the certificate of honorary alumnus to a foreign diplomat."<sup>47</sup>

### **Chinese students in Australia**

Chinese students are a CCP pressure point on campuses and are part of the Party's united front activities. At the seminal 2015 United Front Work Conference, General Secretary Xi Jinping defined Chinese students studying abroad as one of the "three new focuses" of united front work.<sup>48</sup> The CCP makes extensive efforts to keep overseas students in line partly because it's anxious that they may be 'infected' with Western ideas.

Many overseas Chinese students belong to Chinese Students and Scholars Associations (CSSAs). Much of the activity of CSSAs revolves around social events and student support, and that's all that many students want from them. But they also help monitor and regulate the speech and activities of Chinese students on Australian campuses. If a student expresses support for democracy, takes an interest in the Dalai Lama or criticises the CCP, then it's likely that his or her parents in China will be visited by the Ministry of State Security and warned to keep their child in check.

PRC students surveilling and reporting on each other in class is of widespread concern. In recent studies, several professors across the U.S. reported that they assume their students are reporting on each other. Some said that Chinese students had approached them directly about their concerns of being surveilled and denounced.<sup>49</sup>

Many CSSAs report on their website that they are recognised by, registered with, or even subsidized by the local Chinese embassy or consulate. Their office holders typically owe allegiance to the Party and liaise regularly with the embassy or consulate. Their meetings are often held at the consulate. It is through them that Chinese students on campuses can be mobilized to demonstrate "patriotic support" during visits of Chinese leaders or to counter activities that the CCP thinks of as hostile.

In a major operation in 2008, up to 20,000 Chinese students were mobilized by CSSAs across Australia, in collaboration with the embassy and consulates, to welcome the Olympic Torch

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<sup>45</sup> <http://archive.today/2019.08.09-120234/http://brisbane.chineseconsulate.org/chn/zlgxw/t1187074.htm>

<sup>46</sup> <http://archive.today/2019.08.09-121610/http://brisbane.china-consulate.org/chn/zlgxw/t1293712.htm>

<sup>47</sup> <http://archive.today/2019.08.09-111714/http://brisbane.china-consulate.org/chn/zlgxw/t1072801.htm>

<sup>48</sup> <https://warontherocks.com/2019/06/the-third-magic-weapon-reforming-chinas-united-front/>

<sup>49</sup> [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/prc\\_political\\_influence\\_full\\_report.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/prc_political_influence_full_report.pdf)

to Canberra. They shouted down, intimidated and punched protesters supporting Tibetan independence.<sup>50</sup>

One effect of “organised Chinese nationalism” on western campuses is bullying and harassment of students who stand for different visions of China than the one prescribed by the CCP or who simply don’t subscribe to Party orthodoxy. At the University of Maryland, when Chinese graduate Yang Shuping used her graduation speech to praise the “fresh air” of democracy and freedom of speech in the United States, she was hounded and threatened online, and her family in China was harassed, until she issued a fawning public apology.<sup>51</sup>

At the University of Toronto, when students elected a Tibetan-Canadian, Chemi Lhamo, as president of the student union she received death and rape threats from Chinese students on campus, possibly prompted and certainly praised by Chinese diplomats.<sup>52</sup>

While some of this may be organised independently by students, in other cases they are clearly initiated by or coordinated with Chinese embassies and consulates. For instance, students at McMaster University contacted the Chinese embassy to report a planned talk by Uyghur activist Rukiye Turdush, which was disrupted. They later sent photos of the talk to the embassy.<sup>53</sup> Chinese students have proven to be particularly belligerent in Canada.

Around the world, Chinese embassies and consulates, in coordination with local united front bodies in China, have been encouraging and organising counter-protests against those supporting the democracy movement in Hong Kong. In places, the counter-protests have been aggressive and violent, with pro-democracy supporters in fear of being photographed and reported, with repercussions for themselves or their families in mainland China or Hong Kong.

This more confrontational approach of the Beijing loyalists has been actively encouraged. In March this year, a former politics lecturer at Tsinghua University in Beijing, Wu Qiang, said that a newly aggressive stance towards critics is part of the more muscular diplomacy that goes with the Belt & Road Initiative. Diplomats have been instructed to redefine the norms of international relations with “aggressive and tough behavior.” He went on:

[They are] trying to establish an authoritarian world order that is subject to China, and which doesn’t allow any criticism or opposing voices, neither at home or internationally.<sup>54</sup>

This shift helps explain otherwise bizarre behaviour by Chinese nationals. In Birmingham, England, in 2018 a Chinese state media journalist launched an unprovoked attack on a UK Conservative Party member at its annual conference.<sup>55</sup> Kong Linlin stood up in a side event and launched a tirade against ‘Hong Kong traitors’ then slapped Enoch Lieu, who was born

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<sup>50</sup> Hamilton, *Silent Invasion*,

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/2095319/chinese-student-who-praised-us-freedom-apologizes-after-backlash>

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.hongkongfp.com/2019/03/31/dont-mind-haters-tibetan-canadian-student-chemi-lhamo-brushes-off-pro-china-cyberbullying-campaign/>

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/mcmaster-university-china-1.5021406>

<sup>54</sup> Gao Feng, ‘Italian journalist “threatened” by Chinese official in Rome: Newspaper’, *Radio Free Asia*, 25 March 2019. Wu Qiang had been fired from Tsinghua for giving interviews to foreign journalists.

