AUSTRALIA'S NEW GEOPOLITICAL REALITY:

ON THE FRONT LINE OF THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY'S GLOBAL INFLUENCE CAMPAIGN

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Author's Declaration

I, the undersigned Joanna Lei Egan, hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. To the best of my knowledge this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where proper acknowledgement has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted as part of the requirements of any other academic degree or non-degree program, in English or in any other language.

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Abstract

As China has risen as a global power the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has sought to increase its influence abroad. Australia is at the forefront of these efforts and, as such, this thesis seeks to uncover the CCP's influence efforts in Australia and assess the implications this has for the nation. The thesis also considers Australia's policy response to this incursion and whether it is adequate to protect the country's national interests into the future. Relying on policy reports, newspaper articles, government documents, and academic papers, this thesis argues that the CCP's campaign is systematic and aims to align attitudes, politics, and decision-making in Australia with party interests. Moreover, this thesis contends that, as it stands, Australia's response is inadequate to effectively protect the nation's sovereignty and national interests.

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List of Abbreviations

ACPPRC	Australian Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China
ACRI	Australia China Relations Institute
ASIO	Australian Secret Intelligence Organisation
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CI	Confucius Institute
FIRB	Foreign Investment Review Board
FITS	Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme
SOE	State Owned Enterprise
UFWD	United Front Work Department
US	United States

Introduction

As the People's Republic of China (hereafter referred to as China) has taken and consolidated its place as a major power on the global stage it has sought to increase its power and influence abroad. As part of this process, the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Xi Jinping, has sought to create a more assertive China and, in line with this aim, has endeavoured to spread China's web of influence outside its immediate neighbours in Asia. These efforts to gain traction abroad are now being seen on almost every continent. Australia is on the front line of these foreign influence operations as its close economic ties and large Chinese diaspora population make the nation strategically significant and also a relatively easy target (Diamond and Schell 2019, 146). In recent years, Australia has looked with increasing concern at CCP interference efforts, with questions raised as to how this will affect the nation's sovereignty. As Duncan Lewis, then director-general of the Australian Secret Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), said in 2017: "Espionage and foreign interference continue to occur on an unprecedented scale and this has the potential to cause serious harm to the nation's sovereignty, the integrity of our political system, our national security capabilities, our economy and other interests" (McKenzie et al. 2017).

In light of this, the research question being addressed is: How and why is the CCP seeking to gain influence in Australia and is the Australian government's response to this adequate? Consequently, the main argument of this thesis is that the CCP is conducting a concerted effort to subvert Australian society and the democratic values that underpin it in order to sway key decision-makers to make choices that align with the CCP's interests. It does so through interference in the education sector, the political system, and the media, as well as through investment and business. Moreover, Australia's current response is wholly inadequate to effectively counter CCP influence efforts into the future.

Methodology and Research Design

This thesis employs a qualitative, case-based research design, focusing specifically on Australia. A qualitative approach is used as the concept of influence is not quantifiable. By analysing the case of Australia I hope to draw conclusions and identify broader trends that are relevant to other Western liberal democracies that also may be targets of the CCP's foreign influence efforts. Anne-Marie Brady has conducted significant work on this topic in relation to New Zealand, which provided a useful frame of reference, but similar academic work has not been conducted on the Australian case – making this a worthwhile area for new research.

The key concept in the thesis is 'influence' which is measured according to intention for infiltration. Throughout this thesis, when referring to influence or interference I use the definition given by Brady which specifies the CCP's foreign influence activities as those aiming to "guide, buy, or coerce" influence abroad (Brady 2017, 2).

To carry out this research I use secondary data from academic and non-academic sources. In the literature review, I draw upon sources including academic articles, policy papers, and books. For the analysis of the CCP's influence efforts in Australia, I rely more heavily on newspaper articles and reports by investigative journalists. These sources were chosen as by analysing and categorically compiling relevant events (as covered by these sources) it is possible to piece together how the CCP is acting more broadly, thereby establishing a pattern of behaviour. Finally, when considering Australia's policy response to CCP interference, I primarily consult Australian government documents and reports.

Several limitations to this research are worth noting. Foremost, it is not possible to uncover the full extent of the CCP's influence efforts in Australia and what impact they are having given that

these operations are covert. This inherent lack of information is a significant limitation of this research. Another limitation is that information on the CCP's official policy and approach to foreign influence and diaspora relations is not freely available as it would be in Western liberal democracies, thus limiting the available data.

To advance my argument, I begin in the following subsections with a presentation of the relevant contextual information including a discussion of the origins of the CCP's foreign influence efforts and an explanation as to why Australia is a significant target. Then in Chapter 1, I conduct an in-depth survey of the literature and show how this thesis fits within the existing literature and how it contributes to the body of research. In Chapter 2, I outline the nature of the CCP's foreign influence operations in Australia, particularly in regard to the education sector, the political system, the media, and through investment and business. Chapter 3 reflects on the implications of these operations for Australia, considers the long-term goals of CCP influence operations, and then critically evaluates the Australian government's response.

The Origins of the CCP's Influence Efforts

Beijing's approach to foreign and domestic policymaking is informed by the CCP's narrative of the so-called century of humiliation. In this narrative, which has become a fixture in CCP rhetoric over the past 20 years, the CCP advances the idea that between the mid-19th and mid-20th centuries China was exploited by foreign powers leading to the loss of the nation's great power status and its hegemonic role in Asia. This contrived notion of humiliation has fed into the collective memory and contributed to a strengthening of Chinese nationalism (Friend and Thayer 2018, 22–23). As American sinologist Lucian Pye (1992, 50) said: "The most pervasive underlying Chinese emotion is a profound, unquestioned, generally unshakable identification with historical greatness". This feeling of "greatness", as Pye puts it, has bolstered the CCP's resolve to restore China's perceived

former glory and for the nation to resume its rightful place as a great power and hegemon. This desire for redress for the century of humiliation and reclaiming a sense of national pride and glory are key drivers behind the CCP's foreign influence activities and underscore Xi's calls for a realisation of the "Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" (Groot 2017, 280; Wang and Hoo 2019, 4).

