

Cultivating friendly forces

The Chinese Communist Party's influence operations in the Xinjiang diaspora

Lin Li and James Leibold



About the authors

Lin Li is an independent researcher.

James Leibold is a non-resident Senior Fellow with ASPI's International Cyber Policy Centre and a Professor of Politics at La Trobe University.

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What's the problem?

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has committed well-documented and large-scale human rights abuses against the Uyghurs and other indigenous minorities in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) that amount to crimes against humanity. Through its complex united front system, the CCP is actively monitoring members of the diaspora, including Uyghurs, creating databases of actionable intelligence, and mobilising community organisations in the diaspora to counter international criticism of its repressive policies in Xinjiang while promoting its own policies and interests abroad. These organisations are powerful resources in Beijing's ongoing efforts to reshape the global narrative on Xinjiang, influence political elites abroad, and ultimately control the Chinese diaspora, but they're also poorly understood.

These organisations purport to represent and speak on behalf of 'Xinjiang' and its indigenous peoples. They subsume Uyghur and other minority cultures and identities under a nebulous yet hegemonic 'Chineseness', which is defined by and connected to the Han-dominated CCP. In reality, these organisations and their leaders play important roles in muting alternative and independent voices from the community while amplifying CCP messaging and spreading disinformation. They exploit the openness of democratic and multicultural countries while assisting the CCP and its proxies to surveil and even persecute members of the Xinjiang diaspora community or individuals who are critical of the CCP's Xinjiang policies.

Like united front work more broadly, the activities of these groups and their links to the Chinese Government are often overlooked and can be difficult to parse. While human rights abuses in Xinjiang are being exposed internationally, the mechanisms and tactics developed by united front agencies to co-opt overseas Xinjiang-related community groups have gone largely unnoticed. Our research demonstrates how these groups can sow distrust and fear in the community, mislead politicians, journalists and the public, influence government policies, cloud our assessment of the situation in Xinjiang, and disguise the CCP's interference in foreign countries.



What's the solution?

Transparency is the best weapon at our disposal. The international community must expose and counter the CCP's overseas influence and interference operations. In order to counteract Xinjiang-related united front work, we must shine a brighter light on community organisations that cooperate with the CCP to achieve its repressive political aims overseas; at the same time, we must safeguard the ability of citizens of all backgrounds to engage in public life free from outside interference.

Governments must first acknowledge the problem and then denounce the CCP's interference operations publicly. They should work together to disrupt the CCP's capacity to covertly intrude in sovereign countries and open societies, carry out transnational repression and cover up its human rights abuses in Xinjiang. They must strengthen countermeasures through intelligence work, law enforcement and legislative reform, and provide additional funding to analyse the CCP's united front system while working closely with other countries to safeguard universal human rights in China and other parts of the world. Understanding the CCP's united front system, tactics and methods is a crucial starting point.

Finally, we must increase the capacity of political figures and civil society organs to understand and resist interference by the CCP and other nefarious state and non-state actors and strengthen the ability of the policy sector, academia and the media to identify and call out foreign interference and misinformation. This is playing to the strengths of open societies in particular, but is also key to any state's ability to exercise sovereignty in the face of corrosive CCP activities.

Executive summary

Under the pretext of combating instability and countering terrorism, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is coercively altering the human and physical geography of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region through the mass surveillance, detention and re-education of its indigenous Turkic-speaking population and the transmigration of Han Chinese settlers into the far-western corner of the People's Republic of China (PRC). These repressive policies have attracted global criticism but also strident denials from the party and its overseas supporters, allies and agents.¹

China's actions in Xinjiang and their impacts extend beyond its borders and directly affect the 'Xinjiang diaspora' of more than a million people. The diaspora is dominated by Uyghur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz and other indigenous people who now reside in countries such as Kazakhstan, Turkey and Australia, but also includes a small group from the Han ethnic majority who formerly lived in or have links to Xinjiang.² Collectively, these people are referred to as 'overseas Chinese from Xinjiang' (新疆籍华侨华人) by the Chinese Government, regardless of their distinct identities as the colonised and the colonisers, or their connections to the Uyghur homeland.

China 'conducts the most sophisticated, global, and comprehensive campaign of transnational repression in the world', and one of its key targets is the Uyghur community abroad, according to a 2022 Freedom House report.³ Researchers and journalists have documented numerous examples of Uyghurs being threatened, harassed or even forcefully deported by PRC Government agencies or their proxies overseas.⁴ Some victims and witnesses have spoken out, but many others fear for their own safety or the safety of their relatives back in China. Amid this climate of intimidation, some overseas community groups, which purport to be independent civil society organs but have close ties to the CCP, claim to represent Xinjiang and speak on behalf of its community. They're whitewashing the CCP's human rights abuses in the Uyghur homeland and even openly praising the party's policies. Their activities seek to mislead the public and could amount to foreign interference if properly exposed. Not understanding the CCP links behind these activities makes public commentary—and understanding—of such events superficial and misleading.

Take, for example, the events of 28 January 2018 in the South Australian city of Adelaide. To celebrate Australia's national day, hundreds of community groups were invited and endorsed by the Adelaide City Council to march through the city's streets.⁵ One group marched behind the banner of the SA Xinjiang Association (南澳新疆联合会) wearing the traditional attire of the Uyghurs and other ethnic minority groups in the PRC (Figure 1),⁶ despite the strong objections of Adelaide's 1,500-strong Uyghur community, who had relatives vanish inside China's re-education system in their homeland.⁷



Figure 1: Members of the SA Xinjiang Association marching in the 2018 Australia Day Parade in Adelaide



Source: SA Xinjiang Association, *Facebook*, 28 January 2018, [online](#) and [online](#).

‘Our culture, dress and music has been hijacked by the Han Chinese of the SA Xinjiang Association which we strongly believe is part of a soft propaganda publicity act from the communist Chinese government’s eradication of the Uighur Turkic people’, a group of Uyghurs later wrote in protest to the City Council.⁸ ‘You people have been stealing our uighur [sic] culture, stealing our clothes’, wrote a local Uyghur resident in response to event photos posted on the association’s Facebook page. ‘... Just because you were born in that region does not mean you can take the culture and traditions of the natives that once occupied that area’.⁹

The SA Xinjiang Association is a Han-dominated community organisation with the strong backing of the PRC’s diplomatic mission and, until recently, local Australian politicians.¹⁰ It claims the right to speak on behalf of the Xinjiang diaspora while neutralising the legitimate concerns of the Uyghur community about Beijing’s human rights abuses in the Uyghur homeland.¹¹ At the time, the group’s theatrics were openly celebrated. It won the best costume award, and its members were photographed with the then Premier of South Australia, Jay Weatherill, and other officials,¹² providing the group with a positive and amplified public profile.

The SA Xinjiang Association, which is part of a large network of Xinjiang-linked overseas groups, might not be immediately recognisable as closely aligned with the CCP and its united front system, but our research demonstrates how the CCP actively cultivates community organisations, such as the SA Xinjiang Association, as conduits for advancing the party’s agenda abroad and obscuring—or even silencing—the voices of Uyghurs and other critics of its policies in Xinjiang.

All governments seek to assert their influence abroad. China is no exception. Yet the CCP is different in the deceptive and coercive nature of its influence operations, which can undermine the sovereignty and interests of other countries and negatively affect the lives and liberties of diasporic community members in those countries.¹³

This report explores community groups and individuals in the Xinjiang diaspora that are linked to the CCP’s united front system, as well as the methods and tactics used by that system to activate and guide them. We use open-source materials (chiefly Chinese-language media reports, government documents, and social media posts) to track groups and individuals who are promoting the party’s Xinjiang narrative and policies overseas, and place their activities within the wider context of the

CCP's overseas influence operations as previously analysed by James To, Gerry Groot, Alex Joske, Anne-Marie Brady and other scholars.

Our findings demonstrate the following:

- the CCP is systematically collecting information on members of the Xinjiang diaspora and creating databases that could strengthen the party's overseas surveillance and interference work.
- community organisations in the Chinese diaspora and their elites are frequently used as conduits for promoting the party's Xinjiang narrative and policies and are actively cultivated, and at times captured, by united front officials.
- some senior members of these organisations also hold prominent positions in China-based united front organs, which enables them to more effectively coordinate activities and promote the party's agenda.
- the influence of CCP-linked community groups extends well beyond the Xinjiang diaspora, and some groups have secured the open or tacit endorsement of local politicians while influencing local public opinion.
- united front agencies leverage cultural events, language learning, business opportunities and political honours to entice and unify overseas Chinese behind the CCP's hegemonic abstractions of 'China' and 'Chineseness' while marginalising, silencing and delegitimising CCP critics, and identities and cultures not approved by the party.

Our report begins with a brief overview of the united front system and its overseas influence operations targeting the Xinjiang diaspora. We then look at the specific tactics and mechanisms of influence adopted by united front operatives to seize control of the Xinjiang narrative and influence public opinion abroad, before we offer our conclusions and recommendations.

Along the way, we provide four detailed case studies in order to pull back the veil on the activities of Xinjiang-linked community organisations and their ties to the united front system in Canada, Central Asia, Australia and Turkey. The full extent of their activities requires additional research and public transparency, and any policy responses will need to respond dynamically to the specifics of each situation. However, the starting point must be a more nuanced understanding of the CCP's united front system.



1. United front work: understanding the system

The official canon of the PRC's founding chairman, Mao Zedong, begins with a series of questions he posed in 1926: 'Who are our enemies? Who are our friends? This is a question of first importance for the revolution'.¹⁴ The act of answering these questions is what the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) calls united front work (统战工作); that is, winning over friends and neutralising enemies in the exercise and maintenance of political power.

United front work aims to create temporary—even disposable—alliances with non-party groups and individuals in order to co-opt support and marginalise the party's critics. Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949,¹⁵ united front work became 'a habitual, almost instinctual, cast of mind' among senior CCP leaders,¹⁶ but also evolved into a complicated system that permeates all aspects of the party-state bureaucracy and its overseas organs.

The united front system and its work expanded significantly under the CCP's current leader, Xi Jinping.¹⁷ In May 2015, Xi declared front work as a key political task for the entire party and each and every party member and called for the creation of a 'grand united front' (大统战).¹⁸ Achieving the 'China dream' and 'great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation' requires the deepening, intensification and outward expansion of united front work, according to Xi, as well as stronger central oversight.

United front work isn't restricted by national borders, nationality or ethnicity, but rather targets people who can help advance the party's agenda. The January 2021 Regulations on United Front Work (中国共产党统一战线工作条例) stipulate that all non-CCP individuals are united front targets but also call for a focus on influential, so-called 'representative individuals' (代表人士).¹⁹

United front work is systematically guided from the top reaches of the CCP and then down and throughout the entire party-state structure. This is what the party calls the 'united front system' (统战系统): a vast network of decentralised party, state and civil society entities that conducts united front work both inside China and abroad.²⁰

The Central United Front Work Leading Small Group (中央统一战线工作领导小组) sits at the apex of the united front system.²¹ This interagency coordinating body, known as a 'leading small group' (LSG, 领导小组), was re-established in July 2015 to strengthen the leadership of the party centre and Xi Jinping over united front work and improve its centralisation, coordination and division of labour.

This LSG is currently chaired by Wang Yang (汪洋), who is a member of the Politburo Standing Committee and chairman of China's peak united front body, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC, 中国人民政治协商会议).²² The group's office is located inside the United Front Work Department of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (中共中央统一战线工作部 or 中央统战部, UFWD) in Beijing, which has local affiliates across China and throughout the entire administrative hierarchy.²³

Structurally, the united front LSG and the UFWD are responsible for coordinating the united front system and setting its overall policy direction.²⁴ Various united front organs, in turn, are involved in united front work: the mobilisation and co-option of people and groups to advance the CCP's own interests under a veneer of legitimacy, diversity and even democratic participation while silencing or drowning out any critical voices.

Speaking for and about Xinjiang is a key focus of the united front system and its work, but the range of administrative organs and their Chinese and English names and acronyms can be confusing, if not overwhelming, and difficult for outsiders to parse. To help readers to disentangle these bodies, which are discussed throughout this report, we've included a list of acronyms and an appendix of key Xinjiang-related united front bodies at the end of this report.

Overseas united front work (*qiaowu*)

Overseas, the CCP's united front system focuses most of its efforts on the estimated 40 million 'overseas Chinese' (*huaqiao*, 华侨).²⁵ The revised 2021 CCP Regulations on United Front Work include a new section about the party's 'unified leadership' of overseas united front work and overseas Chinese affairs.²⁶ This reflects not only the increased emphasis on overseas united front work but also the party's attempt to claim ownership and control over people living outside of the PRC who have an ethnic or historical connection to China, regardless of their citizenship status.

The Regulations enumerate a range of fundamental tasks for overseas united front work, including:²⁷

- enhancing ideological and political guidance.
- increasing the ardent love of the motherland, and understanding and identification with the Chinese Communist Party and socialism with Chinese characteristics among overseas Chinese and Chinese students studying overseas.
- encouraging overseas Chinese to participate in the PRC's reform and opening up and socialist modernization drive, and to be absorbed into the enterprise of national rejuvenation.
- deterring 'Taiwan independence' and separatist forces, and safeguarding the PRC's core national interests.
- utilising links and bonds to promote friendly relationships between China and foreign countries in order to create a favourable international environment.

