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Lines blurred: Chinese community organisations in Australia

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LINES BLURRED: CHINESE COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS IN AUSTRALIA

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KEY FINDINGS

- Australia's foreign interference debate and the souring of bilateral relations between China and Australia has left many Chinese-Australians and their community organisations caught in a contest for their loyalty. The Chinese Party-state actively reaches out to overseas Chinese communities, in Australia and elsewhere, to promote China's political interests and economic development, with mixed results.
- Australia's efforts to combat this outreach have also had mixed results. A survey of Chinese-Australians found that many believed the new anti-foreign interference laws helped to protect community members from Beijing's overtures. However, a greater number said attacks on the community in Australia — political, verbal, and sometimes physical — had alienated Chinese-Australians and in some cases made them more receptive to messages critical of Australia.
- Many Chinese-Australians said they had little or no engagement with Chinese community organisations. The newer organisations in particular, which often have closer economic ties to China, were not considered to be representative of broader community sentiment. The area in which community associations were reported to have the greatest traction was in promoting business opportunities in China.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines the impact of Australia's foreign interference debate and declining relationship with China on Chinese-Australians and Chinese community organisations in Australia. Existing research has established the connections between some Chinese community organisations in Australia and the Chinese Communist Party's united front, a sprawling network of groups and individuals that aims to shape discourse and decision-making at home and abroad in Beijing's favour.¹ Rather than revisit the activities of the united front, this report seeks to better understand Chinese community organisations in Australia, the way they relate to China, and how they have reacted to Australia's increasingly intense national debate about China.

Drawing on interviews, focus groups, and survey data, this report finds that Australia's foreign interference debate and the souring of bilateral relations between China and Australia has left many Chinese-Australians and their community organisations caught in a contest for their loyalty. The Chinese Party-state clearly reaches out to overseas Chinese communities in Australia to promote China's political interests and economic development. Australia's efforts to combat this outreach have had mixed results thus far. Many Chinese-Australians welcome new anti-foreign interference laws, as they see them as helping to protect the community against CCP outreach. But a greater number of those surveyed said attacks — political, verbal, and sometimes physical — on Chinese communities had alienated Chinese-Australians and in some cases made them more receptive to messages critical of Australia.

It is clear that Beijing's economic incentives appeal to some Chinese-Australians and are often promoted by community organisations. Many of these community organisations in Australia have evolved from service-providing organisations to vehicles for networking, business, and influence. Newer organisations are more likely to have closer economic and other connections to China. Some of these groups claim to speak for Chinese-Australian communities, but the interviews and focus groups found little to no engagement with such bodies and minimal support for the idea that they were representatives of the communities' broader political views.

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INTRODUCTION

Faced with increasing evidence of foreign interference, the Australian government introduced the Espionage and Foreign Interference Act in 2018.

Starting in 2016, Australian politics was rocked by a series of scandals involving individuals in businesses and media tied to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and willing to promote its agenda in Australia. A prominent politician was forced out of parliament after allegations that he warned a Chinese donor about potential Australian government surveillance.² Other political candidates faced media firestorms for their relationships with organisations linked to the People’s Republic of China (PRC).³ Similar allegations are already being weaponised ahead of the next federal election.⁴ Universities were accused of failing to introduce oversight or accountability to ensure that international students were protected from Chinese efforts to monitor and censor.⁵ The scandals had a substantial blowback for Chinese-Australians, with one senator at a parliamentary inquiry into diaspora communities demanding Australian citizens of Chinese descent appearing before him condemn the CCP.⁶ The same inquiry later noted “the damage that racism and discrimination have on social cohesion (and) the apparent increase in anti-Chinese sentiment following the COVID-19 pandemic”.⁷

Faced with increasing evidence of foreign interference, the Australian government introduced the Espionage and Foreign Interference Act in 2018, and a range of other measures to counter foreign state interference, “to provide the public with visibility of the nature, level and extent of foreign influence on Australia’s government and politics”.⁸ The legislation was directed at foreign states in general, but the debate surrounding its introduction made clear that the focus was aimed at PRC influence in particular. The laws were praised in the annual report of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), which has described foreign interference as a major concern, and the diaspora communities in Australia as targets.⁹ The laws have yet to be tested, with the first prosecution currently before the courts.¹⁰

The laws have not won universal support. Some political figures, business and university leaders, scholars, and members of the Chinese-Australian community have questioned the need for the law and the seriousness of the threat that Beijing’s influence poses to Australian democracy.¹¹

The political debate has placed a spotlight on Chinese community organisations in Australia — for their links to Australian politicians and, in some cases, the closeness of their relationships with Beijing. Existing research has established the connections between some Chinese

community organisations in Australia and the CCP's united front, a sprawling network of groups and individuals who aim to shape discourse and decision-making in Beijing's favour.¹² Rather than revisit the activities of the united front, this report seeks to better understand Chinese community organisations in Australia and the way they relate to the national debate about China. The Lowy Institute conducted a series of focus groups among Chinese-Australian communities and 30 in-depth interviews with Chinese-Australian community leaders between November 2020 and April 2021.¹³



The Chinese-Australian migrant community fills a variety of professions, and runs businesses, big and small. (Image: Richard Melick/Unsplash)

The findings reveal that many newer Chinese community organisations in Australia have clear links to the Party-state, primarily for economic reasons, more so than the older organisations. In some cases, recent migrants have taken over the leadership of older organisations, drawing them closer to the Party-state. Some Chinese-Australian participants welcomed Australia's efforts to combat foreign interference. But many more were sceptical of Beijing's efforts to influence Australian politics and, to a lesser extent, sceptical of the PRC's message as well. Most believe Party-state efforts to influence via Chinese-Australian organisations are clumsy and ineffective. An important exception is that most interviewees acknowledge China's efforts to control and interfere with the Tibetan and Uyghur communities in Australia. Many Chinese-Australians say they have encountered racism and other experiences of dislocation in Australia, and these experiences were often the most effective vector for influence for pro-Beijing voices.

AUSTRALIA'S FOREIGN INTERFERENCE DEBATE

The existence of migrant community organisations actively expressing views for, or against, the governments of their former homelands is nothing new in Australia.

The ongoing debate about China's interference in Australian society and politics has been shaped by different incidents over the last five years involving Australian parliamentarians and Chinese-Australians, all of which were covered intensively in the media.¹⁴ In addition, there has been a steady and rising drumbeat of warnings from ASIO, Australia's domestic security agency, about the threat of foreign interference.¹⁵

Australia's new espionage and foreign interference legislation was aimed to address the concerns of political leaders and intelligence agencies about new types of espionage and interference from foreign powers.¹⁶ The laws, and the debate around them, provoked Beijing's ire.¹⁷ They also caused considerable discomfort in the Chinese-Australian community arising from allegations of disloyalty and collusion.¹⁸

The existence of migrant community organisations actively expressing views for, or against, the governments of their former homelands is nothing new in Australia. Past controversies have erupted in the Irish, Croatian, Russian, and Vietnamese communities relating to the politics of their former countries, to name just a few. Chinese-Australians, however, occupy a unique position in modern, multicultural Australia. They are the second-largest migrant community in Australia. The loyalty of Chinese-Australians is openly contested by China's one-party state that seeks their support to promote Beijing's domestic political legitimacy, and its diplomatic interests abroad. The Chinese Party-state targets all overseas Chinese, whether they are from China or not. This prompts insidious debates about dual loyalties, something that many interviewees complained about. Such emotions are accentuated when bilateral political ties are in a downspin.