The CCP also sees an inextricable connection between internal and external threats, with anti-China sentiments held abroad seen as a root cause of serious problems domestically (Roy 1997, 123–24). In this way, actions taken in foreign countries that are contrary to the interests of the CCP are seen as weakening the control of the party within its own borders. Given the CCP's sense of superiority and its desire to maintain control domestically (and the perceived role that foreign nations play in this) it is hardly surprising that Beijing deems it its prerogative to conduct surveillance and influence operations abroad.

The Significance of Australia

Australia is a key target for the CCP's influence operations for several reasons, including the nation's geopolitical and strategic importance, as well as the fact that it hosts a large Chinese diaspora population. As the CCP has begun acting more assertively in its international relations it has become clear that China's conception of its periphery has expanded. According to Xi's so-called "Asia-Pacific Dream", Australia, and Oceania more generally, can now be considered to be within China's wider periphery and sphere of influence (Palit 2017, 7; Woo 2014). This makes the situation faced by Australia (as well as by New Zealand) uniquely precarious in that other Western liberal democracies are much further afield and not directly within China's regional neighbourhood, and thus less at risk of the CCP's influence efforts (Benner et al. 2018, 37). In terms of strategic significance to China, Australia is of key importance as it maintains a strong

alliance with the US. By gaining traction within Australia, the CCP seeks to weaken Australia's US alliance and encourage Australia to take a more neutral position in any disagreement between the US and China (Yu 2016, 741–45). This is an integral step if China wishes to expand and strengthen its sphere of influence. As Hu Jintao, then General Secretary of the CCP, said in 2003: "Australia is a key component of China's external relations" (Hu 2003).

Aside from Australia's role in China's regional neighbourhood, the nation also plays an important role in the Chinese economy. Ensuring development is one of the CCP's key policy objectives. This manifests itself in China's foreign policy through an effort to secure access to natural resources that are crucial to the nation's ongoing development. Australia is important to China in this regard as it is the main import source of iron ore, zinc, and coal – all of which are essential inputs in the Chinese economy (Medeiros 2009, 51; OEC 2017a; 2017b; 2017c; China Power Team 2016). Conversely, as a consequence of Chinese demand, China is Australia's most important trading partner, accounting for almost 30 percent of Australia's trade (Tang 2018). This economic dependence on China puts Australia at particular risk of coercive economic policy and retaliatory measures.

Australia also plays host to a large Chinese diaspora community that has been growing rapidly in recent years. Australia has the largest percentage of people of Chinese ancestry of any country outside Asia, with 5.6 percent of the population claiming Chinese heritage (Poston and Wong 2016, 356–60; ABS 2017b; Statistics Canada 2017; Statistics New Zealand 2019). On top of its 1.2 million people of Chinese ancestry, Australia also hosts almost 200,000 Chinese students (Garnaut 2018). The growth of the Chinese community in Australia can be exemplified in that in 2006 Mandarin was the 6th most common language spoken in Australian households, but 10 years later it had risen to be the most commonly spoken language after English (ABS 2007; 2017a). This large

Chinese community makes Australia a target as the CCP seeks to exert power over its diaspora. This connects with the CCP's vision of the domestic and the foreign as inextricably linked and reflects the view that by maintaining a tight grip on Chinese communities abroad, the CCP's power at home will be protected. Evidently, China has numerous reasons for seeking to exert influence in Australia, including geopolitical and strategic motives, as well as the presence of a large Chinese community.

Chapter 1 - Literature Review

This chapter seeks to provide an overview of the existing academic literature in the field and contextualise this thesis's contribution. In the first section, literature addressing the CCP's foreign influence efforts more generally and the role that the United Front Work Department (UFWD) plays in this is evaluated. In the second section, I consider literature pertaining to Australia in order to provide a more specific academic context in which this thesis fits.

Weaponising the Diaspora and Co-opting Foreigners

When considering foreign influence more generally, this type of activity tends to be characterised as soft power. However, there is an important distinction between the legitimate use of soft power and its use to subvert the politics and societies of foreign countries. On this point, many authors concede that the CCP's foreign influence efforts diverge widely from what is typically understood as soft power, and instead display many characteristics often associated with hard power (Kalimuddin and Anderson 2018, 133; Pleschová and Fürst 2015, 62). Taking this distinction into account, Walker and Ludwig (2017, 6) coined the term sharp power to encompass influence efforts by authoritarian regimes (such as China and Russia) that seek to disrupt and subvert the political systems and alter discourse and information availability in targeted countries.

In this sense, China's coercive foreign influence efforts can be characterised as a form of sharp power and are part of a systematic model used across the globe. Anne-Marie Brady is arguably the preeminent voice in the field and has carried out significant work on CCP influence activities in New Zealand. She characterises Chinese influence as efforts to "influence, subvert, and if necessary, bypass the policies of [foreign] governments and promote the interests of the CCP globally" (Brady 2017, 3). She argues that China is carrying out foreign influence activities on a global scale as part of a comprehensive strategy to gain power abroad and influence the decision-

making of foreign governments (Brady 2017, 6). Suzuki (2019, 95) presents a similar argument and suggests that CCP foreign influence efforts follow a distinct pattern all over the world.

The CCP's influence efforts are primarily orchestrated under the direction of the UFWD. Gill and Schreer (2018, 160) argue that the overarching aim of the UFWD is to maintain CCP control at home and defend the party's strategic interests at the expense of the national interests of other nations. Gill and Schreer (2018, 158) along with Dotson (2019, 19) argue that the UFWD is orchestrating a long-term campaign aimed at subverting target nations' norms, democratic values, and open societies. Similarly, Clarke, Hunt, and Sussex (2020, 208) argue that the CCP's influence efforts are far more advanced than other potential threats, such as from Russia, in that the CCP is employing a long-term strategy with the aim of gaining leverage among foreign elites such as politicians and businesspeople. Despite giving a well-rounded argument addressing many avenues through which the CCP seeks to gain influence abroad, Clarke, Hunt, and Sussex fail to identify the media as one of these avenues. This is a significant gap in their research as the CCP's engagement with local and Chinese-language media is a key method used to exert influence (as I will argue in Chapter 2).