<https://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2017/04/27/in-china-punishments-for-speaking-with-foreign-media/>

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.hongkongfp.com/2018/10/24/just-chinese-state-media-journalist-charged-assault-uk-police-following-slapping-incident/>

in Hong Kong. She was charged with common assault but the Chinese embassy and state broadcaster CCTV turned her into a victim and demanded an apology. Kong Linlin returned to Beijing a hero.

While these actions may seem counter-productive, it's important to remember that Chinese nationalists who engage in patriotic attacks overseas are lauded in China and rewarded for their patriotism.

After nationalist Chinese turned out in numbers to counter a pro-Hong Kong demonstration in Vancouver, University of British Columbia China expert Professor Leo Shin said that the consulate was actively encouraging them to be more vocal.<sup>56</sup> In Auckland in late July a Hong Kong student was pushed over by pro-Beijing students.<sup>57</sup> The Consul General praised them for acting “out of their love of China and love of Hong Kong” and for confronting those “smearing” the Chinese government “under the pretext of so-called academic freedom and freedom of expression.”<sup>58</sup> The New Zealand government rebuked the Consulate.

CCP propaganda organs have been ramping up the patriotic rhetoric, egging on overseas Chinese to engage in aggressive pushback against pro-Hong Kong protesters. At the University of Tasmania, nationalist students have repeatedly torn down Lennon Walls expressing support for Hong Kong democracy. The CSSA at UTAS published a statement calling on the University to ‘build a clean and pure learning environment for students,’ by stopping Hong Kong protests and banning Lennon Walls.<sup>59</sup>

The Tasmanian CSSA has very close links with the local chapter of the ACPPRC.<sup>60</sup> The head of the local branch of the ACPPRC in Tasmania is Wang Xinde, or Master Wang, the leader of a wealthy Buddhist sect in Hobart. He reposted an article calling for pro-democracy protesters to be killed.

Some vice chancellors still say that when Chinese students come to Australia they learn to appreciate the value of democracy and free speech and return to China to spread the word as friends of Australia. How long will it take them to understand that this is wishful thinking?

Chinese parents hope their son or daughter will make Australian friends while studying in Australia, and are disappointed when they come back saying they only hang out with fellow Chinese students. Universities seem to do nothing to break down the ghetto mentality that Beijing actively promotes, through CSSAs, to keep Chinese students away from other students. As China scholar John Fitzgerald wrote, Chinese students “feel they are being hosted by the Chinese government in Australia.”

If left alone, some students from China would indeed learn new ways and see the value of free thinking and free speech. In private conversations with their lecturers, they express their

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<sup>56</sup> Cheryl Chan, “‘Overseas Chinese’ urged to be more vocal in support of Beijing, says Chinese cultural historian,” *Vancouver Sun*, 20 August 2019

<sup>57</sup> [https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=12254118](https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=12254118)

<sup>58</sup> Harrison Christian, ‘Chinese consulate praises students in scuffle at Auckland University,’ *Stuff*, 1 August 2019.

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-08-08/utas-china-hong-kong-student-group-statement/11393938>

<sup>60</sup> [https://twitter.com/search?q=%40geoff\\_p\\_wade%20Gu%20Siyuan&src=typd](https://twitter.com/search?q=%40geoff_p_wade%20Gu%20Siyuan&src=typd)

The CSSA at UTAS is one of the earliest group members of ACPPRC (TAS):

[https://web.archive.org/web/20180902004605/http://rb.52hrtt.com/web/news\\_info.do?id=D1507806795289](https://web.archive.org/web/20180902004605/http://rb.52hrtt.com/web/news_info.do?id=D1507806795289)

desire to learn. But they must be constantly vigilant. If they show any sign of being influenced or express independent opinions then there is a good chance they will be punished.

## UQ protests

We have seen on the UQ campus that mainland students who summon the courage to support Hong Kong protesters must hide their identities. We know that one who attended the UQ protest was identified and his parents in China soon received a visit from the security police, who made threats.<sup>61</sup>

After nationalist students attacked pro-Hong Kong protesters on the campus, China's consul-general in Brisbane, Xu Jie, praised "the spontaneous patriotic behaviour of Chinese students." The foreign ministry in Beijing fully supported the consul-general's criticism of "a very small number of people with ulterior motives conducting anti-China separatist activities." Allegations that China is interfering in another nation's internal affairs are "fabrications and slanders," it said.<sup>62</sup>

As far as we know, Vice Chancellor Hoj did not discipline UQ Professor Xu Jie for endorsing violence on the campus. That was left to Australia's foreign minister, Marise Payne, who rebuked him for not respecting the right to freedom of expression in Australia.