The backlash against the PRC in Australia, and in many other western democracies, suggests that the CCP's 'united front' operations face challenges in open societies. Even in Hong Kong and Taiwan, where the united front operations over decades have co-opted many elites, the pro-PRC candidates have a lengthy losing record in popular elections. Bearing that in mind, it is an open question as to whether Beijing's tactics are successful in Chinese community organisations in Australia.

THE HISTORY OF CHINESE COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS IN AUSTRALIA

Australia's Chinese communities are exceptionally diverse, coming from multiple countries and localities, from China itself, but also from Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Vietnam, and elsewhere. Many Chinese-Australian families trace their heritage in Australia to the different periods of the country's history, including the gold rush era of the 1850s and before the abolition of the White Australia policy. A sizeable number came in through the business migration program. Many more arrived as students and stayed on. As expected of any large migrant community, they fill a variety of professions. They are accountants, doctors, nurses, and dentists; they run big and small businesses and work in service, construction, and hospitality industries. They speak a variety of languages aside from standard Mandarin. Their religious beliefs are also diverse — they are Catholic, an array of Christian denominations, Buddhist, Muslim, and of course no religion.

Some Chinese-Australians born in Australia say they consider themselves to be distinct from ethnic Chinese who arrived as migrants. The reverse is also true — new arrivals feel different from second or third generation Chinese-Australians. Some complain about being identified as Chinese at all, largely because they have never lived there and have no relatives in China. Their physical appearance marks them out nonetheless, often prompting casual assertions that they are pro-PRC or, even worse, spies, merely on the basis of their appearance.

The growth and transformation of Chinese community organisations in Australia closely tracks the different waves of migration to Australia from China, or ethnic Chinese communities outside the mainland. There is great diversity in these organisations: some are hometown associations purporting to represent Chinese who originate from Shanghai, Fujian, Guangdong, and various other cities and localities. There are also numerous business associations and chambers of commerce. Some groupings cluster around popular pastimes, like badminton; others centre on senior citizens who live together in Chinese-Australian retirement facilities. In Perth, Malaysian-Chinese participate in Malaysian-Chinese organisations, for example. Many migrants from Vietnam are ethnically Chinese, and their community organisations reflect this.

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Chinese community organisations can broadly be divided into two streams depending on the year of establishment: prior to 2000, and after 2000. During the 1980s and 1990s, newly arrived Chinese-Australians formed organisations to help with integration. This wave was largely in response to the final dismantling of Australia's discriminatory migration policies in the 1970s. Numbers were boosted by the issuing of permanent residency visas to 42 000 Chinese students studying in Australia in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989. These organisations were shaped by the nature of Australia's multicultural and welfare delivery policies.¹⁹



After the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, the Australian government issued 42 000 permanent residency visas to Chinese students studying in Australia. (Image: Yang Yang/Unsplash)

As governments shifted service provision from the government to the community and private sectors in the 1980s, Chinese community organisations began providing services including aged care, childcare, and language education.²⁰ More opportunities for government contracts of this nature meant the number of non-governmental and non-profit organisations increased, including in Chinese communities in Australia. These community organisations tended to be made up of ethnically Chinese migrants from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and Malaysia — the principal sources of ethnic Chinese migrants to Australia at the time.

These service-driven organisations had little interaction with China and tended to use their resources to provide services to Chinese communities, such as housing for the elderly. At the time, they had little interest in, or need to, engage with China to promote or secure support for their work in Australia.²¹ The Chinese Australian Services Society (CASS, see Case Study 1) is an example, which grew and thrived throughout the 1990s and early 2000s.

CASE STUDY 1

Chinese Australian Services Society (CASS)

The Chinese Australian Services Society is a social welfare organisation founded in 1981. CASS comprises a number of non-profit charities, all of which are registered as companies limited by guarantee, including the principal entity, CASS. Services provided by CASS include home care, child care, residential aged care, seniors' services, vocational training, and settlement. Originally formed to serve the Chinese-Australian community, in 2001 CASS formed a fully owned commercial entity to offer services beyond the Chinese community.

Available financial reports of CASS from 2015 onwards indicate that approximately 90 per cent of CASS revenue comes from the services it provides, with government grants consistent at A\$3 million in 2015 and 2016 before reporting of it was merged with revenue from services. Overall revenue has grown relatively steadily from A\$9 million in 2014 to A\$27 million in 2020.

In 2014, CASS received an Overseas Chinese Aid Centre designation from the PRC's Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, a key united front agency. These centres lead and support Chinese organisations to establish service structures for overseas Chinese, helping overseas Chinese with better living and survival, fostering a 'warm home' for Chinese abroad.

These organisations were also home to community leaders who promoted themselves as a source of expertise for doing business with China in the early years of Australia's economic engagement with China. Leaders such as Helen Sham-Ho — a former NSW Liberal Party parliamentarian — were seen as people who could mediate between different interests. Individuals within Chinese community organisations became sources of cultural knowledge and information that could help Australian organisations establish connections and explore ways to enter the PRC market. The PRC's bureaucratic opacity, complexities, and supposed cultural differences helped self-styled gatekeepers ply their trade.

The demographic changes in Chinese-Australian communities also caused a level of friction between various organisations.

The Chinese Party-state also saw value in these community organisations in Australia. China was seeking overseas Chinese investors to accelerate domestic economic growth. In other words, there were incentives in both the PRC and Australia to strengthen the ties between Chinese community organisations and the authorities in China.

A further wave of migration from China in the 2000s propelled rapid change amongst Chinese community organisations. By 2020, 650 600 Australian residents were recorded as being born in China, which was nearly double the 2009 number of 344 980.²² Most of the service-based organisations established in the 1980s had survived, adapting to the influx of migrants from mainland China, and diversifying the organisations' increasingly ageing membership base.²³ However, the newer migrants also established their own organisations, with stronger ties to China. They were focused less on service delivery than on cultivating economic and business ties to help their members.

The demographic changes in Chinese-Australian communities also caused a level of friction between various organisations. In some cases, newer and older organisations competed for legitimacy to represent the community. For example, the Queensland Chinese Forum (QCF) (initiated in 1984 and formally constituted in 1994) and the Queensland Chinese United Council (QCUC, established in 2006) competed for influence and access in their community.²⁴ QCF focused mainly on domestic social policy for Chinese-Australians, while QCUC sought access to business and trade opportunities between Australia and China.²⁵ Ultimately, QCUC has been more successful in attracting new members than QCF.