In the literature two distinct groups emerge in terms of those being targeted by the CCP's interference efforts – the Chinese diaspora and foreigners. Today there are estimated to be about 60 million people with foreign citizenship of Chinese descent living all around the world (Zhuang 2017). Maintaining connections with overseas Chinese communities and monitoring them is a key priority of the CCP. This is apparent in an excerpt from a manual used in the UFWD: "The unity of Chinese at home requires the unity of the sons and daughters of Chinese abroad" (Anderlini, Hornby, and Kynge 2017). James To (2014), a leading voice in the field, argues that CCP outreach to overseas Chinese communities plays a vital role in the party's soft power strategy. Moreover, he

argues that the CCP's approach has been successful in its ability to propagate general support for party interests within the diaspora community, while also preventing dissenting views from taking hold (To 2014, 194). He argues it does so via a multi-faceted approach that seeks to promote nationalistic patriotism based on a common sense of culture and ancestry (To 2014, 209–10).

Similarly, Suzuki (2019, 90) argues that one of the main roles of the UFWD is to control and surveil Chinese diaspora communities abroad. Suzuki (2019, 88) also argues that overseas Chinese are seen to have a role to play in China's foreign policy with the expectation that they should try to win over foreigners to support the CCP and its interests. Likewise, both Suryadinata (2017, 103) and Chang (1980) argue that the CCP aims to mobilise overseas Chinese communities to serve the interests of the party. Adding to these arguments, Groot (2017, 281; 2019, 4) asserts that the CCP also uses the diaspora community to isolate dissidents within the Chinese community (such as supporters of Taiwan and the Falun Gong) and to serve as vehicles to influence local politics and disseminate pro-China views within the wider community. Many experts also argue that the CCP's attempts to suppress critical voices through the mobilisation of the diaspora community has the effect of undermining key democratic freedoms, such as freedom of speech and freedom of assembly (Hamilton 2018; Pleschová and Fürst 2015).

On the other side of this argument, Gao (2018) argues that the discourse on the Chinese diaspora is very one-sided and exaggerates the role overseas Chinese communities play in the CCP's influence efforts. Liu and Dongen (2016) also argue that the view of overseas Chinese as being co-opted by the CCP is misleading, and that instead the major role of the diaspora community has been to support China's development and growth by bringing capital and knowledge from abroad. In both these cases, the understatement of the role that overseas Chinese communities play in the CCP's foreign influence efforts is problematic, as evidence shows that while it may be a minority,

Chinese communities do play a significant role in the CCP's influence activities abroad (as is elaborated on in the following chapter). Similarly to Liu and Dongen, Schrader (2020, 15) argues that the CCP views overseas Chinese in a utilitarian light in that they can serve as a way to build national strength through their funds and local connections in foreign countries.

Gamlen (2006, 5) argues that diaspora engagement policy is driven by a desire to "trans-nationalise governance" whereby home countries attempt to maintain domestic-style rules over populations residing abroad. Groot (2019, 6) applies Gamlen's lens of trans-nationalised governance to the case of China and labels the CCP's attempts to extend control over its diaspora as "creeping extraterritoriality". Ang See and Ang See (2019, 286) make a similar argument and suggest that the line between Chinese nationals and foreign nationals of Chinese descent is increasingly blurred by the CCP. Brady (2019, 3) also reflects on this argument and concedes that "the boundaries between domestic United Front work and internationally oriented United Front work are no longer distinct". This blurring of what the CCP sees as a domestic policy issue is significant for Australia given the size of its diaspora community.

Aside from the CCP's attempts to control Chinese diaspora communities, many assert that UFWD activities have extended beyond their traditional purview and now include efforts to co-opt foreign politicians, businesses, and societies in order to better serve the interests of the party (Brady 2017; Groot 2015, 133; Hála 2019, 21; Paradise 2009; Szczudlik 2018; Suzuki 2019). This reflects Xi Jinping's push for the nation to take control of China's narrative and expand soft power in order to "tell China's story well" (Shambaugh 2015, 99; Reuters 2016). In line with this, Brady (2015, 51) argues that much of China's desire to influence foreigners comes out of the CCP's view that China is misrepresented in Western media. As a result, China is trying to promote itself as a global power and support the idea of a "peaceful rise" (Brady 2015, 53; Clarke, Hunt, and Sussex 2020, 208). In line with the CCP's efforts to curate information on China, many argue that they are also actively

trying to control intellectual discourse and establish their version of the facts both within and outside China's borders (Kalimuddin and Anderson 2018, 120–21; Shambaugh 2015, 101). As is evident, while there may be some differences of opinion in regard to what is motivating the CCP's influence efforts, the majority of the literature supports the assertion that they are malign.

The Case of Australia

Evidently, quite a significant body of research exists in regard to the CCP's foreign influence efforts and the operations of the UFWD more generally; however, substantially less literature exists specifically on the case of Australia. Nevertheless, several authors support the assertion that Australia is at the front line of the CCP's foreign influence efforts (Fitzgerald 2018; Diamond and Schell 2019; Hamilton 2018; Groot 2019). Clive Hamilton (2018), one of Australia's most vociferous critics of CCP influence, argues that the CCP is orchestrating a systematic campaign to sway decision-makers to act in ways more favourable to China and the CCP. Across the literature many authors agree that these influence efforts are occurring throughout multiple sectors in society, with this being particularly visible in higher education, the political system, the media, and within Australian businesses (Köllner 2018; Fitzgerald 2019; Sun 2016; Hamilton 2018).

In spite of these views of the CCP's efforts as malign, some authors take a more favourable view. McCarthy and Song (2018, 15) argue that Australia has an unnecessary "instinctive angst" towards China and its rise. However, I would argue that this "angst" is entirely justified given that the values and political system promoted by the CCP are distinctly different from, and incompatible with, those of Australia. In a similar vein, Gao (2018) argues that the risk posed by the Chinese community in Australia is overstated and is motivated by fear. While it is surely the case that not all Chinese Australians' actions are politically motivated, Gao's argument downplays the very real threat that exists due to the CCP's efforts to control the diaspora community. Similarly, Sun (2016)

understates the risks associated with CCP influence and argues that while there is clear evidence that the CCP has succeeded in exerting influence over the vast majority of Chinese-language media in Australia, he suggests that this does not pose a problem as the Chinese community is able to access news information from many sources. This argument is overly simplistic as while it may be true that the Chinese community is able to access news from a variety of sources, it is likely that they will choose to access media in their native language, which means that they will inevitably be consuming biased, CCP-influenced media.