In Chinese, united front work among the overseas Chinese is known as *qiaowu* (侨务; literally, 'overseas Chinese affairs'). Their relatives who remain in China are called *qiaojuan* (侨眷) and are also targets of united front work.²⁸ *Qiaowu* is conducted by a network that includes government agencies, diplomats, spies, and community organisations endorsed or supervised by the CCP.

The Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council (国务院侨务办公室, OCAO) has long been a key agency within the united front system for *qiaowu* work. In March 2018, the OCAO was incorporated into the UFWD but maintains its name for external interactions.²⁹ The merger was intended to 'enhance the Party's centralised leadership over overseas united front work; more widely unite overseas Chinese, returned overseas Chinese and their families; and better utilise the role of community organisations'.³⁰ This signals an intensification of CCP influence work in all overseas Chinese communities, including the Xinjiang diaspora.

The new united front Regulations specify the main tasks for *qiaowu*:³¹

- enhancing our work among leading representatives of the overseas Chinese, returned overseas Chinese, and their relatives—centring around the theme of fusing together in order to collectively share in the China dream.

- concentrating the hearts, gathering the wisdom, upholding the interests, and serving the overseas Chinese.
- coordinating *qiaowu* activities inside China and abroad, and cultivating *qiaowu* resources.
- guiding overseas Chinese, returned overseas Chinese, and their relatives, to participate in the development of the motherland, to safeguard the unity of the motherland, and increase friendly exchanges and cooperation between the Chinese people and people around the world to enhance the building of a community of common destiny for all mankind.

Qiaowu work is supposed to be consensual and mutually beneficial. Party officials seek to ‘guide’ overseas Chinese towards the ‘correct’ attitude and behaviour, and in response they receive psychological and material benefits.³² In turn, these ‘correct’ thoughts and actions help to advance the CCP’s power and prestige internationally.

Qiaowu and the Xinjiang diaspora

Religious and ethnic affairs, especially as they relate to Xinjiang and Tibet, have long been a core element of united front work. The control of the party centre in Beijing over Xinjiang policymaking has strengthened under Xi Jinping, and state administrative organs such as the National Ethnic Affairs Commission (国家民族事务委员会) have been placed under the direct supervision of the UFDW and its newly created bureau for Xinjiang work.³³ Wang Yang chairs the Central Coordination Group on Xinjiang Work (中央新疆工作协调小组), which is another top-level interagency coordinating body (Figure 2).³⁴

Figure 2: Wang Yang at the 8th National Xinjiang Counterpart Support Work Meeting in July 2021 as chair of the Central Coordination Group on Xinjiang Work



Source: ‘Two years later! Wang Yang, head of the Central Coordination Group on Xinjiang Work, re-deployed tasks’ [时隔两年！中央新疆工作协调小组组长汪洋再度部署任务], *Beijing Youth Daily* [北京青年报] via *sina.com*, 21 July 2021, online.

Senior *qiaowu* officials also play important roles in united front work targeting the Xinjiang diaspora. Tan Tianxing (谭天星), former deputy head of OCAO and then the UFWD until 2021,³⁵ was labelled the Convenor of the Central Coordination Mechanism for Work on Overseas Ethnic Minority Compatriots of Xinjiang Origin (中央海外新疆籍少数民族侨胞工作协调机制召集人) in a 2015 *Xinjiang Daily* report.³⁶

National-level united front agencies such as the UFWD guide and often collaborate with their subordinate offices in Xinjiang. Through these agencies, the CCP coordinates overseas community groups in the Xinjiang diaspora to carry out influence work in a holistic manner, from business activities to education and cultural work, and from language teaching and to involvement in local politics. For example, in 2015, at the first meeting of the Xinjiang *qiaowu* work LSG (新疆海外涉疆侨务工作专项领导小组) held in Ürümqi, Tan Tianxing indicated that the OCAO would ‘sufficiently mobilise forces in the *qiaowu* system to advance Xinjiang-related *qiaowu* work’.³⁷

Influence work among the Xinjiang diaspora encourages targeted individuals and organisations to echo CCP messaging and publicly endorse CCP policies.³⁸ In 2010, the then head of the OCAO, Li Haifeng (李海峰), outlined five measures to enhance Xinjiang- and Tibet-related *qiaowu* work:³⁹

- strengthen interactions of *qiaowu* agencies with the diaspora through two-way exchanges aimed at ‘enhancing their sense of pride and belonging as a member of the Chinese nation’.
- improve understanding of diaspora members of Xinjiang and Tibet so they can effectively ‘explain the Chinese government’s ethnic and religious policies, and expose the true colors of ‘East Turkestan’ and ‘Tibet independence’ splittist forces’.
- support ethnic members of the diaspora to develop and promote ethnic cultures and Chinese culture.
- utilise the advantage of *qiaowu* to serve Xinjiang and Tibet economically.
- improve consular services and protections for members of the ethnic minorities in the diaspora.

Li also said that overseas Chinese can use appropriate methods to ‘guide international media to more objectively and fairly cover Xinjiang and Tibet, and to win the international community’s understanding and support for China’s policies in Xinjiang and Tibet’.⁴⁰ Those tactics exploit open societies and their media to advance the CCP’s objectives.



2. Whom to influence: remaking ‘Xinjiang’

The Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples have deep historical and cultural connections to their homeland and its landscape. Chinese officials declared Xinjiang, meaning the ‘New Frontier’, a province of the Qing empire in 1884.⁴¹ Under the CCP’s systematic campaign of settler colonialism, the human and physical geography of the Uyghur homeland has been steadily remoulded as the Han population increased from around 5% in 1947 to 42% in 2020.⁴² CCP officials project Xinjiang’s current diversity backwards in time, declaring the region an ancient melting pot of different peoples with ‘Chinese’ rather than Uyghur culture at its core.⁴³

United front work among the Xinjiang diaspora has intensified over the past decade and targets all current or former residents regardless of their state-defined ‘nationality or ethnicity’ (民族) and location. There are an estimated 700,000–800,000 Uyghurs living outside of Xinjiang, making them the largest group, followed by Kazakhs and Hui. There are also about 50,000 Han and people from other ethnic groups living overseas who have some sort of connection to Xinjiang.⁴⁴ They include Han settlers from the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC, 新疆生产建设兵团), known as the Bingtuan (兵团) for short.

The paramilitary Bingtuan was established by Chairman Mao in 1954 as the region’s principal colonising vehicle and has helped to settle millions of Han in Xinjiang over the past 70 years.⁴⁵ The Bingtuan was tasked with cultivating and then ‘civilising’ the Xinjiang frontier. Over time, it emerged as the key economic driver of Xinjiang’s economy. It’s been involved in everything from cotton to polysilicon production and has substantial business interests throughout China and overseas.⁴⁶ This process of settler colonialism continues overseas when Bingtuan families and their children emigrate and then claim to speak on behalf of the region and its indigenous communities (see Case study 1).

There have been repeated waves of migration to and from Xinjiang over the past century. A first generation of Uyghur and Kazakh migrants left China for countries such as Turkey and Kazakhstan as CCP forces advanced on Xinjiang in 1949 and then were joined by a newer generation educated under the PRC who left China—often fleeing repression—when China opened to the world under Deng Xiaoping during the 1980s and 1990s. More than half a million Uyghurs and Kazakhs born in Xinjiang now live in Central Asia,⁴⁷ which is considered by CCP officials to be the main battleground of competition with ‘hostile external forces’ and thus a core focus of overseas Xinjiang united front work (see Case study 2),⁴⁸ but there are also significant Uyghur populations in Germany, Turkey, Egypt and the US. Most Han migrants from Xinjiang were part of the second wave of migration and tended to choose wealthier, more developed destinations, such as Europe, Australia, Canada and the US.⁴⁹

According to Li Dehua (李德华), who is party secretary and head of the Xinjiang branch of *China News Service*, a range of competing terms are used to describe members of the Xinjiang diaspora: ‘Xinjiang person with a Xinjiang background’ (新疆背景的新疆人), ‘overseas Chinese who are Xinjiang natives’ (新疆籍华侨华人), ‘overseas Chinese linked to Xinjiang’ (涉疆华人华侨), ‘individuals linked to Xinjiang’ (涉疆者), and ‘Xinjiang person who has migrated overseas’ (移居国外的新疆人).⁵⁰ The Chinese term *huaqiao huaren* (华侨华人), ‘overseas Chinese’, refers to both Chinese citizens residing abroad and foreign citizens of Chinese descent regardless of their ethnicity.⁵¹

The imprecise and ambiguous nature of this elastic term, scholar Elena Barabantseva argues, makes the place of the non-Han minorities such as the Uyghurs inherently problematic in official discourse. The concept of *huaren* ('Chinese') assumes a primordial cultural and racial bond with the Han majority and, yet, in their overseas work, Chinese officials also seek to unite all those linked to the motherland, including ethnic minorities such as the Uyghurs, with the singular goal of 'first "saving", then "serving", and now "rejuvenating the nation"'.⁵²

In the context of the CCP's Xinjiang influence work, the concept of 'overseas Chinese from Xinjiang' (新疆籍侨胞) conflates two distinct and inherently contradictory groups:

- indigenous Turkic-speaking communities from Xinjiang (Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz etc.) who are currently living abroad or are now citizens of foreign countries.
- Han Chinese colonisers with Xinjiang ties who are living overseas, who are chiefly people associated with the Bingtuan and their descendants.

By employing the term 'Xinjiang' or 'Chinese' as a broad and imprecise identity marker, people's cultural, religious and ethnic identities are erased, and pro-CCP voices from Xinjiang can claim the legitimacy to speak on behalf of others with links to the region, regardless of their authenticity.

In other words, the coloniser can speak on behalf of the colonised (after all, they're both from Xinjiang), and the colonised must seek solidarity with the coloniser (as they're both Chinese from Xinjiang). This linguistic twist clouds international understanding of what's happening in Xinjiang and whose homeland is under siege and hinders meaningful engagement with Uyghur and other Turkic-speaking emigres from Xinjiang.



Case study 1: Canada and the Xinjiang Association of Canada

The Xinjiang Association of Canada (加拿大新疆同乡会) is a good example of how individuals with ties to the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), or Bingtuan, claim to speak on behalf of the Uyghurs overseas. The association was formed in Toronto in February 2010, a year after the 2009 Ürümqi riots brought ethnic tensions in the region to wider global attention.⁵³ Its inaugural event was attended by senior members of the PRC consulate in Toronto, including the Consul-General and consular officials in charge of *qiaowu* and cultural affairs—a clear indication of the Chinese diplomatic mission’s approval.⁵⁴

Members of the group are mainly Han but also claim to include Uyghur, Hui and Mongol members, according to the organisation’s website.⁵⁵ The association celebrates Uyghur and Han festivals and invites local politicians as well as consular officials to participate,⁵⁶ and then uses these public events to present a harmonious picture of Xinjiang and its diasporic population.⁵⁷

The founding president of the group is Richard Zhu (Zhu Jiang, 朱江).⁵⁸ Zhu’s parents moved to Xinjiang from China proper, taking up the call by Chairman Mao and other top CCP leaders to settle, secure and develop the Xinjiang frontier as a part of the Bingtuan.⁵⁹ Zhu Jiang joined the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) when he was 15 years old and played basketball for the Xinjiang Military Command (Figure 3).⁶⁰ He migrated to Canada in 2001 and now operates a Toronto restaurant specialising in Xinjiang cuisine.⁶¹

Figure 3: Zhu Jiang (left) in army uniform



Source: ‘Former professional players of China’s Bayi basketball team open basketball training camp—Zhu Jiang’[前中国八一篮球队职业队员开办篮球训练营-朱江], *Fairchild Television*, 19 January 2017, [online](#).

Zhu Jiang frequently defends the CCP's Xinjiang policies. In December 2019, when the US House of Representatives passed the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act, Zhu Jiang was one of the 'overseas Chinese from Xinjiang' quoted by the CCP's propaganda machine in the party's efforts to denounce the Act, claiming that it ignores the observable facts of Xinjiang's stability and development. 'In the past, I worried a little about safety when I returned to Xinjiang. Now Xinjiang [enjoys] social stability which makes people feel calm and provides a sense of security!' Zhu Jiang was quoted as saying in *China News*.⁶²

In 2019, at the joint recommendation of the PRC consulate in Toronto and the UFWD in Xinjiang, Zhu Jiang was invited by the OCAO to attend National Day celebration events in Beijing⁶³—a prestigious honour awarded to about 2,000 prominent overseas Chinese who are trusted by the CCP (Figure 4).⁶⁴

The OCAO's role in the CCP's overseas influence work has come under increased scrutiny. In January 2022, a Canadian judge supported the assessment of an immigration official that 'OCAO had infiltrated overseas Chinese communities in Canada and other countries and engaged in covert action and intelligence gathering', and concluded that 'the Officer reasonably determined that such acts by OCAO fall within the definition of espionage'.⁶⁵

Figure 4: Zhu Jiang attending a PRC's 70th anniversary celebration event in 2019



Source: 'Zhu Jiang, executive president of the Council of Newcomer Organizations, attends the Chinese National Day military parade and reception' [加拿大华人同乡总会执行主席朱江参加中国国庆阅兵观礼及招待会], *Superlife*, 3 October 2019, [online](#).