The competition for membership was exacerbated because the Australian government “created an incentive structure which favoured umbrella associations or those that at least claimed to represent the whole ethnic Chinese community”.²⁶ These umbrella organisations often had overlapping personnel and resources. Some of the larger organisations, such as the Australian Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification of China (ACPPRC, see Case Study 2), have explicit ties to the PRC and the ruling CCP, and have promoted their agenda on Taiwan and the East and South China Seas.²⁷ For example, more than 100 community organisations came together in Melbourne under the banner of the Melbourne Chinese Alliance for the Safeguard of the South China Sea — the participation of so many organisations suggests active united front work²⁸ — to protest an international tribunal ruling against China's actions in the South China Sea in 2016.²⁹

The Australian Dongbei Chinese Association (ADCA) is one of these umbrella organisations. Founded in 2011, it represents immigrants from the northeast region of China. Hometown associations can be described as “typical examples of organisations that have deployed Chinese ethnicity to promote homeland political agendas”.³⁰ ADCA’s economic ties to the PRC were solidified in 2019 when it established new headquarters in Shenfu in Northeast China’s Liaoning Province.³¹

Much smaller than the ADCA ‘umbrella’, the Australian Heilongjiang Chinese Association (AHCA — Heilongjiang being part of the Dongbei region) received funding from the Dongbei Association in 2019.³² Its president previously served on the executive of ADCA and is on the council of ACPPRC. At the association’s inauguration, the AHCA president pledged to build the association into “a bridge between overseas wanderers and their hometown”.³³

These newer organisations illustrate how community organisations have shifted focus over the past three decades. Unlike the Australian Hokkien HuayKuan Association (AHHK, see Case Study 3) or CASS, many of the newer organisations adapted to the influx of PRC migrants and Chinese state efforts to engage with overseas Chinese communities, and placed less emphasis on local service-delivery. An old community-driven model has been subsumed by a new one, which seeks economic connections in China.³⁴ One interviewee described his discomfort at these organisations having “lost their Australian flavour and becom[ing] more Chinese”.³⁵

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CASE STUDY 2

Australian Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification of China (ACPPRC)

The Australian Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification of China was formed in July 2000, and became incorporated as an association in the same year in NSW. ACPPRC has a close relationship with the China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification (CCPPNR), a united front group. The ACPPRC has hosted CCPPNR visits to Australia, and has participated in a number of world “peaceful reunification” forums hosted by CCPPNR, including in Sydney in 2002. Additionally, the ACPPRC has worked closely with a wide range of PRC institutions, even beyond the typical overseas Chinese-oriented organisations such as OCAO and *Qiaolian*, for example helping cities in the PRC establish sister relationships with cities in Australia.

ACPPRC has chapters across all states in Australia, the latest being the Tasmanian CPPRC, formed in 2017. The Tasmanian CPPRC incorporation documents state: “This Council insists on the One China Principle, opposes all words and actions of splitting the land and sovereignty of China, and promotes the ultimate reunification of China.” The One China Principle is China’s policy that includes Taiwan as a province of China, unlike Australia’s One China Policy, which recognises the PRC as the sole legal Government of China but only acknowledges Beijing’s position that Taiwan is a province of the PRC, rather than recognising it, allowing for informal relations with Taiwan.

The various public statements made by the ACPPRC are usually accompanied by a list of supporting member organisations. In 2017, Sydney-based Chinese newspaper *Australia China Weekend* (澳中周末报) published a list of 81 “member organisations” of ACPPRC. However, the actual number is probably far higher. Leaders of a number of Chinese community organisations are also on the board, or hold honorary positions with ACPPRC.

ACPPRC started to receive significant public attention after media reports of links between its former chairman Huang Xiangmo and various Australian politicians in 2016. ASIO referenced ACPPRC when deciding to cancel Huang Xiangmo’s permanent residency in Australia. The ACPPRC website features events and statements, and indicates a substantial decline in activity in 2019 and 2020, compared to 2015–2017 while Huang was president of the organisation. However, the ACPPRC remains active in 2021, publishing a statement in March endorsing the Beijing-mandated electoral reforms in Hong Kong.

CASE STUDY 3

Australian Hokkien HuayKuan Association (AHHK)

The Australian Hokkien HuayKuan Association was first established in 1982 to assist and support migrants from Fujian. It registered as an association in NSW in 1994, and in May 2020 registered as a charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission. With assistance from its board members and donations from members, AHHK purchased property in Cabramatta, NSW in 2001. It offers a range of activities for its members, from Chinese calligraphy to a seniors' club. AHHK has substantial united front connections, and organised a “finding roots” trip for members back to Fujian and Beijing in 2002. As the relationship between Australia and China expanded, associations like AHHK evolved to facilitate stronger interactions between the two countries.

Prominent members of these associations have been acknowledged and praised by Australian leaders such as former Attorney-General Philip Ruddock. In a speech remembering Dr William Chiu, a patron of AHHK and founding chairman of ACPPRC, Ruddock celebrated Chiu's many achievements including his ability to fundraise for community projects and his educational initiatives, such as the Australian Chinese-Classics Reciting Centre, which provided “a platform for Australian children, whether of Chinese origin or not, to understand Chinese culture and to promote much closer relationships”.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PRC AND OVERSEAS CHINESE COMMUNITIES

Cultivating overseas Chinese and their economic and political support has been a key national priority for China's economic development since the reform period.

Beijing claims to speak on behalf of overseas Chinese communities, irrespective of their citizenship. Often the lines are blurred between overseas Chinese from the PRC (*huaqiao*) and others with Chinese heritage who are not from the PRC (*huaren*). Beijing at times tries to foster affinity between these groups, and with citizens of the PRC. In addition, Beijing has sought support from overseas Chinese to boost its domestic legitimacy and neutralise critical views from finding their way back to China. Overseas Chinese communities also serve as an entry point for Beijing to build influence in foreign societies.

In addition to these ethno-nationalist objectives, Beijing has tapped into overseas Chinese capital for the PRC's national development. Overseas investors and capital were critical to China's rapid economic growth, especially in the early years of 'reform and opening' from the late 1970s.³⁶ Between 1979 and 2005, China attracted US\$622.4 billion in investment, of which US\$417 billion — a staggering two-thirds — came from direct overseas Chinese capital or overseas Chinese-tied capital.³⁷

Cultivating overseas Chinese and their economic and political support has been a key national priority for China's economic development since the reform period.³⁸ As early as 1980, Jiang Zemin, who would go on to be president of the PRC, noted the issue of absorbing overseas Chinese capital to facilitate the establishment of special economic zones in Guangdong and Fujian.³⁹ His successor, Hu Jintao, urged overseas Chinese in 2017 to be "an active participant in China's modernisation drive, be an active promoter of the great cause of China's reunification...and make greater contributions to China's prosperity and progress".⁴⁰

Since Xi Jinping came to power as president in 2012, numerous Party-state institutions have been tasked with fulfilling Xi's aim, which he described in 2017 as building a nation that includes overseas Chinese. "We will maintain extensive contacts with overseas Chinese nationals, returned Chinese and their relatives, and unite them so that they can join our endeavours to revitalise the Chinese nation."⁴¹ Put simply, Xi's policy agenda, known collectively as 'the China Dream' does not just

aim to win the support of Chinese living in China; it also aims to mobilise the support of ethnic Chinese living overseas as well.