Medcalf (2014) also takes too narrow a view when discussing how Australia is seeking to counter China's rise. He considers this solely from a military perspective, ignoring the CCP's foreign interference efforts. Medcalf (2019, 111) also argues that the economic leverage China holds over Australia is overstated and only provides limited capacity for coercion. However, the reality of the situation, as evidenced by the actions of businessmen, politicians and universities, tells a different story (as I argue in Chapter 2).

In regard to Australia's policy response, relatively less literature exists, particularly when considering the issue through the lens of CCP influence. Goodman (2018) and Head (2018) discuss the implications of Australia's foreign interference laws, but do so from the perspective of civil society, arguing that the laws have serious negative consequences for democratic freedoms. Building off these arguments, Mack (2020) contends that the Australian government has taken the wrong approach and that the laws are ineffective and harm civil liberties, while also unnecessarily antagonising China. He suggests that Australia should "[work] with China as partners, rather than adversaries" on the issue of foreign influence, but it is difficult to see how such an approach would be viable considering that Australia's primary foreign influence threat is coming from the CCP (Mack 2020, 396). Similarly, Fitzgerald (2018, 64) also questions the effectiveness of Australia's

interference laws, noting that the current approach is unlikely to be effective due to Australian businesses and organisations openly pursuing relationships with wealthy Chinese investors. Nevertheless, Fitzgerald's focus on profit-seeking as the key factor behind the failure of this policy is misleading because it ignores the fundamental flaws in the policy itself (as is discussed in Chapter 3).

The increased media coverage of the CCP's foreign influence in Australia has not resulted in a corresponding expansion in academic research. Most of the few academic works that do exist on the case of Australia are either a more superficial discussion of the CCP's influence efforts or, instead, look specifically at one field in which influence is present. This lack of an overarching analysis of the CCP's operations in Australia, akin to Brady's work on New Zealand, leaves a substantial gap in the literature. An understanding of the bigger picture is essential in this case, as without appreciating the full extent of CCP influence, it is difficult to grasp the true significance and gravity of the issue. Moreover, there is a distinct lack of literature concerning Australia's policy response and the effectiveness of these policies, particularly when considering the policies from the perspective of countering CCP influence efforts. This thesis seeks to fill these gaps by tracing and analysing CCP influence in Australia, before evaluating the current policies and assessing their effectiveness. In filling this gap, I hope to advance the argument that the CCP's influence in Australia is pervasive and malign, with Australia's policies being wholly inadequate to deal with this threat.

Chapter 2 – Charting CCP Influence Efforts in Australia

Australia is subject to a pervasive influence campaign at the hands of the CCP that permeates all facets of society. This chapter outlines these efforts across four key sectors in society – education, the political system, the media, as well as in investment and business. Within each subsection I present evidence of the CCP's influence efforts in order to compile an overall picture of the situation in Australia.

The Education Sector

Some of the CCP's most conspicuous influence efforts in Australia have occurred within the higher education system. Putting universities at particular risk is the large number of Chinese students in Australia and the resulting heavy reliance on them for a significant portion of universities' income. Some of the nation's top universities derive up to 23 percent of total revenues from Chinese students' tuition fees (Babones 2019, 1). On a per capita basis Australia hosts significantly more international students than any other country and, in Australia's eight major research universities, 60 percent of international students are Chinese (Babones 2019, 4–5; Gill and Jakobson 2017, 3). This is particularly problematic given that education is Australia's third-largest export and gives China the ability to use its heavy stake in the education sector as leverage to influence decision-making at Australian universities and within the government (Tang 2019).

One of the main avenues through which Beijing gains influence at Australian universities is through CCP-backed Chinese student organisations. Through these groups, most prominently Chinese Students and Scholars Associations, the CCP is supporting a campaign of intimidation aimed at crushing dissenting voices and monitoring the actions of Chinese students on Australian campuses (Hamilton and Joske 2018, 12). Cases have emerged of Chinese students harassing members of the wider community if they take any action that may be perceived as anti-China

(Astarita, Patience, and Tok 2019, 319). For example, a Chinese student aggressively confronted a store owner over her shop selling a Falun Gong newspaper. The store subsequently dropped the paper over fears of a boycott by Chinese students (Hamilton 2018, 220). Similar intimidation attempts are also frequently directed against students who publicly raise issue with China or the CCP (Joske 2018). Chinese students are also actively encouraged by Chinese embassy staff and CCP-backed student organisations to stifle in-class discussion of sensitive topics and in their place promote pro-China views (Gill and Jakobson 2017; Hamilton 2019b, 5). There have also been accusations of universities removing items from the curriculum that would be considered sensitive topics by the CCP (Astarita, Patience, and Tok 2019, 319).

In late 2019, clashes occurred between Chinese and Hong Kong students at Hong Kong democracy rallies on Australian campuses, with accusations that Chinese students acted at the behest of Chinese embassies to stifle the pro-democracy students (McCauley 2019). Chen Yonglin, a former Chinese diplomat who defected to Australia in 2005, concurs with these accusations and argues that Chinese students are used by the embassies to block protesters and gather information on their peers (Garnaut 2014).

Surveillance of the Chinese student community through personal relationships as well as increasingly through social media also allows the CCP to maintain control over them. The CCP harnesses the Chinese student community to contribute to a feeling of constant surveillance, with students known to report their peers or professors to the embassy or chastise them personally if they say or do something not condoned by the CCP (Cook 2019). In this way, being outside of China does not mean that students are beyond the reach of censorship, even if this censorship is not directly facilitated by the CCP. Studies from the US have shown that up to 80 percent of

Chinese students carry out self-censorship by avoiding discussion of sensitive topics (Cook 2019). This statistic can likely be extrapolated to the case of Australia.

Aside from attempts to control Chinese students, the CCP is also attempting to influence local discourse through Confucius Institutes (CIs) and campus-based research centres. Li Changchun, a senior member of the CCP, has previously described CIs as "an important part of China's overseas propaganda set-up", with various other researchers also noting that CIs serve hidden political objectives and are increasingly subject to UFWD oversight (Suzuki 2019, 90; The Economist 2009). CIs are intended to teach Chinese language and culture to foreigners and operate on the campuses of 13 Australian universities. CIs are contractually under the control of the CCP and are subject to Beijing's decisions on teaching with no input allowed from the Australian host university (Hunter 2019b). This is clear in that some of the prerequisite skills of teachers applying to work in the institutes include that they must "love the motherland" and have "good political quality" (King and Hui 2019). All of these factors mean that teaching of Chinese history and culture will promulgate a version of facts that would otherwise be impossible to disseminate on Australian university campuses.