The Xinjiang Association of Canada is a corporate member of the Council of Newcomer Organizations (加拿大华人同乡会联合总会), which is an umbrella organisation of more than 20 Chinese hometown associations in Canada.⁶⁶ In 2018, Zhu Jiang became the executive president of the Council of Newcomer Organizations.⁶⁷ The council is also backed by the PRC consulate in Toronto, and consular officials attended its preparatory meeting.⁶⁸

Both the Xinjiang Association of Canada and the Council of Newcomer Organizations are involved in promoting ‘China root-seeking’ camps organised by China’s united front organs.⁶⁹ The camps are one of the key vehicles for united front agencies to ‘cultivate *qiaowu* resources’ (涵养侨务资源) and groom future generations to align with the CCP’s agenda.⁷⁰

The council’s close ties with united front agencies continued when Han Jialiang (韩加良) succeeded Zhu Jiang as the executive president of the Council of Newcomer Organizations in 2020.⁷¹ Around the same time that Zhu Jiang was in Beijing attending the National Day military parade, Han attended a week-long workshop in Beijing organised by united front agencies OCAO and the China Overseas Friendship Association (COFA) for more than 40 community leaders from around the world (Figure 5). He was labelled the workshop’s ‘class captain’ in a state media report and delivered the graduation speech. The students stressed the enhanced sense of mission and responsibility of overseas Chinese leaders.⁷² These workshops are leading platforms for cultivating and guiding community leaders in the diaspora and ensuring their alignment with the CCP’s agenda (see Section 4 of this report).

Figure 5: Han Jialiang (front row, 2nd from right) attended a workshop in 2019 organised by key united front agencies



Source: ‘Children at home and abroad draw concentric circles and build the Chinese dream together’ [海内外儿女共画同心圆 凝心聚力共筑中国梦], Tsinghua University, 24 October 2019, [online](#).

In March 2021, the council, on behalf of its member associations (including the Xinjiang Association of Canada), issued a statement in the local Chinese media denouncing a motion passed in Canada's parliament labelling Beijing's treatment of Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang a genocide, saying the motion was based on 'unsubstantiated rumors'.⁷³ The statement urged Canadian politicians to listen to voices of 'Chinese people from mainland China' when it comes to Sino-Canadian relations.⁷⁴ The council's statement was then reported by China's state media to prove that members of the Chinese diaspora disagree with the Canadian parliament's decision.⁷⁵



3. Methods of influence: love, money and intimidation

United front work involves a range of methods. In general, they include emotional manipulation (highlighting heritage bonds with the motherland), material incentives and inducements, and offering political honours and prestige status to members of the Xinjiang diaspora who are willing to advance the CCP's versions of 'China' and 'Chineseness'.

In October 2015, the chair of the Xinjiang regional CPPCC, Nurlan Abdumanjin (努尔兰·阿不都满金), urged member agencies to fully utilise the region's unique *qiaowu* resources at the first meeting of the Xinjiang LSG for Overseas Xinjiang-related *Qiaowu* Work (新疆海外涉疆侨务工作专项领导小组). He listed five methods for nurturing and expanding the patriotic forces while maximising the party's efforts to guide and control them:⁷⁶

- win people over politically.
- establish emotional bonds of friendships.
- exert cultural influence over people.
- support people financially.
- respect people's religious beliefs.

In 2017, the then director of OCAO, Qiu Yuanping (裘援平), stressed how overseas resources can help maintain social stability in Xinjiang through 'hard' projects, such as attracting investment and donations from the Xinjiang diaspora, as well as 'soft' projects, such as cultural and education exchanges, health care and media cooperation.⁷⁷

Yet, ultimately, if sentiment and inducements are insufficient, the CCP authorities can resort to more coercive methods of direct interference such as harassment, blacklisting and even physical attacks against hostile elements, according to *qiaowu* expert James To.⁷⁸ These more heavy-handed tactics often involve China's intelligence and overseas security agencies.

Hundreds of Uyghurs in Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Thailand, Saudi Arabia and other countries have been forcibly deported back to Xinjiang by local authorities with the assistance of China's diplomatic missions.⁷⁹ Agents of the CCP continue to closely monitor Uyghurs and other Muslim groups overseas. There are also reports of Chinese officials intimidating Uyghurs through social media, phone calls and face-to-face meetings in which the officials threaten their personal safety or the safety and wellbeing of their relatives if they criticise the party and its policies.⁸⁰

Case study 2: Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan)

CCP officials consider Central Asia to be the main battleground of Xinjiang-linked united front work, and their efforts are well advanced and largely free from public scrutiny. Central Asia is home to the largest Xinjiang diaspora, concentrated in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, which share a nearly 3,000-kilometre border with Xinjiang. This population includes over half a million Uyghur, Kazakh and other Turkic emigres but also other ethnic groups, including a small Hui and Han community.⁸¹

In the past, government officials in both countries expressed concerns for the plight of the Uyghur and Kazakh people in Xinjiang. However, in more recent years, as China's economic and political might has grown in both countries, these concerns have been largely silenced as the CCP strengthens its influence operations and mobilises a range of pro-CCP individuals and organisations to help pursue its agenda.⁸²

The Jebeu Ethnic Chinese Association (哈萨克斯坦全国杰标华人华侨联合会, hereafter, Jebeu)⁸³ and the Kyrgyzstan Central Asia Chinese Friendship Association (吉尔吉斯斯坦中亚华人华侨协会, KCACFA) are two of the CCP's key united front-linked organs in Central Asia.

Jebeu was established in 2009 and now has over 3,000 members.⁸⁴ The ethnic Kazakh Omaraly Adilbekuly (乌马尔艾力·阿德力别克) has been its president since 2014 (Figure 6).⁸⁵ Omaraly Adilbekuly was born in Xinjiang during the 1960s, moved to Kazakhstan after graduating from China's leading ethnic minority university in Beijing and became a Kazakh citizen in 2000.⁸⁶ The KCACFA was established in 2004 and claims roughly one hundred members from multi-ethnic groups, including Han, Hui, Russian, Kazakh and Uzbek members.⁸⁷ The president of the organisation is Hu Yumei (虎玉梅), a Hui born in Ürümqi who has lived in Kyrgyzstan for many years.⁸⁸

Figure 6: Omaraly Adilbekuly (left) with deputy director of the OCAO Tan Tianxing (centre) and Talhat Mamur (塔勒哈特·马穆尔) (right), dean of the Kazakhstan–China International Language Institute in Almaty, during a 2017 OCAO visit



Source: 'Tan Tianxing, deputy director of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, visited "Apple City". What did he say to our overseas Chinese?' [国侨办副主任谭天星拜访“苹果之城”·他对咱侨胞都说了啥?], *New Silk Road Observer* [丝路新观察], 11 August 2017, [online](#).

Both Omaraly Adilbekuly and Hu Yumei have direct links with the CCP's united front. In 2015, the CCP appointed them both as council members of the China Association for International Cultural Exchange with Overseas Chinese (中国华侨国际文化交流促进会, ICEA), which is supervised by the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese 中华全国归国华侨联合会, ACFROC)—a key organisation for united front work among people with overseas ties.⁸⁹ In 2017, they were both invited by the CCP to the annual gathering of the regional-level Xinjiang CPPCC as non-voting delegates.⁹⁰ Omaraly Adilbekuly became a member of the Sixth Council of the China Overseas Exchange Association (中国海外交流协会, COEA) in 2017⁹¹ and since 2019 has been listed as a member of the Fifth Council of China Overseas Friendship Association (COFA), which is directly under the supervision of the UFWD.⁹²

Both Jebeu and the KCACFA are key points of contact for united front officials during their 'going out' visits (see Section 4) and help organise *qiaowu* activities with agencies from the PRC. When united front officials from Yili Prefecture in Xinjiang visited Kazakhstan in 2016, Jebeu was one of the groups they engaged with.⁹³ In 2017, Jebeu was one of the community groups visited by Tan Tianxing, then deputy of the OCAO (Figure 6).⁹⁴ At the meeting, Adilbekuly thanked Tan for his visit and said he was born in China, grew up in China, his heart is tied to China, and he hoped to play a role in advancing China–Kazakhstan relations.⁹⁵ In August 2018, when researchers from the Institute of Overseas Chinese History carried out field research across Kyrgyzstan, they first met with KCACFA members.⁹⁶ KCACFA president Hu Yumei provided generous help and support to the research team, according to a news bulletin published on the website ACFROC.⁹⁷

Figure 7: Hu Yumei meeting with Xuan Jiangbo (轩江波), vice president of the Bingtuan's Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese, in May 2017⁹⁸



Source: 'Vice President of the XPCC Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese Meets with ethnic Chinese community leaders in Kyrgyzstan [新疆兵团侨联副主席会见吉尔吉斯斯坦侨领], chinaqw.com, 12 May 2017, [online](#).

Like other pro-CCP community organisations, Jebeu is involved in strengthening the party's voice overseas while downplaying its human rights abuses in Xinjiang. Amid growing international criticism of the party's crackdown in the region, united front officials and PRC diplomatic missions around the world organised events to defend its policies.⁹⁹ These events frequently include testimonials from 'overseas Chinese of Xinjiang origin' about how good life is in Xinjiang. The events are then amplified by state media to present a positive image of the region, including through overseas Chinese media outlets such as the *Silk Road Observer* (丝路新观察报), which is controlled by the state-owned *Chinese News* and is published in Kyrgyz, Chinese and Russian across Central Asia.¹⁰⁰ Omaraly Adilbekuly participated in at least three such events in 2021 alone.¹⁰¹ At a July 2021 event co-organised by the Xinjiang Overseas Friendship Association and consulates in countries such as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, Omaraly Adilbekuly was quoted as saying:

Under the party's leadership, the people are living a good life. I have witnessed the Kazakh population in Xinjiang grow from less than 400,000 to nearly two million and the improvement of people's living standards. These could not have been achieved without the strong leadership of the Communist Party of China. I am very happy and proud.¹⁰²

Finally, multiple sources discuss Jebeu's potential interference in efforts to bring public attention to the plight of Kazakhs caught up in the CCP's crackdown in Xinjiang.¹⁰³ Serikzhan Bilash, a Kazakhstani national who was born in Xinjiang, established the human rights organisation Atajurt (Fatherland) in 2017 to raise awareness of Beijing's repressive policies in Xinjiang.¹⁰⁴ Jebeu apparently attacked Bilash and Atajurt, publishing an open letter to the government of Kazakhstan in January 2019 demanding a ban on the organisation, according to the Society for Threatened Peoples, which is a German based human rights NGO.¹⁰⁵ In March 2019, Bilash was arrested by Kazakh security forces and eventually found guilty of inciting ethnic hatred, but was later released from detention.¹⁰⁶ Bilash fled the country in 2020.¹⁰⁷ In a 2022 interview, he labelled Omaraly Adilbekuly the 'true culprit' behind his 2019 arrest and Jebeu as one of six overseas Chinese organisations that exert influence over Kazakhstan's domestic politics.¹⁰⁸

4. Tactics of influence: information, culture and co-option

Over the course of recent decades, united front agencies have developed a range of strategies and mechanisms for guiding, influencing and ultimately leveraging overseas ‘Chinese’ communities in support of the CCP’s domestic and international agenda. In this section, we discuss several of the most prominent platforms.

Information gathering

Enlisting overseas Xinjiang-linked community organisations to serve the CCP agenda through different means starts with research and information gathering among overseas groups, individuals, and their relatives back in China. In the words of Sun Chunlan (孙春兰), head of the UFWD in 2015, ‘investigation and research is the rice bowl for united front work and the rice for united front work officials. It’s like the nose muzzle of an ox, and the most important “plot of land” united front agencies must cultivate’.¹⁰⁹

Database of Xinjiang diaspora

Party officials in Xinjiang have been building a series of databases of former and current Xinjiang residents with overseas connections since 1997.¹¹⁰ They collect detailed personal information, including ‘political inclinations and attitudes towards the motherland’ and ‘the methods and consequences of the efforts by hostile foreign forces to co-opt this group’, and then use that information to develop *qiaowu* influence strategies.¹¹¹

This is part of a wider strategy for the ‘informatisation’ of united front work.¹¹² Former OCAO director Li Haifeng claimed in 2012 that the building of an integrated database of overseas Chinese was a necessary basis for developing *qiaowu* work and theory.¹¹³ In September 2014, the *People’s Daily* reported that the Xinjiang regional government would cooperate with the Ministry of Public Security and the OCAO to build a database of overseas Xinjiang ethnic minorities.¹¹⁴ The Bingtuan and its various divisions also conduct their own survey and information-gathering work among overseas community members.¹¹⁵ The databases and the detailed personal information they contain are used by CCP officials in their overseas cultivation and coercion work.