To grasp the significance of the PRC's mission to harness overseas Chinese communities, understanding the role of the ruling CCP and its multiple institutions is crucial. Press reports often refer to the tasks of the United Front Work Department (UFWD) as coordinating the Party-state's efforts to reach out to overseas Chinese. UFWD is one of several key Party (not government) departments that report directly to the CCP leadership.⁴² Other Party departments cover issues such as personnel and propaganda. Under Xi Jinping, the efforts of the UFWD have been expanded, both at home and abroad.⁴³ A 2021 update of the *CCP United Front Work Regulations* included a new chapter, titled: "Overseas United Front work and overseas Chinese affairs work", which cemented the goal of winning the support of overseas Chinese as part of the Party-state's long-term political agenda.⁴⁴

Focusing on the work of the UFWD alone, in any case, is misleading. The department sits atop a sprawling system of Party and government bodies, some of which have enjoyed cabinet-level status, along with numerous sub-agencies. These organisations cover a broad range of issues, from religious affairs to industry and commerce. For example, within the State Council (China's cabinet), the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council (OCAO) lists numerous functions on its website, including overseeing relations with people in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and foreign countries with significant Chinese communities.⁴⁵ UFWD has now subsumed OCAO under 'unified management' of its policies. The UFWD office also promotes economic and technological cooperation, which includes finding ethnically Chinese scientists and other professionals to bring them to China to work.

Likewise, the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese (ACFROC, see Case Study 4) presents itself as part of civil society, whilst also operating under the explicit leadership of the ruling Party. These bodies share the same aim of winning over outsiders — in this case, Chinese-Australians — to the ruling CCP or, at the very least, neutralising them as critics.

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Many groups are styled as ‘friendship associations’, the kind of nomenclature that projects positivity and good intentions. But all the bodies in China promoting ‘friendship’ are also acting under the political direction of the ruling Party. Indeed, every CCP member has a duty to promote the Party’s objectives, which means, in effect, that they are required to do ‘united front’ work.

CASE STUDY 4

All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese (ACFROC, *Qiaolian*)

The All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese (ACFROC) is a government-organised non-governmental organisation (GONGO) and a peak united front body. As the communication bridge between the Party, state, and returned overseas Chinese, its presence is across all levels of China’s government, as well as in all sectors of Chinese society from schools to businesses. ACFROC has seven core functions:

1. Leading and organising returned Chinese to study and follow official CCP ideology. Uniting overseas and returned Chinese with regards to their thought and political ideology, mobilising their patriotism;
2. Mobilising overseas Chinese for the purpose of PRC development, through enticing inbound human resources, investment, technology, and knowledge;
3. Participating in the PRC’s political process to advocate for overseas and returned Chinese. Working with CPPCC to recommend and elect overseas delegates;
4. Promoting and implementing policies and legislations relating to overseas Chinese;
5. Liaising closely with overseas Chinese citizens, students, and organisations;
6. Leading and encouraging patriotism among overseas Chinese;
7. Encouraging ACFROC self-improvement (promoting anti-corruption, service capability, etc.)

In practice, the majority of ACFROC work is carried out at the provincial and prefectural levels, where these offices liaise with overseas Chinese groups. Published in 2018, the *Grassroots ACFROC Organisation Work Regulations* (基层侨联组织工作条例) set out how its work is conducted at the grassroots level. Together with OCAO, ACFROC organises a biennial high-profile meeting of overseas Chinese groups worldwide (世界华侨华人社团海外联谊会). In 2019, President Xi Jinping spoke at the meeting, while PRC Premier Li Keqiang spoke at the 2016 meeting.

The Chinese government does not deny that such bodies are political or serve a political purpose. The Trump administration’s last Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, accused the united front apparatus of trying to

“infiltrate” other countries. Tellingly, China’s Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said in 2020 that Pompeo’s accusations of “infiltration” were designed to “discredit China’s political system”.⁴⁶ Wang continued, “[b]y uniting overseas Chinese nationals including students, the Chinese side helps give full play to their role as a bridge linking China with the rest of the world to promote people-to-people exchange and nurture friendship...Its work is transparent, above-board and beyond reproach.”⁴⁷

Our research indicates many examples of interactions between Chinese community organisations in Australia and CCP entities, spanning economic and investment opportunities, arts and cultural exchanges, and disaster assistance.

The Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council (OCAO, *Guoqiaoban*, see Case Study 5) provides one example of how local Party-state officials engage with overseas Chinese and thus meet the requirements as set out by the central government. The OCAO *Outline for the Development of National Overseas Chinese Affairs Work (2016–2020)* explains how overseas Chinese organisations, such as those in Australia, come into the orbit of the Party-state.⁴⁸ The National Outline guides OCAO policy and work, specifically to “aggregate the power and heart of overseas Chinese in fulfilling the China Dream...planning the overall work on overseas Chinese affairs through legal, economic, cultur[al], education[al] and social frameworks”.⁴⁹ China’s aim is to capitalise on the economic resources of overseas Chinese to fulfil its development goals.

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CASE STUDY 5

Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council (OCAO, *Guoqiaoban*)

The Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council was previously the main agency responsible for the drafting, devising, implementation, and supervision of policies and legislation related to Overseas Chinese Affairs (*Qiaowu*, 侨务). Its responsibilities incorporate all aspects of those regulations, including dealing with returning overseas Chinese, liaising and communicating with overseas Chinese individuals and groups, and promoting economic, technological, and cultural cooperation with groups and individuals abroad. OCAO's geographic jurisdiction is global.

OCAO has undergone several organisational changes since its inception in 1949. OCAO began as the Committee of Overseas Chinese Affairs and was first supervised by the predecessor to the modern State Council until it was folded into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the Cultural Revolution. It was re-established as the OCAO in 1978 and continued under the State Council until it was subsumed by the United Front Work Department (UFWD) in 2018. The subsummation under the UFWD was designed to unify the management of overseas Chinese affairs.

The objectives of Chinese community organisations in Australia and PRC-aligned party or government organisations correspond most of all in economic and cultural fields. For example, the Fuyang Prefectural Government (Anhui) response to the *Outline* stated that Fuyang would “actively promote overseas Chinese affairs work”.⁵⁰ The document further noted the plan to not only reach out to those from Fuyang, but engage all overseas Chinese with “significant political influence, economic power, social status...to give them honorary or advisory positions with the Fuyang government”.