On top of establishing CIs across Australia, the CCP has also sought to control the China discourse through the establishment of the Australia-China Relations Institute (ACRI) at the University of Technology Sydney. The institute was established using funds from Chinese billionaire Huang Xiangmo who has long been mired in accusations of connections to the CCP. Huang was the chairman of the Australian Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China (ACPPRC) which is operated under the auspices of the UFWD and is the CCP's primary vehicle through which it controls and engages with the Chinese community in Australia (Hamilton and Joske 2018, 12; Zhang 2017, 30). The institute's attempts to push a pro-China perspective are clear

in that until 2016 the explicit aim articulated on the institute's own website was to promote "a positive and optimistic view of Australia-China relations" (Barro 2019). Professors at the University of Technology Sydney are also concerned, with one calling the work produced by ACRI "party propaganda of the Chinese Government" (Knott and Aston 2016).

Australian universities have also been seen to increasingly adopt an appeasement approach by avoiding discussing materials or hosting events that may anger the CCP. A significant instance of this occurred in 2013 when the University of Sydney cancelled a visit by the Dalai Lama and forced organisers to move the event off-campus in efforts not to antagonise Beijing (The Guardian Australia 2013). Very similar occurrences have also been observed at three other Australian universities (Dias 2013). More recently, student Drew Pavlou, a vociferous critic of the CCP and its influence on campus at the University of Queensland, was suspended for two years for bullying and disciplinary offences primarily related to his role in organising pro-Hong Kong democracy protests in 2019 (Condon 2020). The CCP had previously been openly critical of Pavlou, with party mouthpiece the *Global Times* labelling him an "anti-China rioter" (Xu 2020). However, two of Pavlou's alleged victims have since come forward in his defence, saying that they never lodged complaints against him and were unaware that they were being used as evidence in the case. Moreover, one of the alleged victims said that they felt the complaints against Pavlou had been "manufactured" (Duffy 2020; McKenna 2020). This has contributed to accusations that Pavlou's suspension was politically motivated and given in order to pacify Chinese officials and to ensure the flow of Chinese money into the university. Former prime minister Kevin Rudd responded to the incident saying it gives the impression that the university is "bending the knee to Beijing" (Lynch 2020). The CCP has in the past also been known to strong arm Australian universities by blocking their websites within China if they fail to comply with Beijing's wishes (Martin 2016).

This gives the CCP significant leverage over universities due to their financial dependence on Chinese students.

The CCP's operations at Australian universities have the direct effect of restricting freedom of speech and undermining academic integrity, not just for Chinese students, but for both professors and the wider student body as a whole. This trend towards the use of a policy of appeasement displays how deeply the CCP's influence has already penetrated into the Australian education system.

The Political System

Aside from CCP influence in Australia's higher education institutions, Beijing is also carrying out focused efforts to infiltrate and influence Australian politicians and the decision-making process. Wealthy Chinese businessmen have been known to donate large sums to Australian political parties across the political spectrum. Between 2000 and 2016 around 80 percent of all foreign donations to Australia's political parties came from China (Benner et al. 2018, 35). One donor that gained notoriety in recent years is the aforementioned Huang Xiangmo with his alleged illegal donation of $100,000 delivered in a supermarket bag to the Labor Party (Tan 2019). However, years before the cash-drop incident, Huang was already a key player in Australia's political system. In 2017, he promised to give the Labor Party a $400,000 donation but then withdrew the offer when the party openly condemned China's claims in the South China Sea (The Economist 2017). This demonstrates that there was an element of quid pro quo expected for the donation. As mentioned previously, Huang was the chairman of the CCP-affiliated ACPPRC for four years and was the primary donor behind the establishment of the pro-China ACRI. As a result of his connections with the CCP and his role in political donations, in 2019 Huang's citizenship application was rejected and his permanent residency cancelled on advice from ASIO as they deemed him

"amenable to conducting acts of foreign interference" (Chenoweth, Grigg, and Tadros 2019; Tan 2019).

Another major political donor in Australia with suspected CCP links is Chau Chak Wing. Chau is one of Australia's largest sources of political donations and has given more than $4 million between 2004 and 2018 (Gribbin and Conifer 2018). However, in recent years his donations have been marred with allegations of connections with the CCP and the UFWD. Chau has a well-documented relationship with high-level UFWD officials, having hosted them on numerous occasions, and has also met General Secretary Xi Jinping (McKenzie and Baker 2017; Needham 2019). Chau was also on the committee of the CCP-affiliated ACPPRC (McKenzie and Baker 2017). Moreover, a joint ABC-Fairfax Media report asserted that Chau had gained "privileged access" to Australian politicians with the aim of using this to influence decision-makers to the benefit of the CCP (Riordan 2017).

Other than donations to political parties, the CCP is trying to exert more direct influence by installing 'friends' of China into the Australian government. In 2017 these efforts came to the fore with ASIO identifying 10 political candidates that are believed to have close ties to Chinese intelligence services (Maley and Berkovic 2017). In one now infamous case Sam Dastyari, or as he came to be known "Shanghai Sam", a Labor Party senator, broke party lines and came out in support of China's claims in the South China Sea, calling the issue a "matter for China" (Riordan 2016; McKenzie, Baker, and Coorey 2017). While in office he also lobbied then deputy Labor leader, Tanya Plibersek, in an attempt to have her avoid meeting a pro-democracy activist while visiting Hong Kong (Karp 2017). After these revelations emerged allegations of quid pro quo surfaced, with reporters uncovering that some of Dastyari's domestic travel expenses, a 15-day trip to China, as well as $40,000 in legal fees were paid by an array of businesses and organisations with

links to the CCP (Henderson and Anderson 2016). He also fostered a close relationship with Huang Xiangmo, with Huang personally paying a $5,000 legal bill for Dastyari (McKenzie, Massola, and Baker 2017). Reports also later emerged that Dastyari had informed Huang that his phone and house were likely being tapped by Australian intelligence organisations (Patrick 2017). All this occurred in the context of ASIO's warning that Huang was believed to have connections with the CCP and was likely involved in influence efforts (McKenzie and Uhlmann 2017). It is overwhelmingly apparent in this case that the CCP had attempted to influence Australian politics and decision-making through buying favours from Dastyari. This conclusion is consistent with the opinion of Ross Babbage, a former high-ranking official in the Australian intelligence community, who said that there was clear evidence that Dastyari had been "recruited as an agent of influence" (Patrick 2017).