Research institutes

National and regional-level united front agencies set up institutions to carry out research on the Xinjiang diaspora and provide suggestions to policymakers. In 1984, ACFROC set up the Institute of Overseas Chinese History (华侨历史研究所), which was renamed the China Institute of Overseas Chinese History (中国华侨华人研究所) in 2018. This institute functions as a think tank for *qiaowu* work, especially for the work of ACFROC.¹¹⁶ In about 2013, the Xinjiang branch of ACFROC established the Research Institute for Xinjiang Overseas Chinese History (新疆华侨华人历史研究所), which was tasked with conducting research on the Xinjiang diaspora, collecting historical materials, and building up a research information collection system.¹¹⁷ Overseas community groups linked to the united front serve as important contact points for the Xinjiang-based research teams. They not only provide logistical assistance to the teams but also share with them information about the community.¹¹⁸

Training *qiaowu* cadres

The regional government in Xinjiang provides regular training for grassroots united front officials.¹¹⁹ In September 2019, for example, it organised a five-day workshop at the Xinjiang Party School for more than 40 grassroots officials from various branches across Xinjiang.¹²⁰ Wu Xiaoqing (吴晓青), deputy party secretary and deputy director of the Xinjiang Overseas Chinese Federation, told workshop attendees ‘to guide members of the Xinjiang diaspora to make a contribution to the new era, to fully utilise their connections in China and abroad, to tell a good China story and show the world the full picture of the real China, and to promote the cohesiveness of overseas Chinese networks’.¹²¹ Jinan University, which is under the direct supervision of the UFWD, also runs regular training programs for *qiaowu* cadres from provinces and regions across China, including those from Xinjiang,¹²² as does the Overseas Affairs Office of the Bingtuan (Figure 8).¹²³

Figure 8: *Qiaowu* cadres complete a training workshop with Xinjiang and Tibetan themes held in Jinan University in 2017



Source: ‘The 4th Symposium on Xinjiang- and Tibetan-related *qiaowu* work successfully completed in Guangzhou’ [第4期涉疆涉藏侨务工作专题研讨班在广州圆满结业], *Qiaowu Cadres Online Study Network* [侨务干部在线学习网], 15 June 2017, [online](#).

Cultivating overseas community leaders

Winning allies for the CCP’s agenda is crucial to united front work, and here psychological manipulation and material inducements play an important role in co-opting overseas community elites. Party operatives often hide their real intentions behind colourful platitudes, such as ‘win-win cooperation’ and ‘mutual benefit’, in order to win over as many people as possible and get them to wilfully do the CCP’s bidding.

In a 2014 instructional guide on ‘how to do better *qiaowu* work’, CCP cadres were told to ‘fully utilise the outreach function of *qiaowu* work, and develop and strengthen forces that are friendly to us’.¹²⁴

By providing strong support to community elites in the Xinjiang diaspora and proactively cultivating *qiaowu* resources, Xinjiang officials are able to ‘continuously strengthen the power of friendly community groups’, according to the director of the Xinjiang regional OCAO, Eli Ablimit (艾力·阿不力米提).¹²⁵

Party cadres target people rather than information *per se*, according to former UFWO operative Cheng Ganyuan (程干远), and seek to use the fragilities and vulnerabilities of human nature to win over the agnostics while marginalising any recalcitrants.¹²⁶ Operatives look to guide rather than direct behaviour by appealing to ‘basic human sensibilities, needs, and desires’, seeking to get individuals to voluntarily act in ways that are favourable to the party and its interests.¹²⁷

Inviting in and going out

The strategy of ‘inviting in and going out’ (请进来·走出去) means sending *qiaowu* officials overseas to carry out united front work while cultivating united front targets by inviting them to China.¹²⁸ This is a well-honed *qiaowu* strategy that ‘deepens identification and attachment to the Chinese nation and the motherland while fostering China-friendly forces’, according to former OCAO head Li Haifeng.¹²⁹ It was personally championed and practised by Xi Jinping when he was party secretary of Fujian and Zhejiang provinces.¹³⁰ It aims, according to *qiaowu* expert James To, to mobilise and then capture voices and organisations that appear external to and neutral about the CCP in order to advance the party’s own agenda.¹³¹

Going out activities facilitate information gathering and exerting CCP influence in diaspora communities. *Qiaowu* officials in Xinjiang regularly visit overseas community groups to collect information, provide ‘operational guidance’, ‘isolate and combat “East Turkestan” separatist forces’, and strengthen China’s ‘discourse power’ (话语权) through mutual exchanges.¹³² Since 1997, the Xinjiang regional OCAO has been dispatching work teams to countries with large diasporic populations from Xinjiang,¹³³ and team members hold meetings with consular officials and meet with community groups.¹³⁴

Through these meetings, united front officials ‘painstakingly’ collect information about the historical background of ethnic communities, elite members and their wealth, and their political stance and attitude towards China.¹³⁵ In particular, they identify prominent individuals who hold a special affinity with the Chinese nation, second or third generations of ethnic Chinese, and ‘rightists’ among the ethnic Chinese population as well as those who hold ‘extreme’ religious views in the eyes of the CCP.¹³⁶

Sometimes the outreach teams also provide financial support to friendly organisations. During a visit in 2008 to Pakistan, for example, the Xinjiang Overseas Exchange Association donated ¥200,000 (US\$31,700) to the Rawalpindi Chinese Association (拉瓦尔品第华侨华人协会) and Gilgit Chinese Association (吉尔吉特华侨华人协会) to support their activities (Figure 9).¹³⁷ In return, that friendship can be drawn on to support the CCP’s agenda when needed. Mohammad Nasir Khan, the president of the Rawalpindi Chinese Association, joined a 2021 virtual briefing with Xinjiang party officials and overseas Chinese and students in Pakistan, in which participants ‘refuted the lies and fallacies of the US and Western anti-China forces’ and defended the CCP’s policies in Xinjiang.¹³⁸

Figure 9: Eli Ablimit (艾力·阿不力米提) (2nd from left), deputy director of the Xinjiang Overseas Exchange Association, donates money to community groups in the Xinjiang diaspora in Pakistan



Source: 'Xinjiang Overseas Exchange Association delegation visits Pakistan to investigate the situation of overseas Chinese and convey goodwill to overseas Chinese' [新疆海外交流协会代表团访问巴基斯坦考察侨情慰问侨胞], Embassy of the PRC in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 21 July 2008, [online](#).

On these trips, *qiaowu* officials also seek to meet with elites and politicians in order to cultivate positive voices and supporters for the CCP and its policies in overseas communities.¹³⁹ These interactions cover a wide range of sectors, including business, culture and language teaching, and have increasingly targeted ethnic minority communities in Central Asia, but also communities with a large Uyghur population in countries such as Turkey, Germany and Australia.¹⁴⁰

The Covid-19 pandemic has made face-to-face gatherings more difficult and greatly reduced the scope of inviting in and going out activities over the past three years, but the united front system is adapting. In July 2021, leaders from community groups in foreign countries with ties to Xinjiang attended an online seminar organised by the Xinjiang Overseas Friendship Association (新疆海外联谊会) and China's diplomatic missions in those countries. The theme of the seminar was telling the world the story of the 'real Xinjiang' and countering the 'deliberately fabricated lies' about human rights abuse in Xinjiang in response to the establishment of the Uyghur Tribunal in London.¹⁴¹ In December 2021, another virtual meeting was held on the theme of 'introducing Xinjiang; speaking for Xinjiang; telling a good Xinjiang story; and spreading a positive voice for China'. It was attended by 25 overseas CPPCC plenary delegates from 19 different countries, who pledged to 'actively publicise and introduce the real Xinjiang to overseas countries through interviews with the media and speaking out on social media such as Facebook and Twitter'.¹⁴²

Training workshops

The hosting of training and networking workshops in China for overseas community leaders is a key part of the inviting in strategy. In 2010, ACFROC organised the first workshop for leaders of ‘Xinjiang’s overseas Chinese ethnic minority community organisations’ (新疆籍少数民族华侨华人社团).¹⁴³ Three years later, in August 2013, it hosted another workshop in Ürümqi, this time referred to as ‘Xinjiang overseas Chinese community organisations’ (新疆华侨华人社团). The nine-day workshop was attended by 40 Xinjiang diasporic community leaders from countries such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Canada and Australia (Figure 10).¹⁴⁴

Figure 10: The Second Xinjiang Overseas Chinese Community Leaders Workshop jointly hosted by national and Xinjiang regional *qiaowu* agencies in 2013



Source: ‘Seminar for leaders of Xinjiang-related overseas Chinese associations opens in Xinjiang (photos)’ [新疆华侨华人社团负责人研习班在新疆开班(图)], *China News*, 15 August 2013, online.

The purported goal of the workshop was to enhance the participants’ understanding of Xinjiang’s ethnic, religious and development policies and to learn about the ‘true’ China and Xinjiang through first-hand experience. Yet, as the CCP-controlled *China News* revealed, the ultimate goal was to ensure that members of the Xinjiang diaspora ‘become firm supporters of ethnic unity and long-term stability in Xinjiang, as well as enthusiastic participants of Xinjiang’s leapfrog-style social and economic development’.¹⁴⁵

Australian businessman Ablimit Sadik (阿不力米提·沙迪克), who appears to be either Uyghur or Kazakh, led the 2013 delegation to Ürümqi.¹⁴⁶ As the leader of another delegation in 2015, Sadik met with then XUAR chairman Shöhret Zakir (雪克来提·扎克尔) who urged delegation members ‘to become promoters of Xinjiang’s development, organisers of anti-separatist activities, participants in the development of Xinjiang, and unite the vast majority of the overseas Xinjiang ethnic minorities

in order to create a good external environment for Xinjiang'.¹⁴⁷ In response, Ablimit Sadik reportedly said that the Xinjiang diaspora has an obligation to make a contribution to its homeland and that safeguarding the unity of the motherland is the most sacred mission for members of the diaspora.¹⁴⁸

Cultural performances

Cultural events, which link CCP officials with overseas community groups and individuals, have been described as an important 'carrier' (载体) of *qiaowu* work by senior united front officials.¹⁴⁹ These seemingly prosaic activities 'strengthen the ideological and political leadership over the overseas Chinese community' and help to 'deepen their understanding that the Chinese Communist Party is the real source of happiness for the Chinese people', according to Wan Lijun (万立骏), the party secretary and president of ACFROC.¹⁵⁰

Qiaowu agencies such as ACFROC and the OCAO place great importance on cultural activities.¹⁵¹ What they call '*qiaowu* cultural work' (侨务文化工作) is used not only to enhance people's friendly feelings towards China and the CCP, but also to assist with combating and containing 'hostile separatist forces', according to a senior united front official in the field of *qiaowu* cultural work.¹⁵²

'Embrace China' (亲情中华) and 'Cultural China—Charming Xinjiang' (文化中国·魅力新疆) are two of the most prominent touring cultural performances used by Xinjiang united front officials. Embrace China features Chinese performance arts, painting, calligraphy, traditional Chinese medicine, martial arts and Chinese-language teaching.¹⁵³ The Charming Xinjiang performance purports to feature 'authentic' Uyghur songs, dance and acrobatic programs—including *muqam* (木卡姆), the UNESCO-inscribed intangible cultural heritage that has been sanitised and secularised to promote the CCP's vision of cultural diversity in Xinjiang¹⁵⁴—and has been performed across the globe under the direction of the Xinjiang Overseas Exchange Association (新疆海外交流协会).¹⁵⁵

These events allow CCP officials to meet local community leaders and politicians in order to establish relationships that can later be activated to advance the party's agenda. In 2009, Zhao Yang (赵阳), then OCAO deputy director and director of a Cultural China program, told Chinese state media:

In the past I led many art troupes on overseas trips, but they purely entailed performances for the most part. Later we discovered that community organisations and local dignitaries around the world are extremely interested in such goodwill activities ... concurrent with performances, we now engage in a huge amount of *qiaowu* work, visiting overseas Chinese community organisations, inspecting overseas Chinese businesses, as well as interacting with [local] politicians and prominent individuals. The integration of *qiaowu* work and goodwill activities complement each other well.¹⁵⁶

Community organisations linked to the united front assist in organising these cultural events. In February 2016, for example, a Cultural China—Charming Xinjiang performance was staged in Sydney as Uyghurs began disappearing into prison-like re-education camps in Xinjiang.¹⁵⁷ The event was jointly organised by the OCAO and its Xinjiang regional branch, the PRC consulate in Sydney, and local community organisations with known ties to the CCP's united front system.¹⁵⁸ Ablimit Sadik, the businessman who attended the Second Xinjiang Overseas Chinese Community Leaders Workshop in 2013, was part of the event (Figure 11).¹⁵⁹ He didn't hide his close ties with the Chinese Embassy in an interview he gave to the Uyghur program of *Radio Free Asia* in 2016.¹⁶⁰

Figure 11: Group photo of local organisers of the 2016 Cultural China—Charming Xinjiang performance in Sydney; Ablimit Sadik is 3rd from the left in the front row



Source: “Cultural China, Charming Xinjiang” Chinese Dream Tianshan Love Song and Dance Gala’ [《文化中国 魅力新疆》 中国梦 天山情歌舞晚会], Australian Chinese Performing Artists Association, no date, [online](#).

Case study 3: Australia and the SA Xinjiang Association

In diverse migrant societies such as Australia, the CCP's united front system exploits multiculturalism and uses it as a cover for advancing the party's agenda. Take, for example, the South Australia Xinjiang Association (南澳新疆联合会), which was established in 2009 in Adelaide and regularly co-opts Uyghur cultural traditions (food, songs, dances and clothing) despite most of its members being Han Chinese (Figure 12).¹⁶¹

Figure 12: Members of the SA Xinjiang Association at their 9th Anniversary Gala in November 2018



Source: 'Majestic steeds fly over the waters of Tianchi lake, hand drums and silk strings sound as moonlight cups are drained in the enchanted realm of Tianshan, green carpets and flowers adorn the Belt and Road—on the 9th anniversary of the SA Xinjiang Association' [骏马飞踏天池水 手鼓丝弦月光杯 天山居处仙人境 一带绿毯一路花 —— 南澳新疆联合会9周年侧记], acnweekly [新报阿德莱德] via sohu.com, 19 November 2018, [online](#).