In 2017, Lu Youqin, deputy director of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of Anhui Province, acknowledged the work of the Anhui Association of Australia (Melbourne) in publicising and promoting Anhui, as well as “serving the development of Anhui, coordinating the promotion of economic, trade and cultural exchanges and cooperation between Anhui and Australia”.⁵¹ A meeting between the Anhui Association of Australia (Melbourne) and Anhui's OCAO leaders in 2017 discussed talent and human resources, including investments in an English-Chinese kindergarten in Anhui, as well as other cultural and educational projects in the province. Most of the interactions between Chinese community organisations and the PRC shown in this research were of this nature. The resourcing available to conduct such work varies greatly.⁵²

FINDINGS: RESPONSES FROM CHINESE-AUSTRALIANS AND COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

The media coverage of the foreign interference issue has focused relatively little on the impact on Chinese-Australians. The authors' interviews with 30 Chinese-Australians who are leaders in their fields, and five focus groups — totalling another 30 individuals — across Australia sought to understand and convey their views.

Knowledge of community organisations and their functions

Our fieldwork indicates that Chinese-Australians are aware of the range of Chinese community organisations. They are also aware of the Chinese Party-state's efforts to influence Australian society and politics. The in-depth interviews also suggested that the reach of Chinese government influence is more deeply felt in certain communities, such as among Tibetans and Uyghurs, than others. However, the selected focus group participants had much lower levels of knowledge than those who participated in long-form interviews. Those interviewees, selected for their leadership roles in Chinese-Australian communities, have generally had to grapple with these issues more frequently because of their positions, in comparison to focus group participants. Senior interviewees were not selected because they had prior documented links with the PRC. Occupying leadership roles, however, a number naturally have ties with community organisations or interact with PRC-backed bodies in the course of their work.

Knowledge of some of the larger umbrella organisations with well-publicised ties to the Chinese Party-state — such as ACPPRC, which often featured in media coverage on foreign interference — varied across our research participants, but also amongst senior interviewees. Awareness of such organisations was generally quite low amongst our focus group participants.

No focus group participants reported any sustained personal interactions with any Chinese community organisations in Australia, nor any groups that they recognised as PRC-backed influencers, though of course some may not have been willing to report such ties. Some participants expressed either a vague awareness of such

No focus group participants reported any sustained personal interactions with any Chinese community organisations in Australia.

organisations either through the news or through personal interactions, or a scepticism about their existence:

Those who had most knowledge about Chinese community organisations and organisations such as ACPPRC were journalists or those involved in politics.

I feel like it's something that you hear even though I don't read the news necessarily myself, but you hear people that do say things along those lines and it always makes me wonder. I'm like, "How do they know though [that the associations are PRC-backed]?", because I've never observed anything personally, but at the same time I'm not really in circles perhaps that I would be exposed to that. So as a regular everyday person...I sort of take it with a grain of salt. I feel like people have a tendency to say those things but without necessarily any evidence.⁵³

Responding to questions about the purpose of such organisations, participants largely speculated and displayed little detailed knowledge of their operations and objectives. Most felt the organisations' aims were to promote China's political agenda. While they were generally thought of as dealing in propaganda and political influence, the activities of the organisations were not necessarily regarded as coercive or nefarious, but within the realm of normal political activism: *"I don't know what it is, but my best guess is... [it is an] organisation to...manage [the CCP's] propaganda. But I think this happens everywhere too."⁵⁴*

While most focus group participants professed a generally low awareness of ACPPRC and UFWD, the type of work these organisations perform at the behest of the Chinese Party-state is not unknown. In some cases, focus group participants extrapolated, for example in relation to the 2019 election of Liberal candidate Gladys Liu in the federal seat of Chisholm:

There was talk in the news about her affiliations with Chinese-linked organisations and companies and how that helped her get elected because of the money that was being donated,⁵⁵ so there was that kind of discussion around that as well, about how they're trying to influence local and state level politics as well.⁵⁶

Amongst senior interviewees, knowledge of Chinese community organisations was more specific. Those who had most knowledge about Chinese community organisations and organisations such as ACPPRC were journalists or those involved in politics. A local councillor of Chinese background was open about his membership of a hometown association. He noted that such organisations help people understand their roots and act as social platforms, which assist members to

connect with others in different industries.⁵⁷ Similar sentiments were shared by a Chinese-Australian journalist, who observed that people of Chinese heritage join groups related to their provincial background. According to this interviewee, such groups can help people adjust to Australian life, but have been demonised in the Australian political debate.

Although the senior interviewees were more knowledgeable about organisations like ACPPRC and united front work, they still questioned what distinguishes China's efforts and those of other countries. Moreover, there were questions about what constitutes influence versus soft power diplomacy. For example, one Chinese-Australian journalist noted: *"The confusion in identifying united front...is well, sometimes it's just soft diplomacy or cultural diplomacy, which is obviously legitimate"*. There is also scepticism about the extent of united front work: *"I think the media is the one which has made it much more of a no brainer. It's become a catch-all term. United front is now being used in the media, much more widely than what it actually does and it gets way more credit"*.⁵⁸

There were questions about what constitutes influence versus soft power diplomacy.

There was much more acceptance amongst interviewees and focus group participants that community organisations could act as conduits for Beijing's efforts to influence ethnic minority groups from China. Community organisations acted as a bridge for Uyghurs and Tibetans seeking to return to the PRC to visit family, and helped to fast-track their visa applications because of the organisations' connections with the Chinese embassy or consulate. The Party-state seeks to control these ethnic minorities abroad by placing constraints on their ability to return to China and pressure on their family members still in China.

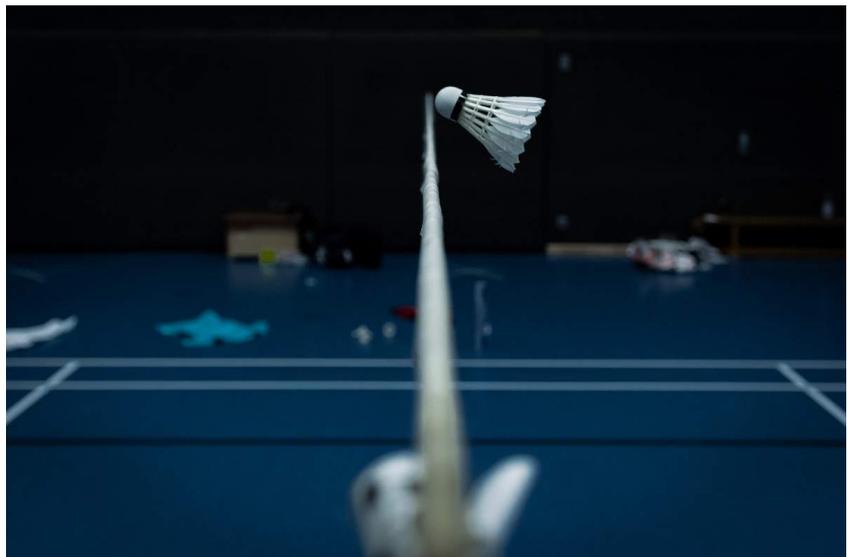
Political agendas and community organisations

For all the diversity in size, antecedents, and languages of Chinese-Australian communities, the political outlook of most community organisations surveyed for this project, with a few notable exceptions, steers clear of conflict with the Chinese government and its core national interests.

The absence of criticism is of itself welcomed by Beijing. But there are other compelling reasons for community organisations to keep their counsel. For some, the change in political climate in Australia has also meant they fear the backlash that comes with any expression of positive sentiment about China and they do not want to get involved in politics at all.