The *Global Times*'s reporting of the protest was a masterclass in how to turn events inside out. "Patriotic Chinese students," it wrote, only wanted "to give themselves a voice" against "foreign separatist groups colluding to disrupt" China's peace and stability.<sup>63</sup> Endorsing the consul-general's vow to stand against any instigation of anti-China sentiment, it quoted a patriotic student at UQ saying that "I will definitely fight back if I see anyone spreading separatist rhetoric on the street." It finished by quoting a Shandong academic: "Freedom of speech can only work within the framework of political correctness."

All of this helps to put into context the protest on the campus of UQ on 24<sup>th</sup> July that turned ugly.<sup>64</sup> The events are now well known. Two things struck me. The first was the way in which the University reacted. Its statements were anodyne calls to respect free speech indicating that it would not be taking sides, thereby imposing a moral equivalence on the pro-democracy and the pro-Beijing protesters who planned and initiated the violence, a bit like President Trump's response to the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville.

Moreover, experienced observers believe that the pro-Beijing protesters were led not by students but by heavies sent by the Consulate, probably MSS agents. If so then the attempt to intimidate and silence pro-Hong Kong protesters was on the face it a violation of Australia's new foreign interference law. It is now a crime for anyone to engage in conduct that 1) is directed by a foreign power, 2) is covert or involves menaces, and 3) is intended to influence the exercise of a democratic or political right in Australia. The penalties are heavy.

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<sup>61</sup> Fergus Hunter, 'A student attended a protest at an Australian uni. Days later Chinese officials visited his family,' *The Age*, 7 August 2019.

<sup>62</sup> [https://twitter.com/geoff\\_p\\_wade/status/1159623687982608384](https://twitter.com/geoff_p_wade/status/1159623687982608384)

<sup>63</sup> Hu Yuwei, Li Lei and Xu Keyue, 'Chinese students fight against media bias and anti-China forces in Australia,' *Global Times*, 7 August 2019.

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-49159820>

[https://amp.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/aug/04/we-cannot-be-seen-the-fallout-from-the-university-of-queenslands-hong-kong-protests?\\_twitter\\_impression=true](https://amp.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/aug/04/we-cannot-be-seen-the-fallout-from-the-university-of-queenslands-hong-kong-protests?_twitter_impression=true)

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-08-10/hong-kong-protests-spread-across-australia/11398832>

The second was an extraordinary incident that took place a few days later, when a University security guard confronted three men tearing down a Lennon Wall. The men refused to show student IDs. When the guard indicated he would call the police, the leader of the group replied: “I don’t care if you call the police. I will call the Ambassador.”<sup>65</sup>

These men, students or not, felt entitled to go to the campus, there to engage in intimidation and to tear down political messages, and believed that the authority to be on campus came not from university authorities but from the Ambassador, which can only mean the consulate. This sense of entitlement is similar to that felt by the president of the CSSA at ANU when in 2015 he walked into the campus pharmacy at ANU. Pointing to a pile of the *Epoch Times*, a Falun Gong newspaper, he angrily demanded to know who had “authorised” the pharmacy to stock the newspaper. He threatened a boycott unless they were removed and the pharmacist, intimidated and anxious, allowed him to throw them in a skip. The university issued some words.

The UQ nationalist protest and streets protests in Sydney and Melbourne are part of a worldwide campaign being orchestrated by Beijing. It has activated its united front network, including CSSAs, which it has built up carefully over many years. UQ has been an easy target because the University has for some years been signalling that whatever Beijing wants it can have. This created an enabling environment for the protests to turn aggressive. Patriotic Chinese students, and the Brisbane consulate, feel that they own the campus and so they were particularly affronted when pro-Hong Kong protesters decided to express their view.

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Vice-chancellors in Australia are quick to say they support free speech and academic freedom. In truth, the corporatisation of the tertiary sector and the extraordinary dependence on revenue flows from China, coupled with a sustained and highly effective influence campaign directed at senior university executives, has meant that many have lost sight of the meaning of academic freedom.

We have yet to see one Australian university draw a line in the sand and make it clear that it is willing to take pain in defence of academic freedom and free speech on campus. Instead, all we hear are fine words without commitment. A principle is worthless unless we are willing to sacrifice something to defend it. Unless we are willing to make that sacrifice soon, Australia’s universities will live under the ever-darkening shadow of Beijing.

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<sup>65</sup> Played by Steve Austin, ABC Radio Brisbane, 14 August 2019.