The SA Xinjiang Association's founding president is Irena Zhang (Zhang Yanxia, 张燕霞), who was born in Ürümqi (Figure 13). Her father, Victor Zhang Wei, is a famous artist who previously worked for the state-run *Xinjiang Daily* newspaper, and her mother is of mixed Han and Russian parentage.¹⁶² Zhang emigrated to Australia in 1983 with her parents when she was a teenager. As a successful businesswoman,¹⁶³ Irena Zhang led several delegations from Australia to her native China,¹⁶⁴ including Xinjiang, where she claims several members of the association have already established factories and other investments.¹⁶⁵ Before founding the SA Xinjiang Association, Zhang had been a vice president of the SA branch of the Australian Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification of China (ACPPRC), a prominent united front organisation in Australia that has been under intense scrutiny for foreign interference activities in recent years.¹⁶⁶

Irena Zhang is reportedly indifferent about the CCP's treatment of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang. She told *SA Weekend* in 2020: 'In my opinion, I don't think they are being mistreated', and 'the initiative is to give them (the Uighurs) some skills, that is how I see it. Whether it's voluntary or not voluntary, we don't know that'.¹⁶⁷ She has also used Twitter to spread misinformation about the region, retweeting an unverified article about the '10 imperialist lies about China's Uyghur population, and the truth'.¹⁶⁸

The SA Xinjiang Association is strongly backed by the PRC's diplomatic mission in Australia. Its inaugural banquet in December 2009 was attended by Mao Runlong (茅润龙), then Minister Counsellor of the Chinese Embassy in Australia,¹⁶⁹ and Chinese Government diplomats are regular guests at the group's anniversary celebrations and other events.¹⁷⁰ In 2011, when then OCAO Deputy Xu Yousheng (许又声) led a Cultural China performance troupe to Australia,¹⁷¹ he met with Irena Zhang and the SA Xinjiang Association in Adelaide.¹⁷² Xu is now deputy head of the UFWD.¹⁷³

From 2016 until November 2021, the group's president was Xia Guanjun (夏冠君, aka Genargi Xia or Genargi Krasnov),¹⁷⁴ who presumably claims some sort of Russian heritage (Figure 13). He moved to Adelaide in 1983 with his parents, who emigrated to Australia from Xinjiang via Hong Kong.¹⁷⁵ He was denied a liquor licence in 2005 for his karaoke bar in Adelaide's central business district after the police presented 'secret criminal intelligence' to the courts.¹⁷⁶

Figure 13: Irena Zhang (1st left), Jing Lee MLC (2nd right) and Genargi Xia (1st right) with He Lanjing, Consul-General of the PRC in Adelaide (2nd from left) at an event to welcome the Consul-General to Adelaide, December 2018



Source: Wang Jiaqi [王家齐], 'Build bridges with delicate shoulders, connect with the past and link with the future, promote the development of traditional friendship, and draw a blueprint in gentle words, continue the past and open up the future, and seek a leap in Australia-China exchange' [柔肩架桥梁 承前启后 促传统友谊发展 轻语绘蓝图 继往开来 谋澳中交流跨越], *acnweekly* [阿德新报], 4 December 2018, [online](#).

As president of the SA Xinjiang Association, Genargi Xia was rubbing shoulders with Chinese and Australian government officials and flying off to Beijing for meetings with united front link agencies. In 2017, he was listed as a member of the Sixth Council of the China Overseas Exchange Association (COEA, 中国海外交流协会).¹⁷⁷ When COEA was merged with the UFWD-supervised China Overseas Friendship Association (COFA, 中华海外联谊会) in 2019,¹⁷⁸ Xia Guanjun was again named as a COFA

council member alongside Turkey’s Sabir Boğda (see Case study 4).¹⁷⁹ That same year, he was invited to attend the CCP’s gala military parade in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square to celebrate the PRC’s 70th anniversary, where he was apparently brought to tears: ‘As an overseas wanderer who left home at a young age’, he was quoted in the local Chinese media as saying, ‘seeing such a strong and prosperous motherland, there is no way to express the feeling in words’.¹⁸⁰

The association’s credibility and influence are enhanced through the involvement of local politicians in its events. South Australian parliamentarian Jing Lee (李菁璇) has a long association with the group that goes back to at least 2010, when the group celebrated its first anniversary.¹⁸¹ As Assistant Minister to former Premier Steven Marshall,¹⁸² Jing Lee reportedly praised the group for its ‘positive contribution to multiculturalism’ (Figures 13 and 14).¹⁸³

Figure 14: Genargi Xia receiving an award from the South Australian Parliament for his contribution to multiculturalism from Jing Lee MLC at the 10th anniversary celebration of the SA Xinjiang Association in 2019



Source: ‘Our country is calm, our love for Xinjiang is strong, fleeting years are like water, we are celebrating with you—on the golden ten year celebration of the SA Xinjiang Association’ [家国静好·情为“新”,流年似水·愿与“君”同——记南澳新疆联合会黄金十年庆典], *MGY Media* [美皋域传媒], 17 December 2019, [online](#).

Despite outrage in segments of Adelaide’s Uyghur community over the association’s activities, the group wasn’t called into public question until an August 2020 investigative article in *The Australian* by reporter David Penberthy. Penberthy spoke with academics and security experts who think that the SA Xinjiang Association is a Beijing front that ‘operates in line with the Chinese Communist Party’s United Front Work Department’, and many Uyghurs believe the Xinjiang Association spies on them.¹⁸⁴ The SA Xinjiang Association denies links with the CCP. According to a local media report, the association sent a letter to politicians and stakeholders saying: ‘Our Association is not in any way linked to the Chinese Communist Party’s United Front Work Department’.¹⁸⁵

In response to these allegations and calls by her fellow politicians for an independent investigation into possible links with the CCP,¹⁸⁶ Jing Lee defended herself, claiming she was a victim of a racist ‘smear campaign’ by her political opponents. She also distanced herself from the SA Xinjiang Association and its views,¹⁸⁷ deleting photos of her at the association’s events,¹⁸⁸ and condemning China’s treatment of the Uyghurs in a December 2020 media interview: ‘Any country that violates human rights issues concerns me ... and China is included’.¹⁸⁹

In November 2021 the association received a facelift at its 12th anniversary celebration event. During a Covid-safe outdoor barbeque attended by Chinese consular officials, the SA Xinjiang Association announced its new leadership team.¹⁹⁰ The new president, Vivian Lim (年巍), is the daughter of a founding member of the association and runs a migration agency in South Australia.¹⁹¹

In a cover article in a local Chinese-language magazine, Lim claimed a mixed Uyghur and Han lineage.¹⁹² In words not dissimilar to CCP’s talking-points on Xinjiang, she stated:

Xinjiang is a place where multiple ethnic groups lived since ancient times, where diverse cultures fuse and intersect. This unique characteristic created an environment where the sons and daughters of all ethnic groups coexist in mutual respect and harmony ... we [the SA Xinjiang Association] respect and promote the native culture of Xinjiang, but are also committed to making Xinjiang culture—even Chinese culture and Australia’s splendid and rich multiculturalism—harmonious and inclusive.¹⁹³

Language schools and root-seeking camps

The CCP’s united front agencies place great importance on cultivating future generations of the Xinjiang diaspora to ensure their alignment with the CCP’s political agenda. *Qiaowu* officials are told to actively ‘guide’ (引导) and ‘foster’ (培养) this new generation of migrants in order to ‘nurture friendly forces for China’, in the words of a former head of the OCAO.¹⁹⁴ As an article on the OCAO website elaborates:

The second and third generations of Chinese from Xinjiang are the future and the hope of Xinjiang’s *qiaowu* work. Working well with them is important not only to cultivate a trustworthy, reliable and usable force to counter the ethnic splittists, but also to nurture unique resources that are beneficial for our social stability and economic development.¹⁹⁵

This cultivation work is commonly conducted through youth-focused cultural activities, such as Chinese-language instruction and root-seeking summer camps in China, which aim to inject and nurture affection for the participants’ ancestral homeland and condition them to the CCP’s world view.¹⁹⁶ In 2010, the OCAO in Xinjiang developed the region’s first ‘Education Base for Chinese Language and Culture’ (华文教育基地) in Ürümqi and invited 20 youths from eight different countries to attend a camp at which they studied Chinese language, Chinese art and calligraphy, and other culture and history lessons.¹⁹⁷

Some UFWD-linked community organisations abroad also run Chinese-language schools. Senior united front officials describe overseas Chinese-language schools as one of the ‘three treasures’ (三宝) in the party’s *qiaowu* work, with the other two ‘treasures’ being overseas community organisations and media outlets.¹⁹⁸

The Egyptian chapter of the UFWD-linked China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification (CCPPNR) established a Chinese-language school targeting the children of Uyghur families in 2009.¹⁹⁹ According to its president, Chen Jiannan (陈建南), the classes ‘provide a good opportunity for Uyghur and Han fusion while ensuring that patriotic education for Uyghur compatriots starts from childhood’.²⁰⁰ Unlike the Chinese diplomatic mission in Egypt (the influence work of which is publicly constrained, according to Chen), civil society groups such as the CCPPNR are better placed to ‘carry out in-depth *qiaowu* united front work among Uyghur groups’, helping to counter efforts by East Turkestan separatists to ‘brainwash’ and ‘alienate’ Uyghurs from their Han and Hui compatriots.²⁰¹

Tapping into business networks

United front agencies in Xinjiang have set up business associations to draw in returned entrepreneurs with foreign citizenship and Xinjiang natives with overseas business links. The associations go beyond facilitating business networking for members and are expected to actively promote CCP policies at home and abroad. The Xinjiang International Federation of Overseas Chinese Entrepreneurs (新疆国际侨商联合会, XJIFOCE) serves as a base for *qiaowu* work and as a bridge for CCP and government agencies to interact with overseas entrepreneurs with links to Xinjiang.²⁰² At its inaugural meeting in September 2013, the XUAR People’s Congress Standing Committee’s current party secretary and director, Shewket Imin (肖开提·依明),²⁰³ called on the business community ‘to rally around the [CCP’s] central task and serve the [CCP’s] overall interests’.²⁰⁴

Serving the party’s ‘overall interests’ includes mobilising business elites to support the CCP’s ‘de-extremification’ policies in the region. In 2017, the XJIFOCE organised a series of activities under the theme of ‘uniting overseas Chinese entrepreneurs; safeguarding social stability’ (凝聚侨商 维护稳定).²⁰⁵ The gatherings were part of a series of public loyalty pledges held across Xinjiang in early 2017 as the re-education campaign was in full swing, at which participants were asked to ‘speak up and brandish the sword’ (发声亮剑) in denouncing the ‘three evil forces’ (三股势力) of separatism, terrorism and extremism before their peers and colleagues (Figure 15).²⁰⁶ Attendees expressed their determination to implement the CCP’s Xinjiang governing strategy and vowed to ‘guide returned overseas Chinese and the diasporic population to further enhance political firmness by sharing the same heart and walking the same path’ and ‘shouldering political responsibilities’.²⁰⁷

Figure 15: Kyrgyzstan's KCACFA president Hu Yumei (front row 2nd from left; see Case study 2) at one of the 'speak up and brandish the sword' events in 2017



Source: 'Xinjiang-related overseas Chinese community in the region hold a symposium on the "Three Loves and Three Antis" and speak up and brandish the sword' [全区侨界“三爱三反”发声亮剑座谈会召开], CCTV, 25 April 2017, online.

The Xinjiang Overseas Chinese Entrepreneurs Association (新疆侨商投资企业协会) was established in Ürümqi in September 2016.²⁰⁸ Its mission included 'strengthening its members' positive role in the development of modern China and international cooperation, especially Xinjiang's centrality to the "Silk Road Economic Belt".²⁰⁹ Sabir Boğda, president of the Turkey-based Uyghur Industrialists and Entrepreneurs Association (see Case study 4), was elected as president of the association in the presence of senior officials in the united front system, such as Tan Tianxing.²¹⁰ The association's vice president is Anwar Ebeydulla (艾尼瓦尔·艾白都拉),²¹¹ a former customs officer in Ürümqi who joined the CCP in 1996 and travels between Australia and Xinjiang for business.²¹² In recent years, Ebeydulla has emerged as a leading pro-CCP Uyghur voice, claiming in an April 2017 open letter that 'Uyghur private entrepreneurs should be a frontline force in maintaining social stability', and become 'warriors' who 'dare to fight against the three evil forces'.²¹³

Case study 4: Turkey and the Uyghur Industrialists and Entrepreneurs Association

Shortly after Zhu Jiang established the Xinjiang Association of Canada, the Uyghur Industrialists and Entrepreneurs Association (土耳其维吾尔工商业者协会, *Uygur Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği*, UYSİD) was established in Istanbul in November 2010.²¹⁴ The association and senior members' activities are a good example of how united front agencies co-opt business networks, offer business opportunities to their targets, and turn them into propaganda instruments that advance the CCP's Xinjiang narrative. According to the group's website and its founder, UYSİD is the first Uyghur business association in Turkey,²¹⁵ which is home to an estimated 30,000–50,000 Uyghurs, and thus (unsurprisingly) is closely watched by CCP authorities.²¹⁶

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan declared China's treatment of its Uyghur population a 'genocide' following the 2009 Ürümqi riots, but has walked back those comments as Turkey has grown more economically dependent on China, and apparently told Xi Jinping during a 2019 visit to Beijing that Turkey respects China's national sovereignty and that the people of Xinjiang are living happy lives.²¹⁷

Sabir Boğda (萨比尔·博格达) and Volkan Öztürk (沃尔坎·奥兹图尔克, aka 乌里坎·奥孜吐鲁克), two Uyghurs who have long called Turkey home, are the president and vice president of UYSİD.²¹⁸ The organisation, and Sabir Boğda in particular, has close ties with the PRC Consulate in Istanbul. In 2016, the Chinese Consul-General met with Sabir Boğda and praised him for uniting Uyghur entrepreneurs in Turkey (Figure 16). Boğda indicated that he and the association would 'further coordinate' with the consulate in its work.²¹⁹ The following year, in his capacity as President of the newly established Turko-Chinese Overseas Chinese Chamber of Commerce (土耳其中国人华侨总商会), which was set up 'under the guidance of the PRC consulate',²²⁰ Sabir Boğda organised an 'ethnic unity' themed event that was attended by Chinese consular officials and publicised on the Consulate's website.²²¹

Figure 16: Sabir Boğda (left) meeting with Qian Bo (钱波), Consul-General of the PRC in Istanbul, on 11 November 2016



Source: 'Consul General Qian Bo in Istanbul met with Sabir, President of the UYSİD' [驻伊斯坦布尔总领事钱波会见土耳其维吾尔工商业者协会会长萨比尔], *mfa.gov.cn*, 13 November 2016, [online](#).