In a case with similar overtones, Gladys Liu, Australia's first Chinese-born MP, has on numerous occasions refused to criticise China's actions in the South China Sea or recognise them as unlawful, despite an international tribunal in the Hague finding otherwise (Harris 2019; Australian Associated Press 2019a). When questioned on whether she was a member of organisations linked to the CCP she said she "[could not] recall" despite reports indicating that she had previously been a member of two different provincial chapters of the China Overseas Exchange Association for over 12 years, as well as being the honorary president of the United Chinese Commerce Association of Australia, and holding positions within the Australia Jiangmen General Commercial Association and the World Trade United Foundation, all of which are generally accepted to have links with the CCP (Harris 2019; Iggulden 2019; Hamilton 2019c; Oakes, Hui, and Curnow 2019).

Another case of the CCP's political interference emerged in 2018 when Melbourne businessman Nick Zhao reported to ASIO that he had been approached by a suspected senior Chinese

intelligence operative and offered $1 million to run for the Melbourne parliamentary seat of Chisholm. Just a few months later he was found dead in a hotel room with the cause of death unable to be determined (Conifer 2019). The incident prompted a rare public statement from ASIO confirming that they were investigating the allegation of CCP interference and the circumstances surrounding Zhao's death, with the organisation calling the incident "troubling and disturbing" (Beech 2019). MP Andrew Hastie reflected on the incident saying: "This is a state-sponsored attempt to infiltrate our Parliament using an Australian citizen and basically run them as an agent of foreign influence" (Beech 2019). Gladys Liu was later elected in the seat Zhao was asked to run for.

As evident, the CCP is carrying out a concerted campaign to gain political influence through efforts to buy the allegiance of decision-makers as well as attempts to install CCP assets in the Australian parliament. Doing so fundamentally undermines the democratic process in Australia.

The Media

In its efforts to shape the China narrative in Australia, the CCP has attempted to assert influence on Chinese and English-language media outlets in order to promote the party's version of China's story. Underlying these efforts is the CCP's belief that "the media should be infused with the spirit of the Party"(Central Committee of the Communist Party of China's General Office 2013, 9). The CCP's efforts are particularly pronounced in their control over Chinese-language media, with concerted efforts to suppress media that does not toe the party line. The CCP has several media outlets available in Australia that are directly controlled by the party including Xinhua, China Central Television, the *Global Times*, the *People's Daily*, and Chinese Radio International. The CCP also has influence over the vast majority of Chinese-language radio and print media, with an editor at one of Australia's CCP-controlled publications conceding that 95 percent of Chinese-language

print media in Australia is under Beijing's influence (Wen and Munro 2016). Even if Chinese-language media outlets are not directly controlled by the CCP, they tend to carry out self-censorship in order to avoid drawing the ire of the party and the potential negative consequences this brings (Van Der Plyum 2014). This has resulted in a clear shift in the content of Chinese-language media from previously a more critical depiction of China, the CCP, and politically sensitive topics, to a far more supportive and optimistic stance being seen today (Sun 2016, 25).

When news outlets publish articles that are contrary to the party's wishes, the CCP attempts to shut them down using coercive economic measures. One instance of this can be seen with *Vision Times*, a Mandarin news publication that has maintained its independent journalism. The CCP has been successful in getting businesses to drop their ads on the publication's website by threatening them with adverse consequences if they fail to do so (Cave 2019). Again, in efforts to dry up *Vision Times*'s income, a migration agent in Beijing, a long-term advertiser with the organisation, was met with constant harassment from Chinese State Security officers who camped in the company's office building for over two weeks in order to force them to stop their advertisements (Chan 2018). A Sydney hotel has also received veiled threats of "financial consequences" from the Chinese Consulate if they did not remove a supposedly anti-China newspaper from their hotel's offerings (Wen and Munro 2016). This is problematic considering that Chinese-language media outlets, particularly those such as *Vision Times* that are primarily based online, rely on advertising revenue for the majority of their income (Sun 2016, 18). Even Australia's main public broadcaster, the ABC, is not immune to pressure from the CCP. In order to secure a deal for expanded access in China the ABC was required to substantially limit news and current affairs coverage on its Chinese-language websites, both in Australia and abroad (Fitzgerald 2018, 62).

Aside from more traditional news outlets, the CCP has also sought to exert control over social media platforms that Chinese people have increasingly turned to for news updates. Popular platforms like WeChat and Weibo are subject to Chinese monitoring and censorship, meaning that news articles that are published in Australia can only be distributed to the Chinese community on these apps if they comply with censorship restrictions (Wen 2016a). This is significant given that surveys have found that over 60 percent of the Chinese diaspora in Australia use WeChat as their primary source of news and information (Sun 2018).

While already exerting influence over the majority of Chinese-language media in Australia, the CCP has in recent years sought to gain influence over the nation's English-language media as well. In 2016 several of Australia's leading news outlets signed agreements with the Central Propaganda Department of the CCP, allowing articles from official party sources to be included within Australian publications. Since then three of Australia's major newspapers, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age,* and the *Australian Financial Review,* have each month included an eight-page section titled "China Watch" that runs articles from CCP news outlet *The China Daily* (Wen 2016b). Among the first articles published under this agreement was one confirming China's claim on the South China Sea, clearly demonstrating how the CCP hopes to co-opt the credibility of Australian newspapers to spout party propaganda.

China's overbearing control of the media in Australia has consequences for both the Chinese diaspora and locals alike. Members of the Chinese community have limited access to balanced and objective reporting in Mandarin, which gives a skewed perception of the facts in relation to China. Moreover, due to the CCP's growing influence on English-language news outlets, Australians are also now increasingly exposed to party propaganda. By maintaining influence over the vast majority of Chinese-language media and exerting increasing influence within English-language

media, the CCP has attempted to drown out dissenting voices and give the impression that pro-China views are the mainstream.