However, the Lowy Institute *Being Chinese in Australia* survey did find Chinese-Australians to be more positive towards China than the broader Australian population. For example, 72 per cent of Chinese-Australians trust China to act responsibly in the world, compared to 23 per cent of the broader population.⁵⁹

But the survey also found that there is limited engagement with Chinese community organisations. Very few people surveyed expressed an interest in joining community groups, or said they found them useful in making their way in society. This limited interaction between ordinary Chinese-Australians and community organisations was confirmed in the numbers: only 25 per cent of Chinese-Australians reported regular contact with such an organisation in the past 12 months.⁶⁰ In other words, the loudest voices in community organisations may be unrepresentative of the community or, at the very least, not speaking with their broad authority.



Chinese community groups often centre on popular pastimes or on groups such as senior citizens (Image: Credit: Stephan Rothe/Unsplash)

High-profile or outspoken individuals often play an outsized role in these community organisations. For some Chinese-Australians, the organisations provide a platform for better access to China. In the past, they also may have helped advance political careers in Australia. Now, they appear to be more of a liability.

For service-oriented organisations that continue to assist the communities in areas such as aged care or language education, the political agendas of key individuals pose a challenge. One interviewee

remarked that his experience in community organisations had generally been positive, but individuals seeking to promote pro-China links exposed them to risk in terms of media coverage and public outrage. He said of one such member, “*What do we do if he starts talking about his support for Hong Kong’s national security law or gives an interview boasting about the Belt and Road? Are we supposed to kick him out? Is that how democracy works?*”⁶¹

Social cohesion and participation in public life

There were areas cited by several interviewees where the CCP’s narrative cut through. Allegations of racism in Australia, for example, were picked up and amplified by state media in China. Chinese state media were quick to highlight findings of the Lowy Institute’s *Being Chinese in Australia* report, which recorded worrying levels of racism and discrimination among Chinese-Australian communities during 2020. On the other hand, the positive findings in the report — about the pride that Chinese-Australians felt about their lives in Australia, their general feelings of acceptance and belonging, and acceptance of Australia’s immigration policy — were covered by few Chinese outlets and only in passing.⁶²

A prominent Chinese-Australian leader cautioned that these experiences of racism produced potent subtexts: “*We should never underestimate how powerful that narrative is in the hands of the CCP. It is pretty easy to reinforce the narratives that Australia is racist and unwelcoming. We are starting way behind.*”⁶³

One participant described her own experience seeking political office in Australia and the impact this distrust has on Chinese-Australians’ access to true political representation:

There’s such a negative rhetoric around these organisations...if you’re even associated with any of these organisations it can be quite negatively viewed by the general population in Australia.”⁶⁴

For these reasons, many participants said entering politics was a risky venture:

I also worry about going into any form of public life. People might point to me being photographed with this or that person. We need more Chinese-Australians. We are the model minority and all that, but look at [the] politics — it does not look like the community. The

Chinese state media were quick to highlight findings of the Lowy Institute’s Being Chinese in Australia report, which recorded worrying levels of racism and discrimination among Chinese-Australian communities during 2020.

*[bilateral] relationship is probably going to get worse, so I will have to develop a thick skin.*⁶⁵

Focus group participants and interviewees commented on the relative absence of Chinese-Australians in public life more generally.

A local councillor believes that Chinese-Australians may make themselves targets by speaking out: “*We focus on our daily life, we focus on what we do, do things right, do things good. No need to comment on foreign issues, no need to comment on government issues. Otherwise, we may become a target.*”⁶⁶

As observed above, focus group participants and interviewees commented on the relative absence of Chinese-Australians in public life more generally. The reasons cited for this were twofold. Some of those surveyed said they did not speak out in public for fear of being accused of being a Chinese sympathiser if they criticised Australian government policy: “*I don’t comment because it has happened to me before that I just can’t say anything really about [China] — everybody just coming on and do a big pile, called it Chinese sympathiser, etc.*”⁶⁷

Equally, other respondents worried about potential reprisals against family members in China, or themselves if they returned there on a visit: “*We are all afraid that if we say something bad, that if we go back to China, we might be invited to have a cup of tea in the police station. That’s why we are scared.*”⁶⁸ Such conflicting sentiments underscore the reality of many Chinese-Australians. They are subject to a tug of war over their loyalty, between their chosen country and what the Chinese Party-state styles as their immutable motherland, which brings with it the Party-state’s political agenda.

This perceived distrust in Australia of Chinese-Australians may in fact work in China’s favour, further dislocating those people from Australian society and fostering more support for China’s political agenda.

Economic benefits

Another area where Beijing’s message is attractive to Chinese-Australians is in the potential economic opportunities China’s modernisation has brought. Numerous interviewees talked about how Chinese community organisations were often started by an ambitious individual for the purposes of printing a business card. The business card could then be taken on work trips to China and proffered as evidence of the individual’s efforts to promote China overseas.

The possibility of participating in CCP-organised talk shops, such as the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC),⁶⁹ is

another avenue to further business opportunities in China and an incentive for some Chinese-Australians to seek leadership positions within the community. A former local council candidate indicated that the Chinese Party-state would use these incentives to channel influence through some organisations. This interviewee had previously been associated with a hometown association, and noted internal tensions and power struggles within these organisations arising from competition for business opportunities in the PRC. Beijing bestows recognition upon those in leadership positions, and invitations to visit the PRC may well lead to offers of low interest rates, land to build factories, and other such opportunities.⁷⁰ His observations align with stated objectives of local OCAOs in the PRC.

The picture that emerges from these interviews is of economic incentives that are sufficiently attractive to Chinese community organisations and their members that they become, sometimes unwittingly, a part of PRC efforts to influence.

Reactions to foreign interference laws

Our interviewees' views of Australia's foreign interference laws ranged from circumspect to complimentary to concern that they unfairly target Chinese-Australians. One interviewee said the laws "have helped control united front activity, but they are ill-defined and put the loyalty of Chinese-Australians into question. They have had a chilling effect. People are scared to even talk about these things."⁷¹ A city councillor believes the laws put people in a difficult position: "You constantly feel like you have to prove your loyalty, even inside the Liberal Party."⁷² A former member of state parliament said, "the extreme right is abusing the foreign interference law to target people".⁷³

Other local government politicians see the laws as a way to clarify the grey zone of influence/interference operations, as long as they are applied to all ethnic groups:

*[T]hat's why I say that the law is really welcome. And we want to have a clear guidance, even training course on whatever to help all ethnic groups understand what is required in this country. So that's my point...set a law against all foreign governments, for all of your citizens to follow and make that clear.*⁷⁴

Although the focus group participants generally had lower awareness of the laws, many said the laws seemed like a reasonable legal mechanism for a nation to have in place. The majority of participants

Our interviewees' views of Australia's foreign interference laws ranged from circumspect to complimentary to concern that they unfairly target Chinese-Australians.

saw the existence of these laws as a logical tool for Australia’s national security policy: *“I think what the law has meant to do is to try to make a grey area with a bit of a hard line.”*⁷⁵



Some interviewees said they had joined Chinese student groups at university, only to leave when they found the organisations were being used for political purposes. (Image: Joshua Hoehne/Unsplash)

The passage of the laws, and the controversy the debate around them provoked, has also had an impact on Australia’s political parties and the way they interact with Chinese-Australians. *“I think the [Australian political parties’] engagement with the diaspora has been superficial, transactional, and ‘small-c’ corrupt,”* said one prominent Chinese-Australian.