Sabir Boğda has held several prominent positions in national and regional-level united front organisations in China, including the 6th Council of the COEA in 2017.²²² He was an overseas member of ACFROC in 2018²²³ and a council member of COFA in 2019.²²⁴

Figure 17: Sabir Boğda attending the annual session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in Beijing as an overseas delegate in 2015



Source: 'A Uyghur face at the Two Sessions: Doing business in Turkey verbally attacked by Xinjiang separatists' [两会上的维族面孔：在土耳其经商被疆独分子骂], *Ta Kung Pao*, 13 March 2015, [online](#).

Both Sabir Boğda and Volkan Öztürk have extensive business interests in Xinjiang and have interacted with united front officials in China while conducting business activities. Chinese corporate records show that, between 2011 and July 2021, Boğda and Öztürk jointly owned the Xinjiang Aolaite Import and Export Trading Co. Ltd. (新疆奥来特进出口贸易有限公司) in Ürümqi.²²⁵ In 2012, Boğda invested in a shopping mall in Ürümqi that specialises in Turkish goods, and Öztürk was the general manager.²²⁶ In addition, Boğda is a director of the Xinjiang New World Silk-road Commercial Investment Co. Ltd (新疆丝路新天地商业投资有限公司),²²⁷ which operates a large mall in Ürümqi, and reportedly received significant support from district- and city-level governments.²²⁸

Öztürk has repeatedly defended the CCP's policies in Xinjiang. In June and July 2015, when overseas media outlets such as *al-Jazeera* and *CNN* reported that the PRC Government had prohibited civil servants, students and teachers in Xinjiang from fasting during Ramadan,²²⁹ Volkan Öztürk told *China News* in Ürümqi that he had heard rumours about fasting bans in Xinjiang and the subsequent anti-China demonstrations they helped spark in Turkey: 'These rumours and demonstrations are instigated by individuals who have ulterior motives. [They are] using Uyghurs and pushing Uyghurs in a bad direction to achieve their sinister goal', said Öztürk, 'What we have seen in Xinjiang is that it's up to Muslims to decide whether or not they wish to fast during Ramadan'.²³⁰

Sabir Boğda has also defended the CCP's ethnic policies and instead promotes Turkish–China trade. In June 2020, Boğda appeared in the Turkish media enthusiastically promoting the importance of Turkish–China trade and the New Silk Road, without mentioning the plight of his own people under intensifying repression in Xinjiang.²³¹ According to *Radio Free Asia*, Sabir Boğda is a regular guest on the 'New Horizons' program on the Turkish TV channel *Ulusal Kanal*, where he has defended the CCP's ethnic policies in Xinjiang and sparked protests on social media.²³² A report about China's Xinjiang propaganda and united front work in Turkey by Ondřej Klimeš provides a detailed account of Boğda's role as 'a channel for the CCP's propaganda directed toward Turkish audiences'.²³³ Sabir Boğda, however, is unmoved by such criticism. In 2015, when he was asked by the pro-Beijing media outlet *Ta Kung Pao* whether Turkey-based pro-Xinjiang independence elements affect his work, he responded: 'Sometimes they accuse us of being bad for this and that, but we ignore them and would not interact with them'.²³⁴

Offering political honours

The conferring of political honours is another tactic the CCP employs to lure prominent individuals in the Chinese diaspora, including those from Xinjiang, into the party's political orbit and its agenda. China's peak national united front organ, the CPPCC, has invited leading members of the Chinese diaspora to attend its annual gathering in Beijing since 2001, where they're wined and dined like VIPs. They're not full members of the CPPCC but are seated in the front row and are welcome to offer suggestions.

The invitation was described by one invited guest as a 'once in a lifetime honour' because, by default, members are invited only once.²³⁵ Senior united front officials receive the overseas delegates and tell them that being invited to attend a CPPCC session is not only a 'political honour but also a political responsibility'.²³⁶ Delegates are also told to enthusiastically propagate China's achievements in their home countries and proactively foster friendly people-to-people interactions between China and foreign countries.²³⁷

With only a couple of dozen individuals invited each year, the selection and vetting process is intense, and love for China is the most important criterion, according to the CCP officials in charge of the selection process in 2014.²³⁸ In 2015, Sabir Boğda was one of the 38 overseas delegates from 27 countries invited. 'I will spare no effort to enhance the connection between overseas Chinese and their motherland based on actual conditions', he was quoted as telling *Xinhua* state media.²³⁹

The regional level Xinjiang Political Consultative Conference (XPPCC) started inviting its own overseas delegates in 2016. Sabir Boğda was one of the first invited (Figure 17).²⁴⁰ The following year, the Kazakh president of the Jebeu Ethnic Chinese Association, Omaraly Adilbekuly, attended alongside Hu Yumei, president of the Kyrgyzstan Central Asia Chinese Friendship Association.²⁴¹

5. Conclusion and recommendations

Through its united front system, the CCP is actively collecting intelligence on the Xinjiang diaspora. That information is used not only to harass Uyghurs and other minorities living overseas but also to cultivate a range of pro-CCP community organisations and individuals in the Xinjiang diaspora. The CCP uses these organs as conduits for the spread of propaganda about the ‘harmony, prosperity and happiness’ of people in Xinjiang while deflecting and denying international criticism of its well-documented human rights abuses in the region.

By claiming to speak on behalf of ‘Xinjiang’ and its people, these community organisations can neutralise—and even silence—genuine criticisms of CCP policies in Xinjiang while sowing fear and confusion. They actively foster a climate of plausible deniability (or at least obfuscation and noise) that can cause foreign governments, politicians, corporate entities and civil society groups to ignore or discount the crimes against humanity being committed by the CCP in Xinjiang.

The CCP’s united front system employs a range of different methods and tactics depending on local circumstances. In free and open countries, such as Australia and Canada, it exploits democratic institutions, civic participation and multiculturalism to create the false impression that Xinjiang is not that dissimilar to their own societies and amplifies pro-CCP voices and narratives. In less open societies, such as Turkey, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, it exploits business and cultural links while leveraging the growing economic dependency of these countries on China.

Despite its abstruse nature, the party’s influence operations can be highly effective, especially when they go unnoticed and operate in a conducive environment. In countries where public scrutiny is possible and the corrupting and corrosive nature of the CCP’s influence operations can be exposed, their impact in the short term can be counteracted; yet, in other countries, where democratic protections and transparency are lacking, its efforts can quickly alter public opinion, export the CCP’s repression overseas, and undermine domestic sovereignty. A decade ago, scholar James To described the CCP’s efforts to win over overseas Tibetans and Uyghurs as having ‘failed miserably’, with only a ‘slim’ prospect of success.²⁴² Today, the picture is more equivocal.

The global rollback of open societies and democratic institutions leaves more dark shadows for the CCP’s united front agents to operate in and fewer opportunities to expose its pernicious effects. Under Xi Jinping, the CCP has doubled down on united front work and shown a willingness to properly resource its vast united front network so it can adapt and evolve in the light of past successes and failures. If governments want to counteract the CCP’s interference activities, they must look beyond individual cases and understand how the united front system works (its goals, methods and tactics for winning friends and neutralising enemies) while increasing public awareness about its dangers.

In the light of this report’s findings, we recommend the following course of action:

- researchers must continue to empirically document the human rights abuses occurring in the XUAR and expose the CCP’s global mis/disinformation campaign.
- governments must work together to build a global coalition of states willing to speak out, hold the Chinese Government accountable for its human rights abuses and help reverse its repressive policies in the region.

- the media, NGOs and research institutes must increase public awareness of the links between nominally independent community organisations in the Xinjiang diaspora and the CCP's diplomatic and united front organs, and strengthen community-level democratic resilience.
- governments, law enforcement and civil society groups must actively disrupt the CCP's ability to interfere in sovereign countries, to cover up its human rights abuses in Xinjiang and to co-opt ethnic Chinese community groups and individuals through a range of countermeasures such as enhanced public transparency, legislative reform, capacity building and law enforcement.
- governments should consider enacting foreign interference legislation, in particular, and, where such legislation is already in place, review its effectiveness in monitoring and disrupting CCP-linked community organisations and other agents of foreign interference.
- governments, NGOs and philanthropic bodies should fund additional research on the complex inner workings of the CCP's united front system while building the appropriate level of Chinese language and studies expertise in government, academia and law enforcement agencies necessary to understand the CCP's overseas interference operations.
- politicians, public servants and other elites must avoid endorsing CCP-linked community groups, refuse to appear at their public events, avoid amplifying CPP messaging and openly denounce the CCP's human rights abuse in Xinjiang while protecting the rights of Uyghurs and other community members to voice their opinions in our societies and media free from foreign interference.
- finally, to assist with this capacity building, training courses or online modules should be developed for federal and local-level politicians (and other concerned agencies and community leaders) on the united front system and how to identify the red flags associated with CCP-linked community organisations, and this sort of training should be part of their induction processes.



Appendix: Key united front organs involved in Xinjiang-related work

1. National level

Central Committee Xinjiang Work Coordination Small Group

The Xinjiang Work Coordination Small Group (中央新疆工作协调小组) of the CCP's Central Committee, established in 2000, has always been chaired by a Politburo member.²⁴³ The group is mainly responsible for assessing the situation, conducting policy research, and coordinating and supervising Xinjiang work.²⁴⁴ Membership of this cross-agency coordinating body consists of representatives from key government and party organs, including the Ministry of Finance, the National Development and Reform Commission, the National Ethnic Affairs Commission, and the People's Armed Police.²⁴⁵ According to a 2011 list on the *uighurbiz.net* website, once operated by the jailed Uyghur scholar Ilham Tohti, the Ministry of State Security is also part of the small group.²⁴⁶

Initially, this group was chaired by the head of the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission of the CCP, and the office responsible for its day-to-day work was in that commission.²⁴⁷ Since 2013, the group has been overseen by the leader of the key united front body, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC 中国人民政治协商会议).²⁴⁸ Its current leader is Wang Yang (汪洋), a member of the Politburo Standing Committee who's also Chairman of the CPPCC.²⁴⁹ The office of this small group is now most likely located inside the UFWD.²⁵⁰ Since 2019, the director of the office has been Shi Jun (侍俊), who's also a deputy head of the UFWD.²⁵¹

United Front Work Department of the CPC Central Committee

Formally established in 1939, the CCP's UFWD coordinates and conducts united front work across all aspects of society to serve CCP interests, both domestically and internationally.²⁵² From its inception, the UFWD was tasked with carrying out influence work among non-CCP members, including ethnic minorities in China. According to the January 2021 Regulations on United Front Work, the department coordinates work on China's ethnic affairs and exercises unified management of religious affairs.²⁵³ In 2018, the UFWD absorbed the State Administration for Religious Affairs (国家宗教事务局) and the OCAO, which is a key agency responsible for *qiaowu* work.²⁵⁴ The National Ethnic Affairs Commission (国家民族事务委员会) was also formally placed under its supervision, although it wasn't fully absorbed by the department.²⁵⁵

Senior officials at the UFWD hold important positions in Xinjiang-related work. For example, Shi Jun (侍俊), former deputy of the Ministry of Public Security and now deputy head of the UFWD, is also the office director of Central Coordination Group on Xinjiang Work (中央新疆工作协调小组办公室主任),²⁵⁶ and Hu Lianhe (胡联合), who defended Xinjiang's re-education camps at a hearing of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in August 2018, was identified at the time as a deputy chief of the UFWD's Xinjiang Bureau and the Office of the Central Coordination Group on Xinjiang Work.²⁵⁷

Senior *qiaowu* officials have been given important roles in united front work targeting the Xinjiang diaspora. Tan Tianxing (谭天星), deputy director of the OCAO until 2018, was referred to as the convenor for the CCP Central Committee Coordination Mechanism for Work on Overseas Chinese Ethnic Minority Compatriots of Xinjiang Origin (中央海外新疆籍少数民族侨胞工作协调机制召集人) in 2015.²⁵⁸ Between March 2018 and November 2021, Tan was deputy head of the UFWD.²⁵⁹