Investment and Business

The CCP is also attempting to exert influence in Australia through investments in businesses, particularly in critical infrastructure. A major development occurred in 2015 when the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement came into force. The agreement increased the threshold at which purchases by Chinese investors must be screened by the Foreign Investment Review Board (FIRB) from $252 million to over $1 billion (Hamilton 2018, 111). This gives Chinese investors increasingly unfettered access to the Australian market with little government oversight. This should be of great concern for the Australian government given that numerous pieces of critical infrastructure have been taken under Chinese control. This is problematic as in order to run a successful business, particularly internationally, it is essential that Chinese businesspeople have a close relationship with the party (Jakobson and Parker 2016).

Perhaps the most famous example of CCP influence within Australian businesses is the case of the Port of Darwin. In 2015 the strategically located port was leased for 99 years to Landbridge Industry Australia, a subsidiary of Shandong Landbridge Group which is headquartered in China and has known links to the CCP and the People's Liberation Army (Walsh 2019). Just a few years prior, the owner of Landbridge, Ye Cheng, had been named by the Chinese Government as one of the top 10 "individuals caring about the development of national defence" (Walsh 2019). In a similar case, the New South Wales government sold a 50 percent stake in the Port of Newcastle, the largest port on Australia's east coast and the world's largest coal port, to Chinese state-owned enterprise (SOE) China Merchants Union (Durie 2018). An even more intrusive development occurred in 2015 when the company of Chinese billionaire Liang Guangwei, who has known links

to the CCP, purchased land directly across from ASIO's new head office in Canberra (Riordan and Mannheim 2015).

Chinese investors and corporations, particularly SOEs, also control a significant portion of Australia's energy sector. Energy Australia, one of the country's largest electricity suppliers, is completely owned by China Light and Power (Hamilton 2018, 121). State Grid, a Chinese SOE with close ties to the CCP, also owns majority shareholdings in various Australian energy providers (Wade 2015). China's State Power Investment Corporation, another SOE, has also purchased Pacific Hydro, one of Australia's major renewable energy producers (Macdonald-Smith 2015). Further demonstrating the extent of China's penetration into Australia's energy sector is that half of the board of Energy Networks Australia, the primary body representing companies involved in the energy sector, is made up of representatives of CCP-associated corporations (Hamilton 2018, 123). Control of the energy sector is particularly significant as Beijing's ability to disrupt the power supply gives the CCP increasing leverage over Australia. In the event of a conflict between Australia and China, the CCP could simply turn the lights off. As such, it is clear that selling off the nation's strategic assets is in serious violation of the national interest.

Throughout this chapter I have argued that CCP influence is pervasive and manifest throughout Australia's education sector, political system, media, and businesses. The chapter has also sought to establish how deeply the CCP has permeated within these four sectors, while also touching on some of the implications this has.

Chapter 3 – Implications and Australia's Response

Building off an understanding of the nature of CCP influence activities in Australia, this chapter seeks to delve deeper into the implications this has for Australia and address how the government is responding. The chapter is divided into three parts. The first section seeks to evaluate the implications of the CCP's influence efforts and outline the long-term goals behind these efforts. The second and third sections are related to Australia's current policy approach and act to outline and then assess the effectiveness of this approach.

The Implications and Long-Term Goals of CCP Interference

Beijing's influence within Australian society is increasingly apparent, with this bringing profound implications that will only continue to grow as time goes on. CCP influence is slowly but surely changing the debate and discourse within Australia in efforts to promote the adoption of a more pro-China tone. Moreover, the CCP's influence activities are also increasingly stifling the exercise of democratic rights within Australia, particularly at Australian universities where academic freedom is being put in peril due to the activities of Chinese students and the attitude of appeasement adopted by the universities' administrations. Freedom of the press has already been significantly restricted within Australia's Chinese-language media outlets due to CCP influence efforts, with pressure also mounting on the nation's English-language media outlets to comply with Beijing's wishes in order to ensure access to lucrative Chinese revenue streams. Beijing is able to leverage Australia's reliance on Chinese money to its advantage and at the expense of Australia's free and democratic society. Moreover, Australia's financial vulnerability to China has been weaponised by Beijing, with the CCP on numerous occasions threatening economic ramifications if the Australian government does not fall into line.

The long-term goal of the CCP's influence operations is to shift Australian decision-making in Beijing's favour. This is driven by the CCP's overarching aim of ensuring that foreign nations do not pose a threat to the party and its control at home. Their efforts to co-opt and control foreigners are designed to do this. Economic manipulation, as we see at the individual (exemplified by Sam Dastyari) and the national level, is only the first step and is a blunt instrument used to strong-arm individuals and countries into compliance. The CCP's influence efforts that target public discourse are much more subtle and sophisticated in that they aspire to subliminally indoctrinate Australians with party propaganda. As these efforts continue, Australians will be living in an increasingly censored environment in which the discussion of anti-China topics is stifled. The final goal of this approach is that decision-makers will make choices that align with CCP interests of their own volition, without economic coercion or strong-arming necessary. Australia has clearly not reached this point yet but is on track with Chinese money greasing the wheels. Ensuring a strong policy response is the only way to effectively combat this threat. As Anson Chan, former chief secretary of Hong Kong, says: "By the time China's infiltration of Australia is readily apparent, it will be too late" (Hartcher 2016).

The Current Policy Approach

In order to counteract CCP influence efforts Australia has three main mechanisms – the banning of foreign political donations, the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme (FITS), and the Foreign Investment Review Board (FIRB). In 2018, the parliament banned all foreign political donations in order to stop foreign entities or individuals from influencing domestic political debate (The Australian Parliament 2017). The next major development occurred later in 2018 with the introduction of the FITS. The scheme was created in response to growing concern over CCP influence in Australia and mandates the public registration of entities acting on the behalf of a foreign government or political organisation (Australian Government n.d.). If organisations or

individuals fail to register or provide false information they may be imprisoned for up to six years or face a fine of $88,200 (Garrick 2019).

The final element of Australia's current approach to foreign influence is the FIRB. The FIRB advises on whether or not a foreign purchase should be approved based on national security concerns. The threshold above which the FIRB considers cases of non-land asset purchases for countries with a free trade agreement with Australia (of which China is one) is $1.2 billion for non-strategic assets and over $275 million for strategic assets (Australian Government 2020a).