*For many, engagement was only because they wanted money or maybe branch stacking. That applies to both parties. So you had CCP coming in and being prepared to engage with the community in ways that the [Australian] political parties were not. The room for China to move was very large. We were under-resourced and disengaged. The transactional relationship was very corrosive. It also meant that we lacked intelligence on the community.*⁷⁶

Some interviewees said they had joined, or their friends had joined, Chinese student groups at university, only to leave when they found the organisations were being used for political purposes. For example, one interviewee said: *“Representatives of the Chinese government got in touch [to say] how caring the government is, so you should support the Chinese government.”*⁷⁷ One former local councillor was frank in saying, *“the CCP*

aims to brainwash. They want to use the democratic system to work against the democratic system.”⁷⁸

This view was not shared by all participants. An ACT community leader with an honorary position in a friendship association said that he had been awarded the role in recognition of his efforts to build bridges between Australia and China.⁷⁹ He questioned why he and other community leaders should be considered guilty of foreign interference simply because of their association with these friendship groups.

Others had the same concern. When asked whether these Chinese community organisations are vehicles of PRC and/or CCP influence, several respondents with political backgrounds said they were not convinced by the evidence available. As one former politician asked: *“What is the factual evidence presented regarding interference?”⁸⁰* If China is wielding its influence in Australia, one senior Chinese-Australian academic judged its approach as clumsy, implying a lack of success.⁸¹ The protests organised by community organisations against the South China Sea tribunal ruling, and the series of concerts glorifying the life of controversial CCP icon Chairman Mao at the Sydney and Melbourne town halls caused backlash in Chinese-Australian communities.⁸² As one politically-active Chinese-Australian noted, *“All the work they [the Chinese Party-state] have done in building soft power has been wiped out.”⁸³*

CONCLUSION

These economic connections continue to be the primary source of shared interest between some Chinese community organisations and the Chinese Party-state.

The Chinese Party-state has sought to connect with overseas Chinese through various means, including the vast array of overseas Chinese groups and organisations prevalent in societies like Australia. It has publicly called for the Chinese overseas community to support China, and to bring skills and resources back to China.

As Australia's relationship with the PRC extended and deepened from the 1980s onwards, some Chinese community leaders and their organisations became self-styled interlocutors for Australian businesses and government to navigate the Chinese environment. Increased migration from the PRC meant these organisations took on a different form in the 2000s. Rather than focusing on service-delivery for the community, many organisations evolved into platforms for individuals to form political and business networks both within Australia and China. Most of these organisations were seeking economic gain, but in some cases they sought to advance China's political agenda.

These economic connections continue to be the primary source of shared interest between some Chinese community organisations and the Chinese Party-state. But the dramatic shift in the bilateral relationship between China and Australia in recent years — including the recent Australia, UK and US trilateral security pact — has had a significant impact on Chinese community organisations and Chinese-Australians. The change in the debate around foreign influence and interference has seen many of these organisations labelled as vectors of Chinese Party-state influence. The toxicity of this debate, as well as racism and underrepresentation in public life, are factors that make some Chinese-Australians more receptive to overtures by the CCP.

METHODOLOGY

Fieldwork and focus groups

This paper draws on qualitative fieldwork, consisting of 30 one-on-one interviews and five focus groups. Interviews were conducted between November 2020 and April 2021 by the authors in Adelaide, Canberra, Melbourne, Sydney, and in some cases, online. Interviewees spanned different sectors, from education and politics to non-governmental organisations, and were selected for their leadership positions within Chinese-Australian communities. To ensure consistency, interview instructions were developed to guide the conversation with the participant. Where permitted by the participants, interviews were recorded.

Focus groups were conducted by The Social Research Centre on behalf of the Lowy Institute. A maximum of eight participants were invited to in-person focus groups where social distancing measures allowed, and a maximum of six people were invited to the online group. In total, 30 people participated in five focus groups, two in Melbourne, two in Sydney, and one online. Final numbers are summarised in Table 1. Participants were selected based on their Chinese cultural heritage (including those with cultural origins in regions outside the PRC, such as Hong Kong, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Vietnam). Further refinement of the sample occurred after the initial focus group, where more participants who had greater lived experience in an overseas Chinese cultural context were recruited, including participants born in China or a Chinese cultural region who had immigrated to Australia after 2000. Participants were grouped into two age brackets, those 18 to 40 years and 40 years and over.

Participants were given an information sheet and asked to provide written consent stating that they agreed to take part in the research. All discussions lasted for up to 90 minutes and were audio recorded (with consent) for analysis purposes. Interviews consisted of guided discussions (using a discussion guide) to cover key themes, whilst also allowing for the discussion to flow in a conversational manner. Two authors of this paper observed the two Sydney focus groups and also observed the Melbourne and online groups via a Zoom link. Participants were briefed on the presence of observers. Participants received an \$85 Coles gift card for in-person participation and an e-voucher for online remote participation.

Table 1 Focus group compositions

Focus group	Location	Month/Year	Age group	Gender	Born overseas	Australian born	Total participants
Group 1	Sydney	Dec 2020	40 years +	Mixed	6	1	7
Group 2	Sydney	Dec 2020	18–40 years	Mixed	5	3	8
Group 3	Melbourne	Jan 2021	18–40 years	Mixed	5	1	6
Group 4	Melbourne	Feb 2021	40 years +	Mixed	4	-	4
Group 5	Online (Brisbane, regional QLD, Perth, Hobart)	Feb 2021	Mixed	Mixed	4	1	5

When commencing the research, a number of relatively comprehensive lists of Chinese-Australian community organisations were available. Sources included: a list compiled by the Chinese-language online platform Ovideo.com.au;⁸⁴ ACPPRC's list of member organisations on their website;⁸⁵ and a partial list of organisations compiled by Alex Joske and Clive Hamilton in their submission to the Australian Parliament.⁸⁶

Information from these lists includes names, addresses, and contact details. The details were independently cross-referenced where possible through keyword searches in both Mandarin and English via Google and Baidu. Australian government databases, such as ABN Look Up, ASIC Registers, and the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission database were also utilised. Other sources of information included Chinese government information, and Australia and China-based English and Chinese-language media reports. A few

Chinese-Australian community organisations' websites were also useful. The aim of this extensive sourcing of information was to create a record of these organisations, their key personnel and activities, and affiliations with Chinese and Australian organisations.

The five case studies (see boxes) were selected for further analysis based on the following factors: longevity of the organisation; intensity of activity and size of membership; notable leadership and personnel; and notable political, economic, and social achievements and affiliations.