China Overseas Friendship Association

The China Overseas Friendship Association (COFA, 中华海外联谊会), established in May 1997, is directly under the supervision of the UFWD.²⁶⁰ It appoints hundreds of prominent individuals in China and abroad as advisers or members.²⁶¹ COFA's tasks include 'actively guiding overseas Chinese to build harmonious ethnic Chinese communities' and 'promoting friendly exchange and cooperation between China and foreign countries'.²⁶²

The association's name has been used by UFWD officials when travelling abroad to conduct united front work among the Xinjiang diaspora. In 2014, Zhang Yijiong (张裔炯), who was then executive deputy head of the UFWD, held a meeting with representatives of Uyghur and Kazak people residing in Turkey in his capacity as deputy director of COFA.²⁶³ He urged those present to contribute to people-to-people friendship between the two countries.²⁶⁴ In 2019, COFA absorbed the China Overseas Exchange Association, which had been guided by the OCAO under the Chinese Government's State Council.²⁶⁵

Overseas Chinese Affairs Office

The OCAO, established in 1978 within the State Council, was responsible for developing and implementing government policies on overseas Chinese affairs (*qiaowu*).²⁶⁶ It's been one of the five major national-level agencies in the united front system responsible for overseas influence work.²⁶⁷ In March 2018, the OCAO was incorporated into the UFWD, but it maintains its name for external interactions.²⁶⁸

Senior *qiaowu* officials have been appointed to important positions in the UFWD. For example, Xu Yousheng (许又声), then deputy director of the OCAO, who visited Adelaide in 2011 and 2017 and met with members of ethnic Chinese community groups, including the SA Xinjiang Association (see Case study 3), is now a deputy head of the UFWD.²⁶⁹ Pan Yue (潘岳), another UFWD deputy, is also listed as the director of the OCAO.²⁷⁰

The OCAO has been actively involved in influencing overseas Chinese communities, including the Tibetan and Xinjiang diasporas.²⁷¹ In May 2010, the OCAO and the China Overseas Exchange Association (COEA) co-organised the 5th Conference for Friendship of Overseas Chinese Associations (第五届世界华侨华人社团联谊大会) in Beijing. Representatives of nearly 120 ethnic Chinese community groups worldwide attended the event. The theme of the conference was 'Safeguarding the unity of China: the past and present of Xinjiang and Tibet'. Li Haifeng (李海峰), OCAO director at the time, stressed the importance of Tibet- and Xinjiang-related *qiaowu* work to the stability of those regions in her speech to the conference.²⁷²

China Overseas Exchange Association

The China Overseas Exchange Association (COEA 海外交流协会), established in 1990, was until 2019 ‘guided’ by the OCAO under the Chinese Government’s State Council.²⁷³ COEA was absorbed by the China Overseas Friendship Association (COFA) in 2019 as a part of the consolidation of *qiaowu* work under the leadership of the UFWD.²⁷⁴

The organisation claimed to be a not-for-profit organisation.²⁷⁵ Senior united front officials and hundreds of prominent individuals in the Chinese and Xinjiang diaspora around the world have been appointed as advisers and council members of COEA.²⁷⁶ It was one of the key platforms used by united front agencies to cultivate *qiaowu* resources and build a force that’s friendly to ‘us’, according to Li Haifeng, the OCAO director in 2012.²⁷⁷ It operated across a wide range of social sectors, including trade, technology, education, culture, tourism, sport and health.²⁷⁸

Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference

The Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC, 中国人民政治协商会议) is a top-level united front organisation.²⁷⁹ The first CPPCC plenary session was held in Beijing in September 1949.²⁸⁰ According to its charter, the CPPCC is ‘an organisation of the Chinese people’s patriotic united front, an important organ of multi-party cooperation and political consultation under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party’.²⁸¹ Its purported functions are ‘to conduct political consultation, exercise democratic supervision and participate in the discussion and the handling of state affairs’.²⁸²

In reality, however, the CPPCC is at the centre of the CCP’s vast united front network. Its convening functions ‘provide a unique capability for the party’s influence-building and interference abroad’, according to analyst Peter Mattis, and it’s ‘the one place where all the relevant actors [of political warfare] inside and outside the party come together: party elders, intelligence officers, diplomats, propagandists, soldiers and political commissars, united front workers, academics, and businesspeople’.²⁸³

The CPPCC also is used as a platform for ‘rewarding and cultivating leaders of non-party groups’, according to Alex Joske, who is an expert on the CCP’s united front work system.²⁸⁴ Since 2001, the CPPCC has invited nearly 600 overseas Chinese to attend its annual meeting as non-voting members (see ‘Offering political honours’ in Section 4).²⁸⁵ The chair of the CPPCC is Wang Yang (汪洋), who also heads the Xinjiang Work Coordination Small Group (中央新疆工作协调小组) of the CCP’s Central Committee.²⁸⁶

The Committee on Liaison with Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan and Overseas Chinese (全国政协港澳台侨委员会) is one of the CPPCC’s nine executive committees. Its roles include carrying out research on *qiaowu* work, broadening its network in the Chinese diaspora, and uniting overseas Chinese as well as their relatives in China.²⁸⁷ Nurlan Abdumanjin (努尔兰·阿不都满金), party secretary and chairman of Xinjiang CPPCC (see below), is a member of the CPPCC.²⁸⁸

The CPPCC plays an active role in defending the CCP’s Xinjiang policies. In October 2021, senior CPPCC officials led a delegation of the Committee on Liaison with Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan and Overseas Chinese and non-voting members from overseas to tour Xinjiang. Members of the delegation were presented with a ‘happy and harmonious’ Xinjiang and vowed to share what they learned in Xinjiang

with the international community.²⁸⁹ In December 2021, the committee, the Xinjiang CPPCC and COFA jointly organised an online conference on how to ‘tell a good Xinjiang story’ in foreign countries; 25 overseas Chinese from 19 countries on five continents attended the meeting.²⁹⁰

All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese

The All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese (ACFROC, 中华全国归国华侨联合会) is a key organisation under the CPPCC for united front work among people with overseas ties.²⁹¹ The history of ACFROC goes back to 1940, when the Overseas Chinese Save-the-Nation Association (延安华侨救国联合会) was established in Yan’an as part of CCP efforts to win support from overseas Chinese in its struggle with the Japanese and the Chinese Nationalist Party.²⁹² The organisation is described as ‘a bridge and link for the party and the government to interact with returned overseas Chinese, relatives of overseas Chinese and overseas compatriots’.²⁹³ Following the restructuring of the UFWD in March 2018, ACFROC’s role in overseas united front work is likely to have expanded, and the OCAO’s work among overseas Chinese groups shifted to ACFROC.²⁹⁴

ACFROC and its regional chapters are engaged in information collection in the Chinese diaspora. At a 2021 meeting on overseas Chinese affairs special reporting work, the deputy chair of ACFROC urged officials to use existing networks, expand the channels of information sources and to extend the tentacles of information collection.²⁹⁵

ACFROC works among all Chinese nationals with overseas ties, including members of the Xinjiang diaspora. In February 2019, for example, the deputy director of ACFROC’s liaison department, Zhu Liu (朱柳), urged a delegation from the Chinese Business Club in Saudi Arabia to ‘widely unite with ethnic minority compatriots from Xinjiang and jointly maintain the stability and enduring peace of the motherland’s border region’.²⁹⁶ ACFROC and its regional subordinates conduct united front work on Xinjiang, including branded cultural events such as Embrace China (亲情中华) and root-seeking summer or winter camps (寻根之旅).²⁹⁷

2. Regional level

Most of the national-level agencies, except the Central Committee Xinjiang Work Coordination Small Group, have subordinates at various levels of the government in Xinjiang. National-level agencies provide training for regional-level cadres. For example, in May 2018, the OCAO held its first series of week-long workshops for prefecture and city-level united front and *qiaowu* cadres in Beijing. Officials from Xinjiang, including the Bingtuan, participated in the workshop, where they learned more about united front work concepts and methods.²⁹⁸

Xinjiang Overseas-related Xinjiang Affairs Leading Small Group

The CCP has established a special regional-level coordination mechanism to carry out influence work overseas. The Xinjiang Autonomous Region Overseas-related Xinjiang Affairs Leading Small Group (自治区海外涉疆侨务工作专项领导小组) was established in Ürümqi in October 2015.²⁹⁹ It’s headed by Nurlan Abdumanjin (努尔兰·阿不都满金), who’s also party secretary and chairman of the Xinjiang-regional CPPCC as well as a member of the national CPPCC.³⁰⁰ The group consists of about 20 member agencies in Xinjiang, including the regional-level propaganda and overseas affairs

offices.³⁰¹ In 2017, the then chairman of the XUAR, Shohrat Zakir (雪克来提·扎克尔), said that the Xinjiang regional government places great importance on Xinjiang-related *qiaowu* work, and that this LSG would serve as an effective mechanism for unified command and coordination actions.³⁰²

This LSG has met at least three times since 2015 to develop plans to carry out effective *qiaowu* work overseas. In October 2015, during its first meeting, it ‘delivered and studied’ the spirit of the meeting of the Central Committee Leadership Group for Coordination Work on Overseas Chinese Ethnic Minority Compatriots of Xinjiang Origin (中央海外新籍少数民族侨胞工作协调机制领导小组).³⁰³ At the 2016 meeting, Nurlan Abdumanjin urged the Xinjiang regional OCAO to carefully map out Xinjiang-related *qiaowu* work, improve data collection and strengthen analysis and development trends among the Xinjiang diaspora.³⁰⁴ At the third meeting, in February 2017, Nurlan Abdumanjin said that the coordinated joint advancement in Xinjiang-related *qiaowu* work under a unified leadership had been effective.³⁰⁵

Xinjiang regional-level United Front Work Department

The United Front Work Department of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang regional UFWD, 中共新疆维吾尔自治区委员会统一战线工作部) is responsible for implementing the CCP Central Committee’s Xinjiang governing strategy, carrying out tasks provided by the office of the Central Committee Xinjiang Work Coordination Small Group, developing the region’s united front policies, and coordinating and supervising united front work in the region.³⁰⁶ It also oversees the region’s ethnic and religious policies and united front work among overseas Chinese community groups and ‘representative individuals’.³⁰⁷ Its 2019 budget report outlines its role in *qiaowu* work, including developing *qiaowu* policies, analysing the domestic and overseas *qiaowu* situation, interacting with overseas community groups and individuals, advancing overseas propaganda, cultural exchange, and Chinese-language teaching.³⁰⁸

Xinjiang’s UFWD has also been involved in the intensification of the CCP’s repression in Xinjiang since 2014.³⁰⁹ It’s part of a team that drafted the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Regulations on Deradicalisation (新疆维吾尔自治区去极端化条例), which were enacted in 2017.³¹⁰ The introduction of the regulations is part of the CCP’s efforts to provide legal justification for its Xinjiang policies and practices and, in the words of Xi Jinping, ‘to govern Xinjiang according to law’ (依法治疆).³¹¹ According to a 2016 article on the regional UFWD website, the department was tasked with convening and coordinating the ‘advancement of deradicalisation work’, and Cheng Zhenshan (程振山), then director of the agency, was also deputy director of Xinjiang’s Advancing Deradicalisation Work LSG (深入推进“去极端化”工作领导小组).³¹² In addition, Xinjiang’s UFWD administers the office of the LSG of the ‘We are One Family’ Campaign (“民族团结一家亲”活动领导小组办公室),³¹³ which has sent more than a million government officials to periodically billet in the households of ethnic minorities and become their ‘relatives’.³¹⁴

Xinjiang Overseas Friendship Association

The Xinjiang Overseas Friendship Association (新疆海外联谊会), established in 1992, is the regional chapter of COFA, which is directly supervised by the central UFWD.³¹⁵ According to information on the COFA website, the association interacts with overseas community groups and representative

individuals and ‘watches for opportunities’ to guide them in serving as unofficial ambassadors to advance friendships between China and foreign countries and ‘tell a good Xinjiang story’.³¹⁶ The Xinjiang Overseas Friendship Association regularly organises conferences and invites members of the Xinjiang diaspora to defend China’s Xinjiang policies.³¹⁷

Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Foreign Affairs (*qiaowu*) Office

The Foreign Affairs (Overseas Chinese Affairs) Office of the XUAR (XJOCAO, 新疆维吾尔自治区外事(侨务)办公室), previously known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Revolutionary Committee Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (新疆维吾尔自治区革命委员会), was officially established in 1979.³¹⁸ In 2018, the *qiaowu* section of the office was probably merged into the Xinjiang regional UFWD, but it keeps its name for external communication after a major reorganisation of national government agencies.³¹⁹

This office has been responsible for information collection and research (in China and abroad), developing the region’s *qiaowu* policies, training *qiaowu* officials, and interacting with overseas Chinese.³²⁰ It carries out ‘inviting in and going out’ activities, dispatches outreach teams overseas to conduct research and ‘goodwill’ work targeting the diaspora, and actively cultivates ‘*qiaowu* resources’ among overseas community groups.³²¹ The XJOCAO also conducts *qiaowu* work through cultural activities, often in collaboration with the national-level OCAO.³²²

The XJOCAO is involved in the regional government’s invasive human surveillance campaigns, known as *fanghaiju* (访惠聚)—an acronym that stands for ‘Visit the People, Benefit the People, and Gather the Hearts of the People’ (访民情、惠民生、聚民心).³²³ These programs regularly dispatch Han officials to stay with ethnic minority households, which are subjected to surveillance and political indoctrination.³²⁴

Xinjiang Overseas Exchange Association

The Xinjiang Overseas Exchange Association (XJOEA, 新疆海外交流协会) was established in 1992.³²⁵ Like its national parent organisation, XJOEA was headed by a senior XJOCAO official in the past, and a deputy of the XJOCAO was appointed as director of the XJOEA in 2013.³²⁶ Corporate members of this organisation have included the Xinjiang regional UFWD, the Department of Public Security, the Office of External Propaganda and *Xinjiang Daily*.³²⁷ When COEA absorbed COFA in 2019, the XJOEA as a regional chapter of the COEA was probably merged into the Xinjiang Overseas Friendship Association.³²⁸ However, we haven’t found an official announcement of the merger.