The government is also set to enact new laws by 2021 that would significantly strengthen Australia's control over foreign purchases. Under this, the FIRB's powers would be expanded with any acquisition of a 10% or larger stake in a "sensitive national security business" needing FIRB approval. Moreover, the Treasurer would also gain significant new powers, particularly the ability to block any purchase, regardless of its value, based on national security concerns, as well as the capacity to order foreign investors to dispose of their stake in an Australian business, again, based on national security concerns (The Treasury 2020). The effect of these reforms is that there would no longer be a monetary threshold under which FIRB screening does not occur, thus helping to avoid situations like the lease of the Port of Darwin in the future. Treasurer Josh Frydenburg has hailed the reforms as the most significant since the creation of the FIRB in 1975 (Frydenberg 2020).

Is This Enough?

Australia's current policy framework is seriously lacking and, as it stands, has several fundamental flaws that severely limit its effectiveness at combating foreign influence. For one, the banning of foreign donations does not solve the issue of Chinese influence in political debate as there are

many Australian citizens of Chinese descent who maintain close links to the CCP. Examples of this can be seen with Australian citizens Chau Chak Wing and Charlton Lok, both of whom are major political donors and have previously worked under Huang Xiangmo in the CCP-affiliated ACPPRC (Knaus 2019).

The FITS, Australia's primary mechanism to uncover foreign influence, also has numerous loopholes that prevent it from functioning effectively. The scheme relies on the cooperation and willingness of foreign entities to register themselves but makes a fundamental error in assuming that Chinese entities with connections to the CCP are likely to do so. Moreover, while there are punishments for non-compliance, providing irrefutable evidence that an organisation has direct links to the CCP is often in reality quite difficult, making it almost impossible for the Australian government to enforce the policy. This issue can be demonstrated in that the ACPPRC and all of Australia's CIs are notably absent from registration despite their clear and well-known ties to the CCP (Australian Government 2020b). In the case of CIs, the institutes and the universities hosting them were directly contacted by the government about the FITS and were instructed to register but this was ignored (Hunter 2019a).

The FIRB is also not functioning as it was designed. It was intended to block the sale of strategically important assets but is failing to do so, with significant purchases, such as the Port of Darwin sale, not being subject to FIRB approval (Anderson 2016). The thresholds currently in place are far too high and allow the purchase of important assets to fly under the radar without government approval. This is a major policy failure with significant national security ramifications. Nevertheless, there is hope for the future as the planned amendments to this policy will act to significantly strengthen the FIRB's oversight powers.

The negative repercussions of CCP interference for Australia's democracy and society are clear; however, the current policies fail to effectively combat the problem. Without a robust policy response, the government is leaving Australia open to ongoing influence efforts that damage the nation's society and democracy. Stronger and more effective policy is essential and, as Clive Hamilton says, "we have only just begun a decade-long project, at least, of undoing the influence networks that the CCP has already established" (Hamilton 2019a, 1).

Conclusion

Australia is on the front line of Beijing's foreign influence campaign with the CCP taking advantage of Australia's close economic ties with China, its large Chinese diaspora population, and the nation's open society. A mounting body of evidence is building demonstrating the CCP's nefarious foreign influence activities throughout Australian society, particularly in the education sector, the political system, in the media, and in businesses. These influence efforts are undermining some of Australia's most fundamental values such as freedom of speech, freedom of association, and academic freedom, while also seeking to subvert the Australian political process to the benefit of the CCP. The Australian government has begun responding to this issue with several new laws coming into force since 2018; however, the ability of these laws to effectively protect the nation from CCP interference is limited. As Mike Burgess, the director of ASIO says: "Hostile foreign intelligence activity continues to pose a real threat to our nation and its security" (Australian Associated Press 2019b).

Australia is in a precarious position. On the one hand, without efforts to counteract CCP interference Australian politics and society will be increasingly subsumed and dictated to by Beijing; but on the other hand, if it seeks to resist, the nation will likely be met with increasingly punitive trade sanctions that will put the Australian economy in jeopardy. Australia's attempts to rebuke the CCP's influence efforts have long been chastised by Beijing, with Australia being labelled as leading an "anti-China campaign" (Harris and Bagshaw 2019). This belligerent approach has recently been on show with China banning Australian meat imports from several producers, putting an 80 percent tariff on Australian barley, as well as labelling Australia unsafe and calling for Chinese citizens not to travel to the nation – all in response to Australia's continued push for an international inquiry into the origins of COVID-19 (Sullivan and Gunders 2020; Irvine 2020; Han 2020).

"This is a war…with lots of battles" (Cave 2019). This is how the Consul General of the Chinese Consulate in Sydney, Gu Xiaojie, described China's influence efforts in Australia. If Australia wishes to win this war the government needs to re-evaluate its relationship with China and decide at what point must they choose national security and sovereignty over economic gain. The CCP's foreign influence efforts in Australia are perhaps the most advanced seen in any country in the world. Australia's open and inclusive society is one of the factors that has put the nation at increased risk, with the CCP targeting loopholes and vulnerabilities within the nation's democratic system. In this light, understanding Australia's case can be instructive for other countries which are just beginning to realise the reach of CCP influence.

The CCP already widely uses economic coercion and trade restrictions as tools to achieve its aims, with this having been employed against Norway, Japan, Mongolia, South Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines, to name a few (Schrader 2020, 5). However, in spite of this many countries seem to be preoccupied with Russia as the main source of foreign interference, with relatively less awareness of China's efforts. Moreover, even when the threat of foreign influence is recognised it tends to be understood in the context of election interference, ignoring influence efforts targeted at the fabric of society. Because of this significant blind spot, many countries are fundamentally unprepared to address this reality, with policies tackling widespread foreign influence often lagging behind. The only way to counteract the problem is by being proactive.

Future Directions

This thesis has sought to explore CCP influence in Australia and understand what implications this has and what the nation is doing to counter it. Australia is an important case, but nevertheless, further research is necessary as academic literature on CCP influence efforts, particularly pertaining to specific case studies, is relatively scant. This deficiency in the literature is significant considering

the seriousness of CCP influence operations and the consequences they bring for sovereignty. Expanded research in this field is essential to inform policymakers. A key weakness in the literature also exists as the issue of CCP influence is not subject to extensive theorising and, as such, further development in this area is likely and necessary. Moreover, the outbreak of COVID-19 has put a spotlight on China and the CCP's efforts to control the diffusion of information and public discourse on a global scale. As a result, it is likely that research into this area will expand in the future. Evidently, there is still important work to be done.

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