For the case studies, more emphasis was placed on official reporting and reporting from relatively reliable media sources.⁸⁷ It is not uncommon for these community organisations to submit their own reporting to local Chinese-language media. Additionally, relevant personal blogs and other forms of social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, WeChat, Weibo) were used. Due to the often informal, personal network-based nature of these organisations, social media is a useful source of information, but its reliability is to be treated with caution.

The authors were unable to locate the primary document: *Outline for the Development of National Overseas Chinese Affairs Work (2016–2020)* (国家侨务工作发展纲要 (2016–2020年)) via open-source means. Instead, key points of the document were reconstructed through analysing interviews with top level officials where this document was discussed, as well as through provincial and local government policy responses and implementation guidelines issued in reply to the National Outline.

Other key sources for this section were reports from Chinese government ministries, bureaux, and agencies, and state media reports. Where possible, examples relating to Chinese-Australian organisations were used, such as Anhui and Shenzhen organisations, to highlight the implementation of the Chinese government's policies.

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Cover image: Men playing mahjong (Angela Rutherford/Flickr)

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⁴⁷ Wang Weibin, 40.

⁴⁸ “Qiu Yuanping Talks about the ‘13th Five-Year’ Overseas Chinese Affairs”, PRC Government, 14 March 2016, http://www.gov.cn/guowuyuan/vom/2016-03/14/content_5053171.htm.

⁴⁹ Guo Jun, Deputy Director OCAO, China Overseas Chinese Network, 2017, <http://www.chinaqw.com/z/2017/qzqy2017/qzqy2017-1.html>.

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⁵¹ “Australian Anhui Overseas Chinese Delegation Visits Anhui Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, Looking Forward to Cooperation between the Two Places”, *China Overseas Chinese Network*, 25 December 2017, <http://www.chinaqw.com/gqqj/2017/12-25/173135.shtml>.

⁵² Small prefectural OCAOs typically have a cadre and staff of around 10–20 people, with budgets ranging from RMB 1 million to 10 million. For example, Nan’an county OCAO in the prefecture level city of Quanzhou of Fujian Province had a budget of RMB 1.75

million in 2015. Quanzhou prefectural OCAO has a separate budget and in 2017 this figure was RMB 11.15 million, with 38 staff. In 2018, Guangdong Province OCAO had a budget of RMB 78 million of which 20 million was devoted to “overseas Chinese work”, and RMB 570 000 to “overseas liaison work”. The example of the OCAO reflects just one part of the budget for ‘United Front’ work. Other community-focused bodies, such as religious associations and commerce federations, also work in countries like Australia. See Quanzhou City, “2017 Final Accounts of the Foreign Affairs and Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the People’s Government of Quanzhou City”, 31 July 2018, http://www.quanzhou.gov.cn/zfb/xxgk/zfxxgkzl/ztzl/wsgz/tzgg/201903/t20190318_1445861.htm; and “2015 Departmental Budget of Nan’an Foreign Affairs and Overseas Chinese Affairs Office,” 4 June 2015, http://www.quanzhou.gov.cn/zfb/xxgk/ztxxgk/czzj/czjs/201506/t20150604_121811.htm; and Tai’an Municipal Government, “2017 Final Accounts of the Municipal Foreign Affairs Office,”

<http://www.taian.gov.cn/module/download/downloadfile.jsp?classid=-1&filename=1904241803537785682.pdf>.

⁵³ Focus Group 5, Online, February 2021.

⁵⁴ Focus Group 1, Sydney, December 2021.

⁵⁵ In a statement, Ms Liu’s office has said any financial support provided to the Chisholm campaign would be declared “in the usual way”. Furthermore, “Ms Liu and the Chisholm campaign are compliant with all donations laws”, the statement said. “Any support provided by Ms Liu to the Chisholm campaign was done so in her own personal capacity.” See:

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/gladys-liu-demanded-liberal-party-pay-back-her-100k-donation-20191204-p53gvp.html>.

⁵⁶ Focus Group 3, Melbourne, January 2021.

⁵⁷ Interview, 23 November 2020.

⁵⁸ Interview, 8 December 2020.

⁵⁹ Natasha Kassam and Jennifer Hsu, *Being Chinese in Australia: Public Opinion in Chinese Communities* (Sydney, Australia: Lowy Institute,

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⁶¹ Interview, 14 December 2020.

⁶² Wang Wenbin, “Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson’s Remarks”, 3 March 2021, http://au.china-embassy.org/eng/sghdxwfb_1/t1858410.htm; an example of a Chinese state media headline, Karl Wilson, “Anti-Chinese Turn Revealed in Australia”, *China Daily*, 10 March 2021, <https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202103/10/WS60481e6ba31024ad0baae1e8.html>.

⁶³ Interview, 14 December 2020.

⁶⁴ Focus Group 3, Melbourne, January 2021.

⁶⁵ Interview, 26 November 2020.

⁶⁶ Interview, 9 February 2021.

⁶⁷ Focus Group 4, Melbourne, January 2021.

⁶⁸ Focus Group 4, Melbourne, January 2021.

⁶⁹ The CPPCC is a political advisory body at the centre of China’s United Front, which includes party and non-party members, including celebrities. At a national level, it meets every year alongside the National People’s Congress.

⁷⁰ Interview, 1 December 2020.

⁷¹ Interview, 20 November 2020.

⁷² Interview, 16 December 2020.

⁷³ Interview, 22 February 2021.

⁷⁴ Interview, 9 February 2021.

⁷⁵ Focus Group 1, Sydney, December 2020.

⁷⁶ Interview, 20 November 2020.

⁷⁷ Interview, 4 December 2021.

⁷⁸ Interview, 8 February 2021.

⁷⁹ Interview, 16 February 2021.

⁸⁰ Interview, 22 February 2021.

⁸¹ Interview, 14 December 2020.

⁸² Philip Wen, "Controversial Chairman Mao Tribute Concerts Sharpen Chinese Community Divide", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 August 2016, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/controversial-chairman-mao-tribute-concerts-sharpen-chinese-community-divide-20160821-gqxt3w.html>.

⁸³ Interview, 7 December 2020.

⁸⁴ "List of Sydney Chinese Societies", Ovideo, 20 February 2014, <http://www.ovideo.com.au/community-groups/item/12674-%E6%82%89%E5%B0%BC%E5%8D%8E%E4%BA%BA%E7%A4%BE%E5%9B%A2%E5%88%97%E8%A1%A8.html>.

⁸⁵ "A Solemn Statement from the Australia China Association for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification and its Branches across Australia", ACPPRC, <http://www.acpprc.org.au/schinese/jinqi/2018/shengming2018.html>.

⁸⁶ Clive Hamilton and Alex Joske, "Submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security", 2017, <https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=96afcef1-c6ea-4052-b5e3-bcac4951bb0e&subId=562658>.

⁸⁷ Due to the proliferation of independent media (自媒体) in the Chinese language media ecosystem, popularity became a proxy for reliability when judging reliability.

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