In the past, the XJOEA was actively involved in ‘inviting in and going out’ activities and worked with its national-level parent organisation and overseas organisations linked to the united front to present cultural performances in foreign countries.³²⁹ In addition to sending *qiaowu* officials overseas to ‘investigate the situation of the Chinese diaspora’, the XJOEA worked with the XJOCAO as well as their respective national-level bodies to host training workshops for community leaders in the Xinjiang diaspora.³³⁰

Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference

The Xinjiang People's Political Consultative Conference (中国人民政治协商会议新疆维吾尔自治区委员会), formally established in 1955, is a subsidiary of the CPPCC which is a 'bedrock institution of the united front'.³³¹ By 2018, there were 120 branches across the region involving more than 15,000 members at different administrative levels.³³² Like its national parent, the XUAR Region Committee's agenda is to advance the CCP's interests among non-party members, both domestically and abroad.³³³ In its January 2020 work report, the committee's chairman, Nurlan Abdumanjin, outlined its overseas outreach work, such as inviting prominent individuals and students originally from Xinjiang to attend the committee's meetings as non-voting delegates, as well as telling China and Xinjiang's story well.³³⁴ The committee is also involved in the *fanghuiju* campaign.³³⁵

The XUAR Region Committee has at least seven subcommittees.³³⁶ The Social Legal System and Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Overseas Chinese and Foreign Affairs Subcommittee (社会法制和港澳台侨外事委员会) works with other *qiaowu* and foreign affairs agencies in the region, according to a 2020 work report on the website of the XUAR Region Committee.³³⁷ The subcommittee maintains communication with overseas community organisations and their senior members and 'strives to create a good environment for Xinjiang-related *qiaowu* and external struggles'.³³⁸ It emphasises 'thought and political guidance and creating broad consensus'.³³⁹

Xinjiang Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese

The Xinjiang Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese (XJFROC, 新疆维吾尔自治区归国华侨联合会) was established in 1980.³⁴⁰ Before 1996, it shared an office and resources with the Xinjiang-level OCAO.³⁴¹

The federation has established grassroots branches at different levels of government as well as in some schools and other institutions across Xinjiang.³⁴² For example, in 2014, the federation established its first village-level branch in Jalpaltakh (加勒帕勒塔克村) in Tacheng Prefecture, just over 100 kilometres from the Kazakhstan border. Some 87% of the 1,800 villagers are Kazakh, and most of them have relatives in Kazakhstan.³⁴³

The federation professes to be a 'bridge' and 'link' between the CCP and overseas Chinese and their relatives in China.³⁴⁴ One important task of the federation is overseas outreach: literally, 'overseas friendship building' (海外联谊).³⁴⁵ At a 2017 meeting of *qiaowu* cadres in Xinjiang to study the 'spirit' of the 19th Party Congress, the federation's officials were instructed 'to make full use of the organisation's non-governmental, internationally linked and united front characteristics to actively conduct people-to-people diplomacy, expand overseas operations, enhance work among overseas ethnic minority compatriots from Xinjiang [and] unite their hearts and resources in order to collectively strive for the great revival of the Chinese nation'.³⁴⁶ The XJFROC, too, is involved in the *fanghuiju* campaign.³⁴⁷

3. Bingtuan

United Front Work Department of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps

The Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (新疆生产建设兵团), or Bingtuan, has its own party committee and bureaucratic structure, which includes a united front work department (新疆生产建设兵团党委统战部).³⁴⁸ Its work covers ethnic and religious affairs in Bingtuan-controlled areas.³⁴⁹

In 1988, the Bingtuan's Department of Mass Work (群工部), which was responsible for ethnic affairs work, was renamed the Bingtuan's Party Committee United Front Work Department (兵团党委统战部) with a dual nameplate as the Bingtuan's Ethnic Affairs Committee (兵团民族事务委员会).³⁵⁰ In 2004, the Bingtuan established the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau (兵团民族宗教事务局) and shared resources and the same office with the Bingtuan's UFWD under the arrangement of *heshubangong* (合署办公; literally, 'co-located work').³⁵¹

The Bingtuan's UFWD is involved in the party's campaign of 'forging the communal consciousness of the Chinese nation' (铸牢中华民族共同体意识), which was introduced at the 19th National Party Congress in 2017 as a key policy in its ethnic affairs work.³⁵² It has also engaged in the 'We are One Family' (民族团结一家亲) and *fanghuiju* campaigns in the region.³⁵³

Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps

The Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (新疆生产建设兵团侨务办公室) was established in 1985.³⁵⁴ Internally it has been referred to as the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the UFWD (统战部侨务处) and externally as the OCAO.³⁵⁵ The Bingtuan's OCAO is now likely to be under the leadership of the Bingtuan's UFWD, because the national-level OCAO was merged into the UFWD in 2018, and the CCP's January 2021 Regulations on United Front Work stipulate that *qiaowu* is overseen by the UFWD.³⁵⁶

The Bingtuan's *qiaowu* work chiefly targets Bingtuan members who have overseas connections. Most of them are Han settlers who entered Xinjiang during the 1950s and 1960s from other parts of China and then migrated overseas during the 1980s and 1990s, and their relatives back in China.³⁵⁷ The Bingtuan's OCAO 'system' has at least 17 division-level branches, targeting more than 30,000 returnees and relatives of overseas Chinese of Xinjiang origin, as well as more than 30,000 Bingtuan members living abroad, according to a 2004 article authored by the director of the Bingtuan's OCAO.³⁵⁸ The Bingtuan's OCAO has sent *qiaowu* cadres to attend workshops organised by the national-level OCAO.³⁵⁹ It has also participated in *qiaowu* research initiated by the Overseas Chinese Affairs Committee of the Xinjiang People's Congress and used *qiaowu* connections to advance the Bingtuan's economic development.³⁶⁰

Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps

The Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese in the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (新疆生产建设兵团侨联), formed in 1985,³⁶¹ has close ties and shared leadership with other Bingtuan united front agencies. For example, the party secretary and president of the federation in 2015, Wang Yuke (王宇科), had also been the director of the Bingtuan's OCAO.³⁶²

This organisation is involved in collecting information about overseas Chinese and their relatives in Xinjiang,³⁶³ and seeks to use *qiaowu* resources to serve China and the Bingtuan's interests. During a *qiaowu* work field trip in 2017, Xuan Jiangbo (轩江波), the then vice president of the Bingtuan's Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese and now deputy head of the Bingtuan's UFWD, urged the Bingtuan's *qiaowu* officials to build a database of overseas Chinese.³⁶⁴ He also instructed *qiaowu* officials to 'proactively guide overseas *qiaowu* resources' to integrate with China's Belt and Road Initiative strategy and advance the integration of *qiaowu* work into community management mechanisms.³⁶⁵

Notes

- 1 For authoritative documentation of the CCP's human rights abuses in Xinjiang, see the Xinjiang Documentation Project, [online](#); Xinjiang Data Project, [online](#); Xinjiang Victims Database, [online](#); and Xinjiang Police Files, [online](#). See also the pioneering scholarship of Darren Blyer, Jo Smith Finley, Adrian Zenz, Sean Roberts, Timothy A. Grose, David Tobin and Maya Wang at Human Rights Watch, among others, in particular, Darren Blyer, *In the Camps: China's high-tech penal colony*, Columbia Global Reports, New York, 2021; Jo Smith Finley, 'Why Scholars and activists increasingly fear a Uyghur genocide in Xinjiang', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2021, vol.23(3):348-370; Adrian Zenz, *The Xinjiang papers: an introduction*, Uyghur Tribunal, London, 10 February 2022, [online](#); Adrian Zenz, 'The Xinjiang police files: re-education camp security and political paranoia in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region', *The Journal of the European Association for Chinese Studies*, 2022, no. 2, [online](#); Sean Roberts, *The war on the Uyghurs: China's internal campaign against a Muslim minority*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2020; Timothy A. Grose, 'If you don't know how, just learn: Chinese housing and the transformation of Uyghur domestic space', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2021, vol. 44(11):2052-2073; David Tobin, 'Genocidal processes: social death in Xinjiang', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2021, vol. 45(16):93-121; 'Break their lineage, break their roots': China's crimes against humanity targeting Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims', *Human Rights Watch*, 19 April 2021, [online](#); Michael Clarke (ed.), *The Xinjiang emergency: exploring the causes and consequences of China's mass detention of Uyghurs*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2022.
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- 3 Yana Gorokhovskaia, Isabel Linzer, *Defending democracy in exile: policy responses to transnational repression*, Freedom House, June 2022, [online](#).
- 4 See the incidents documented by the Oxus Society for Central Asian Studies, [online](#). See also Bradley Jardine, *Great Wall of steel: China's global campaign to suppress the Uyghurs*, Wilson Center, Washington DC, 2022; 'China: Uyghurs living abroad tell of campaign of intimidation', Amnesty International, 21 February 2020, [online](#); Bradley Jardine, Edward Lemon, Natalie Hall, 'No space left to run: China's transnational repression of Uyghurs', The Oxus society and Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2021, [online](#); 'China's global dragnet', *Coda Story*, 2022, [online](#); Joel Gunter, 'The cost of speaking up against China', *BBC*, 31 March 2012, [online](#); 'How China intimidates Uighurs abroad by threatening their families', *DW*, 11 July 2019, [online](#); Paul Mooney, David Lague, 'Holding the fate of families in its hands, China controls refugees abroad', *Reuters*, 30 December 2015, [online](#).
- 5 'Australia Day in the city', play&go Adelaide, 7 January 2018, [online](#).
- 6 SA Xinjiang Association, 'Happy Australian Day', *Facebook*, 28 January 2018, [online](#); or archived screenshot, [online](#).
- 7 Gerry Groot, 'The CCP's grand united front abroad', *Sinopsis*, 24 September 2019, [online](#); Gerry Groot, 'South Australia', in John Fitzgerald (ed.), *Taking the low road: China's influence in Australian states and territories*, ASPI, Canberra, 2022, [online](#).
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- 9 SA Xinjiang Association, 'Happy Australian Day'.
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- 11 'Majestic steeds fly over the waters of Tianchi lake, hand drums and silk strings sound as moonlight cups are drained in the enchanted realm of Tianshan, green carpets and flowers adorn the Belt and Road—on the 9th anniversary of the SA Xinjiang Association' [骏马飞踏天池水 手鼓丝弦月光杯 天山居处仙境 一带绿毯一路花 —— 南澳新疆联合会9周年侧记], *sohu.com*, 19 November 2018, [online](#); McGuire, 'Jing Lee, Liberal MP, fights back over claims she is too close to China'.
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- 19 'CPC Central Committee promulgates Regulations on United Front Work', [中共中央印发中国共产党统一战线工作条例], *People's Daily*, 6 January 2021, [online](#).

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Acronyms and abbreviations

ACFROC	All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese	中华全国归国华侨联合会
ACPPRC	Australian Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification of China	澳洲中国和平统一促进会
CCP	Chinese Communist Party	中国共产党
CCPPNR	China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification	中国和平统一促进会
COEA	China Overseas Exchange Association	中国海外交流协会
COFA	China Overseas Friendship Association	中华海外联谊会
CPPCC	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference	中国人民政治协商会议
KCACFA	Kyrgyzstan Central Asia Chinese Friendship Association	吉尔吉斯斯坦中亚华人华侨协会
LSG	Leading Small Group	领导小组
NGO	non-government organisation	
OCAO	Overseas Chinese Affairs Office	国务院侨务办公室
PLA	People's Liberation Army	中国人民解放军
PRC	People's Republic of China	中华人民共和国
SCIO	The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China	中华人民共和国国务院新闻办公室
UFWD	The United Front Work Department of CPC Central Committee	中共中央统一战线工作部
XJFROC	Xinjiang Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese	新疆维吾尔自治区归国华侨联合会 (新疆侨联)
XJIFOCE	Xinjiang International Federation of Overseas Chinese Entrepreneurs	新疆国际侨商联合会
XJOCAO	Xinjiang Overseas Chinese Affairs Office	新疆维吾尔自治区外(侨)办
XJOEA	Xinjiang Overseas Exchange Association	新疆海外交流协会
XPCC	Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (also known as Bingtuan)	新疆生产建设兵团 or 兵团
Xinjiang CPPCC	Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference or Xinjiang Political Consultative Conference	中国人民政治协商会议新疆维吾尔自治区委员会
XUAR	Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region	新疆维吾尔自治区

Some previous ICPC publications



